

VOCATIONAL COUNSELING AS A COMPONENT OF DIDACTIC PRACTICE

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Abstract: The study aims to develop a short incursion into the field of vocational counseling, with an emphasis on the student-teacher relationship as an expression of the teacher's role as counselor. We highlight the psycho-pedagogical competency and professionalism of teachers in supporting students when it comes to making the right decisions regarding their careers.

Key-words: *vocational personality, career, counseling based student-teacher interaction.*

ARGUMENT

The academic prestige of a higher education institution is not determined solely by the level of technical training it provides its students or by the degree to which it succeeds in molding these students' personalities so that they are adapted and adequate to the professional world and the requirements of objective reality, but, first and foremost, by its ability to engender psycho-social aptitudes that are useful when entering the labor market. In this view, the emphasis falls on the type of student-teacher relationship that is emergent to the teacher's personality type.

The professional competence of educators includes not only competence in their specialist field and psycho-pedagogical competence but also psycho-social and managerial competence (I. Jinga, E. Istrate, 2006), which is expressed didactically through the fulfillment of adjacent roles: that of model or mentor, counselor, moderator and promoter of academic debates and stable benchmark in the development and growth of their student's personalities.

The authority that teachers enjoy as a result of their specialist competence would be ineffective as a tool for their students' professional training, were it not backed up by a partnership with the student – that is, by a relationship that is both emotionally and cognitively empathetic; an authentic and open relationship that affords the students access to one's personal resources and engenders the desire to become a maker of intellectual content rather than stay a consumer of such content.

Studies regarding the efficiency of counseling in the context of student-teacher relations have emphasized the relevance of the quality of this partnership, where an essential role is played by variables such as: socio-relational availability, effective communication with an emphasis on active listening, general availability, empathy, confidentiality and the power of personal examples provided by the educators themselves.

VOCATIONAL PERSONALITY – theoretical models

Specialist literature is full of different approaches to explaining the way that the various components which make up one's personality ultimately impact one's choice of profession and career path.

The dictionary of psychology defines "profession" or "occupation" as "a permanent occupation, which is attained after a period of training or on the basis of a qualification". It is thus "a complex of theoretical knowledge and practical skills which define the level of training of various workers." (U. Şchiopu, 1997). On the other hand, one's career is defined as being synonymous with one's "professional route", that is, "the succession of statutes and roles held by an individual during the course of their life." We note that there is a difference between the dynamic concept of the "career" as opposed to the rigid meaning that "profession" has, especially when one takes into account that, during the professional life of the average adult, there are many changes, readjustments and transformations that take place, both within the same trade/profession, as well as with regard to the role-statute dynamic of the trade in

question at a given moment in time. This is how the idea of the career, which describes its professional, cultural and personal implications of being institutionally engaged, is formed.

An important contribution to the field of vocational sciences was made by Donald Super, with his "Theory of Vocational Development", which was later synthesized by Maria Magdalena Klein in the form of the following 10 statements:

1. People differ on the basis of their abilities, interests and personalities;
2. As a result of these differences, each of them is suited to a particular set of occupations;
3. Each of these occupations has a characteristic matrix of abilities, interests and personality traits, with small tolerances that allow, in any case, a variety of occupations for each individual, but also a variety of individuals for the same occupation;
4. Professional preference and competence in real-life situations – just like one's view of oneself (although this usually stabilizes by late adolescence) – are subject to change over time, making choice and adaptation continuous processes;
5. This process can be characterized, much like the stages of life, through: growth, exploration, stability, consistency and decline, and these may be further divided up into:
 - 5.1 Imaginative, explorative and engagement phases
 - 5.2 Stable phases (within a stable state);
6. The nature of one's career pattern is determined by the individual's parents' socioeconomic status, by one's own mental abilities and personal traits, but also by the conditions that allow one to explore and use these innate abilities;
7. The succession and development of life's stages can be guided, to a certain degree, through the stimulation of interests and aptitudes, and also by helping one to develop one's self-image;
8. The process of vocational development is essential to the development of self-image; it is a process of compromise during which one's concept of oneself becomes the product of the interaction of several factors: innate abilities, the nervous and endocrine system, the chance to act out different roles and the ability to understand the degree to which one's performance in these roles has been found satisfactory by superiors and/or peers;
9. The process of compromise between individual and social factors, between one's self-image and reality is one of roles played out in the mind, in the counseling interview or in real life – regardless of whether this refers to school, dance clubs, leisure activities, and last but not least, the workplace;
10. Workplace satisfaction, as well as satisfaction in a wider sense, will lead to the adequate use of one's abilities, interests, personality traits, value systems; it leads to stability at a particular workplace and a particular "path" through life, that allows the individual to fulfill one's professional role in a way that is in harmony with one's personal development and life experience. "(Klein, 2001, p.351-352).

D. Super places a great deal of emphasis on the idea of “life career”, noting the fact that an individual’s career extends beyond his professional activity per-se, to one’s entire lifespan. Super expresses the interrelation of roles and statuses which pertain to one’s career by comparing them to a rainbow, which is in turn split up into childhood, youth and adulthood, each with its own specific degrees and proportions of roles and statuses.

Here is how D. Super defines career: “A career is a succession of professions, trades and positions that a person holds over the course of their active lives. This definition can be extended beyond one’s active years, to include pre and post-vocational functions, such as university education (which prepares one for work) or pension (which plays the part of pension supplement)” (Super, 1978, p.426).

The instructive and educational process specific to higher education has as its aim the crystallization of as real and positive a self-image as possible (through the creation and stimulation of transversal and longitudinal abilities), without which the maturity of one’s personality would be nothing but an empty concept. Moreover, once given the vocational profile of the specialization the student has opted for, efforts are focused precisely on the transformation of one’s potential in a way that is suitable to the position’s requirements and those of the labor market at large.

A more wide-ranging approach that is still popular today was first put forth by John Holland, known in particular for his Interest Interval, which has a place in almost all vocational testing even today.

According to Holland, career choice is a function with ties to an individual’s personal education, of individual differences which leave a mark on activity types for the entire length of a career. The vocational personality theory put forth by Holland, known as the RIASEC theory, describes six vocational personality types: realist, investigative, artistic, social, entrepreneurial and conventional.

Holland serves as the basis of M. Zlate’s (2004) descriptive tableau, which we will examine next:

1. Realist: objective relationship with the outside world; prefers activities which require physical strength; materialist, emotionally stable, conformist, lacking in intuition; has high agility and motor skills but lacks verbal and relationship aptitudes; has a preference for concrete rather than abstract issues; dislikes social and educational activities.

2. Investigative: has an investigative or theoretical relationship with the outside world, seeks truth; well oriented within a task, thinks problems through, in terms of their root causes and interdependencies; concerned with the abstract, concepts, de ambiguous issues, logic; introverted, unsocial, bookish, perseverant, critical and prudent; has a dislike of social, persuasive and reflective activities.

3. Artistic: prefers indirect personal interaction, which is reached through self-expression; sensitive, flexible,

CONCLUSION

In an academic environment, students have already committed to a professional field, often times even a particular position. The issue facing the teacher-counselor is how to best provide support in the consolidation of the student’s professional identity, in the orientation and planning of his career.

This is a deliberate process, that the student is aware of and feels in control of, and that allows one to make decisions according to one’s own resources and aspirations. It can be seen as a gradually unfolding, student-centered transactional relationship that ultimately leads to the engendering of the abilities the student needs to manage his or her own career.

Essentially, the main objective of vocational counseling is to provide support to students as they uncover their own personalities (in terms of their vocational inclinations), explore the professional world and labor market, and also to aid in the development of tools that he or she will use in order to make the journey to satisfying and appropriate employment that is socially beneficial.

The first stage of vocational counseling is the investigation of the student’s personality, in terms of its aptitude potential, which, under the formative influence of the educational environment may generate manifest aptitudes. An especially important role in the development and formation of aptitudes is held by character – the axiological and self-regulating component of personality. Desirable character traits, such as perseverance, responsibility, persistence within a given task, social nature, honesty, modesty and so on, will do much to contribute to both aptitudes needed for work and psychosocial aptitudes.

introspective, submissive, emotive, unpractical; enjoys sing imagination as a form of self-expression; has a dislike for rules; has a dislike for orderly, systemic, administrative and business tasks.

4. Social: socially oriented, idealist and altruistic; capable in both relating to others and manipulating others; has a preference for lone things; verbally and relationally skilled, warm and caring towards others; dominant values: interest in and care for others; dislike of manual and technical labor, or labor that requires the use of materials and/or tools.

5. Entrepreneurial: interested in interacting with others, but only as long as this interaction serves a purpose or takes the shape of leadership or convincing others; enthusiastic, adventurous, impulsive, dominating; prefers acting to thinking; covets leadership positions; motivated by power and social status; dislike for theoretical ideas that require abstract thinking.

6. Conventional: has a formal, conformist verbal and behavioral structure; places value on security and dependence; prefers clarity and having control but makes little use of imagination; well groomed, sociable, conservative, usually practical and efficient; chooses subordinate positions; has a dislike for unstructured, unsystemized and artistic activity.” (M. Zlate, 2004, p.358 - 359)

Holland’s research in the field of vocational personality ultimately led him to the idea of the heterogeneity of RIASEC types, which he proposed should be ordered according to their degree of dominative tendencies, which allowed him to graphically represent the types as a hexagon and calculate the correlative coefficients between different types. This emphasizes compatibility, for instance, between the realist, conventional and entrepreneurial types, or between the investigative, social and artistic.

This is the source of Holland’s most important assertions and the key points of his theory of vocational personality:

- individuals who choose similar professional routes do so on the basis of underlying similarities in their personalities;
- individuals do not pass indifferently and passively through one or more professions, but are in fact significantly influenced by their professional environment;
- the idea of “the right man for the right job” should be thought of in terms of matching personality types, value systems and interests with the professional activity in question;
- job satisfaction is influenced by positive feedback for accomplished tasks, with conditioning being bi-univocal: success in accomplishing a task increases perseverance, while effort expended during the carrying out of work-related tasks plays a role in intrinsic success motivation.

Many employment interviews are focused on uncovering positive character traits, socio-relational potential, team spirit and ability to fit in with a group.

Adjacent to self-discovery, a great deal of importance is placed on the ability to objectively self-evaluate and on conscientious self-development. This is what Mangan called “knowing how to sell oneself”.

The second stage of vocational counseling is focused on developing one’s own abilities, in particular the ability to formulate goals, action plans and the ability to make the right decisions.

The next stages are focused on educational and occupational exploration, in order to allow the student to make the right decisions and bring about informed changes with regard to their own career.

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