



Spyros Kriwas, *Teacher as a counsellor*,
Counsellogy Seminar, University of Lower Silesia,
Kłodzko, 24th January 2013

Since 2012, Counsellogy Seminar has worked in two sections: “Around career counselling” (initiated in 2008 and supervised by Prof. Bożena Wojtasik) and “Horizons of helping” (led by Prof. Elżbieta Siarkiewicz). This time, the former section met in the Kłodzko Campus, and the Seminar was visited, for the second time, by Prof. Spyros Kriwas from the University of Patras (Greece), an experienced counselling researcher and career counselling practitioner. In his lecture, Prof. Kriwas addressed one of important counselling issues – counselling performed by a teacher – combining theoretical reflection and illustrations from his own practice.

Indicating similarities and differences in the teacher’s and the counsellor’s work, Professor stated that common to them both is supporting students in attempts at finding their own life paths. Teachers and counsellors frequently rely on the same skills and techniques, while their respective pursuits differ in: specific objectives, short-term tasks and job performance strategies. Teaching is usually based on cooperating with a class; a teacher is responsible for organising the teaching process, decides on the kind and scope of knowledge to be imparted and chooses ways of conveying it and of evaluating learning outcomes. Counselling, in turn, allows the counselee to choose the problem to be solved with a counsellor’s support and to influence the course of the counselling process. The counselee is the focus of attention. Teaching requires leading a student group, while counselling requires listening to one person as a rule. Therefore, to become a counsellor, a professional with teaching experience must fundamentally change some of his or her behavioural habits.

Professor Kriwas claims that a good teacher and a good counsellor have a lot of characteristics in common: empathy, patience, flexibility, ability to maintain interpersonal relationships, openness to new ideas, awareness of individual differences. He thinks that teachers frequently develop supportive relationships with pupils and parents and, therefore, they should be able to use counselling techniques, even though they do not have to deliver long-term counselling or take on the role of the counsellor on daily basis.

In this context, Prof. Kriwas’s crucial statement is that proper teacher education could foster full understanding of the distinction between teaching and professional

counselling. Such education should address the following issues: confidence, limits of freedom of speech and expression of emotions, contract-negotiating skills and ability to include counselling techniques in teaching without crossing the line between these two processes. Adequate teacher preparation is necessary, for instance, because teachers happen to face situations similar to those typical of various counselling fields, especially family and career counselling, which aim to increase students' awareness concerning further life path choices. Additionally, conversations on such issues may also reveal certain parental problems. Therefore, a teacher as a counsellor may help not only a student but also his or her family by seeking to understand his or her situation more fully, especially in the context of such variables as multi-cultural diversification of families, emergent intergenerational conflicts and the student's own attempts at making sense of reality.

In the Seminar Prof. Kriwas referred to his counselling practise, telling about the "tools" he uses. He mentioned, among other things, accepting the student the way s/he is; sharing information on emotions; granting the student the right to be wrong; monitoring the student's fear of self-expression and encouraging the use of "I"-utterances; and promoting cooperation and active listening. One of the "tools" useful in counselling is silence. If a teacher is able to listen silently, he or she gives the student the time for afterthoughts. As Professor Wojtasik noticed, this approach draws on Carl Rogers's triad, in which a counsellor is characterised by congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard.

Later in his lecture, Prof. Kirwas insisted on the importance of emotions in the teaching process, recalling his difficult experience in learning mathematics and asking the listeners about feelings triggered by this story. In response, the audience offered feedback which included expression of positive emotions towards the lecturer, sense of shared experience, kindness, and admiration. The seminar participants found it difficult to name their emotions, but, according to Prof. Kriwas, naming and expressing one's feelings is one of the basic skills in counselling, whereas one method a teacher may use to encourage students to open up may be telling them something about himself or herself, about his or her experiences.

The Seminar's important part was a Q&A session in which Prof. Kriwas explained and clarified his earlier points. The questions referred, among others, to the limits of the teacher's responsibility in his counselling function. Answering these questions, Prof. Kriwas pointed out that the teacher's taks as a counsellor is, in a conversation with a student, first to name the problem and, second, if the solution of the problem exceeds the teacher's knowledge and skills, to make the student realise that he or she needs support of a professional counsellor, an expert on that particular problem. In a problem situation, referral to an expert is also a form of support, especially if untainted by labeling and suggested after listening to the student and identifying the problem.

Towards the end of the Seminar, Prof. Bożena Wojtasik briefly presented results of her research indicating that young people want the teacher to be a counsellor; they

expect teachers to recognise them not only as recipients of information to memorise. She also wondered if it is at all possible for a teacher, who has to assess students, to be recognised as empathetic. It induced further reflection and discussion on the limits of the teacher's capacities, complexity inherent in combining teaching and counselling functions and students' ability to trust a teacher as a counsellor. In brief, the Seminar participants seemed rather supportive of the idea of the teacher as a counsellor and critical of the school realities, for example the working conditions or the parents' expectations that go beyond teachers capabilities.

The Seminar was evaluated as absorbing and highly useful, especially in the context of the 2010 Regulation of the Minister of National Education pertaining to the principles of psychological and pedagogical intervention in Polish public kindergartens and schools. The document recommends that intervention should be delivered, among other, as advice and counselling provided by teachers. Prof. Kriwas's lecture and the discussion that it inspired emphatically demonstrated the complexity of these tasks.

Elżbieta Moroń

(Translated from Polish by Elżbieta Moroń)