

The Peculiarities of Academic Youth's Professional Vocation

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Importance of the topic

The professional vocation of a person determines not only his/her lifestyle, efficiency and success in one or other area but also the harmony of his/her relation with the self and the world. Therefore it is important that the revelation of professional vocation becomes an important part of educational process.

Recently the attention of scientists in the field of psychology and pedagogic has been focused on the process of the development of professional qualities. There is a shared opinion that “a person who strives for building his professional ability should not be left for self-training, but should be taught “professionalism” (J. Navaitienė, 2000, p. 6). When trying to answer the question what is the true professional, we encounter many associations related with motivation, skills and other personal qualities that express person’s professional vocation in one way or another. According to E. Danilevičius, another important aspect of vocational education is “the revelation of professional vocation that opens wider possibilities for thorough and comprehensive development of personality by strengthening the understanding the fullness and meaning of life while in professional activities it increases the possibilities of using professional resources...” (2001, p. 99).

On the other hand, great importance should be attributed not only to personal but also to communal revelation and implementation of professional vocation. According to V. Stanišauskienė, social progress is currently influenced by the efficiency of distribution of society members in professional activities. On basis of the conclusions made by A. Vorbecke, she argues that “economic success of the system depends not on the share (the number) of the young people who graduate from universities but on the fact if every person finds in the system his / her place that meets his/her needs and abilities best” (2000, p. 3). Besides, according to Balcombe, assistance for future students in choosing the specialisation for further studies or a profession may alleviate the problem of unemployment.

Theoretic and practical studies of professional vocation experienced revival only at the beginning of the XX century. The name of Frank Parson should be mentioned here. He was the first to establish Vocation Bureau at Civic Service House in Boston in 1908 and to formulate the concept of career choice. Later there came many more theories of career choice, career development, the most prominent are the following: the theory of J. Holland (features), D. Super (development), A. Roe (needs), E.S. Bordin (psychodynamic), J. D. Krumboltz (social learning), and theories of individualistic perspective of A. L. Miller – Tiedeman and D.V. Tiedeman.

In Lithuania the scientific interest in professional vocation of students was apparent already in 1918–1940. At that time there was established an Association of Psychotechnics and Professional Counselling. Works by A. Gučas, J. Vabalas – Gudaitis and other researchers

contributed to helping the young to find their vocation. Later psychological and pedagogic career choice issues were researched by L. Jovaiša (1978, 1993, 1998), S. Kregždė (1982, 1988, 1999), O. Kregždienė (1971, 1974, 1980, 1986), H. Galkytė (1977), D. Beresnevičienė (1990, 1995), R. Petrauskaitė – Kučinskienė (1996) and others. V. Kavaliauskienė (1998) was one of the first researchers to study the phenomenon of teacher's vocation in greater detail. V. Stanišauskienė (2000) has studied the preconditions for career preparation of older pupils. However, the phenomenon of professional vocation has not been studied in greater detail – one can find information only on the most important elements thereof: professional interests, values, preconditions for the development of general skills.

In practical terms the problems of professional vocation in Lithuania are currently gaining more attention: provisions are made for new aims, programmes, projects and professional development centres. Help in solving professional vocation problems is provided by professional counselling services and programmes, projects and editions that they prepare. *The Professional Career Manual* issued in 2002 listed the main theoretical and psychological aspects of career choosing as well as detailed descriptions of jobs. This information could be of help for taking a more informed, rational decision, however, many young people still need a more extensive help of qualified specialists. As *The Professional Career Manual* (2002) indicated, when choosing a job, pupils could use a help of the Professional Counselling division of the National Chamber of Students' Technical Creation, Youth Career and Advising Centre, Pedagogic and Psychology Services that are using various personality testing diagnostic psychotechnic and other methods.

However, after the restoration of independence and the collapse of the former professional counselling system, no efficient professional aid system providing assistance for young people in choosing a job was created to replace it. According to the conclusions of the research performed by V. Stanišauskienė, general education schools provide least preconditions of social education and namely these schools are helping to develop the abilities of understanding the world of job relations. This data is obviously incompatible with the statement of the general programmes of the Lithuanian general education school that “at school children and teenagers acquire comprehensive knowledge about the world of jobs and occupation; they are provided by a possibility to acquire skills that are necessary for occupation” (1994, p. 24).

In the opinion of many researchers, usually professional vocation forms and unfolds in late teens, although many pupils at senior classes (11-12 class) have not yet chosen their future occupation and this encumbers the development of professional vocation in the higher education institution.

Having in mind the facts indicated above, the university students' professional vocation and its implementation in the university was chosen as the object of the research.

Aim of the paper is to reveal some peculiarities of professional vocation of the students and preconditions for the implementation of this vocation.

The level of the implementation of the research hypothesis of the professional vocation depends on these preconditions:

- level of self – knowledge,
- theoretic knowledge of the future occupation,
- practical knowledge of the profession.

Objectives of the research

1. **To provide a theoretical basis for the concept of professional vocation.**
2. **To present the model of professional vocation of the academic youth.**
3. **To single out the peculiarities of professional vocation of II, III and IV year students.**
4. **To reveal the dependence of professional vocation on the gender and specialty.**
5. **To evaluate the peculiarities of the preconditions of the professional vocation in the secondary schools and university.**
6. **To establish the relation between the peculiarities of professional vocation and preconditions of implementation of this vocation.**

1. THEORETIC BASIS FOR PROFESSIONAL VOCATION

1.1 Search for the Concept of Professional Vocation

The question of human vocation was an important one for thinkers of various periods who tried to define its essence, importance, and features. It was approached in the framework of theology, philosophy, psychology, and pedagogic.

The beginnings of the phenomenon of *professional vocation* could be found in *religions*. In the past traditions of religions had greater influence on the professional activities of a person, which was first understood as person's obligation to worship God and thus to react to His will. The basic aim of person's vocation in theological sense was understood as person's calling to love. This is very clearly illustrated by the words of John Paul II: "The history of a calling of every Christian is the history of the inexpressible dialogue between man and God, the story of the dialogue between love of the calling God and man answering with love" (according to E. Danilevičius, 2002, p. 75). Thus, in the sense of theology the calling was and is understood as "the dialogue between the Loves of the two freedoms" (E. Danilevičius, 2000, p. 75) that expresses the spiritual relation between man and the Absolute – the source of man's primary task of being alive. The New Testament speaks of man's calling for certain activities: "If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, then do it gently; if it is to show mercy, then do it cheerfully" (New Testament, 1992, p. 371).

Certainly, in religious sense the calling is considered as an intrinsic, natural thing, a gift from God that man has to find in him / herself and to express. In the New Testament all gifts and skills in a given area that are bestowed on man have their hierarchic order: "And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance and of different kinds of tongues" (NT, 1 Corinthians 12 27–31). Each gift differs in respect of the given grace, and people are encouraged to constantly seek higher gifts of grace.

As early as in XVI century in Lithuania there were attempts to probe the question of man's vocation in theological framework (J. Bretkūnas, M. Valančius, K. Paltarokas), these researchers emphasised the importance of serving the neighbour, answering God's invitation and thus finding and realizing the meaning of life. However, in philosophic, psychological, and pedagogic literature the theological aspect of calling was expressed weakly or it was not expressed at all. Educologist R. Laužackas researches vocation as a subjective aspect by singling out the appearance and development of three aspects of vocation – indirect, individual and public. According to the author,

vocation is increasingly understood as person's inclination towards a certain profession, individual choice based on peculiar spiritual structure and adjustment of private interests with public interests.

The understanding of the phenomenon of vocation as individual and public as well as natural entity can be found in the works of the philosophers of *ancient Greece and Rome*. In Plato's *Republic* (V century) vocation is understood as something bestowed by nature, something inherently related with social position, something to be duly revealed and developed from the early years on. Philosophers of Rome devoted much attention to the importance of the positive attitude towards the chosen activity and object.

Presently the framework of the vocation concept analysis is influenced by the philosophy of existentialism, personalism and humanism. In terms of *philosophy of existentialism* every person has to search for meaningful realisation of his / her life and accept the responsibility for the decisions made. The representative of this trend V. Frankl considers creative values that are realised through work to be the most important for the striving to fulfil one's existence with meaning. Author stresses the unique character of each person's vocation: "Each person has his / her own mission in life, a concrete calling that has to be implemented" (V. Frankl, 1988, p. 102).

The representative of *personalism* K. Wojtyła associates the problem of vocation with the "world of persons and order of love" (1997, p. 337). Ability to decide and choose is the essential condition of vocation. According to the author, internal vocation for every person is "peculiar to that person direction of development, resolution to devote one's whole life for certain values" (ibid, p. 338). Man's free decision is an inseparable element of vocation, therefore the necessary precondition for the revelation and implementation of the vocation of one's life, is person's positive relation with people and the object of vocation, since vocation is also and essential direction of love at the level of personality. "What is my vocation? This means what should be the direction of the development of my personality depending on what I have in me, what I could give and what others expect from me..." (K. Wojtyła, 1997, p. 340).

Representatives of the *humanistic theories* from XVIII century raised the problem of the discovery of person's vocation on basis of the existence of individual vocation. This also had impact on the development of pedagogic thought, as the discovery of vocation for humanists had to become one of the essential aims of the school. Discovery of vocation in this context is considered as inseparable from the education of people who express themselves and find fulfilment. According to A. H. Maslow, to find one's vocation means "to discover something about yourself, who you are, to be able to hear one's inner voice, discover things that we should do in life. What is the altar where the man will burn?" (1985, p. 174). Vocation is discovered through self-knowledge, through improvement of self-awareness. This is an individual spiritual quest of every person. In the opinion of the representatives of humanistic philosophy, person's vocation is encoded in his individual spiritual structure that is in turn partially determined by nature.

Philosophical and pedagogical thought of Lithuania derives the vocation from the totality of natural qualities of an individual. This opinion is reflected in the works of S. Šalkauskis and A. Maceina. The works of S. Šalkauskis stress the individual nature of the expression of vocation. According to the author, person's individuality, uniqueness of its powers and abilities determines his vocation. Vocation is understood as partially natural thing – everyone is born with certain potential possibilities that can be weakly or strongly expressed, however, the essential condition for the realization of vocation is the education factors as “when the powers and abilities of a person are not refined and developed, they may disappear” (S. Šalkauskis, 1991, p. 180). A minimal degree of such gift expressed by according abilities is necessary in the successfully chosen field for individual's activities.

A. Maceina devoted more attention to considering the issues of national vocation and vocation for the nation: “national vocation is not only a privilege to engage in one or other work of universal importance but also to serve for the general will of people” (A. Maceina, 1990, p. 350). He summarises the features of national vocation by attributing them to the vocation in general: “the concept of serving inheres in every vocation” (ibid, 1990, p. 350). In his opinion, vocation is derived from the nature of an individual, but is not something absolutely *given* and it becomes worthless if it is not associated with duty to work for the culture of humanity. Speaking of vocation as subjective inclination and as realization of an idea, A. Maceina emphasizes and relates the subjective and objective aspects of vocation: “to refuse realizing one's vocation means to refuse fulfilling one's duty and serving for the common ideal” (ibid, 1990 p. 351). Moral imperative of public vocation is very strong in his philosophic thought, it associates person's freedom of individual choice with certain sacrifice or abnegation for the sake of higher aims.

In Lithuania the first researches of professional vocation in terms of *psychology* virtually coincide with the establishment of the Association of Psychotechnics and Professional Counselling on 3 October 1931. One of the main aims of the Association was “to help the young in finding their vocation” (A. Gučas, 1937, p. 30). Members of the Association did significant job in researching various aspects of occupation choosing process, to this end they used specially designed methodology of psychotechnics. At that time their works inspired many specialists to show initiative in this field – during 1928-1934 a total of 34 articles were published on the choice of profession and in 1937 a book by A. Gučas “Vocation and Work” was published. A. Gučas argues that work without vocation produces great spiritual suffering, whereas the work for which a person has natural skills is crowned with success.

According to a psychologist and pedagogue J. Vabalas–Gudaitis, vocation has two distinct features: it means striving for useful human activity that answers to the needs of the social life and the adjustment of that activity with one's inner self, natural abilities. J. Gobis also distinguishes social and individual importance of the choice. According to this author, both for the culture and society it is most important that every worker does his / her work and that every occupation is

provided with the sufficient number of skilled specialists. On a personal level it is important that every individual finds it important that his / her work suits his / her inclinations and abilities and has moral value that makes individual “at least relatively happy, that is, satisfied with oneself and one’s life” (J.Gobis, 1928, p. 346).

Pedagogue E. Petkevičiūtė describes vocation as “field of activity or a job that meets person’s spiritual and physical abilities and inclinations” (1935, p. 381). She considered the discovery of vocation a necessary condition of nation’s economy and culture, since discovery of is expressed not only on individual level: “a person will find inner satisfaction in work and will like it”, “person is able to develop his / her natural abilities and qualities” (E. Petkevičiūtė, 1935, p. 381), but also on a more universal, social level – person would improve his / her work, would be interested in it, seek progress and would become a useful member of his / her nation.

During the first years of Soviet occupation the progress in the sphere of professional vocational research slowed down due to limitation imposed on psychological activities (research). Later attitude towards psychology science underwent changes as in the context of science technology development there appeared necessity not only for training people for working with complex machinery but also for taking into consideration person’s abilities in the process of coordinating people’s activities in the context of complex concerted action. At that time Lithuanian pedagogues and psychologists L. Jovaiša and S. Kregždė began, and H. Galkytė, O. Kregždienė, S. Jankevičius and others continued the researches of pupils’ and students’ decisions regarding the choice of jobs. In terms of practical psychology the results of works by S. Kregždė are of importance. His instrumental concept of occupational direction received acclaim not only in Lithuania but also in other Republics of the former Soviet Union. This researcher explained the occupational direction – choosing concept by attributing it exceptional importance. Whereas L. Jovaiša, after a close study of the relation between personality and occupation, more emphasized professional vocation as the most important internal motivation for choosing an occupation. According to his theory, professional interest is seen as one of the elements of the professional vocation, this concept is going to be adhered to also in this paper. Professional vocation here is described as person’s positive relation with a particular occupation, expressing the intersection of the objective occupational reality and subjective motivation, ability and character of personality.

To sum up, these conclusions could be made:

– The idea of vocation was approached by various thinkers, its explanations could be found in religious texts, philosophy, literature of pedagogics and psychology. It is agreed that vocation includes both subjective and objective aspects.

- *In religious sense vocation is an expression of incessant dialogue between man and God. Therefore, professional vocation reflects the power inhering in human nature or graces that God bestows to man and that are expressed through man's activities.*
- *In literature of philosophy, psychology and pedagogics professional vocation is both: person's internal inclination and his / her reaction to the needs and requirements of the society.*
- *Researchers agree that professional vocation is a complex psychological phenomenon that follows its own internal laws and has a specific mechanism of operation.*

1.2 Psychological Structure of Professional Vocation

Many researchers maintain an opinion that in its essence professional vocation is a corresponding relation of the person with occupation that he / she chooses, which derives from the person's nature and mobilizes person's natural powers for the task of achieving the established aim. Different authors are of different opinions as regards the hierarchical order of the expression of this relation.

The approach of the expression of vocation that is most often encountered in literature is concerned with the harmony between *inclination* and *ability*. The essence of the conceptual occupation choosing model of the pioneer of professional orienting theory and practice of F. Parson consists of: 1) relation between abilities and person's features; 2) requirements that occupation imposes. Understanding the importance of the subjective aspect for the successful choice of occupation, F. Parson encouraged teachers to develop occupation–relevant inclination and abilities of the young (cf. E. L. Herr, S. H. Cramer, 1979, p. 125). One of the most prominent researchers of professional development **D.E. Super** bases his work on the important assumption that people are unequally suitable to various professions and that they are different in terms of their abilities, interests, and personalities.

Similar view is maintained by L. Jovaiša – a most systematic and extensive researcher of vocation issues in Lithuania. He argues that the essence of vocation is a relation of personality with a concrete sort of occupation. Although the professor considers vocation of personality to be an indivisible phenomenon and a complex structure, but he also distinguishes several definitions of vocation thereby emphasizing differences of vocation between a working person and person without a profession. These definitions refer to the psychological structure of professional vocation. People that work following their vocation are characterized by these features:

- 1) they work diligently,
- 2) they do not spare efforts nor time,
- 3) they enjoy the success at work and are tough when going through hardships,
- 4) their work is often successful albeit difficult,
- 5) they actively avoid failure in their work,

- 6) they try to improve the work process and results and increase their qualification,
- 7) they do not think about the change of their profession,
- 8) they protect personal and social status associated with their profession,
- 9) they observe professional ethics,
- 10) one of the most important or the most important element of their philosophy is a work to common good. (L. Jovaiša, 1981, p. 76).

According to the author, the professional vocation of these people is “a combination of *motivation, potentiality and character* traits of the personality which determines the meaning of its professional life (ibid). When speaking of the vocation of “searchers”, L. Jovaiša makes the definition more concrete, although he does not introduce any new elements. He looks at the phenomenon at a different angle: “Vocation of persons who do not have a profession is active and long-term inclination to activity where a personality can more or less consciously see a possibility for successful realization of life’s aims and ideals, as well as potential abilities and idiosyncrasies” (ibid). These definitions quite clearly show author’s attitude to the structure of vocation. Although he stresses the indivisibility of the personality’s vocation, the author still thinks that some traits of vocation could be distinguished and divides them into three areas:

- 1) *motivation area* – inclination to engage into certain activities all life, conceptual– political, esthetical and work values, ideals;
- 2) *potentiality area* – knowledge, skills, abilities (intellectual, special, organisational, technical, motory and professional);
- 3) *character area* – activeness, perseverance, initiative, emotionality related to certain sort of activity.

It is important to understand that many psychic compounds could become empirical parameters of vocation: these include feelings relating to the activities, understanding of one’s suitability for the activity in question, attitude to the future professional activity, dreams, plans about the profession, etc.

Thus, most important elements of the vocation development are: *inclination* to the activity in question, professional interests and values that indicate how the person understands meaning of life and work, values and ideals. Various inclinations can in their turn mean the present abilities that become the basis of the professional vocation. The harmony of psychical compounds that belong to motivation and potentiality area has influence on the development of positive traits of character area that are suitable to the occupation in question, while the respective features of personal character determine inclination towards a certain profession. Therefore it is possible to argue that professional vocation is an undivided phenomenon as structural elements that make it up are closely connected and reciprocally influential.

After the start of the empirical research into professional vocation, new concepts of professional suitability and professional direction appeared in the literature of psychology and pedagogics.

Many authors associate the choice of professional direction with concept of professional vocation, some researchers see it as professional suitability, therefore, it is apparent that here we need a better understanding of the relation of these concepts with professional vocation.

To summarise, these conclusions could be made:

- *Scientific literature most often mentions psychological parts of professional vocation – inclination and abilities.*
- *Inclination, ideals and values belong to motivation area of professional vocation, which expresses person's professional direction, whereas abilities, knowledge, skills belong to potentiality area. Character area is also important – it includes personality character features that answer to the requirements of the profession.*
- *All traits are closely interrelated, therefore in essence professional vocation should be seen as indivisible phenomenon that includes motivation, potentiality and character areas.*

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