

# Guidance for Individuals – Guidance for the World

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## ABSTRACT

Students at educational institutions are shaping their futures while they acquire knowledge and skills. Yet, their educational and career choices extend beyond personal impact; they imprint on the world at large. This opinion piece challenges a dominant narrative in education that frames education mainly as a tool for personal achievement—aiming for maximum individual freedom, influence, and privileges—rather than as a catalyst for societal change. Drawing on the works of sociologists and educators like Hartmut Rosa and Gert Biesta, we advocate for a shift towards integrating societal values into educational guidance. We propose that guidance professionals encourage students to consider how their educational and career choices can contribute to solving societal challenges. This approach aims to foster a deeper, more resonant relationship with the world, promoting a balance between personal fulfilment and societal contribution. We tackle this issue for the sake of students... and for all of us.

## KEYWORDS

Student guidance; Values; World-centred education; Educational consumerism; Student anxiety and stress

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## The Millennium accent of guidance

'*What do YOU want to do with YOUR life?*' is one of the central questions of modern student guidance and career counselling. This “person-centred” approach is not new, but it has become the self-evident starting point for all “good” practice in our field since the 90's.

It was the time when Anthony Giddens was discussing self-identity, postmodernism was strangling communal ideologies, and the coaching wave was at its peak. As guidance counsellors, we were immersed in Personal Development Planning (PDP). Identity creation became central to guidance, influencing decisions about education and career paths. Both authors of this opinion piece, personally and professionally shaped by the liberation postmodernism offered, have taught hundreds of guidance practitioners how to support individuals in their identity creation projects.

Over time, we have come to recognize that this movement has contributed as much harm as good. And we are not alone. German sociologist Hartmut Rosa describes how our creation of

what we thought was paradise turned out to be hell (Rosa, 2020). Our culture's pace has accelerated, and our focus on using the world—through education, relationships, nature, work—to expand personal opportunities has compromised healthy, 'resonant' relationships with the world. We now view the world through a lens of functionality and utility, a stance Rosa describes as an '*aggressive relationship with the world*.' Gert Biesta addresses the same theme when he criticizes the utilitarian paradigm in European educational policy over the past 30 years (Biesta, 2021).

To sum up, this aggressive approach contributes to young people's discomfort—uncertainty, loneliness, stress, and anxiety (Sørensen et al., 2017).

And if we took Rosa and Biesta with us through today's guidance landscape, they would tell us that the aggressive approach to the world leads to alienation, where individuals lose a deeper connection to the world around them. Instead of experiencing resonance, where there is a mutual and meaningful connection between the individual and the world, many feel a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness.

However, the millennium accent still resides in the way we talk about education. '*What would you like to study?*', '*What do you hope to achieve in life?*', '*How can you exploit your network?*' etc. These are questions that promote consumer-oriented answers to educational questions (Lauridsen & Nielsen, 2022). They speak to self-staging and the egocentric, omnipresent question, '*What's in it for me?*'".

### **Inviting values into guidance**

In our profession, driven by our eagerness to do good, we need to critically consider which ideas and values we carry and reproduce. As we see it, the future of guidance must challenge the view that education is solely for personal gain. We should aim to encourage students to consider how their educational and career choices relate to the world and impact their environment in meaningful ways.

Developing specific guidance methods that integrate societal values into practice is essential. We must dare to ask, '*How can your educational and career choices make a difference in the world?*'

### **Ask: "*How do you want to contribute to solving society's challenges?*"**

Inspired by Thomsen, Hooley, and Sultana's ideas on 'Guidance for Social Justice' (Hooley et al., 2018), Dimsits and Buhl's work on 'Sustainable Guidance,' (Buhl & Plant, 2023), Gert Biesta's concept of 'World-centered Education,' and Hartmut Rosa's points that many educational institutions end up as 'Alienation Spaces' we at SDU have worked to shift our students' perspective from a self-centric view to a broader global outlook when discussing educational

choices and priorities. We might ask them: *'How do you want to contribute to solving the world's and society's challenges?'* This new perspective has resonated well with the students, encouraging them to consider the broader impact of their education.

By taking 'the world' as our starting point in our quest for the purpose of education, we seek deeper, more meaningful responses and a stronger sense of connection to the world. This approach does not compromise individual freedom, opportunities, or quality of life. Rather, it enhances them, as a fulfilling life for individuals arises from experiencing a responsive relation to the world.

In August 2024, we boldly asked all new MA students in our online introduction course at the Humanities department: *"What does it mean to you that you can relate what you learn to the challenges of society and the world?"* This question was merely designed to provoke reflection, as the students clicked their answer. But we were curious about the outcome and the response was telling: 98% of students acknowledged the importance of connecting their studies to broader societal and global challenges.

### **Need for speed vs. Need for being part of something bigger**

A striking feature of youth in 2025 is their embrace of contradictory ideals. In our dialogues with young people, we often encounter these dichotomies: the self-focused, benefit-driven *'what's in it for me'* versus the globally engaged, community-oriented *'what's in it for all of us'* As illustrated in Figure 1.

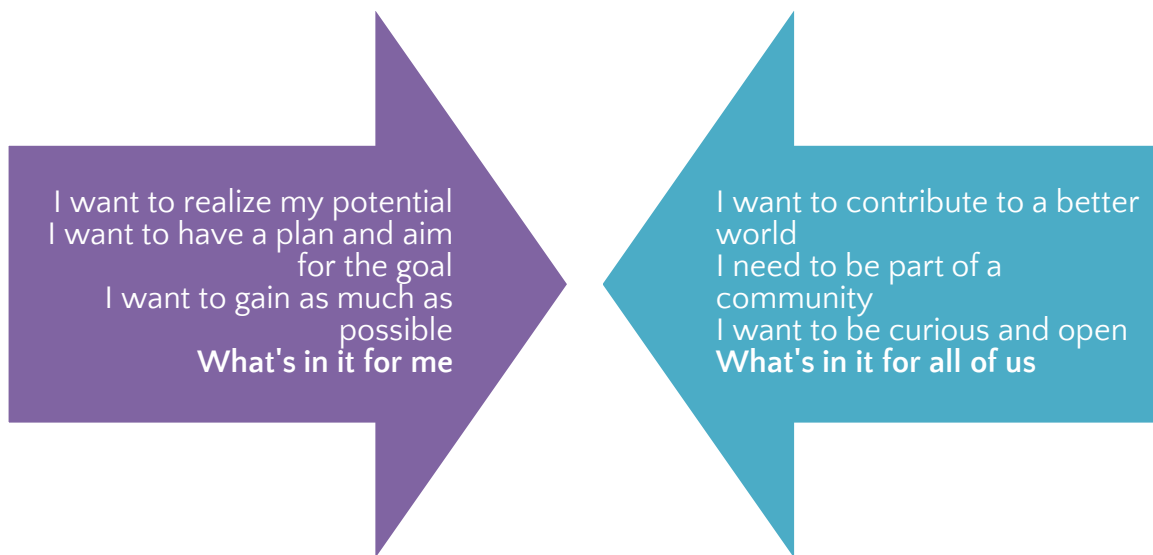


Figure 1 - The dialogic dichotomy

We see this as a dichotomy between the individual-focused, self-staging, benefit-oriented '*what's in it for me*' on one side, and the world-engaged, community-seeking, curious '*what's in it for all of us*' on the other. These two approaches have strong resemblances with Hartmut Rosa's description of an '*aggressive relation to the world*' versus '*a resonant relation to the world*'.

Many of the young are fully aware that this dichotomy resides within them. But very often they expect questions related to education and career to be addressed from a '*what's in it for me?*' perspective. They might even approach us and open our conversation on that premise.

What we, as guidance counsellors, educational institutions, and other stakeholders, focus on determines which side of this dichotomy is activated and, thus what ideas, norms, and ideals about education and learning are engendered.

We should decide which of the two sides should shape our practice, our conversations, and our ways of talking about education and career for the sake of individuals as well as our common good. It requires awareness and full attention—just like mastering a new language.

We still have a long way to go at Humanities SDU, but we are trying to shift the language of educational themes towards the values that reside in the young and away from the millennium accent that inhabits much of the language we typically use. When our students question what they will gain from attending class or group work, we ask what their contribution could be.

And when they as a default reaction look towards large, famous companies and institutions for project collaborations and internships, we allow ourselves to challenge them with reflections on where one as an unexperienced academic intern might contribute most.

### **Find the courage to challenge the way we speak about education and career?**

We, as professional educators and guidance counsellors, must dare to believe that young people prefer to prioritize their opportunity to contribute to the world over more self-centred, self-staging parameters in their choice of education and career. We must invite reflections on the good life and have the courage to ask outward-looking questions:

- How can your educational and career choices make a difference in the world?
- What is important in study and work life?
- Which challenges do you want to help solve?
- How will you make a mark?
- What is a meaningful existence for you?
- Where can you make the greatest difference?

By asking these types of questions, we can help students see their education in a broader perspective. This promotes a more sustainable, society-oriented approach to their future career choices, and they feel a deeper connection to the world.

We must also summon the courage to challenge our colleagues within our institutions when they frame our educational 'products' through a narrowly self-interested '*what's in it for me*' lens. When surveys indicate that students are primarily concerned with the tangible benefits of their education, it's crucial to question why we haven't explored the broader implications of their learning—specifically, its capacity to enact meaningful change in the world. Rather than focusing solely on job placement as the culmination of education, we should redefine success to mean '*embarking on a journey to make a significant impact*'—a shift that moves beyond viewing students as mere consumers and instead as agents of change.

And finally, we all need to address what it looks like when you change the world.

### About the Author/s

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