

Multicultural careers guidance

By Leonardo Evangelista www.leonardoevangelista.it/english.htm, 5 June 2006

According to Giddens (1991:20,21) one of the distinctive features of modern society is that entire fields of human experience are brought back within the realm of rationality (Giddens talks of 'institutional reflexivity'). The idea comes from the concept of Enlightenment which aims to replace beliefs and behaviours based on traditions and superstitions with ones having a 'scientific' basis, in other words, ones based on rational thinking through the constant accumulation and expansion of knowledge. The development of Careers Guidance has also taken place from this standpoint: since the beginning of the twentieth century, rather than relying on circumstance or common sense, counsellors have sought to identify principles which determine successful career development and, based on these, provide advice.

The 'scientific' approach to career development is often focused on personal psychological characteristics, and assumes that professional success is achieved simply on the basis of competition and individual merit (Killeen 1996:27). In the real world, career development also depends on social context and, in particular, on social values and norms prevalent in the organisation in which one works and, more in general, on the network of social relationships in the society to which one belongs. Some of these factors (for example, having connections or patronage) are considered distortions, anomalies, mishaps and are, therefore, disregarded by many careers guidance theories. Disregarding them, however, makes careers advice less effective. For example, new graduates who are seeking employment and who live in certain parts of Italy cannot be 'advised' in the same way as their counterparts living in the much more open American society. If we were to give advice as though we were in the United States, we would disregard all aspects connected with finding a sponsor or patron but, in some parts of Italy, 'having connections' can be fundamental. From a certain point of view, this is a moralistic approach (in this case it disregards this kind of social support because it considers it a bad thing), and blinds the counsellor to the context within which he/she is working. From another point of view, this approach makes the careers adviser, for better or worse, a agent for 'modernity' in social development (in other words, for a world where blood ties and family bonds and relationships have little significance). More in general, it leads the careers counsellor to validate individualistic alternatives even in societies, like those of Asia and Italy, where the family is very important.

From a multicultural careers guidance perspective, we have to ask ourselves whether factors relating to social context should also be taken into account and legitimately used in career planning. For example, we must ask ourselves if it is right to include searching for patronage in a jobseekers action plan.

Giddens, Anthony (1991), *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age.*

Law, B, Killeen, J, Kidd, J. M, and Hawthorn, R (1996) *Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance Theory, Policy and Practice.*