

On behalf of the Editors...

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Thinking like a counsellor ...

The title of my short contribution is an obvious reference to Bogusław Śliwerski's book *Mysleć jak pedagog* (*Thinking like an educator*). It is also my response to the invitation to join in the discussion on the nature of pedagogical reflection (Śliwerski, 2010, p. 31). Far from fancying myself able to face up to the challenge in its entire complexity, I would like to reflect on one of the many areas educators (and not only educators) engage with, that is counselling.

Researchers have sought to formulate an accurate definition of counselling for years, but over the last decade helping services have diversified and proliferated so much that it seems increasingly difficult to determine what in fact is and what is not counselling. Some activities appropriate the label of counselling without actually being counselling, and other ones, while apparently defying counselling, in fact pursue counselling purposes. Alicja Kargulowa writes: "counselling is made up of actions undertaken by rational agents who enter diverse relationships with other agents. The most characteristic feature of counselling is an interpersonal relationship between the counsellor and the counselee aimed at formulating guidance together with and for the sake of the counselee. The relationship is located in various social, economic and cultural contexts" (Kargulowa, 2009, p. 22). She adds in a footnote that "the phrase 'formulating guidance' is a certain conceptual shortcut. Verbalised guidance provision is, namely, not the main point in a counselling relationship; the point lies rather in being together, showing understanding and offering emotional support" (*Ibid.*). So, if counselling is not limited to guidance provision but can take on various supportive forms which help the counselee answer such questions as "what should I do in this situation?", "what should I think of it?", "what should I choose?" and, finally, "how should I live?", it may as well be part of a teacher-student, parent-child, confessor-penitent, therapist-patient, coach-client, trainer-trainee, physical therapist-patient, or financial advisor-bank client relationship. That does not imply, of course, that teaching, upbringing, confession, therapy, coaching, training, rehabilitation or financial consultancy have no other functions to fulfil. Neither does it imply that counselling is ubiquitous and everything is counselling. Nevertheless, I want to emphasise that counselling is intrinsic

to various social roles, which tends to evade our attention. And if we acknowledge non-professional counselling (e.g. in support- or advice-giving among friends or colleagues), why should we refuse the name of counselling to the counselling practices which make up part of a vocation one performs?

Many voices quoted and referred to in this volume in response to the debate initiated by Jean Guichard continue the discourse started back in the 70s by no one other but Alicja Kargulowa, who insisted on emancipating counsellogy as a separate sub-discipline. As she has tried to specify what the term denotes repeatedly and perseveringly, it would be difficult to quote here all the definitions coined over the years. I will provide one of the latest formulations from her book *Poradownawstwo – kontynuacja dyskursu (Counsellogy: An On-Going Discourse)*: Counsellogy is a science of counselling as a fact, a phenomenon or a process of social life which takes on the form of an interpersonal relationship or an institutional activity” (Kargulowa, 2009, p. 17). Evidently, counsellogy is not simply a knowledge of guidance provision rules applicable in particular circumstances (which is the answer that students most frequently choose in test), but rather a continuing reflection on the counselling practice and a theory of counselling.

So, asking what it means to think like a counsellogist (as distinct from what it means to think like an advice-giver), I actually ask what is specific to and in the thinking of counselling researchers (who may and frequently in fact are practising counsellors).¹

Who are those counsellogists? Baza Nauki Polskiej (the Polish Science Database) (<http://nauka-polska.pl>) lists only eight counselling researchers. Does it mean that only the eight think like counsellogists? Clearly, NOT. The group of counselling researchers is infinitely more numerous. What counsellogists find important is studying reality and detecting traces of helping/guiding/supporting in it; analysing the help provision process and its effects; and, finally, designing helping models, methods, techniques and tools and testing them in counselling practice. Counsellogists attentively focus on values, norms and rules which underpin the helping processes, and discover and expose their latent dimensions. In this way, they produce knowledge about the counselling world, environment and climate.

Nevertheless, as B. Śliwerski claims, citing Robert Kwaśnica, “not all knowledge is at the same time thinking” (Kwaśnica, 1994, p. 5), paraphrasing which we could say that one may know but need not necessarily think in a certain way (Śliwerski, 2010, p. 38). With this remark in mind, I would propose that thinking like a counsellogist means attending to what is important because of its involvement with counselling or because of its intrinsic counselling aspect (*Ibid.*, p. 9). Counsellogy should thus be a particular way of thinking about reality saturated with and steeped in counselling, which it actually is. A sub-discipline of educational science, drawing

¹ An educator with whose thinking B. Śliwerski is concerned so much could be seen both as a practitioner and a theoretician. In case of counsellogy, the matter becomes much more complicated.

also on other disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology or medicine, counselling proposes a unique mode of looking into and interpreting the helping phenomena as a very particular dialogue-based interaction of two persons/agents.

To me, a counsellological way of thinking means, thus, a dialogue-sensitive anthropocentric thinking. This perspective enables us to see that:

- ◆ dialogue is an interpersonal relation (counselling is an encounter of the counsellor and the counselee, though “the counselee” may denote a group of clients or even a whole company that seeks solution to a problem);
- ◆ dialogue has an intrapersonal dimension (everybody is involved in an inner dialogue and, paradoxically though it may sound, may be a counsellor and a counselee at the same time; a so-called personal credo that an individual adopts is nothing else but a kind of self-provided guidance; I wonder whether we may call it “self-counselling.”);
- ◆ dialogue can be formal and informal (counselling may be practised within institutional structures, i.e. in facilities which employ professional counsellors, but it may also take place beyond such services: at home, in a peer group, among friends, acquaintances or colleagues);
- ◆ dialogue can be object-oriented or subject-oriented (counselling may thus be a directive instruction, an algorithm of action, a guideline, a piece of information or a non-directive presence, listening and support);
- ◆ dialogue can be direct or indirect (counselling may involve close face-to-face meetings or encounters at a distance, mediated by the telephone, the Internet, television, etc.);
- ◆ dialogue can be a conversation and a posture (counselling may be a transmission of certain content, a discussion, an exchange of ideas, or a confrontation, yet it may also proceed without words – relying on behaviours, actions, gestures, or an assisting, supportive presence);
- ◆ dialogue has individual and global dimensions (dialogicity is a specific mode of human existence and, hence, engaging in a direct relationship with an other is a constitutive factor; at the same time, an individual enters into a dialogue with the surrounding world, which makes us conceive of a therapeutic/counselling culture which “counsels” how to live and offers possible life patterns and identity projects);
- ◆ dialogue demands respect for values (counselling needs ethical values in order to serve individuals, to be sensitive to cultural difference and to resist external pressures);
- ◆ and finally: dialogue requires acceptance, openness, trust, confidentiality, responsibility and awareness of the impact the counsellor has on the counselee. Even if the counsellor prefers the extreme *laissez-faire* model (Wojtasik, 1993), the very fact of his/her being there, at the counselee’s side (who should “manage on his/her own”), affects the ways in which the person using the counsellor’s help (?) thinks, acts and behaves. As Józef Tischner

states: „A meeting of man with man is so powerfully persuasive that it has the potency to change a person's attitude to the world around, form anew his/her being-in-this-world and undermine his/her prior hierarchy of values. An encounter initiates man into the grand secrets of existence, whence questions about the sense and senselessness of everything that is ensue” (Tischner, 1980, p. 137).

In other words, counsellogical thinking is specifically sensitive to the perceived problems and issues which are interpreted and worked through so as to arrive at a better understanding of the reality that is being analysed. My view on what it means to think like a counsellor is, of course, one of many possible options. I am fully aware that my take on the challenge posed by the initial question is more of a new opening in (or a continuation of) an on-going discussion than a ready answer to the query. I hope, however, that with this we are taking another step on our path of exploration.

(Translated from Polish by Patrycja Poniatońska)

References

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