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SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING IN UNIVERSITIES
– BETWEEN NECESSITY AND OBLIGATION

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Abstract

A society which is likely to develop harmoniously should take into consideration and support the career guidance activity dedicated to school pupils and students, providing them the opportunity to receive free professional services. Career guidance is an educational activity carried out regularly to foster the success of the students and implicitly of the future adults. Several factors, both internal and external, which may lead to school success and later on to professional self-fulfilment and development, are taken into consideration in choosing a student's career. Generally, students should choose those studies and professions which, in their opinion, will ensure their development and give them certain satisfaction and success. Most times, however, the family is important in shaping a student's career option. Therefore, parents become a motivational, material and emotional source, supporting their children to choose their future career. But what happens when the former school pupils want to continue their education and pursue university studies, what way can take given the security and future of their profession on the labour market, the social and material position provided by the profession, but also considering their personal capacities and their competences acquired during mainstream education? We have all faced a number of mistakes in this process of career guidance, such as early school leaving, postponement, discouragement etc. These may have a major impact not only on the student's and future adult's personality and career, but also on society.

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Keywords: School advisory services, counselling and career guidance services, student, workshops, group meetings, support groups.



1. Introduction

Youth, the age of great quests, self-knowledge, self-evaluation, self-realization, has a major influence on the professional and social future of each individual.

The personality, kneaded during childhood and adolescence, will be fulfilled and polished insofar as the young person discovers himself or herself, objectively knows himself or herself and makes a realistic decision on the professional and social path, considering the personal needs and potential, as well as the demands and offers of society (Schiopu, & Verza, 1995).

Due to the winding road he or she travels under the impact of multiple, diverse and sometimes contradictory influences from the environment (outstanding personalities, friends, parents, values expressed in the media) and education, the young student goes through a series of problems that nuance his development and mark his social, professional and personal life (Allport, 1981).

The society we live in, where we carry out our existence, is particularly mobile, and sets multiple and different, sometimes fluctuating requirements on the individual.

Self-knowledge (which requires self-observation, introspection, self-analysis) and the accompanying self-evaluation, the prerequisites in building one's future, not guided by specific approaches of the school, are often achieved chaotically, without value criteria.

This results in underrated or overrated self-image, both generating wrong professional choices and orientations. If the option for certain studies was made under the impact of spontaneous attractions, insufficiently strengthened interests, subjective guidance from family or friends, the student experiences disillusionment, the feeling of failure, and, in time, professional and social inadequacy.

There are countless situations where the professional option has nothing to do with one's own availabilities, skills, capabilities, but not even with the system of preferences, attractions, interests in the process of final shaping. This option is only related to the social offer; and this leads to serious phenomena of dissatisfaction and even self-estrangement in time.

For most students the professional option is determined vocationally and proves deep self-knowledge. This objective self-knowledge, accompanied by realistic judgment regarding one's possibilities, is the prerequisite for achieving a fair correlation between skills, aspirations, and achievements.

Unless a correct ratio between the three elements is obtained, there is a risk of outpacing one's actual, real possibilities and of exacerbating individual aspirations and desires, therefore failing to achieve the dynamic balance between experience, capability, and aspirations.

While the young student who makes the professional choice based on vocation experiences the feeling of success, which is of great mobilizing value, the young student who is vocationally frustrated experiences intense discontentment, dissatisfaction, and unfulfillment of one's personality.

The student status broadens the way to culture, to self-knowledge, offers multiple possibilities for personal development, creates a secure environment. Lacking the accumulation of professional experience (needed for career development and requested by most employers, they postpone the assumption of professional responsibility; thereby a risk of social inadequacy arises.

Many times, barely arrived in college or after he or she has stepped into the second year, the student starts working.

He or she is strongly motivated by the need for material independence, the need to be a useful member of their family or to not be a burden for them, by the need for prestige (in a world where prestige is being attached not so much to the quality of work and culture as to the material situation and the perceptions of others).

The achievement of the so much longed for material independence raises them in their own eyes, leading them to oversize their self-image, allowing them to meet their immediate desires, and gaining a state of well-being that is far from happiness. Under the overwhelming influence of social life and immediate professional requirements, they risk becoming an adult too soon. Insufficient learning time diminishes their access to culture, the development possibilities offered by the faculty, and works against in-depth self-knowledge.

These are only a few of the situations in which the professional option of young people who choose the path of higher education to live, fulfill themselves, outdo themselves is undertaken/manifested.

2. Problem Statement

The social and economic changes in the recent years and the evolutionary trends of society have caused the school to change its aims, reorganize its priorities, and improve the methods and tools that are necessary for the cognitive, social and emotional development of children, adolescents and young people. Many expert studies capture the increase in the number of students that face learning difficulties (generating serious effects such as insufficient preparation, school failure, school dropout) with behavioral problems and emotional problems (generating intra- and interpersonal conflicts, depression). Unsuccessful schooling sets up professional and social failure.

School counselling, the intensive and complex process of providing psycho-pedagogic assistance to the persons involved in the educational process (pupils, teachers, parents, guardians, school authorities) in order to ensure the personal development of pupils (Tomșa, 1999) came as a school strategy to ensure socio-professional adaptation, success in life, and the state of balance with oneself and the others.

School and professional guidance has turned into a more complex activity or a set of interdependent activities, becoming school counselling and guidance, and supporting students to develop the abilities they need for proper adaptation to the school and work environment.

The general goals of school counselling and school guidance are: the development by pupils of a set of abilities and competences that are necessary for socio-professional adaptation and integration, handling them for self-knowledge and personal development, communication skills, social and emotional skills, learning management, career planning, and lifestyle management (Jigău, 2006; Silvas, 2009).

Three terms are being circulated in the literature in relation to counselling and career guidance interventions:

- Career guidance or school and professional guidance
- Career counselling
- Education for career.

The concept of **career guidance** is the term that covers the broadest range of activities, from information and evaluation, to counselling and education for career and thus becomes the umbrella-concept for the activities in this field.

Career counselling aims at developing the abilities of a person or group of people to solve a specific career-related problem - indecision, career anxiety, academic dissatisfaction, career plan - and is essentially a psychological activity.

Unlike counselling, **education for career** is an educational intervention to develop the habits and abilities needed by young people for the development and management of their own careers (Lemeni & Miclea, 2004; Silvas, 2009).

Education for career aims at personal development and providing pupils with the knowledge and abilities that are necessary for the management of their own educational and professional path (Zlate, 2004).

By means of the career education programs, students develop skills in the following areas:

Education for career is a systematic and continuous educational intervention, focused on developing the skills needed by pupils to manage their own careers.

- At the Self-knowledge and personal development - abilities of realistic self-evaluation of one's features and emotional and behavioral self-regulation in all kinds of life and career-related circumstances
- Interpersonal communication and connection - ability of active listening and assertive expression in view of increasing communication efficiency within human interactions.
- Information and learning management - information abilities needed to streamline learning performance, the decision-making and problem-solving process.
- Career planning – knowledge and abilities needed to make realistic career plans and adapt to labor market requirements.
- Entrepreneurial education – fostering interest in entrepreneurship and developing skills for analysis and making the most of business opportunities.
- Lifestyle management – to increase the quality of physical, mental, social and occupational life.

same time, education for career aims at forming an active attitude towards self-knowledge and personal development on the one hand, and exploring educational and professional opportunities on the other hand.

3. Research Questions

Is necessary to support the students for a deeper self-knowledge of their personal resources, abilities and skills?

4. Purpose of the Study

Yes, we believe that higher education can do a lot in students' education for career. It is necessary to support them for a deeper self-knowledge of their personal resources, abilities and skills, and of the difficulties they need to overcome by their own effort. It is particularly important to achieve the real transformation of the student from the object of teacher's education into the subject of self-education and self-training.

5. Research Methods

The student employed in the labor market, and particularly the one whose current job is not related to the desired professional field, must realize that there is more to learning than the preparation for sessions, as it is not just an accumulation of knowledge, but above all a process generating (personal, professional) development. Time management becomes another aspect in education for career.

The applied investigation (aside from its predominantly ascertaining nature, it was a research-action trial) that we conducted was aimed at helping students build their careers. The underlying goals were:

- to identify the problems faced by students in the educational process;
- to identify the ratio between the time devoted to personal development and the time spent on the job, the moment when the student starts to work and the occupational sectors approached;
- to identify the main reasons that cause students to work and the states experienced at work/in relation to the work process;
- to support students in knowing themselves objectively and in making the best decisions about their future;
- to support students in achieving school and professional success at the same time.

Our investigation was carried out in the academic year 2016-2017 with a sample of 100 students from the Faculty of Geography, the University of Bucharest and repeated in the academic year 2017-2018 with a sample of 100 students from the Faculty of Medical Engineering, the Polytechnic University of Bucharest.

The questionnaire survey, the analysis of school results (on one semester), and the case study (a student who has changed their career choice by way of their job) have been used to collect data.

We have designed and implemented a career education program.

The questionnaire, built with multi-choice questions, comprised relevant items for: school adaptation and success, criteria based on which the choice of studies was made, strategies and solutions adopted in building one's career, difficulties and satisfaction experienced in the world of work.

A small part of the career education program was held during those seminars that dealt with knowledge and self-knowledge, learning and development, motivation, mental tools, and most of it in a series of informal meetings with small groups.

6. Findings

The items of the questionnaire by means of which we sought to obtain information about students' school adaptation and success gave us a series of data which are not related to the grades obtained, but to the intellectual, motivational, emotional states experienced by the students.

Most of the first-year students (73% of the geography and 90% of the polytechnic students) showed that after the joy/euphoria/satisfaction/fulfillment/pride they felt right after admission and in the first month of school, dissatisfaction accompanied by the desire to drop those studies appeared. This dissatisfaction was caused, students say, by the methods used by teachers (generally teacher-centered), by the requirement of being prepared for the continuous assessment (the polytechnic students are checked by written tests at the end of each subtopic), by the rigid educational interactions with the teachers from all the age groups, the theoretical nature of the courses, the insufficiency of applications. 10% of the geography students, 12%

of the polytechnic students admit that they overrated themselves as regards their preparation for that particular field.

In the answers of the third-year students, the same feelings experienced at the beginning of the first year stand out, which they have managed to overcome in time. As the main changes/factors that have favored change, the students from both faculties mention: participation in their own training, dealing with self-tuition methods (many admit they did not know how to learn) and self-training, special relationships with guardians, special meeting with mentors (very many students have shown that they have discovered and got close to teachers), non-formal education actions carried out at faculty level, voluntary actions, individual and group taking of roles.

The information received in the relevant items for the criteria based on which the subjects have chosen the respective studies confirmed our opinion. Most students choose the faculty randomly, without taking into account the ratio between intellectual potential/skills/specialty culture, motivation and personal feelings for the professional area and the requirements of the faculty and the profession. What mattered primarily was: the grades obtained during the high-school education, the scientific training owed to the baccalaureate, the friends enrolled in the same faculties, the opinions of the parents. Only 5% of the students showed that they also considered what the labor market had to offer. The persons that provided guidance, counselling were the parents, friends who were already students, family friends. From within school, they mentioned the teachers who taught Geography/Mathematics, Physics (30%) and their headmasters (15%). Vocational information and guidance, career counselling are almost absent in school. Pupils admit what they feel uncomfortable asking for a teacher's guidance advice.

The answers to the questionnaire helped us to form an opinion regarding the reasons why students start to work during college. It should be noted that the quota of those who work is higher for Geography students (43%) than for Polytechnic ones (29%).

Geography students complain about their precarious material situation (40%), the need for experience in the field (3%). Polytechnic students decide to work for the experience or because they have received a proposition from a serious employer (40%).

All students admit that they had professional adaptation problems (entailed by the work schedule, coworkers, their insufficient professional development) and great problems at school (small grades, insufficient preparation, outstanding exams).

What is very important is their decision to give up work in the final year to bring themselves up to date and to prepare for their bachelor's degree.

In order to build up their careers, students generally resort to colleague models, teacher advice, and early employment.

The career education program developed after the application of the questionnaire has provided the students with self-knowledge methods (self-observation, introspection, self-analysis, the "who am I" method, the life story, the diary), the self-evaluation methods, (e.g. training evaluation, analyzing one's potential against external objective requirements, peer review, comparison with the other, etc.), time management methods, self-stimulation methods (suggestion, self-persuasion), self-tuition methods (explanatory reading, problem posing reading, critical reading, reflection, etc.). During informal meetings, matters of life (personal, professional) have been discussed, applications have been made, films that are suggestive for personal and professional life have been viewed.

7. Conclusion

Very few students receive serious vocational information and counselling. Effects are felt in the important choices they make.

Education for career, that systematic and continuous educational intervention focused on the development of professional and transversal competences, must also be present during college. Enhancing the efficiency of interventions in the socio-professional counselling of the student and future graduate is possible by support for deeper knowledge and self-knowledge through workshops, meeting groups, support groups, free counselling and socio-professional guidance services for students and young college graduates.

All this involves psycho-pedagogic diagnosis and intervention under the guidance of professional teachers (psychologists, educational psychologists, educators, psychotherapists).

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