

Stead, G.B., Watson, M.B. (eds.) (1999). *Career psychology in the South African context*. Pretoria: J L van Schaik.

The fascinating aspect about career psychology is that it is constantly changing. The idea of a career, changes from the work that one does to the career rainbow of Super which incorporates all aspects of one's life. Today young people do not automatically follow in the footsteps of their parents, and both men and women may have careers outside the home. Some occupations no longer exist; and permanence in any career can no longer be guaranteed; what used to be security 'for the rest of your life' or something to 'fall back on' in the case of an emergency very seldom occurs now. Technology has changed the world of work to such an extent that many of the older professions no longer follow reliable paths. This makes career psychology a fascinating field, and one which cannot be pinned down.

The book falls into three sections. At the start of each is a short introduction indicating what is contained in the next chapters relating to the topic. The first section examines theories of career guidance, the second the skills that are needed in careers counselling, and the third the state of career education in this country, the provision of information on careers, and the various forms in which it is presented. Because of the speed with which the world of work changes these days computerised information would seem to have an advantage over other forms, and this is also looked at.

In the first section the history of career psychology is traced, and the various theories which have attempted to define it since Parsons first tried to fit square pegs into square holes and round ones into round holes. It looks at the various instruments and tests for the assessment of the factors which each theory identifies as influential in careers choice. It is therefore of use to all those interested in the field from psychologists, academic and practising, to students to guidance teachers, to human resource personnel, who would be dealing with placement and career development.

The theories that are discussed in detail are American in origin, and appear to be handled by individuals who subscribe to them, have experience of them and can therefore identify their advantages and the limitations which one has to recognise. Reference is made also to overseas research, and the findings which have confirmed or raised further questions on the theory. As the Americans were responsible for the idea of career guidance, and the British lagged behind, this would seem to be the most suitable source of theory.

In the second section the skills needed to counsel those looking for help are examined. This includes the various instruments of assessment, and where this has been done the research on overseas instruments to see how relevant/effective they are in the multi-cultural setting. At some point clients have to reach closure, and so besides the examination of factors related to a course of action, decision-making and career maturity is looked at in terms of appropriate action.

There are now many written sources of careers information in this country, from the pamphlets put out by training institutions, to the Department of Manpower's 'My Career' updated every two years to dictionaries put out by private individuals and professional organisations, and these are identified in the third section. Other ways of getting a more accurate feel for an occupation are suggested, and are graded according to the value for the individual.

The last chapter pleads for a 'localised career psychology'. In a world which is becoming increasingly homogeneous, where the need to create one's own employment opportunities takes precedence over encouraging people to look for jobs, the need for careers education obviously becomes increasingly important. This means increased knowledge of one's self, increased confidence in one's ability to turn one's hand to what is needed, and the ability to search out opportunities for earning a living, even if only for a short period. Theory and 'localisation' becomes academic.

What saddens me is that none of the research done by the NIPR in the 70's and 80's is recognised; it appears to have vanished. There were special 'tests' attempting to overcome cultural barriers, methods of administering tests, especially to illiterates, selection procedures for engineers, doctors, medical technologists and nurses, methods of counselling older people and advising Std 7's on subject choice. There were career workshops mainly in Black and Indian schools, training of Soweto guidance teachers with exposure to various careers and training institutions, training of test administrators. The Careers Centre in Soweto under the late Sebolelo Mohajane was set up, with guidance and support from the NIPR personnel. There were comparisons of test performance of speed vs power, which suggested that for second language speakers the problem was one of speed pressure rather than lack of ability to solve the problems given time. The fact that the differences between test performance of English and Afrikaans speakers diminished with increased urbanisation/education would seem to have relevance in our increasingly urbanised society. Colour was less of an issue than fairness, and this body of work would seem to be an important aspect of trying to develop an effective system of careers education/counselling/development in SA.

This is, however, by far the most comprehensive effort made to produce relevant information on the situation in South Africa and to look at the factors, which might or might not impact on the local scene. As such it a useful handbook for those involved in the careers education/counselling/development scene.

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