

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT - SHOULD WE DETECT TALENTS AND DEVELOP CAREER PATHS EARLIER?

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Abstract:

The young are a social group most likely to be included in insecure forms of employment. Employers give special emphasis to the presented talents of young job seekers. Each individual's offering, his or her personal characteristics and competences are important for every organisation. In this paper we focus on the possibility of early identification of talent. We assume that one of the reasons for the increase in self-employment, retraining, delayed completion of studies and education of young job seekers may lie in them returning to fields where they have always been successful, to their primary aspirations, hobbies and so-called early talents. Does the school system operate in accordance with its objective, namely to prepare young adults for the future? The question of how to begin the process of discovering single talent and where possibilities to develop early career paths lie, remains open. Namely, we assume that early talent identification is an important social factor and this aspect should be taken into account by the (primary) school system. We reflect on potential solutions to finding options for creating a (primary) school system in light of the early development of "soft skills" that are becoming increasingly relevant in the process of youth employment.

Keywords: youth unemployment, talents, career, early career paths.

Empirical evidence regarding employment/unemployment trends shows that the young – when entering the labour market as first job seekers (after completed education) – are, despite being well educated, socially the most deprived group regarding access to work/jobs. The young are a social group most likely to be included in insecure forms of employment that often do not enable personal career-building, such as temporary and occasional work, fixed-term and part-time jobs. Another issue is over-education, referring to the group of people (in some segments) with the highest educational level. In this respect we can speak of market inefficiency of particular disciplines, referring to the market hyper-density of highly educated young job seekers relative to their specific educational field.

Comparison of data regarding unemployment trends relative to education across EU countries shows that the highest proportion among employment seekers represent those with higher levels of secondary education (in most cases they exceed half of all employment seekers). The share of people seeking jobs with primary or lower levels of secondary education is generally around one third, while persons with tertiary education represent the lowest proportion of the unemployed (slightly over one tenth) (LABORSTA, 2008). Despite this, the vast majority of all EU students enrolled in tertiary education are in programs that are ‘theory-based’, ‘research-preparatory’ or give access to ‘professions with high skill requirements’ as opposed to those students undertaking shorter, more practice-oriented programs (Education and Culture DG, 2007).

Although better education decreases the risk of unemployment, some research results indicate that almost one third of graduates end up in jobs that do not match their educational qualifications very well (Maarten H.J. Wolbers 2003). EU policy enhances the principle of equal opportunities for education (i.e. the fairness/justice of educational systems) and is based on three criterions: guaranteed equality of inclusion in education process; social justice, i.e. tuition fees (educational expenses) suited/adjusted to the financial means of respective participants in the educational system; and, finally, compensation of expenses in the form of gained benefits (CEC, 2006). These criterions on the one hand enable access to higher educational study, while on the other, we increasingly witness new negative consequences of the great increase of enrolment in higher secondary and tertiary education over the past few decades. These consequences include the fact that employers are more demanding, and instead of certificates and degrees they pay more attention to other characteristics, such as social and communicational abilities, information literacy, intercultural competences, using foreign languages¹ as indices of formal education, despite the fact that these skills are not necessarily obtained from the process of formal education. Employers pay special emphasis on the presented talents of young job seekers². This explains the main reason for recruiting young people from other EU countries, which lies in recruiting the best available talent (Employers' perception of graduate employability, 2010). For each organisation it is important what one has, what are his or her personal characteristics and competences.

L. Lundahl mentions that so-called yo-yo transitions (the YO-YO effect) (Walther et al., 2002; Colley et al., 2007; Evans, 2009; Lundahl, 2011), representing frequent, repeated

¹ The “Euro barometer” analysis 2010 reveals that employers desire some competences of their potential employees that are not the product of the current system. For example, organizations in Slovenia list as most relevant *sector-specific skills* (73 %), team-working skills (71 %), the ability to adapt to and act in new situations, communication skills, while good reading/ writing skills (45 %), being good with numbers (39 %), and foreign language skills (39 %) were viewed as less important.

² In the business world, “talent” is defined as “repeating form of thinking, feeling, behaviour, which can be usefully used” (Buckingham & Coffman 1999, p. 71).

movements back and forth between education, spells of work and (often) unemployment, have become increasingly common (Walther, 2006; Kovacheva & Pohl, 2007; Lundahl, 2011). More often than before, young job seekers gain self-employment, take a new profession or starting build new careers. Approximately 15 % of young people in Europe become self-employed immediately after leaving education³. Enrolling in further study or even in high school simply to obtain student status and the social benefits this status entails is an extremely negative solution for the unemployment of young people. Educational institutions, which were in the past able to adjust to increased demand on the youth labour market, are today unable to adjust to the reduced demand. Therefore, the discrepancy between the production of educated youngsters and their ability to find (proper) employment has today become one of the greatest problems in EU countries. In addition, paradoxically, in today's so-called knowledge society, the vast amount of knowledge gained through the secondary and tertiary education is unutilized. On the micro level, young employment seekers respond to the changes in the labour market by adjusting their careers. Traditional career building is being replaced by contemporary multiple career paths, which puts forward individuals who shape their careers independently of the organisation.

Solutions to these problems, which have in the past decade received increased attention in guidelines and policies as well as in research, are varied and complex. In the paper we focus on the possibility of early identification of skills, talents and motivational factors that could contribute to more direct and self-creation of a steering career. In this we rely on the holistic emphasis in humanistic psychology, which emphasizes the study of the basic needs of self-realization that are universal in every human being (Ferbežar, 2008). We assume that one of the reasons for the increase in self-employment, retraining, delaying completion of studies and education may lie in the fact that young job seekers are returning to areas where they have always been successful, namely to their primary aspirations, hobbies and so-called early talents.

Indeed, individual talents express themselves in childhood, and some potentials may stand out. The question is: Does the school system operate in accordance with its objective, namely to prepare young adults for the future? While education has 4 main roles, one of them is *"individual"*. Children are born with immense natural powers of imagination and curiosity, which come as standard in human beings. In addition to what they have in common, all children have their own particular aptitudes, dispositions and potential passions. Beside the *"social"* and *"cultural"* role there is also the *"economic"* role, namely to enable all students to achieve financial independence and contribute to wealth creation in ways that are ethical and sustainable (Robinson & Gerver, 2010).

In the most general sense, talent is a sum of each person's abilities, his or her inter-instinct gifts, skills, knowledge, experiences, intelligence, judgement, attitude, character and drive. Talent also includes the ability to learn and grow⁴ (Michaels et al., 2001, p. 11). According to the Primary Education Act (1996), the main roles of Slovenian primary school education include: promoting the harmonious, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social development of the individual; promoting awareness of the individual's integrity; obtaining general and useful knowledge that enables the individual to independently, effectively and creatively deal with social and natural environment and develop the critical power of adjudication, enabling

³ A greater proportion was detected in Belgium and South European countries.

⁴ Since there are many definitions of talent, we refer in this paper to Michaels et al. (2001) and to Clayton (2007), who considers motivation and opportunity factors.

personal development of students, according to their abilities and principles of development. While from the objectives of secondary education, referred to above, can be found only one (to promote awareness of the integrity of the individual) (Secondary education act, 1996). This is one of the arguments that the career path may move on to creating already in primary school.

Teachers usually identify talented and gifted students as they are required to by law. Freeman et al. (2010) conclude that in various countries around the world, various talent identification procedures are used. The most commonly used are teacher assessment (80 %) followed by students' evaluation and knowledge tests (62 %), information from parents and the community (62 %), tests of intellectual ability (54 %), other tests (51 %), evaluation of school psychologist (48 %), the pupil's work in the school context (45 %), tests of creativity (23 %).

We would like to draw attention to shortcomings in the talent identification procedures set by law. An open question is how to begin the process of discovering single talent, as it is clear that all the proposed methods cannot be applied to an entire generation of students in order to discover them. In addition, psychology is increasingly consolidating knowledge of multiple intelligence and talent. Assuming that early talent identification is an important social factor, this aspect should be taken into account, meaning that full attention should not only be given to identified gifted pupils, but teachers should also be directed to developing potential talents in other students.

In this respect, attention may be drawn to an interview with N. Černigoj in which the researcher presents a new concept of building careers versus the traditional conception arising from the assumption that people have skills and motivation that are relevant to a particular profession. It also highlights the importance of a career that is not tied only to "paid work", as each career path reflects upon the individual, creating a personal and social identity. In the primary school is already starting to develop confident behaviour, teamwork, communication skills and above all the creative and innovative thinking properties, which subsequently shape skills, by which young people, can act in competitive labour markets. In this paper we attempt to discuss possible solutions towards finding options for amending the (primary) school system in light of the early development of "soft skills" that are becoming increasingly relevant in the process of youth employment.

According to trends in youth employment, the question also arises as to whether a tertiary level degree actually is the most important goal of the education system and whether students that complete their education earlier are viewed as *failures*. As Robinson (2001) writes, "Human culture is diverse, rich, and this part of our mind is so intelligent and dynamic. We all claim significant natural capacities – all different. In this world there are not just two types of people academic and non-academic, we all have abilities, characteristic profiles and talents, ability in music, thinking, math, sports..." Gardner explains that in early childhood, we can easily see which potentials are developed by each child. It is important to recognise and encourage these potentials early and allow them to develop during adolescence. "If we saw a talent in every child and would act accordingly and included him in enriched programs, many educational problems would be solved as well" (Armstrong, 1999, p. 151). Academic education covers only certain types of skills – those who have them often also have other skills that are unfortunately overlooked. Those who have non-academic qualifications are often labelled as unintelligent, failures. If we are to take the notion of human capital seriously, the first step is to recognize the diversity and resources of individuals (Robinson, 2001 p. 9–10).

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