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**Tony Evans (2015). *Counselling skills for becoming a wiser practitioner. Tools, techniques and reflections for building practice wisdom.* London–Philadelphia: Jessica Kinsley Publishers, pp. 240**

It has been twenty years since Prof. Alicja Kargulowa introduced counselling studies at Pedagogy Department of the University of Wrocław (academic year 1995/1996). Initially, the curriculum was implemented as a three-year specialization during long-cycle five-year studies. After the education reform following the Bologna process, the syllabus has been overhauled as a four-semester specialization making part of a three-year BA studies and a three-semester specialization incorporated in MA studies. Currently, the MA students at the Pedagogy Department are being offered two counselling specializations: *Counselling and psychological-pedagogical support* and *Vocational guidance and career coaching*.

The beginnings of academic training in this field were challenging, due to the scarcity of blueprints specifying the curriculum and scientific publications dealing with counselling. Until early 90's, there were only c. ten monographs available, i.e. two by Olga Czerniawska (*Poradnictwo kulturalno-wychowawcze*, 1973; *Poradnictwo jako wzmacnianie środowiska wychowawczego*, 1977), two by Alicja Kargulowa (*Praca poradni wychowawczo-zawodowej*, 1980; *Poradnictwo jako wiedza i system działań. Wstęp do poradownictwa*, 1986)<sup>1</sup>, one by Stanisław Szajek (*Orientacja i poradnictwo zawodowe*, 1979), another one by Elżbieta Sujak (*Poradnictwo małżeńskie i rodzinne*, 1988) and one by Róża Pawłowska (*Poradnictwo pedagogiczne*, 1986). Those whose objective was to provide assistance in a competent manner could also use Lawrence Brammer's practical study *Helping relationship* (1973), however it was only available to a handful of professionals. Educational-vocational centres as such were not the subject of researchers' interest. Fundamental changes started with the political break-

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<sup>1</sup> The same issue of *Journal of Counsellogy* included a review of the latest monograph by Alicja Kargulowa (2016) *Discourses of counsellogy: toward an anthropology of counseling* [Koronkiewicz, Wieszczyńska (2018). *Studia Poradownicze / Journal of Counsellogy*, p. 399–406.

through in 1989, resulting in incorporating western trends into the Polish academia. Significant organizational and material adjustments in counselling took place, such as formulating new expectations for candidates applying for jobs in educational-vocational centres (since 1993 known as psychological-pedagogical counselling centres). At the same time, new political, economic, and societal factors were forming liberal-democratic society, with citizens gaining awareness of their needs, and possibilities of fulfilling them. The so-called “therapeutic culture” has become one of the cultural trends that emerged after 1990, and is still gaining influence in the Polish society (Furedi, 2003; Jacyno, 2007). Scholars have observed a significant increase in the number of “new generation priests”, i.e. psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors, as well as common usage of “emotive ethics” while conceptualizing the experienced world (Nolan after Maślany, 2004). Classic publications on psychological counselling started to appear simultaneously on the Polish publishing market (*Client-centered therapy: Encounter groups* by Carl Rogers, 1951; Polish edition published in 1991; et al.) and variety of guides, e.g. *How to win friends and influence people* by Dale Carnegie, 1936, published in Polish in 1995), which encouraged readers both to self-support and to turn to professional counsellors for assistance. Nevertheless, counselling has not been immune to market competition, advertisement, marketing, and other cultural changes promoted by pop-culture and expressed in hedonistic endeavours.

The reason why I am mentioning all of these is not only to underscore how much has changed for Polish counselling, but also to provide a background for the book under review here.

*Becoming a wiser practitioner. Tools, techniques and reflections for building practice wisdom* is a book of interest for Polish counselling specialists (researchers investigating counselling, theoreticians, academic teachers) and practitioners (counsellors and psychotherapists) as it presents a systematic overview of the process of becoming a competent advisor, and enhances reflective implementing of this process (both for practicing professionals and students getting acquainted with the science and art of counselling). Tony Evans, the author of this publication, works as a lecturer in the Psychology Department at the Roehampton University in London and is a practicing psychotherapist.

The book *Counselling skills for becoming a wiser practitioner* was published in the series “Essential skills for counselling”, so far comprising four items, including *Counselling skills for working with trauma*, *Counselling skills for working with shame* and *Counselling skills for working with gender diversity and identity*. The publication’s title makes explicit the author’s goal, which is to familiarize the audience with skills essential in a counsellor’s job: considering both the construction of professional role and assistance practice (current or planned for the near future). By choosing the “counselling” specialization during their pedagogical studies at the University of Wrocław, students very often expect

that they will soon possess the technical know-how enabling them to work “on” issues and by guiding people rather than (co)working with clients on familiarizing themselves with their own selves and seeking solutions to their own issues (Łysak, 2010; Czerkawska, 2013). Students are mainly concerned with behaviour modification strategies, as well as with beliefs and ways of experiencing emotions in the supported people, like in “behavioural engineering”. At the beginning of their studies, students only rarely realize the need to work on themselves, since their personalities, attitudes, knowledge, opinions and experiences will serve as the “object” of their reflective “treatment” during the academic education, and as a main tool in the professional practice (Corey, 2005, pp. 36–67). It is only later, that they start to understand the necessity to confront their own expectations within their academic education and requirements of their future profession. However, they fairly quickly seem to come to the conclusion that as far as the features and attitudes desired in the counsellor’s profession, such as e.g. empathy, tolerance, openness, etc. are concerned, they had acquired them through being part of a family, through providing non-professional help to their friends and through faith (cf. Szumigraj, 2016). Such beliefs may suggest that the students “feel” the completion of their self-developmental process, even before the start of their professional career. No wonder, then, that they decide to study only to get acquainted with techniques and methods of influencing others (and to obtain a certificate authorizing them to take up employment). Some of the courses are likely to strengthen this conviction, as they are devoted to working methods in individual and group counselling. Evans’s book, however, emphasizes the fundamental part of an effective, and primarily ethical and creative, work of counsellors, which boils down to long-term life wisdom acquisition<sup>2</sup>.

In his book, Evans presents subsequent stages of becoming a *wiser practitioner*, and in particular specific micro-skills that result in competencies which can be described as “professional wisdom” of the counsellor, who is consciously engaged in self-development. Wisdom, contrary to intelligence, understood as a hereditary intellectual potential, develops in the course of doing, feeling, observing, listening, imagining, and experiencing (Evans, 2015, p. 20), which means that it refers to the real world. The book’s introduction is devoted to describing this difference, as Evans uses the image of a real territory compared with a two-dimensional map, and then mentions the discrepancy between the theory and practice, to finally refer to the question of assistance model grounded in assumptions of a chosen concept and professional support, which he calls *situated action*. He underlines the significance of acting flexibly, adjusting to the real context and ongoing changes (instead of adhering closely to theory), being open to each client and their unique

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<sup>2</sup> In Polish psychology the notion of wisdom is discussed by M. Straś-Romanowska; however, she describes it as an approach to life that is mainly possible to acquire in late adulthood (Straś-Romanowska, 2002; Kozerska, 2017).

distinctness, acting in dialogue, based on discovering, identifying and reacting to what is happening in the present (so also using improvisation and intuition), etc.

In order to make the narration coherent and smooth, the author uses the metaphor of “wisdom well/streams” (which I don’t find very helpful). There are 34 such streams; they relate to skills, knowledge, experiential awareness, personality features and attitude to life (Evans, 2015, p. 18), which altogether fill a “well” (Evans, 2015, p. 19). Working on oneself – illustrated as standing on the well’s verge, jumping into it, and then immersing oneself in it – requires courage. Every new situation raises concerns and anxiety, therefore without self-belief it is impossible to step into intersubjective space of a meeting with the client (Evans, 2015, p. 42). Possibly, the majority of people undertaking studies either of psychology or pedagogy (here: counselling), if not all of them, fulfil the introductory requirement. What is more, they usually possess some prior experience in supporting others. Being conscious of the responsibility for a constructive, effective relationship with the client may be for some people a burden, affecting their courage, so the self-belief becomes a key factor of undertaking the process of acquiring wisdom. Those people could be advised to pursue their actions despite being afraid (*feel fear, and do it anyway*, Evans, 2015, p. 47). Thus, it may seem that Evans wants to convince his audience not to lose freshness, interest, or even excitement in their professional practice, and to avoid controlling (due to their theoretical knowledge), and focusing on their failures and mistakes (Evans, 2015, s. 51). Openness to discovery and adventure seems to trigger happiness, interest, and will to act. The main issue here is to develop an inner need to learn and critically review the process of learning, mainly in order not to establish wrong habits, and treat mistakes as “life-based educational material” (Evans, 2015, pp. 55, 60).

Even though such observations, obvious (or even banal) as they may seem, are prevalent in the book, they exhaustively illustrate all the most important aspects making up the “therapeutic wisdom” and skills of an effective and ethical counsellor. Evans helps his readers – mostly counselling specialists-to-be – undertake systematic consideration of the professional identity that is being formed and developed. For this purpose, along with explaining subsequent issues and sharing his experience and reflections, he cites brief remarks by his students, and does not hesitate to ask readers personal questions, enabling them to look at themselves from diverse points of view, e.g. “If your life was a story, what in your opinion would be its main topics?”; “Do you consider yourself the author of your story?”; “Who authorized your story when you were a child?”; “What themes were added?”; “If the next five years would be a next chapter of your story, what would you like it to be?” (Evans, 2015, p. 87). Reflections shared by Evans help understand the client, the nature of relationship with them, and its importance in life of the counselee. The author suggests that it makes sense to

slow down, listen, and feel. Without such an attitude (patience, mindfulness, sensitivity), the counsellor cannot make real, full contact with the client, and therefore is unable to get to know them, or to see them in their unique position (Evans, 2015, pp. 102–106). The actual act of listening to the client implies hearing the emotional aspect of their message (“music hidden under the words”, Evans, 2015, p. 106). However, in order to be a master in this domain, or at least an experienced specialist, the counsellors should develop the ability of self-regulation (i.e. the ability to effectively manage their cognitive, emotional and behavioural reactions to the environment, Evans, 2015, p. 106). This skill and 33 other skills make up resources enabling them to become not only great, but also wise counsellors (Evans, 2015, p. 114).

Evans’s book, despite raising controversies due to favouring intuition and spontaneity over theory and thinking (which is sometimes assumed to be counterproductive, Evans, 2015, p. 144), is still worth recommending to people who are interested in helping others (professionally or not). Although the publication deals with seemingly obvious issues, it enhances reflection and deeper self-observation, which turns supporting others into a self-development task, and not just a skilful manipulation of emotions.

*Becoming a wiser practitioner* may complement and enrich the already existing selection of books on the Polish publishing market, especially those pertaining to dialogue counselling, which is close to Evans’s theory. While Bożena Wojtasik in her books (1993, 1997) theoretically catalogued the counselling methods and characterized the techniques of a counsellor’s advisor, Tony Evans presents these topics from the practical and technical point of view. Undoubtedly, the book should be a mandatory reading for students specializing in counselling.

*Translated by Agnieszka Czapka*

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