

Career guidance for youth with social risk status

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Abstract

The importance of the issue in question should be underlined due to several conditions. According to research approximately 29% of young people have problems in finding self-confidence and possibilities to continue education or to enter labour market. Some of them are dropouts and do not have compulsory education or have graduated vocational school without any professional qualifications. Some of them have certain health conditions, language and speech disorders, learning difficulties, social behaviour problems or special individual needs.

The aim of the study is to draw attention to economic, social, psychological, pedagogical and linguistic problems in schools and families and to offer solutions for career guidance as a way to help individuals apply the obtained knowledge and skills when decisions should be made concerning their career development.

The quality of career guidance is determined by the professional competence of a career counsellor and by the competence of a school teacher or class master. It is not just counselling or providing information to the client according to his or her individual needs, but also involves cooperation with various institutions responsible for human resource development; it also requires managerial work experience, skills for using information technologies, emotional intelligence etc.

The information about general problems and possible solutions in this abstract is based on research by scientists of pedagogy and psychology, experience of career counselling centres and professional competence shared by school teachers or class masters.

Keywords: youth with social risk status, career, career guidance

Introduction

In analysing the mentioned study we would first of all like to clarify terminology: a youngster of social risk status is the one in age of 16 to 24 who, under the impact of social economic or other factors, is systematically missing school or becomes a drop-out without even basic education qualifications, as well as the one without any experience for entering labour market.

Every seventh youngster in Europe discontinues formal education without a secondary education qualification. Thus he/she acquires a social risk status and feels a growing insecurity about own life (Guiding at-risk youth through learning to Work across Europe, 2010).

After regaining independence of Latvia the number of inhabitants with insufficient formal education levels has grown. This includes 19% of young people who in the age of 16-24 have only basic education and do not continue studies. It is the highest indicator in the Baltic states (10.3% in Lithuania, 13.2% in Estonia) (Bebriša, Ieviņa, Krastiņa, 2007).

An insufficient level of initial education leaves a significant impact on career development. One should note that the notion of career has changed and considerably expanded in recent decades. Initially we understood the notion of career as a successful activity in a professional area with possibilities of promotion, fame and popularity while today the term "career" is understood not only as progress in a professional area but also as a purposeful development of one's personality and a consecutive change of one's professional activity types during lifetime (Karjeras attīstības atbalsts: izglītība, konsultēšana, pakalpojumi, 2008).

It means that today every youngster should earlier or later grasp that in the 21st century one cannot learn a profession and acquire other skills for the whole life. In modern times every area of human activity is submitted to continuous development and change. Career development is closely related to purposeful studies and, what is most important, to the understanding that one should be ready to use all available resources for reaching his or her aims in a chosen area of life for the whole length of it (Landzmane, Landzmanis, 2009).

The aim of the study is to draw attention to economic, social, psychological, pedagogical and linguistic problems in schools and families and to offer solutions for career guidance as a way to help individuals apply the obtained knowledge and skills when decisions should be made concerning their career development.

Materials and methods. The article analyses theories on youth career development and its guidance, and results of empirical studies carried out within various projects and during the work in Career Guidance Centre for Youth and Parents. In gathering data we used observations, inquiries, tests, surveys, individual interviews, couple or double and family guidance methods helping to learn about young people's career guidance needs. Respondent group consisted of young people receiving career guidance services in career guidance centres, and teachers working with youngsters in various education institutions (general and vocational schools, vocational colleges, special education schools).

Results and discussion. In order to help at-risk youth to plan their career, one should be aware of their psychological and social type and reasons for falling into this condition. Results of empirical studies show that young people are submitted to social risk no matter whether they come from a well-off family, low-income family or a socially disadvantaged family.

The most important reasons for falling within a social risk group are as follows:

- dropping out of school with no basic or upper secondary education qualification;
- inability to follow school requirements and underachievement due to low performance in previous education stages;
- frequent unjustified absence from school resulting in insufficient curriculum completion;
- completion of vocational studies without certification resulting in limited possibilities to enter labour market;
- being out of Latvia for a longer period of time resulting in a difficulty to adapt oneself in a particular school or labour environment;
- no physical and emotional support from family for studies or finding a job;
- inability to cope with everyday a.o. problems occurring in family or school;
- drug or other addiction since early age;
- attention deficit syndrome, very low self-confidence and self-esteem, low self-organisation and socialisation skills;
- learning difficulties due to low level of perception, bad memory, way and speed of thinking a.o. problems of psychological character;
- existence of special needs, even mental retardation;
- health problems requiring regular medical help, insufficiency of means or determination to address the issue;
- social behaviour disorders, ignorance of socially accepted behaviour norms, aggressiveness etc.
- significant age gap with other school mates resulting in lack of emotional comfort in the group;
- originating from a minority family and learning in a school with the Latvian language of instruction

According to the submersion model ("the student is thrown into the deepest end of the swimming-pool despite the fact that he/she cannot swim"), this situation causes high stress levels and decrease of self-esteem.

When clarifying family conditions of young people with social risk status, in 87% of cases it turns out that social circumstances in families (more than often young people do not live together with both parents or have even broken up ties with their biological families; open market situation shows that part of children have the so-called status of 'European Orphans' as during the absence of parents they stay at grandparents or have guardians) are of highest importance.

In surveying young people to find out reasons for irregular school attendance or dropping out the results show that 10-14 % believe the situation in schools is difficult: curriculum is too complicated, they have difficulties to learn and don't receive individual support, too much homework,

conflicts with teachers who, in their opinion, don't understand them. Young people believe that teachers use unproductive teaching methods, and frontal work prevails. When changing schools or progressing from one education level to the next, teachers change, too, and this hinders successful integration within education process. Dislike felt by at-risk youngsters against a particular school and unwillingness to attend it may also be caused by inconsiderate school policies, e.g. the pupil is not admitted into the class because he/she does not have the required school accessories and study materials, or wears clothes, styles or haircut unacceptable for the teacher etc. Not infrequently do schools avoid working at-risk youngsters in order to preserve their good status. An outcast from one school may lose motivation to proceed with studies in any other school (Bebriša, Ieviņa, Krastiņa, 2007).

In discussions with career counsellors youngsters admit that often they do not understand themselves, changes in the society and the way those will affect their career paths, are not able to analyse their short life experience, interests and talents. They are waiting for someone to prompt what and how should be done, where to study further, what is necessary for studies and future working life. Also, if someone still counsels them in the mentioned issues (subject or class teachers), it is mainly done in a formal way. Young people do receive information what can be done after finishing basic or upper secondary school, however advice on what possibilities are most suitable, is often missing. The youngsters believe career guidance experts are able to help yet are rarely informed where to find such.

Teachers, on their part, admit that their work with young people is becoming more difficult from year to year: classes or study groups are becoming more heterogeneous, there are certain problems that have come up only recently and not everyone has experience how to act in such situation, e.g. teachers are informing of always growing numbers of youth with low learning motivation. 30-40% of pupils do not receive the necessary support from their families, and for them school is the only place where they are assisted in doing not only study tasks but also to solve economic and social issues which, as a matter of fact, fall under the responsibility of families or social services. Teachers also indicate problems related to school environment such as insufficient material basis, low-spirited emotional settings, avoiding working with pupils with social behaviour problems, and ignorance of not only traditions and native language of most school children, but of those of minority pupils as well. Teachers would like to have been more trained in education management, methods of bilingualism and bilingual studies, use of ICT. Characteristic features of teacher personality (sensitivity, tolerance, patience) are very important as well, as they help to create suitable emotional climate in heterogeneous pupil groups. Sometimes insufficient collaboration or non-professional collaboration between school and families serve as hindrance.

Often schools provide insufficient care for organising additional study work for children with learning difficulties. Also, oversized classes hinder curriculum completion – teachers are overloaded and not able to ensure personalised approach to everyone and to notice learning difficulties in good time which may serve as a first step to social risk for a youngster (Bebriša, Ieviņa, Krastiņa, 2007).

Good knowledge and skills help not only to enter labour market but also make a successful career today in the conditions of changing technologies and economies. It is important to understand that education is not only accumulation of specific competences and qualifications, but also a process of developing talents, emotional and social intelligence and personality (Strategy for a sustainable development of Latvia up to 2030, 2011). It means that to offer a suitable and timely career development support for young people who have come to a social risk status, is a live issue for the society.

The system of career guidance and support as one of public service types includes services and other measures to help individuals of any age, including youngsters, to choose the area of education, training and employment and purposefully shape their career at any place and time of their life. Such services are provided in schools, vocational colleges, universities and other education institutions, also in work places and specially established career guidance centres. Career guidance and support serve also to help overcome problems of psychological or social character (Landzmane, Landzmanis, 2009).

Career planning is closely related to decision-making and action planning and analysing skills. However this experience may only be gained if one is first informed on various employment areas. This includes knowledge on economy areas, understanding one's interests and skills, ability to learn and acquire information on employment possibilities, knowing why people change their job, different

job tasks in various activity areas, accepted behaviour etc. (*Ertelts, Šulcs, 2008; Garleja, 2006; Patton, 1999*).

Most of the mentioned skills may be learned already in schools with good career education, i.e. with a provision of planned activities, courses, programmes in order to give youngsters a chance to acquire competences and skills necessary to commensurate their interests and skills with actual possibilities, to put forward their career aims and to fulfil them, to understand the world of work and its relation to education (Karjeras attīstības atbalsts: izglītība, konsultēšana, pakalpojumi, 2008).

One of the most important skills lacking in at-risk youth is the skill to learn. As a matter of fact, the teacher, with his or her personality and professionalism, has the most essential role in acquiring this skill. It is important to perceive learning as a meaningful activity. Positive emotions, settings admitting the use of sensory a.o. experience, conditions requiring analysing, synthesizing, comparing, generalising etc. encourage the pupil to think and act creatively.

48.5% of at-risk youth population includes pupils with various learning disorders. It is known that pupils with such difficulties get upset and confused even when carrying out the simplest tasks. If the teacher does not take it into account and fails to act so that during learning process the pupil has as little negative experience as possible, learning for them starts to associate with something unpleasant, undoable etc. This results in a negative attitude towards studies, and also creates conflict situations between pupils and teachers and behavioural problems in pupils. No matter what learning disorder reasons – whether they are created by physiological or external conditions, irrespective of learning disorder level (starting with elementary reading problems to psychologically complicated learning disorders), all these pupils have a common problem – learning for them means to fail. Everybody has an inner need to be convinced that his or her knowledge and opinions mean something to others. This stimulates to involve in learning process and gain at least minimum satisfaction from it. Only success gives the joy of victory while defeat is upsetting. To be a successful learner one needs help to overcome losses and defeat and, after that, not to perceive oneself as a loser (Riņķis, 2002; Rimma, 2000).

Taking into account that youngsters often value their skills to learn and study results by how others think, enough attention in teaching process should be paid to the development of self-confidence assuming the so-called success-oriented guidance. Success-oriented young people are willing to learn and are more resistant to failures and frustration. Success-oriented school policy stimulates better achievements, especially ability to overcome hardships and successfully fulfil new tasks. Some features characterising a success-oriented teenager are as follows: consideration of any problems as a challenge to his or her strength, recognition of failures without looking for excuses and fault in others, constant search for possibilities to prevent failures, desire to reach particular learning objectives. Both helplessness and success-oriented behaviour are not related to one's intellect: it is a personal quality, a way the youngster sees him- or herself, is able to treat other people and cope with different conditions (Fischer, 2005; Hargreaves, 2004).

An important role in youth career development is played by their self-esteem. It helps to get to know oneself, one's interests, talents, skills, temperament, character etc. In encouraging the youngster to self-assess his or her daily learning results the teacher may strengthen pupils' inherent value, to enhance faith in one's own abilities, to help perceive learning process as a purposeful and personally important activity. One should remember, though, that a youngster tended towards irregular school attendance and having other characteristics bringing nearer to the social risk status, should be able to differentiate self-esteem from uncritical self-satisfaction. Every youngster's self-dependence and responsibility is equally important. Modern social and economic environments constantly create non-standard situations which can be interpreted in various ways, and everybody has to be aware of his or her role in today's culture, ability to provide certain contribution to the society in terms of time and space, according to one's experience and moral values (Garleja, 2006; Patton, 1999).

In order to prevent dropping out of school and low learning motivation, one of possibilities is development of personalised study programmes – they involve improvement of learning skills in basic and upper secondary school, especially in subjects providing basic skills necessary for continuing education or finding a job. It is especially important to support those youngsters who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

One of most important values of a multicultural society is multilingualism. Language variety is a treasure, as it helps to learn about cultural heritage of various ethnoses, to mutually enrich one

another and to integrate in education or labour environment in an efficient way. In learning process it is important to be aware that language is not only the means of communication, but also a means of thinking, a discoverer of individual and collective culture, a maker of impact on mutual relations, another means for self-development. The more successfully the youngster has acquired language skills, the better he or she is able to socialise, to acquire the necessary information or express his or her opinion, to defend it both in speech and writing in correspondence with established language norms. A youngster with good skills of several languages is more able to grasp a particular situation, prognosticate its development and find his or her place in it (Anspoka, 2009).

The system of assistant teachers approved in several European states for supporting pupils with prospects of retention encourages a successful integration of such pupils in education process. At the same time, it makes it possible to duly notice individual problems in the family, between peers, with teachers etc. (Guiding at-risk youth through learning to Work across Europe, 2010) If the teacher purposefully orientates teaching activity towards a mutual cooperation and finds learning objectives together with the pupil, he or she creates conditions for assuming responsibility and active participation in teaching process, and at the same time pupil's professional values may form, too (Rozenblats, 2001).

Individual interviews with career guidance clients, i.e. young people who face problems with learning, makes one conclude that a timely intervention is what helps these youngsters not to alienate from school. It is especially important in the stage of transition from basic school to a vocational or upper secondary school: according to empirical studies it is the time when many youngsters start breaking their ties with education and fail to find any other socially important occupation.

Learning young people's needs both in educational aspect and personal and social aspect is important. Correct determination of a youngster's needs makes it possible to offer a specially designed guidance suitable for a particular life situation. If the youngster tends to wander and is already leading the so-called wanderer lifestyle, completion of a certain curriculum in a particular site of attendance may be replaced by distance learning or electronic study ways. If the pupil, due to many absences or termination of education, has not acquired certain competences and basic skills of learning, one may offer additional individual support for learning the necessary skills. If the pupil does not have sufficient life management skills, guidance staff should involve in solving the youngster's social matters, e.g. helping to get material support for ensuring school attendance, provision of study materials or travelling expenses. It is very important that when communicating with at-risk pupils counsellors are considerate and keep benevolent attitudes without prejudices and stereotypes. The pupils should be helped to be aware that their general education level will have a direct impact on their welfare and competitiveness later in life and will also promote economic growth of their families and the state. The school's role in this process is invaluable: it should be responsive towards the different and often complicated needs of individual pupils, and it should ensure that pupils finish it with sufficient knowledge and motivation to take up responsibility for studies during their whole life (Karjeras izglītība skolā. Pieredze 2009, 2010).

Teacher support staff in education institutions bears an important role in preventing risks and promoting guidance. Individual consulting provided by psychologists, social pedagogues, school career counsellors and medical workers is an inherent part of youth career development system. Often one needs to think behind traditional stereotypes and to find individual approach to each pupil's situation (Hargreaves, 2004).

In career guidance there are different methods and approaches for assessing one's interests, suitability for a certain job, attitudes and values. If those methods are coupled with purposeful interviews with the client, the youngster is able to learn to be aware of his or her talents, skills, level of knowledge and skills, to choose a path of education or working life, to learn taking decisions and carry out autonomous career planning (Career counseling, compendium of methods and techniques, 2007).

Individual professional guidance and other support may be integrated also with social inclusion measures. An important role in integration measures is played by non-formal and informal support provided by family, friends, peers, informal education teachers, trainers, members and leaders of non-formal organisations. Some studies show that often multilateral cooperation is more effective in providing support to a successful at-risk youth career development than mutually unrelated pedagogical upbringing (*Guiding at-risk youth through learning to Work across Europe, 2010*).

Career support system should also include measures addressing young people's free time:

possibilities to do different types of sports, hip-hop dancing etc. to help free oneself from tension, stress and even aggression accumulated during daytime. In dance there is a need to express and move oneself, to set oneself free from accumulated negative or spare energy and instead gain positive and balanced energy. After such dance classes one reaches a balanced mood. Dance not only helps to employ one's physical skills, but also develops one's mind, establishes an emotional attitude towards the surrounding world and oneself, and coins one's values. (Taylor, Taylor, 2007). Other types of art or sports may help as well. One should remember that for youngsters it is important that those involving them in various free time activities become their authorities and are able to listen and not reject and to create a situation that every youngster's opinion is counted with and everyone's success is a reason to be proud. This is what raises motivation in young people for further activity in order to look and find both personally and publicly important occupations in a particular social and economic environments.

Conclusions

- Social portrait of youth-at-risk and reasons for their situations vary. It depends from settings where they grow and develop, from teaching process quality in various education stages and individual needs (health conditions, self-confidence, level of self-esteem, learning experience, level of language skills etc.).
- In order to help at-risk youngsters in their career development one should count with their possible previous negative experiences; they are not able to carry out objective evaluation of their skills, interests, changes in society and the impact these may have on their career. Often these youngsters are waiting for someone to prompt what and how should be done, where to study further, what is necessary for studies and future working life.
- One of the most important skills lacking in at-risk youngsters is the skill to learn. Independently from the character of each individual's learning disorder, all of them have one common trait – learning is associated with failure. In order that learning becomes more successful, it is important to have positive settings where the youngster may regain self-confidence, a skill to self-assess his or her experience and assume a success-oriented approach.
- One of possibilities is to create personalised study programmes, especially if they involve leaning of basic competences like literacy and numeracy which make a basis for continuing education or finding a job.
- A timely help by career counsellors for at-risk youngsters helps to effectively prevent alienation from school, especially when passing from basic school to vocational or upper secondary school, and to find another socially important occupation.
- It should be taken into account that in career guidance there are different methods and approaches for assessing young people's interests, suitability for a certain job, attitudes and values. If those methods are coupled with purposeful interviews with the client, it is possible to help find one's talents, skills, level of knowledge and skills, to choose a path of education or working life, to acquire the skill to prepare for taking decisions and autonomous career planning

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