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Alicja Kargulowa (2016). *Discourses of counselling: toward an anthropology of counselling*. Kraków: Towarzystwo Naukowe “Societas Vistulana”, pp. 252

Counselling (i.e. counselling studies) is considered to be an interdisciplinary scientific reflection (subdiscipline), practiced for many years by Prof. Alicja Kargulowa¹. This review's objective is to introduce her monograph *Discourses of Counselling: Toward an Anthropology of Counselling*, published in 2016 by a Kraków-based publishing house “Societas Vistulana”, to English and Polish readers.

The book places counselling within a very specific political, economic and cultural (along with historical) context. Counselling offices in Poland first appeared in the beginning of the 20th century. The very first of them was established in 1907 in Warsaw and charged with a mission to help people in choosing their profession (Kargulowa, 1996). In the following years, such professional help extended to children with various disabilities, and focused on the issues concerning upbringing (Skałbana, 2009, p. 11). The institutional help was, until 1989, tailored mostly for children and adolescents who needed assistance with professional issues, such as the choice of a school or their future employment. The political transformation of 1989 made a great impact on counselling in Poland; it started to rapidly change and expand into the areas which had until then been beyond the focus of the counsellors. More attention has been devoted to assisting adults, both those who were generally helpless, and those who faced only temporary hardships. The counsellors stopped focusing on helping adolescents exclusively with their careers, and started paying attention to other aspects of human life as well (Wojtasik, 2012, p. 37). The first years after the political transformation were the time of establishing numerous the counselling offices of which many were, in later years, either closed due to failure to fulfill

¹ In 1979–1995, the researcher organized a nationwide scientific seminar: „Counselling in contemporary society”, resulting in several publications. She published five monographs (Zierkiewicz, 2016), and the book under review here is the sixth in the series.

their objectives, or significantly re-organized. Currently, counselling services in Poland offer assistance to people experiencing a variety of issues, through counsellors working in specialized establishments, as well as many professionals, and individuals, who are especially active in supporting each other on the Internet (Kargulowa, 2010, pp. 15, 17, 19).

Polish counselling, much like the Western one, is meant to develop entrepreneurship, counteract unemployment, and increase the feeling of social security. However, it has developed independently from its foreign counterparts (Kargulowa, 2010, p. 9). Changes in Poland occurred later, took less time and were more rapid. While comparing the current counselling systems in Poland and outside of it, one can notice differences in education of the counselling experts. In Western countries the counsellors are mostly psychologists, while in Poland, pedagogues and sociologists are commonly found in this role as well (Wojtasik, 2012, pp. 36, 45–46). What is more, Western counselling is more thoroughly connected with various aspects of social life and economy. It does not rely on a homogeneous theory, or an explicitly described scientific sub-discipline, which would consider counselling as the subject of its studies. As Anna Bilon notes, counselling in the West forms a section of psychology; namely, the psychology of counselling (Bilon, 2010, pp. 57–66).

Polish science had been under the influence of the socialist ideology since 1945; a fact that still affects its quality. One of the most significant restrictions imposed on Polish science was its relative isolation from the Western world, which for over forty years limited international dialogue in terms of exchange of thought, inspirations and insights. In Poland, the Western-developed sciences, in particular psychology, were regarded as bourgeois and harmful. Sociology, similarly, had been “invalidated” for an extended period (Karwińska, 2008, p. 9), ethnology was replaced by ethnography (Ząbek, 2013, p. 22), while pedagogy, being subject to the Marxist ideology, halted some of the research that had started before 1939 (Gajdamowicz, 2010, p. 1). As a result, those disciplines developed in an isolated environment; but it was also the environment that allowed for an independent development of those scientific disciplines and sub-disciplines, which had to respond to the needs of contemporary society. One of these developments was counselling (the science of counselling, counselling theory) which in Poland, in contrast to the Western countries, became a separate sub-discipline of pedagogy, developed since 1979 by the person who coined the term, professor Kargulowa.

While constructing the concept, Kargulowa considered the fact that no scientific discipline can develop in complete isolation: theories of other scientists in related (or sometimes even the unrelated) fields often provide an inspiration, a prompt, or a point of contention, which may lead to a new perspective on the research subject. The increasing popularity of interdisciplinary research may

be a proof that connecting two or more disciplines can yield valuable results. Findings coming from outside the country are as valuable, since different social and cultural context can lead to different approaches to the same notions and questions. All these premises are reflected in professor Kargulowa's book.

The reader will find this work interesting, as it describes Polish outlook on counselling, which developed in a rather specific social, cultural, and ideological reality, and then rapidly transformed after these conditions changed. Before 1989, the sub-discipline of counselling had already been established in Poland, both theoretically and institutionally, and still today, it provides a slightly different approach to professional assistance than that offered by psychology or psychotherapy. Kargulowa notes the need for interdisciplinary and inter-paradigmatic methodological theories of counselling; her ambition was, and still is, to create an approach that would present such considerations in a multilateral way, without disconnecting them from their practical aspect. The author has been constructing and developing the science of counselling for almost forty years. Her 2004 monograph, *O teorii i praktyce poradnictwa. Odmiany poradoznawczego dyskursu. Podręcznik akademicki (On the Theory and Practice of Counselling. Variants of Counselling Discourse. An Academic Handbook)*, is still recognized as one of the most important publications in this field. It is one of the basic texts, often a mandatory read² for students in relevant departments and future practitioners. The most recent publication of professor Kargulowa, reviewed here, *Discourses of Counselling: Toward an Anthropology of Counselling*, makes it possible for English readers to familiarize themselves with the insights (verified and completed) included in the monograph mentioned above. As an academic handbook, *Discourses...* provide a comprehensive, multi-dimensional presentation of the methodology of counselling in Poland. Due to limited space, here it would be difficult to present these ideas in detail, so we provide their general description or only mention them briefly.

The reviewed book is a scrupulous collection of research results and theories, collected into eight chapters, and describing a broad perspective of assistance using a methodological approach. The first few chapters present theories, which for the Western reader, unfamiliar with the theories elaborated by Polish authors, will provide a novel distinction into counselling and practical counselling. Counselling registers changes in counselling, improves its perceivable goals and defines its values. It can have a prognostic function, predicting future ways of development for professional assistance. Anna Bilon (2010) claimed that counselling in our country combined counselling trends from all over the world, and analysed them more thoroughly.

² The book is included in the basic reading list for students of some Polish universities, including those registered in two specialized courses on pedagogy studies – „Counselling and psychopedagogical assistance” and „Professional counselling and career coaching” – offered at the Institute of Pedagogy of the University of Wrocław.

This fact is noticeable in the definition itself. Kargulowa understands counselling as a social action, an interpersonal interaction, organized activity, and a form of social assistance. The social context of counselling is also apparent for many non-Polish authors (Corey, 2005; Feltham, Horton, 2006; Launikari, Puukari, 2007), though they are more interested in the relevance of cultural differences for the course of the assistance process. Kargulowa's thoughts seem to resemble those of John McLeod (2003), who also claimed that counselling should be regarded as a social process. However, his work presents this process as different from other ways of understanding it, described in *Discourses of Counselling: Toward an Anthropology of Counselling*.

The book is an attempt to order various thoughts on counselling. To put it briefly, it explains the theoretical basis and the most important notions in this field of study, presents the main directions of research in counselling, discusses methods and ways of counselling work, characteristic for the aspects described in the definition, and prepares working scenarios for contemporary counsellors. Through this, it justifies the complexity of practical counselling. According to Kargulowa, practical science, and counselling is such science, is able to generate changes through stating what counselling is, can be, and what could be changed to achieve that goal.

Since counselling is an interdisciplinary approach to the practice, we can observe competitive (or mutually beneficent) paradigms with epistemological and ontological assumptions, which determine cognitive activity of the counsellors. The reader will find four methodological approaches in this book: positivist, interpretative, critical, and post-modernist. They were selected from a variety of options set out by Robin Usher (Usher 1996), whose categorization has been adopted to Polish science by Mieczysław Malewski (Malewski 1998).

An important advantage of the reviewed monograph is the array of original uses of the paradigms mentioned above in counselling research. These propositions can serve as guidance to scholars interested in the topic, indicating how those approaches can help in planning and interpreting one's research results. Since Polish empirical studies of counselling are still few and far between (though we should mention the work of researchers such as Barbara Skąłbani (2011) and Daria Zielińska-Pękał (2007), Kargulowa's approach is the most valuable. However, one must take into consideration the fact that the audience expecting primarily a study of the landscape of Polish counselling, may find the reviewed monograph somehow lacking. The research results reported in the book are not recent (e.g. conclusions regarding the contribution of counselling centres' to optimization of the professional launch of the adolescents come from the late 1970s, and even though they seem to be confirmed by new research, carried out almost 50 years later [Minta, Kargul, 2016], they are unlikely to fully capture the phenomenon), the book does not provide their detailed methodological context (e.g. reflection on limitations of counselling tailored for parents).

They seem to constitute just an illustration for presenting the selected directions for research. There is a considerable need for continued research in the field of counselling – using the directions we mentioned, but also developing new – carried out by future researchers.

This is all the more important, as the analysis of books and articles on assistance systems worldwide (Bilon, 2016; Drabik-Podgórná, 2005; Morys-Gieorgica, Woynarowska, 2003; Zaremba, 2009; Źurek, 2014), indicates that every nation (or region) has a specific understanding and practice of counselling, and tends to place it differently in the broader system of institutions charged with assistance and support. Taking that into account, common theoretical inspirations, as well as specification of the general mission of counselling, can create a basis through which familiarizing oneself with a different practice can enrich one's own method; a fact most valuable in today's globalized reality (Zaremba, 2009, p. 4).

The increasing relevance of cultural context of professional assistance has been stressed not only by Kargulowa, but by many Polish counselling scholars (Paszowska-Rogacz et al., 2006; Kownacka et al., 2007). Going beyond the narrowly-understood multiculturalism, researchers have already noticed social changes which lead to the situation in which mobility becomes not only a privilege and a possibility, but often a necessity caused by one's economic situation. Mass migrations and social, economic, political, and cultural issues connected with them on the national as well as individual level, require an increase in assistance activities. The decolonization movement, gaining momentum since the second half of the 20th century, has also caused many groups, which until now did not appear within a broader social discourse, to demand respect for their voice. Along with them went many others, discriminated against for various reasons in their respective societies (sexual minorities, people with disabilities, etc.), thus expanding the field of counselling activity. This fact has been noted and interpreted by counselling researchers (Collins, Arthur, Brown, Kennedy, 2013; Dec, 2012). McLeod noticed that counselling responds to the increasing cultural diversification of societies in two different ways: on the one hand, it stresses the necessity to sensitize students and practitioners of counselling to cultural issues; on the other hand, it claims that multiculturalism should be treated as „the fourth power” in the elaboration of the counselling basis, which would provide a theoretical contribution, complementary to behaviourism, psychoanalysis, and humanist psychology (McLeod, 2003, p. 244).

In the context of Bilon's reflection on counselling practiced outside of Poland, the reviewed handbook, through presentation of established scientific approaches to various forms of assistance, is a valuable research resource for both counselling practitioners and students who wish to become counsellors. Bilon stresses that the term “counsellogy” (and related “counselling” or “counselling studies”) in English literature is connected with didactic activity.

Focus on “technical knowledge” of the counsellors (and therefore methodical and, less often, methodological skills, explaining how they should work in order to be efficient) in Western handbooks steers counselling students mostly in the direction of pragmatic approaches (Bilon, 2010, p. 57). Meanwhile, though the reviewed handbook focuses mostly on the general methodological strategies of counselling, it also notes the history of counselling research, theoretical contexts of counselling practice, and the subject matter of the research. It offers guidance as to how a sub-discipline such as counselling is formed in other countries and how counselling practice can benefit from it.

One could say that counselling, as of now, is a regional phenomenon, since it is mostly practiced by Kargulowa and the researchers who work with her. As was metaphorically put by the author herself, counselling still resembles a jigsaw puzzle, more than a complete, integrated, and relatively closed system of knowledge (Kargulowa, 2014, p. 65). Still, the sub-discipline is undoubtedly progressing, and is definitely needed. Polish scientists have been making attempts to popularize their current discoveries among foreign audiences. They organize international conferences and seminars³. They share their knowledge during scientific meetings and internships abroad. They engage in international research, and present the results of their work in English-language publications, such as the journal *Studia Poradoznawcze / Journal of Counselling*, edited by professor Kargulowa, or on the Internet (Kargulowa, 2014, p. 64).

Discourses of Counselling: Toward an Anthropology of Counselling may prove to be an important text for English-language literature on counselling, encouraging Western authors to adopt a new perspective on counselling and further research. The broad selection of topics addressed in the book sometimes leads to their only cursory treatment, but still may inspire the reader to delve deeper into the subject. Due to the clear structure of the handbook and its focus on methodological aspects of counselling work, it is worth recommending it not only to students, but also to counselling professionals and practitioners. Considerable expansion of the perspective on counselling, going beyond the technical knowledge of counsellors, for which the reviewed text seems to provide an opportunity, may become an inspiration for finding new directions and ways of thinking on professional assistance and support.

Translated by Jakub Wiczorek

³ Scientific meetings with international participants took place at, for example, the University of Wrocław, the seat of UNESCO Chair, and at the University of Lower Silesia during the seminar *Horyzonty pomagania (Horizons of assistance)*.

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