



**Frans Meijers, *To Choose or Be Chosen?*,  
Wrocław, Poland, 12<sup>th</sup> April 2012,  
Counsellogy Seminars, University of Lower Silesia**

Counsellogy Seminars created by Professor Bożena Wojtasik have been organized periodically at the University of Lower Silesia (ULS) since 2008<sup>1</sup>. Participants in the seminars were Alicja Kargul, who through analysis of the current research on counselling practice and counselling reflection, gave a lecture entitled 'Counsellogy. Continuation of the discourse'. Examples of action research and action anthropology were discussed by Bogusława Gołębniak. Biographical study that allows one to explore and to understand the problems experienced and faced by others was the main feature of the talk by Mirosława Nowak-Dziemianowicz. Considering the speeches of foreign visitors, I recall the lecture of Spyros Kriwas from the University in Patras (Greece) entitled 'Social Constructionism and constructivism in career counselling intervention: basic theoretical points and practical implications'. In addition, he conducted a workshop about 'Solution-focused strategies for career counselling interventions'. Moreover, I would like to mention the lecture of Bernd-Joachim Ertelt from the University in Heidelberg (Germany) on 'New trends in career counselling. Theory – research – practice'. Those are only a few examples of the issues discussed during the Counsellogy Seminars.

The main subject of the Counsellogy Seminars focused on the research possibilities, the limitations as well as the barriers faced by investigators of counselling practice, who are characterized by their attachment to searching for epistemological certainty. Moreover, discussions that took place during lectures revealed methodological difficulties brought about by the trap of accepting epistemological, which was certainty manifested by some investigators. Debaters often presented the struggles of those who create a counselling practice and those who are exposed to it, diagnosing, evaluating and reflecting on what they experienced or analyzed.

A lecture that I wish to discuss more precisely took place in April 2012; the keynote speaker was Frans Meijers from the Hague University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands), Director of Meijers Research & Advice. He specializes in research and consulting on the connections between education, work and life. Furthermore, he considers that he has built up substantial and varied expertise through

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<sup>1</sup> The graphic form of logo was elaborated by Mirosław Antoniewicz and Andrzej Chmiel.

the execution of research and the implementation of projects in educational, labour and quasi-governmental organisations (detailed information on his webpage: [www.frans-meijers.nl](http://www.frans-meijers.nl)).

For participants in the Counsellogy Seminars he prepared a lecture entitled ‘To choose or be chosen?’. The speech included the thesis that the educational system is based on two assumptions and he criticized the conventional career learning environment (schools) as very poor. Firstly, *theory before experience*, secondly, *from simple to complex subject matter*. According to the assumed division, he listed following negative consequences:

- education becomes corrupted into an exchange of knowledge for order
- students have no clear perspectives for the future
- and as a result no clear learning focus or questions
- The result is: choosing is the same as getting chosen (also with parents who choose equally blindly)

When discussing the negative aspects of the learning environment provided by schools and by some parents and teachers, the professor evoked the metaphor of a car. The car that has an appropriate engine, powered by a specific fuel and that offers additional, professional equipment is driven by adults, while young people and students (who are supposed to decide about the driving direction and its goal) are seated in the back seats.

Frans Meijers claims that nowadays it is impossible to make a rational career choice because there is no stable self-concept and because professions (which provide societal meaning and – therefore – offer youngsters a possibility for identification) have disappeared. What is more, the lecturer perceived decision-making as an irrational process and justified this concept by following arguments:

- lack of a stable self-concept
- professions are disappearing (in 1976: 5,500 professions and approx. 2,000 functions/positions; in 2003 only 1,073 professions and approx. 23,000 positions)
- with that: the disappearance of possibilities for identification and a lack of direction.

According to the above justification, Frans Meijers indicated factors that determine decision-making behavior. These factors have a different influence on decision-making process than counsellors usually expect. These are as follows:

- experiences
  - ◆ one’s own experiences
  - ◆ experiences had by relevant others (especially parents)
- rumours, newsmakers
- contamination through mass media (e.g., the three times a week CSI programme on television results in an increase in students going into the forensic sciences)
- objective information

The author presented a comparison of the process of career choosing with the process of choosing a partner (wife or husband), additionally, he noted that it is very important for the quality of our life and ideally should be long-term. He emphasized the importance of what is attractive in our opinion and what we love while deciding about a future career. Finally, the author remarked on the meaning of what is most important from our biographical experiences when selecting our education and career. He turned his attention to the fact that the current educational system does not allow young people to acquire the necessary competencies needed for the appropriate process of career choice. Frans Meijers claims that 'real dialogue' and talks with students is what is needed. Furthermore, those two may help to create a strong career-learning environment, in which dialogue is an essential element; however, it is almost completely missing in education.

For each participant in the Counselling Seminars (students, researchers and counsellors), the basis for the discussion were the conclusions of Frans Meijers that ended the lecture and were based on research on the human brain:

- ◆ cognitive capabilities are limited
- ◆ choice making should not be postponed but practised so that the ability to make choices develops
- ◆ do not ask 'why' - questions but ask about actual experiences
- ◆ provide information based on actual questions in response to real experiences
- ◆ emotions are faster than thoughts: expressing and sharing feelings is important (via internal and external dialogues)
- ◆ make room for intuition, but intuition only works when it has been 'prepared' i.e. based on actual experiences
- ◆ one makes selections rationally but one chooses intuitively

The lecture presented by Frans Meijers has become an important area for exchanging experiences and reflections that are present in Dutch and Polish counselling. These experiences and reflections are formed within two different cultures and therefore; the need for specific 'delicacy' and 'openness' for a different manner and perspective of perceiving of the phenomena is observable. What is worth noticing is the fact that the representatives of both of these cultures may agree that 'real' counselling takes place when it is based on 'real' dialogue with the student, but not in a situation when we 'talk *to* or *about* the student'. Undoubtedly, the identification and description of similarities and differences may provide an interesting challenge for researchers.

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(Translated from Polish by Zofia Siarkiewicz)