

Bożena Wojtasik, *Podstawy poradnictwa kariery. Poradnik dla nauczycieli (The basics of career counselling: A guide for teachers)*, Krajowy Ośrodek Wsparcia Edukacji Zawodowej I Ustawicznej (National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education), Warsaw, 2011, pp. 140

The basics of career counselling: A guide for teachers by Bożena Wojtasik was published by the NCFSVCE in the „Euroguidance” series. The publication is addressed to teachers who would like to participate in forming their students’ life career.

The book consists of three chapters. In the first chapter the author introduces – within the constraints of a short publication – the theoretical underpinnings of vocational guidance and outlines its development over the past decades, starting with the theories put forward by F.W. Parsons, A. Roe, D. Super, and finishing with the concepts proposed by J. D. Krumboltz and A. S. Levin.

In the second chapter, the author addresses the condition of youth, focusing on the level of their mental and physical development in the face of challenges that they confront when engaging in career decision-making in the postmodern “risk society.” Importantly, as her analysis of young people’s isolation in coping with such challenges shows (Chapter 2.2.4), the author clearly recognises the gravity of the problem.

In the third chapter, the author explores various models of counselling. She explains the differences between two perspectives: dialogical and liberal, and outlines the criteria for choosing a particular model and situations in which it should be applied. The author discusses counselling methods, and lists the skills and competencies necessary and useful in this type of work.

The book also includes an annex consisting of ten types of attachments, such as sample exercises, models of CV writing surveys, letters to parents and offices. They all can be helpful in the teacher-coach’s work.

Throughout her book, the author builds a narrative revolving around two basic concepts: “risk society” and “vocation”. She writes that “*we live in a world of manufactured risk, which is the price of progress. (...) In risk society, nothing can be certain*

and we are unable to plan anything.” In such a world, we are compelled to make career choices or determine the direction of career path. However, this raises the semantic and normative question of what a profession is in a rapidly changing world. The author cites the definition coined by J. Szczepanski, in which a vocation is an “*internally consistent system of activities, requiring specific qualifications, performed systematically in a regulated manner, which provides livelihood and ensures one’s status in society*”. However, Wojtasik does not fully endorse this definition, as two paragraphs later we read: “*In a world of permanent change (...) it is hard to speak of an internally coherent system of activities, also qualifications can be various, and the wording ‘systematic and durable performance of vocation is debatable as well.*” As a result, “*the notions of work and employment become destabilised One may inquire what is and what is not work.*”

The ambiguity of these terms originates in the fact that in our view they lose the meaning we originally invested in them in the industrial era, turning “empty” in the postmodern world we currently inhabit. It is impossible not to agree with the author, who observes that “*In the post-market era society (...) this change has already come to pass with the increasingly wider spread of teleworking, self-employment and involvement in various projects rather than performing a particular vocation – [emphasis S.S.]*”

Therefore, the terms “employment” and “profession” seem no longer legitimate. Perhaps we should even go one step further and reject them altogether! We should reject them, because they are no longer informative; instead of explaining, they simply create ambiguity.

If we are to trust analyses of many contemporary scholars who herald an upcoming “end of employment” era for nearly everybody, our society is on the verge of radical changes. Just imagine the consequences of permanent unemployment, if employment is understood not only as a way of securing basic living conditions, but also as a way of building identity or forming a sense of personal usefulness and adequacy. If these analyses prove right, a different society will emerge, a society based on a different paradigm, one we are unable to foresee today. It would mean that we live in a very special period which we could call an “interregnum.” In another context, Prof. Burszta perfectly explained that “*This is the time between something that shall cease to apply and something that is just emerging, but has not taken (...) a particular shape yet. Nevertheless, it stands in opposition to what has been there so far*” (Burszta, 2013). This specific conjuncture is reflected in the reviewed book – it is organised around the contradiction between two paradigms: one of the world that is disappearing, and one of a world that is supposed to emerge. The former is expressed through the concept of “vocation” and its derivatives such as “a list of vocations.” The latter is encapsulated in the concept of “risk society.” These worlds cannot “reach an agreement” or remain in conflict with each other. This implies the challenge which Wojtasik, and indeed all of us, face when we try to deal with “something that is emerging but has not taken any definite shape yet.” If we

want to provide responsible career counselling, we cannot disregard this clash of paradigms.

The above is related to another problem. The author devoted a lot of attention to vocations of the future, concluding: *“Taking into consideration future vocations we can notice an increasing demand for creative, mobile, flexible workers, who, ready to change, will learn and improve their qualifications.”* The whole discourse aims at fostering such skills in people whom counseling interventions will target. However, another question offers itself here: What about those non-creative, non-mobile, non-flexible, not ready to change, and incapable of continuous learning and upskilling? Briefly and most empathically speaking, what about people (students) who, despite trying really hard, will fail to meet the challenge posed, now or in the future, by the “New World”? A world in which employment and work as we understand them now will be given to a few only... A reality in which repetitive tasks and even conceptual work, will be performed by machines on a scale as yet unimaginable?

Over the last 20 years, the percentage of young people enrolling at universities has rapidly increased in Poland. However, *“according to U. Beck, a “ghost station” emerged – education without employment. (...) As a result of an excess supply of education and a decline in the number of jobs, a paradox of devaluation and revaluation of diplomas has appeared. Without a degree, job prospects are close to zero; a degree has ceased to guarantee employment. On the other hand, a degree is a necessary prerequisite of joining in a job chase in the first place.”* University education does not guarantee employment; at its best, it just increases the chances of entering the labor market and, consequently, building a societally appreciated life.

Let us repeat the question: What about those who would not cope?

Such question loses its pertinence if we accept the metaphysical assumption that all people are potentially equal. But what if *“People are not equal”* (Nietzsche F., 2004)? And what if we admit that common experience makes us agree with a very uncomfortable argument that lies at the centre of this question?

B. Wojtasik’s book clearly shows that counselling faces this challenge. Does counselling target only those tens of thousands of the great and strong, leaving the remaining millions of the weak, “numerous as the sand of the sea” and in need of support, to be only the soil for the great and strong? The Great Inquisitor replies: *“No, we care for the weak too”* (Dostojewski F., 2010).

The author does not resort to literature in her analysis. Careful consideration of her words, however, reveals her attitude to the problem of “the weak.” She describes the role of the contemporary coach as follows: *“The role of such coaches will not be based on counselling, but on supporting clients in constructing their own career and shaping their identity,”* where she gives a biographical, narrative meaning to the concept of “career.” Here again we see the “destabilized notions of work and employment” since the role of coach is not to advise. The identity of a person engaging in a relationship with a coach seems to be significantly reconceptualised. The concept of “identity” can be given a narrative sense and a metaphysical sense,

which is what the Author does following B. Skarga. This opens up a space in which counselling can follow the Great Inquisitor's response. Given this, the coach's essential goal would not lie in preparing the unemployed (or the young) to be competitive on the labor market. "Constructing career" would only indirectly concern (or perhaps even elide?) the problem of "employment." It could be a process of self-construction and finding one's own place in the emerging world, a world we can now only vaguely speculate about.

Undoubtedly, Wojtasik's book is a valuable reading for teachers. It offers an abbreviated introduction to the theoretical foundations of counselling. In the second and third chapters, it provides many practical guidelines on how to prepare for counselling interviews and how to conduct them. The appendix with its ten carefully selected proposals of exercises can be a starting point for future counselling meetings (lessons) with students, and as such be particularly helpful for teachers who take their first steps in the practice of counselling. The very rich bibliography containing the most important literature on counselling is also extremely valuable as it enables the reader to continue his/her individual study in the field of counselling.

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(Translated by Anna Machel)

References

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