



*Sapere Auso
I dedicate these reflections
to the Most Honourable Professor, Our Master
Zygmunt Wiatrowski,
in whom the greatness of our scientific sub-discipline is realised
– “pedagogy of working on oneself for the benefit of others”*

VOCATIONAL INTERESTS AS A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM OF THE LABOUR PEDAGOGY RESEARCH

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Abstract. Interests are a research problem for scientists representing various scientific disciplines: psychologists, educators, and sociologists. More and more often, interest researchers treat general interests and vocational ones differently. In the paper, individual research positions in a historical perspective, combined with an attempt to find a methodological interpretation for researching the issues of professional interests by labour educators have been discussed.

ZAINTERESOWANIA ZAWODOWE ISTOTNYM PROBLEMEM BADAŃ PEDAGOGIKI PRACY

Słowa kluczowe: zainteresowania, zainteresowania zawodowe, pedagogika pracy

Streszczenie. Zainteresowania stanowią problem badawczy dla naukowców reprezentujących różne dyscypliny naukowe: psychologów, pedagogów, socjologów. Badacze zainteresowań coraz częściej odmiennie traktują zainteresowania ogólne i zainteresowania zawodowe. W artykule dokonano analizy poszczególnych stanowisk badawczych w ujęciu historycznym, połączonej z próbą znalezienia wykładni metodologicznej dla badania problematyki zainteresowań zawodowych przez pedagogów pracy.

Introduction

The object of research chosen by the founder of labour pedagogy Tadeusz Nowacki, focused on the educational aspects of the triad an individual – work – occupation (1982, p. 61), and then further specified by Zygmunt Wiatrowski to the form a human – education – work (1985, p. 9), contains a number of problem areas. The content of the problems occurring in the areas and the specific approach to their solution constitute labour pedagogy as a pedagogical discipline. Among the whole range of diverse research problems that require and at the same time are worthy of research efforts, there are „occupational interests” (cf. Rachalska 1982, p. 169).

Interests, including vocational interests, are a research problem for scientists representing various disciplines: psychologists, pedagogues, sociologists. Interests determine: the choice of profession (Rachalska 1987; Parzęcki 2003), school-professional achievements (Parsons 1909; Czarnecki, 1998), job satisfaction (Super 1972, p. 198), education, professional development (Nowacki 1977; Wiatrowski 2000, 2009), value system (Marczuk 1988) and professional performance (Dąbek 1987; Holland 1992).

In the literature, we can also find many different terminological interpretations and models of interest development, which, projecting on the exploration procedure, make it impossible to compare the research results. The analysis of terminological conventions of interests, including professional interests, defining their characteristics and conditions, showing the evolution of research positions combined with an attempt to develop a methodological interpretation for the study of professional interests by labour pedagogues was chosen as the subject of this article.

Understanding ‘interest’ historically

Interest as a phenomenon that motivates and directs the child’s activity is common across the developmental spectrum of pedagogical theory and practice. The interests of children and adolescents – on the one hand – were identified to determine the direction and scope of educational work; on the other hand – being an object of pedagogical activity – they became a measure of its effectiveness. At the same time, numerous authors point to the increased role of the interests of the upbringing (of pupils) in progressive pedagogical currents,

e.g. new upbringing, the current of emancipatory, liberating pedagogy (Dewey 1913; Gurycka 1978, p. 7; Hidi, Renninger 2020).

At the turn of the 20th century, the first research works on interests emerge. These focus on identifying developmental changes (phases) in children's interest objects (Claparède 1905; Decrol, Boon 1921; Dewey 1913; Hutchinson 1899; Nagy 1907).

Woods Hutchison (1899) sees four phases of interest development in childhood, which correspond to the stages of development of human civilisation. These are, in turn: catching, hunting and fighting interests; pastoral interests (children build huts, dig holes in the ground, look after animals); agricultural interests (tending flowers, plants); commercial interests (playing shop).

The evolution of interests developed by Ladislaus Nagy (1907) is more general in nature, containing five stages: 1) sensory interests (0 to 2 years), 2) subjective interests (2 to 7 years), 3) objective interests (7 to 10 years), 4) fixed interests (10 to 15 years), and 5) logical interests (15 years and older).

The change of objects of interest is considered by Ovide Decroly with reference to the questions posed by children (1921, after Baley S., 1946, p. 224):

- Questions about the name of objects: “What is the name of this, that?”; “What is that?”;
- Questions about use, or purpose: “What is it for?”; “Is it for eating?”;
- Questions about the perpetrator: “Who did it?”;
- Questions about the cause: “Why is it dark?”;
- Questions about motives, rationale: “Why are you laughing?”;
- Questions concerning the beginning, the origin, in which time, space are considered: “What is it made of?”; “Where is it from?”;
- Questions about means, tools: “How is it done?”; “What happened?”.

E. Claparède points out that whereas the child at the pre-school age is interested in the activity itself, objective interests emerge and develop at the early school and school age. The child is no longer interested in the activity itself, but also in the resultant product (1936).

The work of Douglas H. Fryer (1931) summarises and at the same time marks a turning point in the numerous studies of the problematic of interest carried out at the beginning of the 20th century. The author, stressing the importance of the problem of interests for both pedagogues and psychologists, points out the inadequacy of the research methods developed up to that time, above all observation and interview. An in-depth analysis of existing work

resulted in the conclusion that interests manifested by children and adults should be treated differently.

Further research work on the topic of interest was mainly carried out in four directions:

- identifying the content of children and young people's interests at different stages of their development;
- the co-occurrence of interests with other personal dispositions;
- developing general patterns of interest formation and development;
- separation of professional interests.

Content of children and young people's interests at different stages of their development

In the research under the direction of Lidia Voloshinkova, attention was paid to the change in the content of children's interests in the early school period (Voloshinkova 1975, p. 643). The content of interests was divided by the author of the research into 15 categories: school activities, sports, motor games, reading, drawing, playing with dolls, helping in the household, television, current events and issues, thematic games, radio, DIY, cinema, music, and collecting. According to the survey, interests in sports and physical play are among the leading interests of children. The tendency to decline is mainly shown by school-related activities. In the third grades of primary school there is a clear increase in interest in DIY.

In contrast to the period preceding adolescence, when children are easily, but also rather superficially, interested in all phenomena around them, adolescents at the age of 12 or 13 focus on certain specific areas, and individuals become very intensely involved in the field of their choice (Łapińska, Żebrowska 1975, p. 774). The objects of interest of adolescent youth can be divided into four groups:

- 1) objects related to one's own development: the sphere of personal experiences, increasing knowledge, self-awareness, growth of intellectual and physical capabilities;
- 2) objects resulting from social development: belonging to peer groups, chosen organisation, school class, choice of school, profession;
- 3) objects related to the assimilation of cultural values, the need to make choices, the formation of a world view;
- 4) objects related to sexual development: experiences, friendships with members of the opposite sex.

According to Donald E. Super, the crystallisation of interests begins somewhat later – at the age of 14, 15 (1972, p. 153). Subject interests are differentiated: humanities, natural sciences, mathematics. Vibrant interests in various areas that are not covered by the school curriculum are outlined. These include interests in information technology, modelling, playing an instrument, art, sightseeing, etc. Ethical, social and cultural interests are emerging and a “permanent specialisation of interests” takes place (Claparede, 1936).

National studies carried out in the 1990s showed that at the age of 15, there is a wide disparity between the interests of girls and boys (Frydrychowicz et al. 1994). Of the nine interests identified: commercial and office, technical, literary, agricultural, caring, military, artistic, scientific, musical, the predominant interests of boys are technical and military, while girls’ interests are caring, literary and artistic (Fig. 1).

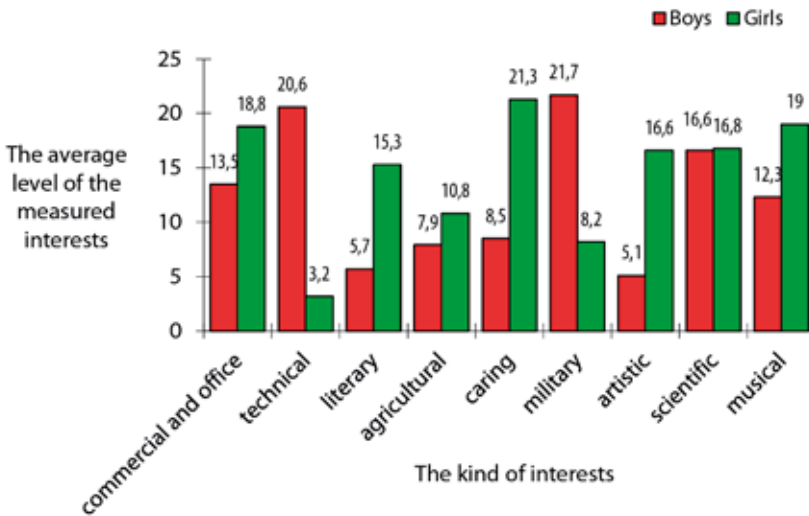


Figure 1. Interests of boys and girls aged 15 (Frydrychowicz et al. 1994)

General patterns of interest formation and development

Already in the late 1970s, Antonina Gurycka stated, that less and less research was being undertaken into the problem of phases of interest development (1978, p. 120), due to the empirically established high dependence of interests on cultural factors, pedagogical tendencies and children’s living conditions. The constant regularity of interest development is therefore not the content, but the intensification of certain interest characteristics. This

development is characterised, according to Claparede E., by a transition: from the simple to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract, from passive receptivity to spontaneity, from generality to specialisation, from subjectivity to objectivity, from directness to indirectness, from dispersion into details to fusion (1936).

A different problem is to determine the regularities of occurrence – the successive stages of emergence, development and formation – of interests in general. One of the first models of interest development is the three-stage model developed by A. Gurycka (1978, p. 155). The first stage is related to the evocation of interest on the basis of the provision of appropriate stimuli. Such stimuli can be problematic situations, i.e. situations in which something new and unclear is involved – which will not only divert the individual's attention, but will result in deeper cognitive involvement. In stage two, there is a transformation of curiosity into interest through external reinforcement of the student's actions (teachers, tutors, peers – significant others). When the stimuli for cognition and action in a given direction are generated by the individual, independently of the influence of the environment, we are dealing with the emergence of passion (mature interest).

Most contemporary studies of children and adolescents' interests are based on the four-stage (four-phase) model of interest development developed by Suzanne Hidi and K. Ann Renninger (2006). However, the models by A. Gurycka and S. Hidi, K.A. Renninger are largely convergent, it is worth noting certain and well-established (already used quite widely by problem researchers) two terminological categories: situational interest and individual interest (e.g. Alexander, Kulikowich, Schulze 1994; Krapp 2000; Renninger 2000; Schraw and Lehman 2001).

Situational interest refers to the attentional focus and affective response that are triggered in the moment by an environmental stimulus (Hidi and Baird 1986), whereas individual interest refers to a person's relatively enduring predisposition to re-engage in a particular activity, as well as the immediate mental state when this predisposition has been activated (Renninger 2000).

In the first stage of the interest development model, a situational interest is triggered (triggered situational interest). This interest, after some time, can develop into a stable situational interest (maintained situational interest) – stage two. In the third stage, individual interest emerges (emerging individual interest), which can lead to the fourth stage – well-developed individual interest. As the authors of the model emphasise, each stage of interest is characterised

by different intensities of the aphotic factor, knowledge and values. The length and nature of a particular stage can be influenced by individual experience, temperament and genetic predisposition. The four stages are believed to be sequential and distinct, and are also a form of joint (cumulative), gradual development where interest is fostered and maintained, either through the efforts of others or because of challenges or opportunities perceived by the individual in a task situation. While the highest stage in the development of interests, i.e. well-developed individual interests, can be equated with passion – resistant to external factors (e.g. Rotgans, Schmidt 2017), a fundamental discrepancy is expressed in the emphasis by the authors of the four-phase model and other researchers on the determining role of external factors. Without support from others, interests at each stage can become dormant, regress to a previous stage or disappear altogether (Renninger 2000; Renninger and Hidi 2002).

Separating the issue of professional interests as mature interests with a focus on content

The research presented here focused primarily on students' interests, the so-called school interests. The second stream of research, which emerged from the need to take into account a broad spectrum of personal dispositions and inclinations in the decision-making process aimed at optimal choice or change of profession, focuses on vocational interests as a category different from school interests. The words of D.E. Super “one can trust interests identified only in the eighteenth year of life, the so-called inventory-vocational interests” (1972) are significant here.

The origins of the exploration of this issue date back to the 1920s. The pioneer of research into the issue of occupational interests was Edward K. Strong, who assumed that people in the same or similar occupations share interests that distinguish them from people in different occupations (1927). The similarity of interests applies not only to professional areas but also to many aspects of non-professional life. The *Strong Vocational Interest Blank* Questionnaire contains several hundred questions on names of occupations, school and university subjects, pastimes and favourite activities, and psychosocial characteristics. The tool allows the separation of realistic, research, artistic, social, entrepreneurial and conventional interests.

A different way of examining interests was proposed in 1939 by Frederic Kuder (*Kuder Preference Record Vocational*). The study, which involved choosing

one of a set of pairs of activities, made it possible to measure the respondents' preferred activities in seven spheres: scientific, accounting, artistic, musical, literary, social and persuasive, and, from 1946, additionally in three spheres: mechanical, office and outdoor (Zytowski 1992).

Current occupational interest survey tools, which include, among others, improved versions of the questionnaires by E.K. Strong and F. Kuder and *the Questionnaire of Occupational Preferences* (KPZ) by John L. Holland (1985,1992; Nosal et al. 1997), the *Global Personal Globe Inventory* by Terence J.G. Tracey (1997) and the *Youth Questionnaire of Occupational Interests* (MŁOKOZZ) by A. Paszkowska-Rogacz (2011), or the projection test by Martin Achtnich (after H. Jarosiewicz, 2013) and the computer application *Perspektywy Edukacyjno-Zawodowe* (Dębska et al. 2015) make it possible to determine the content of professional inclinations and interests. Thus, they find widespread use in vocational counselling, the theoretical basis of which was developed by Frank Parsons (1909). Getting to know oneself, including one's interests, is one of the three factors – along with knowledge of job requirements and conditions and consideration of the relationship between the two factors – determining the optimal choice of profession. This approach – characteristic of vocational guidance in industrial society (Bańka 2005; Szumigraj 2011), in a significant percentage occurs in the guidance practice today (Herr, Cramer 2001, Bajcar et al. 2006), and together with new concepts (models) by D. Super (1951), Holland (1992), Dale Prediger (1999) contributes to the high popularity of the above-mentioned and the tools developed on their basis to measure interests. The research tools shown – while meeting basic methodological criteria – will not be useful or will only play a supporting role in the investigation of a number of pedagogical problems. I am referring here to the study of students' interest in a particular field of knowledge, the study of students' interest in a particular field of study or the study of employees' interest in a particular narrow activity.

An attempt to define professional interests

Another methodological divergence can be observed in the interest research to date. On the one hand, the literature gives the category “occupational interests” a broad layer of meaning combining, in part, employee qualifications and work motivation (cf. Super 1972; Dąbek 1987; Silva 2001; Schultz & Schultz 2002). On the other hand, the methodological practice of the study of occupational interests (inclinations) and, at the same time, the operational definitions focus

only on a narrow slice of the phenomenon allowing, in principle, the exploration of one of their characteristics.

If we assume that occupational interests are a psychological property (a personal trait) that manifests itself in the individual's relatively persistent desire to know and act in a specific area of occupational activity and experience feelings related to the lack, acquisition and possession of occupational qualifications (cf. Super 1964; Gurycka 1989; Marszałek 2016), the consequence is that a whole range of research techniques and tools must be used to determine them.

Vocational interests understood in this way are differentiated in terms of: content, breadth, strength, depth and persistence (cf. Fryer 1931; Słoniewska 1959; Dąbek 1987; Gurycka 1989; Marszałek 2016). The content of interest can be identified with the object of cognition, the area of professional activity. Professional interests in terms of content can be divided into technical, educational, musical, artistic, IT, biological, medical and other interests. The multiplicity of cognitive objects is linked to the next feature – the breadth (scope) of the interest. The more objects of cognition are in a person's sphere of interest, the broader the interests. The strength of interest can be determined by the emotional attitude towards the object of interest. This feature makes it possible to distinguish strong, average and weak interests. The frequency of cognitive acts occurring in relation to an object of interest per unit of time can be related to the intensity (depth) of interest. Persistence is expressed in the length of time interests are manifested.

Professional interests in the research of the work educator

The use of the presented definition of vocational interests creates a methodological basis for the selection, or construction, of one's own research tools. It is not possible to determine individual characteristics of interests using only standard interest inventories, which allow the emergence of categorised content, or to measure the strength of interests or professional inclinations. A way out of this disadvantageous – from a methodological point of view – situation is the use of different methods and techniques for the study of occupational interests, used autonomously or complementary to the inventory study, such as observation, (Fryer 1931, Super 1972, Gurycka 1978), conversation (loose statements) “expressed interests” (Darley, Hagenah 1955; Dolliver 1969; Silva 2001, analysis of documents and artefacts (Marshall 2016, Dabek 1987), interview (Fryer 1931, Silva 2001).

A comprehensive study of vocational interests is of great importance for the individual development of people and for the creators of educational activities. The results of the research make it possible to verify the accuracy of the choice, to determine the specificity, strength, intensity (depth), width, permanence and variability of the direction of professional interests. The measurement of the aforementioned characteristics of interests also fulfils an important function in the self-determination of the individual – the assessment of one's own professional dispositions, the possibilities for their development and – so useful nowadays – self-reflection, self-determination, self-diagnosis leading to success in professional work. In relation to the creators of changes in the reality of vocational education, a comprehensive study of vocational interests allows to verify the assumptions on the content and directions of education, the modernization of methods and forms of work organization transformable into measurable indicators of the effectiveness of educational policy.

The main role of the occupational pedagogue is to perceive and take action towards the problems falling within the human-educational-occupational triad, aimed at supporting the development of the human being, his or her satisfactions, values and aspirations. This implies not only the possibility, but above all the necessity of a comprehensive approach to the problem of vocational interest research, taking into account qualitative and quantitative research, covering a rich spectrum of specific issues, as well as taking comprehensive measures aimed at the development of interests.

In the context of the considerations carried out, longitudinal research, allowing to trace changes in the characteristics of professional interests at different stages of human professional development, acquires particular importance. In the current of these studies, the problems of appropriateness of transformation of pre-school, school and extracurricular (pro-professional) interests into professional interests, passions should be taken into account. A different research direction should take into account the correlation of professional interests with personal characteristics and environmental conditions.

It is also extremely important to bring children and young people into contact with potential objects of interest, to make them more attractive and to ensure that their activities in these areas are constantly strengthened by the following educational measures:

- carrying out, and to a large extent reactivating, education through service work, production work, but also agricultural work at the pre-school and general school level;

- promoting student achievement;
- broadening the profiles and strengthening the activities of interest groups;
- the organisation of meetings with masters in their profession and excursions to workplaces.

Conclusions

The study of professional interests by work pedagogues, according to the presented methodological concept, defining the scope and content of scientific inquiry, allows to explore the extremely important – for the development of scientific sub-discipline – problematic much wider and deeper than before. The consequence of this is the inclusion in the research of five defined characteristics of interest (content, strength, permanence, breadth, depth), three spheres (components) of the manifestation of interest (cognitive, action and emotional-motivational) and a stage model of interest development – the transition from curiosity (situational interest) to mature interest, passion (individual interest). Comprehensive research outlined in this way becomes possible with the use of a range of methods, techniques and research tools by labour pedagogues and interdisciplinary teams consisting of psychologists, pedagogues and sociologists. The significant role of labour pedagogues in the exploration of issues is also due to the possibility to carry out comprehensive research of occupational interests independently, taking into account the theoretical and methodological dimensions and translating them into numerous practical solutions.

It is also my hope that the way of exploring professional interests identified in the article will contribute to cementing the place of work pedagogy among other scientific disciplines, to its development and, consequently, will allow a wider opening of the “window on culture” (Alexander 2001) and, at the same time, a fuller participation in the global scientific output.

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