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**Maria Eduarda Duarte: *Life designing and counselling: searching career construction.***

**On searching for knowledge, meaning and essence of life as elements of varied dimensions of counselling,  
UNESCO Chair of Lifelong Guidance and  
Counselling, Institute of Pedagogy,  
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Once again, the international UNESCO Chair on Lifelong Guidance and Counselling at the Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław, brought together many career guidance professionals, career counsellors, personal coaches, reflexively oriented theorists of counselling studies, representatives of the academic community, students of the University of Wrocław and guests from the NGO sector. This numerous and diverse group of people interested in the issues of personal counselling convened to listen to Professor Maria Eduarda Duarte (University of Lisbon), a guest speaker at the seminar organised by Dr Violetta Drabik-Podgórna and Dr Marek Podgórný on May 19-20, 2015.

The first day of the seminar offered an opportunity to discuss the condition of career guidance and counselling in today's world. Besides Prof. Duarte, the panel discussion was attended by members of the Polish counsellogical community (Professor Alicja Kargulowa, Professor Bożena Wojtasik, Professor Wiktor Żłobicki, Dr Henryk Jarosiewicz), authorities of the University of Wrocław (Professor Witold Jakubowski and Professor Przemysław Wiszewski, Vice-Deans of the Faculty of Historical and Pedagogical Sciences) and the Department of Education of City of Wrocław (Ewa Szczęch, Director of the Department of Lower and Upper Secondary Schools).

A necessary starting point, as well as the interpretative key, in relating Prof. Maria E. Duarte's visit is an interdisciplinary perspective underpinning the holistic vision of the individual. Deep insights into and the comprehensive approach

to counselling presented by the speaker in the context of new trends, processes and phenomena triggered by civilisation changes allowed us to see counselling as an integral part of the scholarly discourse on the important dimensions of social and individual life. Prof. Duarte's analyses addressed many dilemmas and problems experienced by individuals at different levels of existence. Inherent in her reflections, the ability to integrate multiple interpretative paradigms in the face of dynamic change in social life gave us a multidimensional account of the individual. The multifaceted view inclusive of various needs, aspirations, socio-cultural conditions, as well as of the categories of the purpose, essence and meaning of life, was the foundation of the idea of lifelong counselling, a theme to which the visitor devoted considerable attention in her presentations. With such focal points, the contemporary reflection on counselling is capable of perceiving its object in the processual context and of redefining the basic problem areas within the rapidly developing and diversified scholarly discipline of counselling studies.

The panel discussion titled *Life Designing and Counselling: Helping in Career Construction*, part of Prof. Duarte's visit at University of Wrocław, focused on such issues as LD in counselling (intervention and practice), philosophy of science, cultural models and ecological relatedness. As the panel presentations were clearly divided into preliminary issues to discuss and the problems and statements punctuated with questions, the audience could actively and valuably participate in the discussion. In Prof. Duarte's view, LD counselling should include in-depth research and focus on developing adaptability in a lifelong process rather than on targeting vocational success. The role of counselling lies primarily in facilitating the individual's subjective success identified with well-being, and the counsellor's chief intervention method is analysis of dialogues in a particular socio-cultural context. Poignantly concluding this part of Prof. Duarte's was the question about the individual's ability to symbolically close the door, to abandon the technocratic vision of knowledge and to open up onto new models developed in career psychology in opposition to the mechanisation of human behaviours.

On the second day of the seminar, the audience were invited to a lecture and workshops led by Prof. Duarte. The lecture focused on changes in counselling and counselling studies: *From Vocational Guidance to Career Counselling: Life Designing or Life Coaching*. The speaker outlined the chronological development of guidance and counselling in a historical and cultural perspective. Referring to notable scholars and their ideas and insights (e.g. Parsons, Claparede, Binet, Pieron, Germain, Kargulowa), she highlighted the diversification of vocations and support-provision in negotiating their meanings during the industrial revolution, as well as the still pertinent notions of vocational career and goals of vocational guidance (social uniformisation, standardisation and intervention), which apparently dovetail with the social norms of the 1950s. Stressing the breakthrough moments in the development of counselling, she referred to the emergence of vocational psychology (i.e. the period when collectivism started to give way to individualism) and to the later

postulates to humanise organisations based on James's pragmatism, Lewin's dynamic psychology, Happock's job satisfaction concept, Maslow's notions of motivation and Arygis's personnel development framework. In summing up the 20<sup>th</sup>-century legacy of counselling theory, she referred to the concept of the individual as rooted in a greater system (family, workplace, local community), based on which guidance and counselling could rely on the theories of constructivism and social constructivism, and use such concepts as personnel management, human resources management and human potential development.

Passing to the new phase in approaches to counselling, Prof. Duarte referred to well-known strategies of counselling and the concept of lifelong construction and counselling that promotes conscious career design and lifestyle choices. She suggested that to understand 21<sup>st</sup>-century counselling one should study attempts at integrating guidance and counselling theories combined with invention of new models, techniques and tools as well as new concepts of the human. She reminded also of the importance of mass social movements in looking for new ways to meet human aspirations and kindle human hopes.

Describing the levels of intervention, she pointed to information as the first step which helps the clients understand their situation on the labour market; the next step involves psychological and educational interventions tying in with other career and life counselling interventions. It seems that, in the context of LD counselling, Prof. Duarte puts a particular emphasis on the training for thinking of oneself as a co-constructor. Co-construction, or the ability to achieve success in and through dialogue, which entails both shaping the self and modifying the context, is based on an idiographic rather than a nomothetic definition of success. In this perspective, counselling is a social product; it involves capitalising on individual strengths and compensating for individual weaknesses in an interplay of personal resources, team-work and the socio-cultural context. As Prof. Duarte emphasises, the Life-Design paradigm is founded, in practice, on reflection on the self and the environment, receptivity to feedback and envisioning of possible selves. The nature of the unfolding changes and the demands of intervention (counselling process) urgently require developing new counsellor training programmes based on the intensive study of self-dialogues and preparation for dialogue with the Other.

Life Designing counselling can be understood only upon accepting that production and reception invariably coexist in the same process. Dialogue, which is a basis of self-narrative woven from the memories of life history, triggers cognitive and emotional processes and is amenable to inter-disciplinary and multi-methodological approaches. The concept of dialogue and the related notion of intersubjectivity posit that the meaning of life can be grasped through self-narratives and dialogues with others. Dialogue is, thus, fundamental to counselling since any semiotic practice, focused on interpretation and meaning-making, implies the relevance of dialogue and communication as strategies for understanding the existence. In this context, Prof. Duarte drew on P. Ricoeur to point out the spaces of mediation which

entail socialisation of the individual and his/her embedment in a broader scheme of trans-individuality. Co-construction of meanings aims to transform the client and to help him/her recast his/her narrative identity in ways that open new possibilities of self-construction, e.g. in the vocational role. Thus, an important dimension of Life Designing counselling is self-consciousness bound up with working through one's life history as evoked by memory. Dialogue demarcates new horizons of communication and becomes a contextualising activity, which helps revamp individual biography and understand things outside one's own life story. As Prof. Duarte put it, each contextualisation reflects another story, which, in being retold, is re-envisaged by the self as it engages in sequential interpretation of the past. With the life story being retold, a metamorphosis of life becomes possible, which means that the past framed in aspirations and plans is channelled toward the now projected future. In this light, to return to the past entails delineating a desired future and figures as a moral crowning the biographical story. Without a dialogue-based relationship, counselling is simply impossible. Counselling must be founded on and, at the same time, seek mutual understanding and the client's agency.

In Prof. Duarte's view, counselling as a social activity is not only the domain of counsellors; it also ties in what has come to be referred to as *life coaching*. As described in the lecture, coaching is rooted in management consultancy, leadership training and organisation development, but it renounces advising, liberal counselling, therapy and mentoring. Counselling, in turn, is a time and space of dialogue, in which the importance of intersubjectivity is discussed face-to-face. Essentially, counselling is a relationship in and through which meanings are constructed that bring the principles of solidarity, social justice and freedom into fruition.

In the workshop section, titled *A Reflection for Training Counsellors: Dialogues and Narratives*, Prof. Duarte shared practical guidelines on life-design in career counselling and discussed career counsellor training as related to this model. The key issues she addressed included critique vs. criticism, training as a journey, co-construction of identity and challenges of introspection. Drawing on metaphorical images, the speaker sketched a transition the individual goes through, abandoning the position of a passive object affected by various "factors" and consciously embracing his/her ETHOS, whereby s/he becomes an agent engaged in rational interpretation (LOGOS) and construction of the future path (PATHOS).

In the workshop, attention was also given to capitalising on experience and transforming ideas into reality through motivated action, working on life stories, engagement and personal choices. An extremely valuable illustration of the speaker's conceptually opulent presentation was provided by the biblical story of Joseph – an inspiring example of self-examination as an individual entangled in a drama of individuality, negative assessment of ordinary people, self-knowledge, expectations of solidarity and reliance on memory. Prof. Duarte insisted that by meticulously examining life stories counselling becomes a sustained interaction replete with emotions, feelings and decision-making embedded in the real contexts of

individual lives and actions. This interaction requires multiple competencies (planning, decision-making, research, problem-solving, negotiating). Future projections help find idiographic solutions, promoting change related to soft and hard skills, task-orientation and expertise. Other necessary elements include also a flexible action scheme, communication channel, construal of career as a process of continuous interactions and a paradigmatic shift toward matching a right person and new contexts. These factors are especially important now as the realities of modernity abound in problems manifest in depression, addictions, suicide, discrimination and unemployment, which affect vulnerable individuals in particular. Distinct to our reality are heterogeneous civilisation models, cultural diversity and extreme volatility. Given this, Prof. Duarte insists that the counselling process must be divided into stages, including: 1) identification of the client's problem in its main context, 2) exploration of the current system of the client's subjective identity forms, 3) opening perspectives, 4) locating the problems in the new life story, 5) concretisation of activities and actualisation of identity.

In conclusion, a new understanding of counselling has evolved in which the counsellor's role consists in co-construction, fitting vocation into life and life into vocation while the ultimate goal of counselling interventions is the search for true knowledge and, ultimately, striving to find the essence, purpose and, related, meaning of life.

The visit of Prof. Duarte gave rise to an informal platform for exchanging experiences, opinions and reflections based on the participants' perceptions and research experiences. The versatile, valuable and universal nature of the event gives reason to hope for more initiatives of this kind, which would dovetail with one of the ideas articulated by Prof. M. Duarte – the need to engage in rational interpretation (LOGOS) and construction of the future path (PATHOS).

*Translated from Polish by Paweł Jabłoński*