

Multicultural Career Counselling: Helping Minority Groups

Violetta Drabik-Podgórna / e-mail: m.podgorny@pedagogika.uni.wroc.pl
Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław, Poland

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The article deals with multicultural career counselling. It introduces the situation of minorities in a globalized world and the consequences of the migration process. The author mainly focuses on the concept and principle of career counselling. She also pays great attention to the issue of multicultural counselling, which belongs among the three main categories of counselling interventions.

Key words: *career counselling; multiculturalism; minority groups*

Minorities in the global world

The contemporary world distinctly abounds in cultural differences, which does not mean, of course, that multiculturalism is a novel phenomenon. In a sense, multiculturalism has always been there; today, however, the fact that many cultures cohabit side by side, has accrued particular relevance due to globalisation processes. Globalisation designates processes which lead to a greater interdependence and integration of various regions of the world, which results in the emergence of a global society. Roland Robertson defines globalisation as “a set of processes which yields a single world.”¹ The ways in which the world economy and politics are organised make globalisation, in a sense, inevitable. Information and communication technologies accelerate and expand the scope of human interactions and “facilitate the compression of time and space,” as Anthony Giddens puts it.² Beneficial effects of globalisation, including elimination of barriers to international commerce,

1 Robertson, R. (1992). *Globality, global culture and images of world order*. In Haferkamp, H., Smelser, N. J. (Eds.), *Social Change and Modernity*. Berkeley: California University Press, pp. 395–411.

2 Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 125.

3 Sztompka, P. (2002). *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa*, Kraków: Znak, p. 584.

4 Cf.: Giddens, A. *op. cit.*, p. 631.

5 Ibid.

growth of tourism and free flow of information, do not offset, unfortunately, its detrimental consequences, such as the domination of Western culture (Westernisation, Americanisation, McDonaldisation), the overall uniformisation and homogenisation of culture,³ globally resonant financial crises, emergence of new risk zones and exacerbation of social inequality and inequity both globally and nationally.

One consequence of dynamic changes is increased migration, which makes societies blend and diversify while the already existing contrasts are becoming ever more enhanced. In this way, societies are formed in which a minority group is subordinated to a dominant majority group. Minorities are groups of people which differ from the majority of the citizens of the country in nationality, race, religious denomination, language, traditions, customs and beliefs. In its sociological usage, the term designates not so much the size of the group (as they tend to be very populous) as rather its low standing in the society.⁴ “[M]embers of the minority are disadvantaged [...] and have some sense of group solidarity, of belonging together. The experience of being the subject of prejudice and discrimination tends to heighten feelings of common loyalty and interests.”⁵

Speaking of minorities, we usually have ethnic and national minority groups in mind. The biggest ethnic and cultural minority in Europe are Roma – twelve million people scattered across, chiefly, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Russia, Poland and the Balkan states. But minorities are also groups excluded for reasons of gender, age, sexual orientation and/or disability. The criteria underpinning exclusion are derived both from biological differences and from cultural otherness. We must even face up to new cultural racism as “hierarchies of superiority and inferiority are constructed according to the values of the majority culture.”⁶

Although migrations contribute to cultural and ethnic augmentation of many societies and “help to shape demographic, economic and social dynamics,”⁷ constructive coexistence of differences is very difficult to foster, and to build societies which would include various cultural groups on equal footing is an extremely challenging task.

In 2000, the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia launched a study into Europeans’ attitudes to ethnic minorities. Based on the research findings, four categories of attitudes were distinguished: actively tolerant, intolerant, passively tolerant and ambivalent. The *actively tolerant* people believe that ethnic minorities enrich society and,

⁶ Op. cit., p. 635.

⁷ Op. cit., p. 653.

hence, should be allowed to cultivate their traditions, without being coerced into assimilation to the dominant culture. They support policies which encourage such developments. The *passively tolerant* people have, basically, positive attitudes to minority groups but do not support pro-minority policies. The *ambivalent* ones expect minority groups to assimilate and do not see their otherness and specificity as adding in any way to society's resources. The *intolerant* ones find the very fact that minority groups exist a threat to the social order. The study revealed that, somewhat contrary to expectations, the passively tolerant rather than the intolerant ones were the biggest respondent group (39% and 14%, respectively). The actively tolerant people made up 21% and the ambivalent people 26% of the respondents.

When these issues are considered in the context of vocational activity, even graver problems and divisions come to light. By facilitating free international trade, globalisation triggered changes in the occupational structure. Some jobs and whole occupations have declined, making unemployment rates soar.⁸ The labour market is not homogeneous, but comprised of various segments with limited access to employment. The primary sector offers advantageous employment conditions (attractive jobs and good pay), while the secondary sector offers only so-called "junk" contracts and low wages. It is to that secondary labour market that people from defavoured, marginalised and discriminated groups find themselves consigned as a rule. They include the elderly, women who return to employment after breaks caused by post-natal and early child-care, young school-leavers without graduation credentials or vocational certifications, people with disabilities, members of ethnic minorities and immigrants. Even when such people do make their way to the primary sector, their promotion to senior positions is constrained by "the glass ceiling." These tendencies might subside in the course of time, but currently discriminatory practices are still very powerfully in place. One of the relevant factors in combating multilayered discrimination is career counselling – professional help for people who seek support in solving problems related to their unfavourable positioning.

Career counselling

Over a hundred-plus years of its history, career counselling has dynamically developed, shifting from the directive model (vocational

⁸ Cf., *Ibid.*, s. 85.

guidance) to liberal support and is now defined as an interpersonal process aimed to assist the individual in career development.⁹ Clearly, it is not limited to helping choose a vocation but evolves toward lifelong or biographical counselling, which targets both youth and adults. It covers various dimensions of life and various roles that people perform, attending to their socio-economic and cultural contexts as well as the individuals' specific situation in life.

In compliance with recommendations of the European Commission, career counselling is regarded as a priority area for national and European policy making and implementation because it promotes equal opportunities through disseminating lifelong education and furthers the development and upgrading of competencies necessary in vocational life.¹⁰ It designates "a range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make training, educational and vocational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings (...). Guidance throughout life contributes to the achievement of the European Union goals of economic development, labour market efficiency, and occupational and geographical mobility by enhancing the efficiency of investment in education and vocational training, lifelong learning and human capital and workforce development."¹¹ In this way, career counselling may contribute to improving the position minority groups hold on the labour market.

Today's counsellors provide both individual and group counselling interventions, they work in face-to-face settings and also use new technologies which enable virtual counselling, making counselling more widely accessible, particularly to those people who are prevented (by disability, for example) from meeting a counsellor in person. Counselling methods range from applications of the re-interpreted classic repertoire (e.g. based on J. Holland's concepts) to models underpinned by

⁹ Cf. Brown, D., Brooks, L. (1990). *Career Counselling Techniques*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

¹⁰ Communication of the European Commission, *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* – Brussels, 21. 11. 2001 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF> (retrieved: 15. 09. 2014).

¹¹ Guidance throughout life in Europe. Całozyciowe poradnictwo zawodowe w Europie (2007). In *Poradnictwo zawodowe w oficjalnych dokumentach oraz opracowaniach o zasięgu międzynarodowym*. Warszawa, Euroguidance, p. 120.

constructivist (M. Savickas, J. Guichard) and socio-dynamic (V. Peavy) frameworks.¹²

A. Bańka believes that contemporary career counselling should aim to “discover life scenarios which make it possible to cross borders, adapt to various environments and assimilate models stimulating mental mobility; to show opportunities of life and development in permanent change and help people cope with negative effects of change; and to support sustained renewal of personal potential.”¹³ Given the complexity of the contemporary world, career counselling must address multicultural coexistence of various social groups, especially minority groups. It seems, thus, that multicultural counselling should be developed to respond to these needs.

Multicultural counselling

There is no consensus in the literature on how multicultural counselling and cross-cultural counselling should be defined or where exactly the line between them runs. Frequently, the two terms are used interchangeably. However, some scholars insist that they denote two different, though related, things and, therefore, must be kept apart carefully. A. Bańka claims that multicultural counselling seeks to achieve the goals which share the concerns of equality of cultural/ethnic groups, that is, to obliterate differences between them. Cross-cultural counselling, in turn, aims to highlight differences between cultures and show possible advantages as well as constraints inherent in the coexistence of differences.¹⁴ The former of these notions is also a chronologically earlier one, as it developed in the United States in the first half of the 20th century. The then counsellors attempted to oppose discrimination against minorities. In the 1960s, ethnicity counselling developed, but it was only in the 1970s that multicultural concerns attracted increased interest. Today, they actually lie at the very centre of reflection on the responsibilities of professional helping services.¹⁵

¹² Cf. Guichard, J., Huteau, M. (2005). *Psychologia orientacji i poradnictwa zawodowego*. Kraków: Impuls; cf. Savickas, M. L. (2011). *Career Counseling*. Washington: American Psychological Association; Peavy, V. (2014). *Poradnictwo socjodynamiczne. Praktyczne podejście do nadawania znaczeń*, Taos Institut.

¹³ Cf. Bańka, A. (2007). *Psychologiczne doradztwo karier*. Poznań: Print-B, p. 25.

¹⁴ Bańka A. (2006). *Poradnictwo transnarodowe. Cele i metody międzykulturowego doradztwa karier*. Warszawa: MPiPS, Departament rynku pracy, p. 44.

¹⁵ Højer B., Launikari, M., Pukari, S. (2007). Droga do ‘czwartego nurtu’ w poradnictwie – historyczne i aktualne perspektywy rozwoju poradnictwa multikulturowego. In Launikari, M. – Pukari, S. (Eds.), *Poradnictwo i doradztwo multikulturowe. Podstawy teoretyczne i najlepsze praktyki w Europie*. Warszawa: MPiPS, Departament Rynku Pracy, pp. 80–81.

The issues of coexistence or intersection of many cultures are tackled in several counselling contexts. There are three major categories of counselling interventions in this field. Firstly, we could distinguish *multicultural counselling*, in the broad sense of diversity counselling. Here, all counselling relationships are viewed as multicultural in a way because each meeting is in fact a meeting of members of different cultures. The counsellor and the client could be said to form two separate worlds, as each of them brings into the counselling relationship his/her environment, social class, race, values, motivations, sensitivity, empathy, meanings, anxieties, fitness and health status.

Another, narrower sense of multicultural counselling pertains only to the situations in which members of different national or ethnic groups meet. Mutual perceptions of otherness tend to lead to stigmatisation. According to E. Goffmana, the stigma is "an attribute that is deeply discrediting."¹⁶ It may be related to appearance, behaviours, creed, beliefs and outlooks, to name but a few. In the case of minorities, the very membership in another culture becomes the attribute that sets one apart, distinguishing one from the rest of the community and making the other group less socially desirable, so to say, which produces isolation and prompts discrimination. *Cross-cultural counselling*, called also cross-cultural counselling, inter-cultural counselling and trans-cultural counselling, is counselling that "recognizes diversity and embraces approaches that support the worth, dignity, potential and uniqueness of individuals within their historical, cultural, economic, political, and psychosocial contexts."¹⁷ In keeping with this definition, its task is to combat social exclusion and foster a good climate for mutual understanding and beneficial use of cultural diversity.

The third framework for multicultural concerns is *transnational counselling*. It is a specific form of help provision which takes place in a culturally different setting (outside of the homeland) but involves the client and the counsellor who do not differ in terms of culture. Transnational counselling is informed by "the idea of helping people who leave their countries but intend to return home at some point."¹⁸ Transnational counselling aims to help in problem-solving at various points in life when decisions are made to relocate, work or study abroad

¹⁶ Goffman, E. (1986). *Sigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Touchstone, p. 3.

¹⁷ *The ACA Code of Ethics (2014)*. American Counseling Association, p. 20, www.counseling.org (retrieved: 15. 09. 2014).

¹⁸ Bańka A. *Poradnictwo transnarodowe...*, p. 30.

for a period of time.¹⁹ Its point is to make the clients aware of exigencies involved in living in a country which is foreign to them, help them handle these challenges and prevent the identity disintegration in people who, admittedly, willingly decide to leave but are not always able to envisage the ramifications of the act. One of the essential problems many people are forced to face up to is stigmatisation of immigrants. That is why one of the goals set by and for transnational counselling is to combat discrimination.²⁰ In transnational counselling, a supportive climate is created which facilitates migrant problem-solving, fosters individual growth and helps create career plans in the context of cultural diversity. This kind of counselling, however, does not aim to assimilate immigrants to the living conditions in the host country, to balance their deficits or to target those who intend to make the host country their permanent home and integrate with its culture.²¹

Competences for diversity career counselling

Irrespective of what counselling model is adopted, counsellors need specific competences in order to effectively help people in culturally diversified environments. Besides specialist knowledge, emotional maturity, active listening skills, empathy and congruence (C. Rogers's famous triad), which are considered central to any counselling model, diversity-focused counsellors need also cultural sensitivity to sustain the meeting with a client from a minority group.²²

Multicultural/diversity competence can be best and succinctly defined as "the counselors' cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and how this awareness and knowledge are applied effectively in practice with clients and client groups."²³ It comprises awareness of one's own value system and limitations consequent upon it (stereotypes, aversions, resistance) and knowledge of minority groups, their language and values, social, political and cultural conditions in which they function and barriers to be encountered in individual biographies.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

²¹ Ibid., p. 43.

²² Cf. Collins, S., Arthur, N., Brown, C., Kennedy, B. (2013). Counsellor and Supervisor Views of Multicultural and Social Justice Education. *Journal of Counsellogy*, no. 2, pp. 279–295.

²³ *Code of Ethics*. American Counseling Association, p. 20, www.counseling.org (retrieved: 15. 09. 2014).

²⁴ Paszkowska-Rogacz, A. (1989). *Kompetencje międzykulturowe w doradztwie*. Aneks A, p. 107–110.

A key skill is also grasping the broader social processes and factors involved in them as well as learning about strategies for combating discrimination, which often takes place on multiple levels. Intersectionality (study of intersections) usefully illuminates how various socially produced categories overlap and reinforce each other, which helps refine analyses of coexistence of culturally diverse groups.²⁵ To understand, with tolerable precision, the situation a person is in, we must consider many overlapping, intersecting factors. An insight into links between social class, nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, disability, etc. reveals the interpenetration and mutual buttressing of various manifestations of discrimination.²⁶

To adequately comprehend a client in counselling, we must analyse his/her situation from multiple perspectives, attending to ethnic and cultural difference (not only religious practices, but also customs as well as verbal and non-verbal behaviour patterns), sex and gender difference, age difference and concomitant specific educational and developmental needs, class and socio-economic position, health status and disability, sexual orientation, education and competence level.²⁷

E. Torrey in his superb book *Witchdoctors and Psychiatrists* comprehensively compared Western therapists with therapists from other cultures of the world. His cultural-anthropological analysis led him to conclude that there are four major factors which, irrespective of differences among communities, affect the course of help provision and determine its efficacy. They are: a common worldview that the psychotherapist and the patient share (owing to which problems can be defined in the same terms), the psychotherapist's personal qualities, the patient's expectations for therapy and the therapeutic techniques applied.²⁸ That is why helping strategies in diversity career counselling require the command of foreign languages and that not only for effective communication, but primarily for understanding the meanings invested in experiences, causes of the unfolding events and their outcomes. Respect for otherness requires also finding out about diverse helping theories and diagnostic tools

²⁵ For intersectionality, see Crenshaw, K. (1989). *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Legal Forum, p. 139.

²⁶ *Doradztwo zawodowe dla osób zagrożonych wykluczeniem społecznym*. Handbook at http://www.link-project.eu/content_files/pages/files/LINK_Handbook_PL.pdf, p. 76.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁸ Cf. Torrey, E. F. (1981). *Czarownicy i psychiatrzy*, Warszawa: PiW.

they underpin as well as skilful adaptation to particular client groups.²⁹

Another competence relevant to diversity counselling is readiness to engage in active advocacy for effecting changes in social scales. This takes a determination to interrogate and transform institutional practices which mount barriers to various groups – working toward this aim in one's own organisation as well as sensitising employers, policy-makers and politicians to these barriers.³⁰

In conclusion, we could say that the counsellor in multicultural counselling is a person who is responsible for promoting the idea of equal opportunity and creating an axiological space which fosters coexistence, dialogue and understanding amidst cultural diversity.

²⁹ Cf: Paszkowska-Rogacz, A. (2006). Praktyczne umiejętności międzykulturowe. In Paszkowska-Rogacz, A., Olczak, E., Kownacka, E., Cieślukowska, D. (Eds.): *Doradztwo zawodowe a wyzwania międzykulturowe*, Warszawa: KOWEZ, pp. 100–104.

³⁰ *Doradztwo zawodowe dla osób zagrożonych wykluczeniem społecznym...*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.