

SCHOOL ORIENTATION AND CAREER COUNSELING IN ROMANIA

1. Strong Points and Weak Points:

1.1. The orienteering school service in Romania – background information

The very appearance and development of career orientation in Romania has been and still is closely linked to similar situations existent in other countries, such as:

- a) Social-economic background, which in its turn, requires a more judicious evaluation of work-force and its qualifications;
- b) Cultural and familial background, which in its turn, requires re-evaluation of economic needs and realities;
- c) Media influence and pragmatic factors which influence decision and hinder quality evaluation of scientifically influenced career decisions.

Historically speaking, the career orientation process in Romania has 3 distinct episodes:

- a) The inter-war period, up to 1950;
- b) The communist period, up to 1989;
- c) The contemporary period, from 1989 up to now.

Theoretically speaking, a lot more was done in stage no.1 than in any of the other stages which, in turn, has lead to a total overlook of the career orientation process in time and with disastrous results at present. To give you some basic examples:

- a) During the inter-war period and shortly afterwards, there was high interest in career orientation compared to other European countries or the USA because of political, economic, and social situation which left plenty of space for such endeavours in the given geo-political circumstances.

- b) As a new communist country, we used the experience and expertise of the former Soviet Union in order to assess requirements and qualifications needed for the work force, without taking into consideration in-service training potential or apprenticeship.
- c) The national policy has enabled manual labour to take over any intellectual endeavour, which ranked professions such as architect, doctor, professor, researcher or scientist lower than worker, constructor or miner.

1.2. Yet, lately there has been a change!

In the last decade or so, more attention is given to the career orientation of the youth which seems to be addressed to all education beneficiaries, in theory, at least. Under the new legislation, career orienteering is applied to all school leavers at the ending of an educational stage, which have to be steered, both medically and psychologically, towards a potentially beneficial profession that matches their development. The result is simple: within no clear legislative framework, teachers are required to determine, both medically and psychologically, which career will best fit a student, on the basis of a couple of tests that will reveal nothing more than the students' interests and aptitudes (Holland). This test will be applied to all students and results will become meaningful in the career orientation process of the target group. This might become meaningful for early school leavers, aged up to 14, but it is of no real use for elder students, id.est. 16+ ones.

In theory, again, getting to know our students and their career awareness have become tasks for all form teachers and career counselors in any school, without real support of courses or additional materials to aid the process.

1.3. Organizations to Aid the Process

Several organisations have been set up in order to aid the process such as **CJAP – County Psychopedagogical Assistance Centres for students, teachers and parents**, starting with 1991/1992 academic school year, with ministerial supervision and local guidance. Then the new Education Bill established a set of tests to be implemented by law, unfortunately so many that no counselor will ever be able to apply them all to 1 pupil, let aside the hundreds or even thousands the specialist is generally in charge of. Therefore, no real results can be mentioned here, apart from a series of studies that fundamented the theoretical background.

1.4. Evaluation of pshychosomatic development

Between the academic years of 2012 and 2013 a novelty in the area is recorded: *“The evaluation of psychosomatic development”* as the very first form of career orienteering format proposed by the Ministry of Education in Romania. It is a form of evaluation meant to assess the levels of personal development of pupils about to enter 1st grade and to decide whether these students have or do not have the necessary background knowledge and skills necessary for entering the 1st grade. Logopedists and psychologists were thereby involved and avoidance of early school leaving appeared as a major standpoint in the evaluation process. Apart from these, unfortunately hardly anything else has been done.

1.5. New terrain for research

The research done in other countries allows us to conclude the following:

- a) The majority of worldwide developed countries have a well-developed system of career orientation, aimed at all levels of scholastic development;
- b) This system is based on 4 types of career orientation patterns:
 - 1 - School based mainly, with work placement options offered by acknowledged placement services;
 - 2 – Pre-service based orientation, on the basis of interests and proficiency;
 - 3 – Outer-service orientation, on the basis of individual interests;
 - 4 – Mixed career orientation services.

School based work placement options in Romania are generally available with vocational schools and undergraduate programmes, both of which offer on regular basis apprenticeship programmes and work placement opportunities as part of the compulsory practical activity that will thereby be integral part of the final evaluation. This is achieved either by direct contract between the school and companies interested in the programme, or by using international specialized placement services within the framework of EU funded programmes and projects such as Leonardo. Special situations acknowledge the existence of similar projects undertaken by theoretical high schools, as is the case of National College “Gheorghe Lazar” in Sibiu, which for years now is committed to a work placement project aimed at 11th grade pupils that have already decided upon a career to follow, who are offered a 1 week apprenticeship in local companies or subsidiaries that work in the chosen field and are willing to accept trainees on regular basis. The aim of this is twofold: on the one hand the endeavour answers the requirements of well-done career orientation on institutional basis and becomes beneficial to pupils; on the other hand it aims to prevent, if possible, the brain drain process

Romania is confronting with by showing pupils that there is still hope for well paid jobs in the country.

Pre-service based orientation is mostly aimed at university students who, while learning, are given the option of using their acquired knowledge and skills to do practical work with companies or institutes, on the basis of personal interests and/or area(s) of proficiency, for a short time span with the sole purpose of acquiring experience in the work field and assess sustainability of job choice on personal basis. This activity is commonly controlled by firm contracts between the university and companies or institutes chosen as partners, and in most cases becomes a lucrative endeavour for both signing parties.

Outer-service orientation is mainly aimed at unemployed people or at persons who are interested in professional conversion and is available through programmes offered by public institutions dealing in occupancy, labour and job placements. Although these may offer beneficial insights to schools with regard to information and availability of jobs, there is hardly any communication bridge to connect the systems. Therefore, the former is highly efficient for the adult unemployed people, but waiting for the outcomes of the latter to become unemployed in order to provide viable solutions.

Mixed career orientation services are in their infancy in Romania at this point. A small number of NGOs try to alleviate the situation, yet consolidated results still remain to be seen.

1.6. Theoretical perspectives in Romania today

In Romania, generally speaking, career guidance and counseling are aimed at making the pupil the co-participant at his/her own destiny (through information, education, self-teaching and self-orienting) at such a degree as to allow own decision making processes as a plus to peer or parent-oriented mono-directional choices, on a pragmatic basis. This is, at least what all theoreticians describe it to be at this point. In reality, the truth is, nonetheless, far from this.

Education towards career-building includes, in this respect and more often than none, topics which apparently have no direct link to career orientation, such as: family life, pastimes, upbringing of minors, family economics, life quality, moral values, and adjustment to new surroundings. Counseling becomes a form of socialization or learning social values and attempts to offer individuals new experiences and information that, in their turns, will enable receptors to develop identity, to shape personality and to adjust to the existent environment, hence surpassing obstacles, finding satisfaction and facilitating social integration. This

ultimately tries to reflect career orientation, yet overlaps hugely with other areas of research and investigation like psychology and sociology.

Nevertheless, career counseling implies the complex process of specialized and highly professional assistance an individual is to receive on the way of defining an educational and professional life-path. This implies information packs provided to the beneficiaries as well as support in the decision-making process. Generation of viable and adaptable alternatives is part of a successful endeavour. The principles here might seem very similar to any basic counseling, yet the format and the contents are definitely different and strictly designed to meet the needs of vocational career orientation.

1.7. Job description of career counselors in Romania

The main activities counselors find in their job profile as must-dos are:

- Collection, assessment, storage and dissemination of information concerning labour market and job availability;
- Assessment of individuals on the basis of interviews, tests, questionnaires, inventories and work probes;
- Assistance in evaluation of educational/professional options;
- Assistance in the design and implementation of individual's action plan in order to meet the selected target(s);
- Monitoring the individual's progress in the process.

Counselors are to identify target groups according to several criteria, as follow:

- By final aim, comprising individuals that are to make decisions upon own career and individuals that are able to influence such decisions;
- By position towards the labour market, comprising pupils, students, unemployed people;
- By position on the labour market, comprising employed individuals that are threatened with job loss perspective, want to change jobs, pursue career development.

School and career orienteering implies the counselor's work on *cognitive aspects*, such as providing information, building techniques for job search and application; on *affective aspects*, such as improving self-assertiveness, building positive attitudes to work, and on *pro-*

active aspects, such as decision making, planning and implementation. Again, all good in theory, but unfortunately hardly any support and observation are given to these in practice.

1.8. School orientation versus career orientation

There is a clear distinction between school orientation and career orientation. For both, the premises are ample, yet clearly, in Romania, career orientation is given far more attention than school orientation and is mainly achieved with already in-service trainees, that are young adults who have already chosen a path to follow, yet feel the need of being re-orientated toward niche professions or more widely available jobs.

School orientation should focus on individuals who start any new stage of basic education, on the idea that best results can be achieved by reaching maximum potential on the basis of own aptitudes, personality traits and personal skills. Therefore school orientation should ensure the match between personal assets and the final or general objectives of the education process. Different factors may contribute to school orientation, from the child's decision to parental guidance, yet the entire process should be supported by in-depth analysis of what the child can do, might do and is willing to do upon objective assessment of existing reality at the given moment. The practice of giving parents or tutors, even the school sometimes, total power of decision upon the school orientation of a child is fundamentally wrong, as it dismisses both the child's rights and his/her capacity to self-determination, which, at young ages, needs to be aided in its development.

Compulsory education is beneficial, yet the fact that there is no clear streaming apart from age considerations, in kindergarten, for example, will work against the child's best interest in the long run. Hardly any streaming is done at the beginning of primary school, with the exception of individual assessment of certain children on who teachers feel psychological evaluation is necessary, and then logopedists, teachers and psychologists come together to assess the child's suitability to enter first grade or be allowed one more year in pre-school education. Junior-secondary or middle school does not involve streaming either, apart from discriminative situations when the decision is left in the hands of the school and the school streams pupils by results previously obtained at scholastic levels only, therefore indirectly classifying their pupils as smart or IQ-challenged, or making a clear distinction – in the worst case scenario – between children coming from better-off families versus children coming from poor families. And thus discrimination starts from an early age and chances of optimal future career orientation diminish from the very beginnings of the education process. Anti-

discrimination legislation is available, yet hardly any law-suit has ever been started on such grounds, which is precisely why such situations are still met and have become quite widespread practices.

School orientations needs to become a fundamental right of the child who must be given a choice and the possibility to co-participate in the decision-making process. This way the child will adhere to a set of values and educational principles which he/she will internalize in time, while also becoming aware of the differentiated actions society through education exercises upon him/her. Guiding a child towards a certain school or school type determines links built with certain social and professional categories and, at young ages, indirectly contributes to career orientation.

Career orientation is to start as early as high school choices are made and should be carried out as a distinct process based on the observations and developments noticed in any individual along the previous school years. This is both the task of counselors and teachers, but also of parents and tutors and implies directly the child as well, as again the process is complex and has to be fully internalized by all factors involved and by the child itself. Information is to be made available and familiarization with different job profiles, according to the child's choices has to be available. The young generation will have to become productive individuals who make use of their full potential at their work places in order for them to integrate in society and achieve the desired levels of comfort and job satisfaction, therefore personal, well-guided, pragmatic choices are better than peer-based options or parental infringements in the process.

Career orientation basically follows a simple principle: that of establishing a balance between the job profile and the personal traits of an individual. If the balance is firmly established, the individual will make good use of his full potential and will bring his contribution in the area of activity he has ultimately selected.

In Romania the trend today is to consider career orientation as more suitable to be applied as the individual approaches the ending of the compulsory education, which is towards the final years of high school and even towards the ending of undergraduate studies in order to determine narrower areas of specialization with the MAs or MSc. Moreover, career orientation, as afore said, targets individuals that are already outside the labour market, such as unemployed people or persons looking for another job. Little attention is being given to the segment of population which will benefit most from career guidance just before choosing the high school to attend or their major specialization, as is the case with vocational schools.

Choice is mainly based on personal preference coupled with social determination, peer pressure and parental involvement in the decision-making process, while an individual's aptitudes, acquired skills, talents and personality are left aside or bluntly disconsidered. And to support this statement, we will mention the results of a questionnaire applied to pupils of National College "Mircea Eliade" Resita, which revealed the fact that from 120 pupils questioned, 27 acknowledged the fact that some career orientation questionnaires were ever applied to them in the 8th grade – the results of which have never been discussed with them - , that career orientation has never appeared at school level in any serious attempt except for minor discussions with some teachers, that they have chosen the high school to attend on the basis of peer pressure (45%), parental guidance (23%), personal decision – yet unsupported by any consistent observations or process – (26%) and randomly (6%). Moreover, when asked what has determined the choice of a certain profile of studies, such as Humanistics, most respondents answered that abhorrence of Natural Sciences, above all of Math, determined their options. This will turn into a saddening situation at the ending of high school when these pupils will have a limited range of career options and university studies options since the curricula dismisses the study of natural Sciences in upper secondary school for Humanistics-oriented students. On the other hand, pupils majoring in Computer Sciences have opted for this line of specialization due to personal decision and social determination, yet few are contented with the choice made and blame the system for this. Both categories, when asked what their career options would be, have declared (81%) that they have no clear idea as they have hardly any information on possibilities and availabilities offered to them on the labour market. From the rest of 19%, the majority have opted for professions such as lawyer, manager, computer programmer, mechanic and plumber, the last 2 of which are quite surprising as these pupils should have chosen a vocational school over the theoretical one they currently study at. This proves how inefficient the endeavour for school and career orientation still is in Romania and shows how little has been done in order to alleviate the situation and to really support our youth in making a wise decision concerning the most important aspect of their lives: their future careers.

2. Opportunities

2.1. Good practice is available to all factors of decision

There are a number of schools in Romania where the interest in school and career orientation is major. Some of them have already been mentioned before, while others pride themselves on

having school/career orientation boards on display. There is a magazine with national coverage on the topic and there is legislation to cover all aspects. And definitely there is the identified need, the idea shared by all factors involved in education that more must be done in order to aid the process and make it efficient.

There is also common starting ground as all those that are involved in the area claim that school and career orientation has to start as early as school integration of a child, otherwise the complex phenomena present on the labour market will catch potential beneficiaries unaware of the rapid changes and shifts in opportunities. The same sources claim that all factors involved in education, from school management to teachers, counselor and parents or tutors should do their best to ensure that any child will make a fully aware decision upon his/her own future, therefore enabling the child and the family to opt wisely according to the child's innate capacities, talents and predispositions, to the child's development at certain ages, to the acquired skills and potential proven along the years spent in school.

All practitioners and all those who offer good practice models in the field claim that the most important aspect of school and career orientation is the close monitorization of child development in early years of schooling, coupled with a minute investigation of the child's familial background, peers and extra-curricular activities. All of these converge towards forming a clearer image of the child's potential, spheres of interest, capacities and personality traits that will all aid the process of school and career orientation.

Direct observation, reports and portfolios are a measure of the afore-mentioned factors and should become a must which will ultimately reflect how prepared a pupil is, in what areas the pupil is proficient, what personality traits can be used to choose a future profession, what field(s) of activity suit(s) the pupil best, what causes have determined scholastic success or insuccess, medical problems, special areas to be addressed, academic progress and factors hindering it, interests, aptitudes, attitudes and motivation levels. Although still sporadic, such endeavours are here to stay and produce results in the long run.

Country-wide, yearly education fairs are organized to help the decision-making process concerning school and career orientation. Parents and pupils are invited to attend these and options are displayed and marketed. The segments of beneficiaries triggered are as follows: on the one hand, the 8th graders on the point of choosing a high school - be that vocational or theoretical - , therefore school orientation becomes the aim, and on the other hand, the university studies fairs for 12th graders which is mostly aimed at career orientation. Both offer

clear insights into the educational offers of the participating institutions and provide a brief overview of opportunities potential candidates are provided with.

The Hollande test has become common-place for 8th graders lately. And although we consider it obsolete and over-rated, we give it the benefit of helping stream pupils and orient them as much as possible towards a wise choice of both school and career.

Numerous studies have been published on the topic and suggestions have been made on how to make the process more approachable, less time consuming and more effective. Roles have been assigned and among these the teacher's role takes place of pride, as it should.

2.2 The role of the teacher in career orientation in Romania

The teacher has a distinctive role in school and career orientation of pupils, according to latest studies. As a complex process, counseling and career orientation has to take into consideration factors such as aptitudes, interests, acquired skills and inborn talents that any beneficiary is endowed with or builds in school. Personality is also very important, as well as providing information concerning the job market, the options of employment, the social status offered by each profession. Also, teachers should be responsible for inducing a positive attitude towards work, for teaching values related to work and job commitment, punctuality and devotion, loyalty and entrepreneurial spirit.

The teacher, irrespective of the subject taught, will transmit a set of values, information, and knowledge, will form skills and help instill habits that will become valuable assets for future use. It is also the teacher the one who will make the difference between what pupils want to do, can do, and have to do. Also the teacher's personality and method may have a huge impact on how a pupil relates to potential careers or social integration grids.

Yet the teacher, in order to become a fundamental factor in the school orientation and/or career orientation process needs to know every pupil's background, to minutely observe the pupil's evolution, progress and development in a familiar environment, with all necessary data made available by previous research and contribution. Thus the teacher's advice concerning school and career orientation will be fully informed, professional and helpful, though consultative in essence.

As counselors have many pupils to deal with, sometimes a lot more than their physical and mental capacity (1 counselor ordinarily deals with about 1,000 subjects), cooperation is essential and it is mainly the role of the teacher to guide, after careful observation and to ask for the counselor's help only in extreme situations, when decisions made are against all odds or when deviant behavior poses a risk for future personal development. And again, it is the role

of the teacher to observe such situations, monitor them and put them on the counselor's agenda, as the teacher, apart from the parent or tutor, is the only one who has permanent contact with the pupil and is thereby capable of noticing and observing changes in behavior, absenteeism, lapses of concentration, indifference or lack of motivation.

There are several ways through which a teacher or a form-teacher can contribute to bettering the school and career orientation of the pupils:

- Organization of visits to other schools, universities, companies to aid school or career orientation;
- Application of self-awareness and inter-evaluation drills;
- Discussion of pastime activities, of hobbies and of personal interests;
- Job-marketing for parents and pupils;
- Job presentations with the help of acknowledged professionals;
- Information dissemination on jobs with the help of the media;
- Meetings with decidents of other educational institutes;
- Class simulations of different social and professional mediums;
- Organization of extra-curricular activities and close observation of pupils' implication;
- Meetings with former pupils with remarkable work achievements;
- PTA meetings on the topic of school and career orientation.

2.3. Self-awareness as the key to successful career orientation

Self-awareness is without doubt the most essential part of the process which ultimately leads to optimal school and career orientation decisions. There are 4 major areas connected to self-awareness which ease the process for both professionals involved and pupils as beneficiaries:

- a) Interests represent the crystallized preferences of an individual for certain area(s) of activity or domain(s) of knowledge. They are an important factor of decision upon career as they determine job short-listing and selection. Investigation of interests can be done by putting together an inventory of interests for each individual and by systematic reflection and revision of previous choices. The Holland test is a good instrument to determine interests and repeating it will also help update the inventory. Unfortunately as it has such a simplistic content, application of Holland test should commence in the 6th or 7th grades and re-application will occur at the beginning of the 8th grade.

- b) Values are synonymous with an individual's core principles. These are motivational sources and determine personal or acknowledged standards of performance and proficiency in the selected area(s). Values can be investigated by building hierarchies of given values, analysis of time management, analysis of previous choices, analysis of career fantasies, and role-model identification.
- c) Personality traits are typical patterns of thinking, behavior, affectivity and relationships an individual uses consciously or subconsciously. It is common knowledge that personality is the main variable which determines career decision and job adjustment. It is also true that persons with similar personality traits can be performant and achieve satisfaction while doing different jobs, and at the same time individuals with different personality traits can perform well and find satisfaction in the same job. This happens because human behavior is determined both by personality traits and by environment. Correlation of personality traits with career decisions can be done by using Jung's typology of the 4 bipolar dimensions.
- d) Aptitudes and skills are also essential in career orientation. There is a clear distinction between the two, as aptitudes represent an individual's potential to learn and achieve results in an area of activity. Learning and practicing takes an aptitude to the level of ability while practical application and automatization of it takes it to the level of skill. Aptitudes can be identified by making an inventory of activities a person can perform without significant effort and with satisfactory results. Special aptitude questionnaires are also available and these generally link identified aptitudes or aptitudinal set to potential career options.

2.4. School and career orientation in Romanian schools

School and career orientation in schools in Romania includes a number of specific methods already applied and centres around 4 major lines of action:

- a) Investigation of pupils' personality
- b) Investigation of pupils' aptitudes and education towards aptitude development
- c) Information on school networks and career options as reflected on the job market at a given time
- d) Counseling pupils to aid the decision making process.

Getting to know every pupil's personality is a difficult task shared by form-teachers, family members, peers and psychologists, if available. It is a time consuming process mainly carried

out in primary and junior secondary or middle school. Methods used are direct observation, academic results analysis, discussion, biographical data analysis, self-characterization and behavioral analysis.

When available, counselors will then step in and begin career orientation counseling sessions. These begin with raising self-awareness and the testing of aptitudes, then drawing the inventory of interests, guidance and reaching a final decision. Counselors investigate hobbies and areas of extra-curricular activities the pupils are interested or involved in, search for obstacles that hinder personal development or threaten academic performance. The method used is the interview coupled with questionnaires of aptitudes, interests, motivation and personal values. Of the tests applied, the aptitude one is by far the most frequent and it aims to disclose the typology of intelligences that concur to form a certain type of personality and reveal certain professions open to each individual. IQ tests are sometimes applied, if necessity arises. Discussions are often used in order to get to know the pupil better.

Biographical data analysis offers valuable information about the pupil's background, such as family relationships, professions and education levels of parents, health issues, attitudes towards work and sets of values families promote. This is completed then by the self-characterization which is in fact the pupil's insight upon himself/herself and the way the pupil ranks himself/herself in the social environment he/she belongs to.

The counselor's activity is normed and generally focuses on the following directions:

- a) Personal and social development of every individual;
- b) General self-awareness;
- c) Evaluation of intellectual potential;
- d) Understanding of identity;
- e) Development through education and profession;
- f) Understanding the role and finalities of education;
- g) Identification of motivation sources;
- h) Development of career plans;
- i) Understanding of social and economic realities such as: family, economy, profession, salary, ownership, money, cultural assets;
- j) Understanding the social and economic environment;
- k) Awareness of personal value and position on the job market;
- l) Diversification of work content;
- m) Pastime and community oriented activities, personal life.

To these counselors add the activity of providing information packs on scholastic routes available, including minute details such as address, contact person, specializations, admission requirements and so on.

Theoreticians claim that career counseling and orientation is not an area of research or a school subject, but an area of investigations, applications, practical developments, experiences and attitudes that have to be learned and practiced as skills for life. Hesitation, reversability, abandonment, error and multiple choices are characteristics of it and the final decision

implies all these as natural stages. Therefore the role of career counseling and orientation is to be found in the following actions:

- a) Providing credible, precise and usable information packs, as well as moral and emotional support to those individuals who are in the process of decision-making on future careers;
- b) Helping the youth to adapt to the social and economic dynamics of the society;
- c) Providing entrepreneurial education;
- d) Reducing the gap between school and labour market;
- e) Observing the realistic and pragmatic dimension of career counseling by not offering false hopes and exaggerated expectations;
- f) Combating professional stereotypes such as: clean vs. dirty, remunerative vs. underpaid, social status vs. degrading, etc.;
- g) Teaching the youth what and how to choose based on full awareness and freedom of choice;
- h) Reducing the emotional pressure of the unemployed by finding alternative solutions;
- i) Helping disabled persons, ethnic minorities, social minorities, homeless people to access the labour market.

2.5. Career Counseling – a must for today’s youth

Whenever a young person makes a career choice without any external support, chances are high that the choice is wrong and it will be either abandoned or changed. This will cause unnecessary delays in the process of career building and will ultimately have a detrimental effect upon the person’s future development. Examples are unfortunately numerous as statistics show that 15% of university students abandon their studies within the first 3 semesters on account of bad initial choice of career or professional path. No statistics have yet been made for those who do not exit the system and continue to prepare themselves for professions they hate even before starting work, and do so because of parental insistence, peer pressure or shame. Therefore, external counseling along with other methods applicable by teachers, parents and the beneficiary himself are welcome and have become a must for the youth of today.

Career choices are of many types. They can be socially oriented, that is based on prestige, social positioning and social success. This type of career choice is prevalent among the youth today as social success is mainly seen as complementary to financial success or at least with financial comfort. Other career choices are altruistic and trigger jobs that deal in the areas of social assistance. At the other end there are the selfish choices that imply jobs with low responsibility levels and shallow effort. Career options can also come out of high levels of frustration when familial pressure is causing conflict and decisions are made under stressful conditions. Conformists will never take any risks and allow others to decide upon their future careers while non-conformists will take the plunge and dare follow their dream job, irrespective of other people’s opinions.

All these choice types are fundamentally wrong unless they are supported by thorough analysis of all characteristics that form personality and if not corroborated with personal

interests and aspirations, with the motivation and determination necessary in order to achieve success and satisfaction.

3.Threats

3.1. Family as a major threat to efficient career orientation

All is not well though, and Romania makes no exception, mostly when it comes to school and career orientation and counseling. As before stated, counselors are still few and a small number of schools benefit from their professionalism. So far only big schools have appointed counselors and their job is really difficult as most of them have to cater for the needs of around 1,000 pupils, sometimes even more. Moreover, they are not only there to aid the process of career orientation, as in most cases they are psychologists who are also in charge of several other areas of activity such as psychological counseling of pupils with behavioral issues, evaluations, monitoring of progress and others alike.

This being the situation, unfortunately school and career orientation rests again with the family. Yet the traditional approach is obsolete and hardly gives any positive results, as most families will leave the decision to their off-springs to make. Even worse is the case when parental guidance becomes pressure. Actually there are 2 possible scenarios: the first one mostly covers the first 10 years of schooling, from kindergarten to the 8th grade where the decision belongs entirely to the family. The child has no word to say and is forced to attend the school his/her parents consider best or most suitable. Yet parents follow the trend without questioning values, results or suitability for their children, and, as no counseling is available, many children end up in programmes such as *Waldorf* or *Step By Step* which may prove totally inappropriate for their level of development. The second one gravitates around the 8th grade when children are asked what they would like to study and what career they might have already considered. Options are many, yet children are partially informed and parents even less. And again the decision belongs mainly to the parents as financial considerations are of utmost importance. Once the child begins high school, parental influence diminishes gradually and career orientation towards the 12th grade is left entirely to the child, who, now a teenager, will lend an ear to peers, friends and professions glamorously presented by the media.

Nevertheless, if school can do little, behavioral models will come from the family and sets of values are definitely instilled by parents. Also from parents come professional stereotypes which hinder more than help the process of career orientation. In the absence of close monitoring of the child's development and of specialized external evaluations, parents are the ones that will shape the child's expectations and attitude to work. Most parents tend to over-rate the capabilities of their children, which is good but only up to a point as the major danger here is a false image upon himself the child may grow up with and which will minimize his chances to a fair integration on the job market.

Parents take certain factors into consideration when advising a certain job or career path to follow to their children. Generally the criteria parents consider are financially oriented and very pragmatic from this point of view. Parents will inquire about job availability, job

security, duration of studies and cost of these, income, social position and potential risks. This comes against the approach taken by specialists who will consider cognitive, affective and pro-active aspects, cultural component of the job profile, social integration and community development.

Lack of information coupled with lack of knowledge and improper information about possible career paths offered by the education system leads parents to sometimes totally mislead their children when it comes to career decision. Over-rating the child's capabilities and dismissal of certain professions as dirty, underpaid or not good enough for their child will ultimately create false expectations and trigger decisions that will make the child feel under pressure, unhappy, embarrassed and totally dissatisfied with whatever he or she has to learn or do in order to please parents and rise up to the challenge posed by them. This often leads to failure which in most cases starts with early school leaving, anti-social behaviour, rejection of education and educators, and ends with the image of the misfit that the child builds of himself. In the event that the child grows to become an adult engaged in the profession chosen this way, results will be mediocre at best, no job satisfaction will ever appear and success will never come his/her way.

In view of all of the above reasons, parents should be taught in order to enable them to really help their children make wise career choices. Parents should know that it is vital to:

- Treat the younger members of the family with respect, listen to them, encourage them to express opinions;
- Support the decisions taken by children and never impose their own viewpoints;
- Never present their own professions as ultimate models to follow;
- Listen and bring pertinent arguments in discussions concerning school and career orientation;
- Contact school to get informed;
- Acquire pertinent information about labour market options and share it with their teen children;
- Encourage research in the labour market options done by the youth on their own;
- Explain misleading job ads and what dangers these can hide;
- Discuss several options the youth might have with each one's pros and cons;
- Avoid stereotyping certain professions;
- Clarify work situations such as job change, unemployment, professional development, professional reconversion, life-long learning;
- Explain the direct link between the level of education and the availability of jobs;
- Foster self-confidence and self-awareness in the absence of exaggerations and false images;
- Alleviate frustrations built in the process of career orientation, decision making or pursuit of a job;
- Support part-time jobs the youth may feel inclined to take up in order to gain financial freedom;
- Share their own work experience, know-how and information.

3.2. School and threats the system poses to career orientation

As incredible as this may sound, a profoundly viciated system of education will become a major threat to an efficient career orientation processes. Unfortunately and typically for the Romanian school, in transition for 25 years now, theory always takes the floor and practice follows way behind, if ever.

Theoreticians speak about vocation when tackling aspects of career orientation. Vocation is a sum of inclinations, aptitudes, interests, and attitudes, all structured around a nucleus of professionally oriented preoccupations an individual may have. Vocational orientation is said to be formed between the ages of 12 and 18. During this span of time a pupil's interest in a certain type of activity or area of study, and the passion with which the pupil pursues goals connected to this define vocational orientation. In its turn, this will most likely determine decisions upon future career paths.

Yet between the ages of 12 and 16 all pupils have a core common curricula and fixed syllabus for each subject. The little space offered to the school to build and implement personalized courses is most often occupied with uninteresting and totally unchallenging topics, which the pupils, although they are supposed to, cannot choose or decide upon. To make matters worse, these optional courses cater for the needs of the teachers and augment their meagre income instead of offering pupils the opportunity to discover new areas of learning, of activity, of information and knowledge. Moreover, the ones offered are generally obsolete as they have been there for years and get repeated year after year for different beneficiaries, but without updates or changes to meet the requirements of the fast pace changing technology and world.

The entire education process is mainly exam oriented and this again leaves little time or space for subjects that will indeed cater for pupils' individual or group interests. Practical application of theory taught is almost non-existent, to such an extent that even lab work has been forgotten during physics or chemistry classes because of security reasons. Resources are anyway insufficient and then the simplest solution is to teach theory. Field trips have become rare because of the new set of regulations that almost forbid a teacher to take pupils out to learn anything practically, again because of security aspects. Centres of excellence were once commonplace (not longer ago than 10 years) and they were meant to foster pupils' interest and motivation towards performance in a given field of study, yet fewer and fewer pupils attend them today and their numbers have dwindled rapidly.

Plagiarism has also become a huge issue of the Romanian academic world and unfortunately schools do little to stop the phenomenon. On the contrary, in high school, grades are easily obtained through the copy-paste method, which eventually becomes a style of life for pupils, with major negative effects on their future student and working lives. Specialized websites offer ready-made essays and studies, and teachers hardly ever bother to check whether the paper submitted by a pupil is original or copied. The young generation seems to grow more shallow and superficial than ever and they are unfortunately helped to do so by the system itself.

Time management has also become a huge issue, both for pupils and teachers or any other professional involved in education, such as counselors. As an example we will consider the order of the MECS (The Ministry of Education and Scientific Research) concerning the implementation of career orientation in Romanian schools and which offers 89 basic tests to be applied to beneficiaries as well as countless others on condition they are approved by national experts. A tenth of these are vital to the school and career orientation process, yet a counselor has to work with about 1,000 pupils of different ages. A simple calculus leads to a sum total of 10,000 tests to be multiplied, applied, interpreted and filed, statistically presented and reported, feedback given and monitoring implemented. From here on we will ask readers to draw their own conclusions upon the volume of material, the amount of work and the time span necessary to accomplish all these.

Career guidance is supposed to be a systematic effort of informing beneficiaries about issues connected to the job market and also related to the individual's potential, capabilities and aspirations. Individual and group sessions are generally organized, or, at least, classes are devoted to this aspect. This all falls upon the counselor again, but where is the person supposed to take away a class from? Surely not from subjects that struggle to cover their syllabus and hardly succeed. And with a timetable of solid 7 hours a day and 3 extra hours, at least, dedicated to homework, pupils can hardly be expected to accept the idea of spending some of their free time to do career guidance activities.

Career education, on the other hand, is a more complex process which implies systematic influencing of career development for pupils through providing viable information, introduction of specific concepts for labour market in the school curriculum, activities that are aimed at informing pupils and helping them make appropriate choices, such as field trips and work placements. All these again are time consuming and the counselor is mostly responsible for them. The only persons that can help along are the form-teachers who unfortunately have no real expertise in the area as they are ordinary teachers, specialized in teaching their various subjects.

Labour market information is an inherent part of career orientation and is generally aimed at 11th and 12th graders (ages 16 to 18) who are close to making career decisions. It implies a thorough analysis of tendencies existent on the labour market, of its dynamics, of new jobs and their potential, new industrial sectors and the offers they come along with on the labour market. Such an information pack can be presented to pupils and discussed with them during counseling hours, yet the collection and selection of data, the design of the presentation itself means time, time that the school counselor generally does not have.

And after all these have been covered the real career counseling process starts, which is individualized and takes all steps and stages mentioned before, from aptitude testing to inventory of choices and alteration of short lists of potential professions, all under professional supervision and guidance of the same single individual, the counselor. In an average school, the average number of school leavers that have to undergo the process is between 100 and 150 individuals whose needs have to be catered for.

Ultimately the Romanian school system poses a threat to career orientation by the very structure of it. The system that induces the decisions made in the 8th grade leave pupils with 2 basic options: attending a theoretical high school with 2 major specialization lines, Natural Sciences or Humanistics, or choosing a vocational school where options are multiple, but hollow when it comes to content. In the last 15 to 20 years so many changes have been brought to the organization, curricula and activity of vocational schools that today what we are left with is a blurred image of what such a school should be and what social needs it is supposed to answer to. Vocational schools in Romania do not prepare professionals any longer. They have remained vocational in name only, although most will not even recognize the term; now they have all become technical colleges. Ordinarily one would expect such a school to offer practice and work placement opportunities, a hands-on approach vital to the skill acquisition that define the job profile pupils are prepared for. Moreover, one would probably expect employment opportunities to be offered to these pupils right after graduation, as such schools should be highly supported by companies interested in acquiring specialized work force. Nothing further from the sad truth. Vocational schools in Romania today, although numerous, offer obsolete specializations, provide their pupils with huge amounts of theory and hardly any practice and work placement opportunities are still to be desired for. On top of this, to be a pupil of one of such schools is viewed as degrading as it immediately implies low academic achievement, low IQ levels, stereotyped professions, no social status and "lower social class" peer labelling.

3.3 Threats posed by society

There are both subjective and objective factors that generally influence career decision-making processes. Society should be ranked among the objective factors, yet the existing reality contradicts the statement.

Society comes to alleviate choice if information provided is accurate. Ultimately the aim of effective career orientation is social integration and job satisfaction, material comfort and success. Yet the same society perverts the entire process and invites to failure through the influence of the media. Models presented by the media as social and professional successes are most times shallow and thus the role-models adolescents tend to follow lack consistency and realism.

Reasons for choosing a career such as: "I like it!", "It is cool!", "Seems interesting.", "Sounds great!" should be dismissed from the moment of appearance with good sustainable arguments. Even more, if such explanation of choice appears, pupils should be asked to clearly motivate the choice and argument it, and in the absence of solid argumentation, steps should be taken to direct the pupil into a personal investigation of the mentioned profession.

Another aspect society is to be blamed for is the ranking of schools according to academic results obtained. This leads to an awkward situation in which pupils first select the school they qualify for without considering career options it offers and specialization pathways available to them after becoming integral part of the school of choice, when in fact the reverse

should be applied. First there should be a clear decision and then a selection of schools that offer that particular line of specialization.

Social determination of career choice also comes with heredity. "It's in the genes" is the most popular statement made that unfortunately summarizes it all. Here parental influence is determinant, as social status and material comfort offered by the profession of one or both of the parents will most likely determine a pupil to go against the external specialized evaluation and follow in the footsteps of either the mother or the father. A family of doctors will most likely send their off-springs to medical school, and lawyers will do the same. The only problem with such statement is the fact that middle-class professionals offer their children solid starting points which are mostly unavailable to the others. Even so, the idea is faulty in principle, as any individual's personality traits, interests, aptitudes and skills conjure potential professions far away from those of the parents.

A final threat we can identify is the failure to adapt to the working environment. This is closely linked to over-rated expectations, improperly developed self-awareness, false image of the self, faulty attitude to work and ungrounded professional development opportunities. Again the media, and with it the society, has a distinct role in fostering such misleading concepts. Expectations that have been too high might not materialize in due time, the job profile may appear too demanding, responsibilities become overwhelming, stress reaches alarming levels, social positioning has faded in the meantime, remuneration cannot cope with inflation rates, standards of living remain unsatisfactory, there is hardly any prospect of promotion within the next 10 years. Health is at risk, motivation disappears, psychological issues are topical, the individual simply cannot digest the job any longer. In fact what the individual has to deal with is vocational frustration. Failure is not already there but the feeling of it is acute and hinders efficiency at the work place. Therefore an acute feeling of frustration takes over and the individual has few options to fight it. Unfortunately the same happens when school orientation is poor and the school an individual ends up in matches no prior expectations.

Are there any viable solutions? Of course, but the best way to deal with such unfortunate cases is to find a balance between what parents can do, school can do and individuals can do in order to make fundamented career choices, based on external investigation carried out by factors that are able to influence decisions. Therefore, career orientation and counseling is a must to be considered as integral part of any education system and which has to given the proper attention and consideration that will take it to the next level, the efficient one.