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## **How to recognize coaching: A voice in the discussion of coaching in andragogy and counsellogy**

**Abstract:** The article is an attempt at clarifying the terminological confusion around the notion of coaching. The authors compile polarised opinions and views on coaching, seeking to expose its pitfalls and appearances. First of all, however, they open a discussion on the educational potential of coaching and its relevance in supporting human development. To this purpose, they explore coaching applying adult education and counselling studies perspectives, which enables them to interpret coaching as an interactive process of discovering and consolidating people's personal potential and coping with problems and challenges.

**Keywords:** coaching, counsellogy, adult education

### **Introduction**

Coaching is a word which has made an outstanding name for itself in recent years. In some people it raises hopes for unimaginable earnings, in others a smile of pity, and in others still dissatisfaction and irritation (Maroszek, 2015). You cannot resist the impression that coaching is everywhere and everything has suddenly become coaching: training, classes, talks and motivational lectures; a disciplining talk between employer and employee or between teacher and student; career planning and planning child conception; tutoring and consulting; creativity and entertainment; and even the writing of horoscopes (astrocoaching). Like mushrooms after a rain, coaching companies pop up, bookstore shelves sag under the weight of books devoted to the subject, every manager becomes a self-professed coach, and every unconventional training method is baptized "coaching." With the invasion of coaching and the lack of a precise definition thereof, it is not surprising that there have been attempts to prohibit this practice (the Facebook profile "Outlaw coaching and personal development" [Zdelegalizować coaching i rozwój osobisty]), or to identify it as "bullshit" (one weekly magazine), "personal robbery" (Król, 2015), or "applied

cosmetology” (Śliwerski, 2012, critically evaluating new degree programs in education studies) and accusing it of naïve idealism, superficiality, thoughtlessness, and shallowness.

A preliminary analysis of the literature on coaching, of press articles, and observation of training and coaching practices provides evidence that not everything sold on the services market as coaching is in fact coaching. With the sheer volume of alleged coaching offers, it becomes more and more problematic to discern which of these offers comply with the authentic methodology of coaching and which are confined to the unjustified borrowing of terminology. On the one hand, this situation is partly justified by the fact that the theory of coaching is still in its early stages of development (Vickers, Bavister, 2007, p. 32), and like any evolving discipline, coaching is only developing its conceptual framework, rules, and research methodology. So there is still no consensus as to the way in which to define coaching or capture its essence, nor to the types of practical solutions. On the other hand, the aforementioned excessive liberty in the use of the term “coaching” is caused by the fact that since the recent collapse of the professional training market and with the clear surplus of supply in the area of services and training – i.e., the kind of guidance which implies personal changes and supports development – many people perceive in coaching an opportunity to make their business offer more attractive. However, such actions are largely limited to the realm of language, being thus a purely marketing ploy, unsupported by any deeper thought on methodology, or even less often on the theoretical foundations of coaching. This artificially created popularity of coaching, together with limited awareness among both coachees and suppliers of what coaching is, means that it is impossible today to talk about a single model of work, let alone a consistent “philosophy of coaching.”

There are also no crystallized rules on the qualifications of the coach, which often leads to the belief that everyone is or can be a coach. This all causes the opinions on the theoretical fundamentals of coaching to be highly polarized. One can encounter in opinions that downplay (to say the least) the need for recourse to any scientific basis. According to these views, “coaching requires specialized knowledge (only) in the field of coaching” (Whitmore, 2011, p. 21), so the main focus is placed on purely technical solutions. The principal and sufficient legitimization for the process would be only the coach’s intuition. Such “intuitive” coaching is contrasted more and more often with the view that the effectiveness of coaching to a large extent depends on the conscious application of scientific content. Supporters of this view see the need to build coaching strategies on a theoretical foundation, the particularly valuable source of knowledge for which lies primarily in psychology, sociology, and pedagogy, but also in history, linguistics, and cultural studies. So far,

however, there have not been many reliable and in-depth studies on the effectiveness and importance of coaching for individual development.<sup>1</sup>

It is not our aim to convince the reader that our vision of coaching is the most appropriate one and we do not hold the belief that we know best what real coaching consists of. Bearing all this in mind and trying to expose the pretense of coaching, we would only like to join the discussion on the particular educational potential of coaching and the possibilities of its use. We will start from citing well-known definitions.

### **The methods of defining coaching – “wandering aimlessly in the semantic jungle”<sup>2</sup>**

The evolution of the meaning of coaching is shown by Lukasz T. Marciniak, who writes that “despite the fact that the word “coaching” has been used in Poland for several years, there is still no shortage of voices criticizing its use as an unnecessary neologism simply displacing the concept of training” (Marciniak, 2009, p. 36). In opposition to this point of view, one can also hear the opinion that the concept of coaching cannot be translated directly. “Its root, the English term ‘coach,’ is closely associated with a borrowing from the sixteenth-century Hungarian language in which the word *kocsi* signified a type of carriage, designed among other things for long trips. Over time, the word had been adopted by other European languages (including *coche* in French, *kotsche* in German, *cocchio* in Italian, and also *kocz* in Polish) and in many languages its meaning remained unchanged until modern times” (Marciniak qtd. in: Weekley, 2009, p. 36).

The modern meaning of the term coaching was admittedly coined in close relation to its original meaning, but it appeared only in the early nineteenth century and was associated with the occurrences that took place at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The term ‘coach’ at these universities described a teacher who tutored students. His task was to individually work with students, to oversee their revision for exams, and to support them in obtaining credits for individual courses,

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the studies which one can find focus on business coaching, indicating the following factors, which should be taken into account when measuring: increase in the company’s revenue, an overall increase in profitability, improved relationships with clients, improvement in the use of working time, a growth in the readiness of employees to take on new challenges, enhanced job satisfaction, improved balance between their personal and professional life, growth of business innovation, improvement of internal communication, increase in the efficiency of meetings and workers’ conferences, improving the timeliness of performed tasks, an increase in the accuracy of business decisions, an increase in the number and rate of acquisition of new skills by the employees, improving the efficiency of team work and improved communication and employee relations (Żylicz, 2009, pp. 151-153).

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “wandering in the semantic jungle,” describing the search for an adequate definition of coaching is borrowed from the book by Eric Parsloe and Monica Wray, *Coach and Mentor* (2002, p. 19).

thus helping them to graduate. Later the term began to be used commonly in relation to such activities as tutoring, instructing, or training (Marciniak, 2009, p. 37).

The term appeared for the first time with its current meaning in the book "The Inner Game of Tennis" by Tim Gallwey in 1974. With the already famous assertion that "results = potential – interference" the author argued that the primary task of a coach is to release the potential dormant in every person (particularly knowledge resources). The basis for achieving this goal was the development of one's self-awareness. The titular inner game takes place inside each of us by means of an internal dialogue. To win it, a person needs to minimize excessive critical thinking and to overcome their weaknesses, doubts, and neurosis, which are a kind of internal obstacle on the path to the goal (Gallwey, 2006, p. 50).

This way of thinking about the needs of the coachee as a person who, on the one hand, requires support and, on the other hand, is reflective and reserves for himself or herself a large space of personal independence in decision-making is continued in the next definition: "Coaching is a process whose main aim is to strengthen and support the coachee in carrying out their own intended change, based on their own (coachee's) discoveries, applications, and resources" (Pilipczuk, 2012, p. 143).

One can find definitions that are quite abstract and suggest a unique and advanced character of coaching. Philippe Rosinski and Myles Downey elevate it to an art form, defining coaching as "the art of facilitating action, teaching and the development of another person" (Marciniak, 2009 in: Rosinski, Downey, p. 21). Elsewhere in the text Downey adds that the relationship of the coach and the coachee "becomes a dance between two people moving in harmony and partnership." (Parsloe, Wray, 2002, in: Downey, p. 48). Such references often become an excuse for a complete break with all theories and assumptions, giving coaching a completely intuitive character, devoid of any scientific validity.

On the other hand, Sara Thorpe and Jackie Clifford use the definition which characterizes coaching as "processes of helping people enhance or improve their performance through reflection on how they apply a specific skill and/or knowledge." (2011, p. 17). In this sense, coaching fosters reflection on one's activities in a particular area with the help of a supporting, objective person who knows the problem. Angus McLeod states that coaching is "the use of silence, the use of questions and the use of challenges to assist a coachee" in the realization of a specific goal in their professional career or in their personal life (McLeod, 2008, p. 22).<sup>3</sup>

Other definitions emphasize the value of conversation in coaching. An example is the statement of Julie Starr, who writes that in the simplest understanding of the

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<sup>3</sup> McLeod defines coaching, highlighting its three main instruments: silence ("The real work of coaching is done in the coachee's episodes of thinking and feeling in which the coach plays no part other than silent witness"); questions (to help determine the scope of the coachee's horizons, reviewing them and, at the same time, encouraging him or her to discover new ones); and challenges (they perform a similar function to the questions, but they are much more confrontational in nature (2008, pp. 22-26).

term, coaching is “a conversation, or series of conversations, that one person has with another” (Starr, 2011, p. 11). A person acting as a coach tends to shape the conversation, which will benefit the other person while involving the processes of learning and development. Such a conversation may take place in a variety of environments and take different turns (Starr, 2011, p. 11).

Some definitions of coaching show and enumerate important properties that distinguish this practice, such as the definition of Anthony Grant, which presents coaching as “a collaborative systematic solution-focused, results-orientated and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of goal attainment, life experience, self-directed learning and the personal growth of the coachee” (Grant, 2006).

The vast majority of authors emphasize the process-like nature of coaching interactions visible both within a single session and throughout the whole cycle, which creates an obligation on the part of the coach to reserve a considerable amount of time and personal commitment (see Parsloe, Wray, 2002, pp. 48-49). This is also how it is recognized by international organizations of coaches. An example is the already cited definition by Peter Pilipczuk, who represents the position of the International Coaching Community (ICC). On the official website of the ICC, we can also read the definition by Joseph O'Connor, the founder of this community, according to which “Coaching is a process for competency in an area(s) that the client wants to develop. It is based on a partnered relationship and mutual trust. It helps people become who they want to be and being the best as possible at what they do.” ([www.iccpoland.pl/pl/szkolenia\\_icc\\_i\\_stopnia/co\\_to\\_jest\\_coaching](http://www.iccpoland.pl/pl/szkolenia_icc_i_stopnia/co_to_jest_coaching)). This approach is also shared by the members of the International Coach Federation (ICF), which recognizes that coaching is “an interactive process that helps individuals or organizations to accelerate the pace of development and to improve the effects of action” ([www.icf.org/pl/pl79,coaching.html](http://www.icf.org/pl/pl79,coaching.html)).

The volume and multiplicity of interpretations of coaching also stem from the identification of many of its types and varieties. With regard to the discipline, scholars distinguish between life coaching and personal coaching. In this first type, other subcategories are sometimes named, e.g., business, managerial/executive, corporate, utility, performance, specialist, expert, or shadow coaching; leadership coaching (focused on the development of leadership skills) and career coaching. Taking into account the type of coachee, we can distinguish between individual and team coaching, as well as executive VIP coaching (e.g., for politicians). With regard to the adopted theoretical method we can distinguish, for example, co-active coaching (stressing the strength and creativity of the coachee), coaching based on solutions, or integral coaching. Taking into consideration, the style of conducting coaching workshops, different authors enlist instructional hands-on coaching, based on demonstration and explanation – used in working with coachees in the initial phase of their career – and hands-off coaching which transfers activity to the

coachee and relies on the art of asking questions, offered to coachees with experience (Parsloe, Wray, 2002, p. 53).

Analyzing the multiplicity of definitions, it is easy to see the influence of various disciplines which coaching was based on and is currently being developed. And so, while the influence of pedagogy and andragogy is visible in those definitions, in which emphasis is placed on the process of teaching and learning by people in different spheres and points in their lives, inspiration from the fields of sociology and social communication can be found in those definitions which highlight the role of interactivity, conversational style, and the broader context of action. In turn, references to psychology, its varieties and trends, are discernible in the emphasis on the mental qualities and characteristics of people, the individual potential and the ability to change the coachee's consciousness and behavior. The definitions also betray references to the science of management and to the theory of organizational development, counseling, or even philosophy or theology. There are also definitions which combine multiple disciplinary threads, whose proportions and accents are distributed according to the author's will, especially to his or her scientific or practical background.

Generally, one can cite definitions summarizing coaching in a narrower or wider sense. In the narrower sense one can talk about operative coaching, focused on only one field, as indicated by the coachee, and on targets associated with it. It is targeted at "acquiring new skills by correcting ineffective behaviors" (Pilipczuk, 2012, p. 155). Consequently, its nature is instructional, task-oriented, and one-dimensional, so it often occurs in the real-life circumstances of the coachee's work (a variety of business coaching), it is reduced to handing strict instructions. In addition, the objectives pursued during the session do not come from the client, but are determined by the supervisor or the employer.

Coaching in a broader sense is understood as holistic. It rests on the assumption that

the central point, the subject, is a Person – the coachee. The objectives of the process are determined by the coachee.... By definition holistic coaching focuses not only on the objectives, but on the whole system, in which they are located. The coachee is treated as a (comprehensive and complete) coherent system (Pilipczuk, 2012, p. 151).

In this approach, it is assumed that the source of the individual's behavior is not only their knowledge and skills but also their identity, their hierarchy of values, system of beliefs, the level and the developed techniques of controlling their own emotions, and their habits of thinking and acting. It centers on what the coachee considers to be crucial for their life, but considers it in many interrelated life contexts. This kind of coaching is called life coaching, based on the belief that a person is a whole, thus different spheres of the psyche and the course of life cannot be separated from each other. The purpose of life coaching is to help in harmonious

development, finding a life balance, balancing roles, and finally in self-fulfillment and in discovering the meaning of life (Popiołek, 2009, pp. 189-206). Such an approach to coaching seems to be particularly useful in pedagogy, psychology, and andragogy, which are oriented towards humanism and stress the importance of integrity and subjectivity in the process of education. For this reason, we assume such a perspective in our inquiry into coaching.

Since it is impossible today to propose a sufficiently precise definition of coaching, one which would have a chance at gaining the acceptance of one's social group, the only way out of this situation may be a definition of a very general quality, just sketching the nature of the coaching process; thus leaving a lot of flexibility in the interpretation of specific issues. In our understanding, coaching is **a dynamic process geared towards the coachee's personal and/or professional goals and unlocking his or her potential through training reflectivity about oneself and the surroundings and by learning new skills. It is carried out through an interpersonal dialogue, built on partnership and trust, and includes the multi-contextual positioning of an individual** (Drabik-Podgórná, Podgorny, 2014, p. 9).

### Coaching vs. other forms of supporting development

If it is important to define the essence of coaching, then it is equally important to precisely distinguish it from related activities, such as courses, training, development workshops, consulting, advice-giving and mentoring.

A training course is a term that includes "a wide variety of activities and forms of skills, aimed at enhancing one's knowledge and skills in many areas." (Łaguna, 2004, p. 13). It is this form of supporting development, which pivots on specific skills or a certain type of knowledge which are essential in carrying out professional tasks. Courses equip participants with instructions, guidance or specific tools that can be used in their daily practice; moreover, courses strengthen the participants' abilities, ensuring that they can independently deal with particular problems which will only appear in the future (Łaguna, 2004: pp. 13-14). Courses follow a pre-designed script and plan, and the coach is the person in charge of the order of performed tasks. Coaching, in turn – despite the fact that it has a structure – is always a dynamic process, in which questions and answers cannot be planned in advance, as the active subject is primarily the coachee.

Training – as with a course – is carried out in groups and takes advantage of group dynamics. However, its purpose is primarily to increase self-awareness and self-knowledge, and to analyze relationships with others and to work on self-improvement. There are various forms of training, for example, sensitivity training, anger management training, assertiveness training and creative thinking training. Group training can be one of the forms of training related to certain skills (Łaguna, 2004, p. 15). One example of this is psychological group training: it can be general

(shaping overall mental efficiency) or specific (undertaking adaptive, stimulating and corrective tasks) (Cenin, 1993, p. 45). Sometimes the term “training” is used interchangeably with the term “development workshop” (Łaguna, 2004, p. 15), but it seems that these two are separate forms. A workshop is a type of training which is based on the activity of the participants, so when organizing it one selects mainly activating methods (simulation games, existential exercises, group discussions, etc.). It serves to build and strengthen skills (psychosocial competences), which the participants can practice during the classes. Its defining feature is also a reference to different situations from life, focusing on the past (use of previous experiences), the present (learning specific skills) and the future (planning and implementing changes).

Another method of supporting development is counseling, which is an instructive form of guidance, in which a consultant – assuming the position of an expert – performs a diagnosis of the situation, proposes direct solutions to problems reported by coachees or gives advice and tips on which actions will ensure success. (Later in this article we will follow up on these ideas). Consulting, on the other hand, is a form of counseling which usually involves the sphere of business. Described as “a set of activities performed by the consultant to help the coachee in perceiving and understanding the problem and in taking action concerning the events in the coachee’s surroundings in order to improve the situation that the coachee has defined” (Kostera, 2008, p. 261). Therefore, “the consultants are perceived in different ways: as counselors, educators, agents of change or helpers in solving a widely and variously understood problem” (Kostera, 2008, p. 261).

The last form of support which is comparable to coaching is mentoring, the classification of which is equally difficult. A mentor – according to the mythological model – is someone worthy of emulation. In literature one can find a narrower and a wider characterization of mentoring. In the narrow sense, it is a process that stimulates and supports learning. A mentor is “A mentor is a more experienced individual willing to share their knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust. A mixture of parent and peer, the mentor’s primary function is to be a transitional figure in an individual’s development.” (Parsloe, Wray, in: Clutterbuck, 2002, p. 78). When it comes to the broader concept, it turns out to be very broad because it also includes “coaching, direct assistance in development, [and] advice and an informal exchange of information. It is not necessary to impress and astonish the mentee with one’s own knowledge and experience. Encouragement and enthusiasm suffice” (Parsloe, Wray, in: Clutterbuck, 2002, p. 78). It is also interesting that the so-called American School conceptualizes the mentor as a person who has – rather than a broader range of experience – a significant power, who expects loyalty, while the European tradition views the mentor as a person who, rather than possessing power, is more experienced (Parsloe, Wray, 2002, p. 79).

It is necessary at this point to indicate the relationship between coaching and psychotherapy. Intentionally, however, we will omit this topic, bearing in mind that

these links are so important that they require a separate article, and that discussing them here would exceed the scope of this study. Being aware of the existence of a number of trends within psychotherapy, situated on a continuum from instructive to non-instructive, we will only mention that it essentially involves treatment – the search for the causes and elimination of symptoms of disorders or liberation from mental discomfort<sup>4</sup> – and we are going to concentrate on a preliminary examination of coaching from the perspective of counselling and andragogy. The first one will allow us to look at the process of coaching as a particular kind of aid, the latter one will classify it as learning and the management of personal knowledge.

### **Coaching in education theory**

Many specialists in coaching, recognizing only its roots in business or sports, put it in total opposition to education, counseling, or psychotherapy. In doing so, they ignore the fact that, in spite of the distinct principles of the organization of the coaching process, its description and explanation require borrowings from various theories, sometimes in an attempt to combine contradictory and mutually exclusive concepts of mankind (e.g., coaching based on psychoanalysis), and implement a method of analysis derived from the concepts of, for example, andragogy, psychotherapy, counselling or the theory of organization and management. Searching for the theoretical foundations of coaching, researchers refer to the theory of learning (David Kolb, Benjamin Bloom, Albert Bandura, David Boud), the theory of change (Liam Hudson, Daniel Batson, Thomas Kotter, Walter Scott), the theory of organization development (Peter Burke, Dave Ulrich, Norm Smallwood, Edgar Schein), leadership theory (Arnold Weinstock, Warren Bennis, Kenneth Blanchard), and the theory of emotional intelligence (Daniel Goleman, Candace Pert) (Zaleska, 2015). We have also seen the first attempts to consider coaching from the perspective of lifelong education and its educational applications (Muszyński, Wrona, 2014; Kozielska, Skowrońska-Pucka, 2015; Ćwikła, 2015; Podgorny 2015).

### **Coaching in the perspective of counselling**

It is worth noting that many articles on coaching clearly emphasize that it is different from guidance and counseling, whereas the names of these two processes are treated as synonyms (e.g., Vickers, Bavister, 2007, p. 37). However, from the point of view of counselling, guidance and counseling are not the same. The differences between them have long been recognized and described in Polish literature

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<sup>4</sup> This issue is obviously much more complex. Positive psychology developed today by M. Seligman strongly emphasizes the shift in psychology from focusing on the pathology of human functioning to paying attention to resources of the mind and the desire to achieve, increase and maintain welfare (Seligman, 2012). Some currents of psychotherapy are closer to counseling than to classic clinical approaches.

(Kargulowa, 1986; Kargulowa, Ferenz, 1991, p. 38). It is worth recalling the misconceptions that are connected with the use of these two terms and that can still be found in research. Alicja Kargulowa writes

it is unfounded to claim that counseling, whose name comes from the word 'counsel/advice' applies to people permanently disadvantaged by life: the disabled, physically or mentally handicapped, afflicted by 'hopeless helplessness,' i.e., people who are unable to manage their own lives and require the care of others; while guidance, named after 'guide' is for people who are resourceful, coping with some problems whose solution requires the help of others – specifically of an advisor. This statement is not entirely correct, and even harmful by giving the term 'counseling' a stigmatizing character. ... Counseling is in fact a form of assistance that 'normal' people expect, i.e., people who are resourceful (though at the moment uncertain as to their decisions, facing alternative choices, experiencing psychological states of moderate stress or collapse, etc. – that is, those people who need the help of counseling) and people who are helpless, however not consistently and completely, but because they found themselves in specific problematic situations, sometimes critical situations, perceived by them as requiring such a change, which going through alone seems beyond their ability at that point in their lives (Kargulowa, 2010, p. 10-11).

Counseling can therefore be understood both as the removal of difficulties as well as supportive and pro-development action, which optimizes the functioning of an individual and increases the level of his or her inventiveness. It can assume the form of directive/expert-based counseling, through dialogic counseling to liberal counseling. The directive type is the advice that is aimed at increasing the coachee's knowledge in a particular area, to enhance his/her competence, and thus mostly mentally support a person struggling with problems (Kargulowa, 2010). Non-directive counseling (dialogic and liberal) is based on the resources of an individual and aims at the discovery, enhancement, development, optimization and promotion of these resources.

If we adopt such a perspective, coaching could be – in our view – placed between the liberal and dialogic counseling. Experts in counselogy would discern here the model of a trustworthy guardian, identified by Bożena Wojtasik (Wojtasik, 1993). In our opinion, the coach is not comparable, because even when asked for advice, he or she will not offer it. A coach is neither a consultant nor a laissez-faire leader (as defined by Wojtasik). A consultant is equally responsible for the advisory process whereas in coaching the responsibility lies with the coachee. A laissez-faire leader, is – like a coach – only a mirror in which the client can view himself or herself, as he or she (the coachee) is the active agent. Neither a coach nor a laissez-faire advisor, advises, dictates or suggests. However, coaching sessions may end with

a so-called developmental task that a coach proposes, though often these tasks arise from the process and are designed by the coachees themselves.

To compare counseling and coaching, it is worth quoting the definition formulated by Alicja Kargulowa, who believes that guidance is primarily

interpersonal contact in which two (or more) people interact with each other by means of direct communication, thus modifying each other's behavior. This communication is built on complete trust; it is a significant exchange of verbal and non-verbal symbols between its participants (Kargulowa, 2004, p. 47).

In other words, counseling is a relationship built on multi-personal dialogue. Given this approach to counseling and comparing it with the previously proposed definition of coaching, we can see that both these forms of support are of a relational nature – that they are anchored in relationships and occur within relationships. A relationship in coaching

constitutes the grounds for the transformation of the coachee, changes to old habits, a readiness to take on new challenges, to acquire new competencies which will be based on the potential and on the strengths of the client. The client-coach relationship is a kind of synergy. The coachee brings the motivation, objectives and need for change, and the coach brings knowledge about the progress and nature of change, commitment and skills. ... Building a coach-client relationship ... can be generally described as the creation of a safe, creative space for development (Kukiełka-Pucher, 2009, p. 97).

The basis for such a relationship is once again – like in counseling – partnership and trust. In the personal consultation model, proposed by Nash Popovic and Ilna Boniwell, a relationship is defined as ‘being with the client’ (Popovic, Boniwell, 2007, p. 25-26). It is a relationship of full acceptance of the other person. The postulate of acceptance is close to the philosophy of the encounter, which stresses that “the place of man in the space of encounters is not a point beside another point, but a field of specific possibilities and impossibilities closely related to one's own freedom and the freedom of others” (Tischner, 1977, p. 77).<sup>5</sup>

When we make a comparison of guidance (especially understood as lifelong, biographical Life Design) and coaching (especially holistic life coaching) we can see the main differences and similarities between them. This comparison is presented in the following table.

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<sup>5</sup> A detailed analysis of counseling as a relationship was presented in the text *Guidance in the Perspective of Dialogical Personalism* (Drabik-Podgórna, 2009).

Table 1. Coaching and lifelong counseling (Source: author's own research)

	<b>Coaching</b>	<b>Lifelong counseling</b>
<b>Vision of man</b>	a strong individual, without disorders	
<b>Main aim</b>	promoting integral development	
<b>Detailed objectives</b>	understanding of the coachee, developing reflexivity, discovering resources, "building solutions" instead of "solving problems," <sup>6</sup> analyzing the possibilities and opportunities for success instead of analyzing the causes of failures, support for coping with challenges	
	strengthening the potential	alleviating fears and uncertainties
<b>Time perspective</b>	focus on the present and the future (the past is important only in the search for resources)	
<b>The role of diagnosis</b>	only self-diagnosis is possible	diagnosis as part of the process
<b>Professional qualifications</b>	there are no explicit regulations concerning the qualifications of a coach	university degree in psychology or education
<b>Methods of work</b>	dialogue as a key method of work (it serves to create a space for developing self-awareness, adopting different perspectives, changing the way of looking at different situations; following the coachee; active listening and flexible response; creating an atmosphere enabling change)	
<b>Responsibility</b>	delegating responsibility to the coachee	sharing responsibility with the client

As can be seen above, both forms of help, starting with a positive vision of mankind, are aimed at supporting a person's integral development through the development of his or her reflexivity, discovering and building his or her potential, supporting him or her in dealing with challenges and analyzing the chances of success. Both forms of help seek to understand the coachee through dialogue, concentrating on the present and the future and treating the past only as a source of personal resources. The differences between coaching and lifelong counseling concern the role of diagnosis in the process of helping, which in counseling can be done either on one's own (liberal counseling), with the participation of advisors (dialogic counseling), or by the counselor (directive counseling), so it can be part of the assistance process, while in coaching it is only possible through a self-diagnosis made by the client. The obvious difference is also the possibility of consultants' advice or suggestions which may appear in counseling, whereas coaching is devoid of any

<sup>6</sup> The apparent play on words in this phrase is based on the concept of therapy focused on the solutions presented in the book by De Jong Peter and Insoo Kim Berg (2007).

hints, suggestions, advice or consultation. There are also no regulations regarding the qualifications of the coach; nonetheless, some schools grant a coaching diploma only after a complex certification procedure, including theoretical and practical examinations and supervisions. In lifelong counseling, psychological and pedagogical qualifications are required. The idea of responsibility is also conceptualized differently – in counseling we are dealing with co-responsibility (sharing responsibility with the client), while in coaching the responsibility lies with the coachee.

### **Coaching from an andragogical perspective**

Analyzed from the perspective of andragogy, coaching can be treated as a specific method of learning which supports the management of personal knowledge especially about one's strengths and weaknesses. Such an approach fits into the general trends occurring in the theory and practice of adult education. Mieczyslaw Malewski illustrated these changes with the diagram: *technological education – humanistic education – critical education* (Malewski, 2000). Personal knowledge management supported by coaching, being undoubtedly a complex and multi-faceted educational process, can be seen as another link in the above scheme, namely *personalized education*. This is definitely something different and much more comprehensive than individualized education. Already at the stage of formulating objectives it is the learners themselves who play the clearly leading role (in this case, the client of coaching). These clients draw conclusions for personal educational purposes from an analysis of their own private or professional situation, experience they acquired in life or gaps they identified in their knowledge or for other reasons that they deemed important. Apart from acquiring knowledge, it is equally important for them in the management of personal knowledge to locate and evaluate sources of knowledge, to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, to update knowledge, to organize knowledge, and to share and exchange knowledge (Probst, Raub, Romhardt, 2004, pp. 40-48). Therefore, the proposed understanding of personalized education incorporates completely new areas and actions into the scope of the activities of the learner. This engenders the need to master new, broader competences in order to finally be able to independently and successfully implement the process of managing personal knowledge. Yet, this will not be possible without forming the conviction of the need to take responsibility for one's own knowledge, for its development and organization. This can be a major challenge (if not a barrier) for educators of adults accustomed to the process of "learning" which is guided rather than only supported.

What seems equally problematic – because of the standard skills of teachers of adults – is inspiring learners to self-reflect on their own knowledge. The third barrier (perhaps the most difficult one to overcome) may be the need to give recognition to the learners' own experiences, as a valuable source of knowledge and, at the same time, the basic material in the learning process (Smedley, 2009, p. 221-223).

This will require from future educators of adults new skills and a readiness to accept a new role – from a teaching person to an assisting person – not even so much the acquisition of knowledge, as the management of knowledge.

Another extremely complex and widely analyzed issue is the source, nature and role of goals in coaching. The primary objective of coaching is assumed to be the awakening of the client's consciousness. This happens through bringing to light both his or her potential strengths and restrictive beliefs, thus expanding the coachee's "comfort zone" (Law, Ireland, Hussain, 2010, p. 74). Only an awareness (as full as possible) of these two realms of existence (potential vs. prejudices and complexes), allows one to focus on the first and learn how to overcome the latter. "Only a free mind can embrace experience because it alone can divest itself of ideological prejudices. It alone can make good use of experience, because experience as such does not lead to new certitudes: it closes certitudes and opens up questions." we read in the work of Chantal Delsol (2003, p. 35). Stimulating awareness has another important advantage: by shedding new light on the previous experiences of the individual, it allows one to see in them a new quality; it opens up new possibilities for their interpretation and for employing the teachings that come from them – an openness not only to new actions, but also to constructing new life goals. It must be noted, however, that the past experiences of an individual are not analyzed to find the source of problems, failures, defeats or reasons for lack of fulfillment (as is the case in psychotherapy). Coaching only serves to search for resources and to strengthen them in order to utilize them in the future.

Not trusting everyday life entirely and activating our own reflexivity, we prepare for changes and learn to treat them not as a rigid frame ... but as a temporary solution, because – as Zygmunt Bauman writes – learned skills and memorized responses that serve us well in a stable environment which is free of surprises can push us to destruction, when events suddenly spin out of routine and begin to mock the expectations justified by precedents" (Nizińska, 2008, pp. 42-43).

Fostering consciousness is of course not an end in itself – it is not enough to know reality, ponder it and study it in order to enable a change. A real change in the coachee's life – which is the most crucial goal of the coaching work – is only initiated during a session. It actually occurs in the periods between sessions when the coachee follows the task to independently cultivate and practice new behaviors in his or her everyday life, persistently working on his or her own resources, so as to obtain some relative stability of the desired change. It can therefore be concluded that the coaching process, taken as a whole (the sessions and the coachee's individual work) is situated at the junction of *non-formal education* and *extra-formal education*, occupying the border zone. Thus, it appears as a new space in the field of adult education.

## Examples of non-coaching

Below we present only some selected examples of misunderstandings which may arise from the previously discussed conceptual confusion around coaching. There are, in fact, many more, of course, but these three have caused the most controversial debates in recent months in the circles of both theorists and practitioners.

**“Coaching is a scam”.** At the beginning of November 2015, a video was released on the Internet which shows coverage of a meeting organized by the Student Research Group at the University of Science and Technology. One of the weekly magazines published an interview with a trainer and consultant in the field of HRM, which is critical of some of the scenes which appear in that clip. The video became extremely popular because it showed students hitting themselves on the faces at a meeting organized at the renowned university. Therefore, charges that boundaries were crossed and that the person leading the meeting lacked professionalism are justified. The Student Research Group at the Warsaw School of Economics, which was the organizer of the meeting, quickly posted an explanation on their Facebook profile: “The event was part of a project *The Art of Building Relationships*, designed to familiarize participants with the theme of both interpersonal relationships and business relationships. ... During the workshop, however, ... an inappropriate situation occurred which might arouse indignation. As a Students’ Group of Personal Development, we are also appalled by what we saw, because it was inconsistent with the arrangements we made with the speaker. The title of the workshop, ‘What to talk about with women, how to treat them and how to maintain relationships with them,’ and its announcements in no way suggested that the event may involve the use of violence” (<https://pl-pl.facebook.com/SKNRO>).

As follows from the quoted statement, that was one of the workshops which was part of a larger educational project, and, therefore, it was not a training session on coaching, much less a coaching session. This did not prevent many journalists and commentators from regarding the event as a pretext for voicing critical opinions about coaching. The above situation illustrates how public discussion about coaching is initiated and how its image reaches the average recipient, shaping current opinions, often also cited in scientific texts.

**Tool-oriented coaching.** One type of coaching which you can come across in the literature is called tool-oriented coaching. It is a type of operational coaching and focuses on developing specific skills which are sought after in a given industry. Therefore it is not surprising that a book by Wojciech Jerzy and Haman Gut (2015) was published under the same name. But the subtitle of the book may already raise doubts: *Boss, coaching is easy, because we are all coaches*. The authors aim to – in their opinion – dispel the myth that coaching requires specific competences: “Coaching is associated with an almost occult knowledge which requires many years of studying and obtaining certificates which are hard to attain. We decided

to disprove this myth and show that coaching can be a very helpful, yet simple and intuitive tool in the hands of the boss” (Haman, Gut, 2015, p. 9).

Elsewhere in the book they write that coaching is “a simple and friendly method of development work,” a natural way of helping, based on “experience and training, not stories, good counsel and instructions” and it consists in providing suggestions for new behaviors in difficult situations (Haman, Gut, 2015, p. 15). The most interesting thing, however, is the goal that the authors attribute to coaching: counteracting neurosis. This is why they start by defining modern neurosis, ignoring and questioning the existing psychological methods of understanding this disorder. As they openly declare, “under the word neurosis we understand something else ... neurosis is a condition in which someone employs behavior in a forced way, even though he or she notices that this method is inefficient and further exposes him or her to unwanted consequences” (Haman Gut, 2015, p. 19). Coaching, which every boss should undertake, is supposed to become a practical tool for dealing with neurosis (Haman, Gut, 2015, p. 25).

As in the case of neurosis, Haman and Gut also define conversational tools used in the course of coaching in their own way. For example, they label a paraphrase – a part of the well-known active listening – as “the ability to repeat the most important content of our interlocutor, which relates to his or her emotional needs. It is most important for a paraphrase to become a quote of the partner’s specific wording, not an “intelligent” interpretation of his or her words” (Haman, Gut, 2015, p. 35). Being the boss seems, therefore, to be sufficient proof of being competent at coaching. Following from the correct observation that the boss should support his or her employees and accompany them in their work, however, the authors treat coaching at one point as a method of “caring for workers” (Haman, Gut, 2015, p. 41) and at other times as a tool for monitoring and improving the subordinates’ quality of work (ibid., p. 10), according to the proverb “the eye of the master fattens the horse” (Haman, Gut, 2015, p. 40).

Analyzing the book “Tool-Oriented Coaching,” one can understand those employees who demonstrate their unwillingness to participate in coaching sessions and who express their concerns. At the same time, this raises a number of doubts as to whether we are in fact dealing with coaching here, as coaching presupposes a partnership relationship (therefore, there is no imbalance that characterizes the boss-subordinate dyad, not to mention the master-and-his-horse dyad), mutual trust, cooperation and no evaluation. It’s difficult to avoid the impression that the authors of the book are not only creating a new understanding of coaching, but also trying to propose a new sub-discipline of psychology (the book was published in the series *The Psychology of the Boss*). I can only guess what the authors’ actual intentions were. Is perhaps transforming coaching into a supervisor’s job not only a simple way of cutting the costs associated with commissioning a professional coach – let alone staffing a full-time coach – in a company whose boss wishes to take care of his or her employees?

Reporting on excerpts from the book, we absolutely do not want to undermine and denigrate the experience of all bosses. Some of them certainly possess coaching competence; others can intuitively support their employees, but, unfortunately, we cannot exclude the possibility that there is a group of such bosses, who, without resistance and encouraged by the publication will venture to take up the challenge of becoming the only coach for their employees.

**National coaching.** Another extremely intriguing application of coaching – and one absent from the literature so far – is the concept of national coaching, which became the theme of the IX Congress of Citizens (Warsaw, 25 October 2014).<sup>7</sup> There was even a special insert in one of the editions of “Rzeczpospolita” (30 June 2014) dedicated to the promotion of the Congress. The Congress initiated a discussion on the competencies needed in the modern world, and in the spring of 2015 debates took place in 40 public libraries throughout the country, during which over a thousand people engaged in a dialogue on the topic *Competence of the Future: How to Spread Your Wings?* Identical scenarios have been prepared by the Foundation for the Development of Information Society, and the report prepared by the Institute for Market Economics (<http://www.kongresobywatelski.pl/category/narodowy-coaching>).

As you can read in the report:

“National Coaching is a project of social debate on the attitudes and skills that we Poles need in order to achieve individual and collective success in the twenty-first century. The project inspires us to take a collective look in the mirror and to try to answer the questions: Who are we as a society? What kind of nation would we like to be? What are our strengths and weaknesses? What competences does the future require from us? The project involves provoking a broad discussion on the condition of our personal and social competences and ways of improving them. It is also meant to lead to genuine changes in Poles’ patterns of thinking and behavior, drawing from experience. The phrase ‘National Coaching’ refers not only to the scope of this process, but primarily to its nature – learning from each other, supporting and inspiring each other – but also to self-coaching (Report: “Debate Competences of the Future: How to Spread Your Wings?”, 2015, p. 1).

Analyzing a mere 25-page report (half of which consists of photo stories and links to media debates), it is difficult to find an explanation of what national coaching is. The report is devoted solely to competences which are supposed to enable individual and communal success and, moreover, they are discussed in a very laconic

<sup>7</sup> A critical evaluative report on the congress “How to become an Icarus of Education” is published on the blog of Prof. Boguslaw Śliwerski (<http://sliwerski-pedagog.blogspot.com/2014/11/jak-zostac-ikarem-edukacji.html>). The author also criticizes coaching itself, even though – as it is clear from the analysis of materials about the Congress – it is difficult to find there any connection with coaching, apart from borrowing the name.

way. Debate itself – which is one of the varieties of discussion – is not a method of coaching work. Although the goal of debate is to induce reflection, as we said earlier, this is not a sufficient condition to consider a given action to be coaching. We do not want to exclude, however, that the project will inspire to actions that will actually permit change.

We can therefore surmise that once again the term ‘coaching’ was used here purely for marketing purposes. The project was partially financed with funds from the Polish-American Freedom Foundation within as part of the project *Support the Library Development Program in 2015*. So far there has been no evidence that as part of the project any support of a coaching character was provided which would help an individual, let alone the whole nation, develop competence. A palpable result, however, is that the project managed to activate libraries, which as a result of a decline in readership, the dissemination of e-book readers and the availability of online versions are looking for new opportunities in the absence of customers.

## Conclusion

There are many more practices and activities similar to those described above; their consequence is the unfortunate deprecation of the idea of coaching as such. Media-friendly, persuasively worded titles (“outlaw coaching,” “coaching is a fake,” “another market bubble”) are the reason we do not verify what is described and presented as coaching. This, in turn, is conducive to growing skepticism and the general questioning of the competence of the people involved in coaching. To get a full picture of coaching, it seems necessary, however, to devise and conduct extensive empirical research. The small – so far – amount of research on the meaning and effectiveness of coaching is seen as a sign of immaturity in this discipline, which the theory of coaching may be, and is a significant weakness of debates on coaching. For the same reason, we do not have evidence of its harmful effects or inefficacy. An actual debate about the value of coaching will be possible only when both its opponents and supporters gather sufficient arguments.

From an andragogical point of view, it would be important to consider the value of coaching not only in terms of its efficiency and economic benefits, but as an interactive process of discovering and strengthening the personal potential of people through their learning about themselves. In addition to quantitative research we could then consider the usefulness of quality procedures, including biographical approaches (especially useful for the study of education), especially since the entirety of the coaching process is significantly spread out over time.

Taking into account that coaching introduces a fundamental change into human life, from the point of view of counselogy, it may be interesting to learn not only how this change is achieved, but, above all, how it affects one’s further existence in the world and, especially, how it modulates the perception of the client’s

own life before and after the change, and, ultimately, how it shapes the coachee's identity and his or her ability to cope with problems and challenges.

Before we take a final decision on what place coaching should occupy in the fields of andragogy and counselling, we should design and carry out activities, during which elements of professional coaching could become incorporated into educational situations and everyday situations, and then examine the effectiveness of these actions. It would be possible here to use comparative studies, which would include both integrated actions with elements of coaching, and actions devoid of such elements. The role of researchers could be taken by coaches themselves<sup>8</sup> who are adequately prepared for this additional role: they would carry out the research. On the other hand, we must remember that the effects of supporting activities often manifest themselves in the long term. We would therefore need to consider the reasonableness of the use of longitudinal studies and the use of narrative methods.

While taking into account that the process of coaching is really the process of recognizing and conferring meanings to different objects, events and experiences in the coachee's life, a hermeneutic perspective seems to be especially attractive in these studies. Finally, we must take on a theoretical perspective, i.e., an explanatory theory which could be applied to studies which empower the examined subject (coachee) and could very well fall in line with the philosophy of coaching.

*Translated from Polish by Ludmiła Makuchowska*

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<sup>8</sup> The first such research attempts were described in the article “Coaching for students: an example of positive prospective career counseling”, which appeared in the journal *Counseling* (V. Drabik-Podgórna, M. Podgórnny, 2014).

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