

THE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR IN THE PEDAGOGICAL COUNSELING PROCESS*

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Abstract

Counseling in the educational process involves knowing the general principles of student population development, but also applying an individualistic approach, since each student is a separate person. A key role in this process is played by the counselor, who should lead the counseling with students not only from the student's current, present status, but also his future. The purpose of the counselor in this process is to raise the awareness of the students about the possibility to overcome certain obstacles and barriers in their personal functioning. Whether it is individual students, student groups, or classes as a collective, counseling is focused on providing unconditional support and helping students overcome certain problems, difficulties, or simply dilemmas related to different school and life situations. The counseling should contribute to the development of self-awareness and the situations the student is going through, as well as the development of strategies that will lead to positive changes. The importance of counselor work with students with learning and behavioral problems should be emphasized, as well as work with students who have any life dilemmas or concerns about how to target and meet specific desires and needs and who need expert knowledge, honest conversation and support.

Keywords: *pedagogy, counseling, process, student, education*

1. Introduction

In school systems in many countries, besides teaching staff, schools have engaged and expert assistants (pedagogical counselors) whose primary task is to provide expert assistance and support to the participants in the educational process in order to achieve the most successful implementation of the same. Their professional work is aimed at encouraging and directing the development and progress of students, recognizing, identifying and understanding the difficulties they face and providing help to overcome them, as well as preventing learning and behavioral difficulties. In addition, their professional role is achieved through collaboration with teachers and school leadership to provide optimal conditions for students' learning and development, as well as for the successful functioning of the school as an institution. They also unreservedly support parents in matters that are important to the development and education of their children. Providing expert assistance and support is achieved through collaboration with students, teachers, school management, parents, as well as entities from the immediate and wider environment.

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2. The meaning of the term counseling

Starting from the fact that the term counseling is used in different ways in different situations of daily life, it is necessary at the outset to emphasize the difference between counseling that takes place in an informal context and counseling which is a formal way of professional support to individuals, smaller or larger groups. As opposed to informal assistance, i.e. secular counseling, which is spontaneous and with different intentions (can be provided by almost anyone), counseling, as a form of professional activity, is a formal form of assistance provided by a person who is specifically qualified for such work in the various sciences and scientific disciplines (psychology, pedagogy, medicine, law, etc.) etc. (Janković, 2004)

In this sense, counseling is defined as a theoretically and methodologically based, systematic and planned activity that requires training and responsibility. The theoretical and methodological underpinnings involve the grounding of relevant theories and theoretical approaches, methods and techniques derived from them, as well as grounding the results and implications of scientific and empirical research in this field. Counseling training implies developed competencies that the expert gains through general and specific education, training and supervision, which upgrades them through continuous professional and personal development, while responsibility means counseling in accordance with professional standards, legal regulations and codes of ethics. (Srna, 2012) The concept of counseling can be viewed from two angles:

- 1) Counseling as providing expert advice (information, guidelines, recommendations, suggestions) which implies that the counselor offers "ready-made solutions" ("recipes") to the specific needs and problems of counseling users (eg counseling in the education process, choice of profession, employment, etc.) in various social situations lack and satisfaction of social needs, etc.
- 2) Counseling as a partnership in which the counselor helps users to better understand themselves and their problems. In this case, counseling involves linking two experts - the counselor (as counseling counselor) and the counseling beneficiary (as an expert on himself and his problem) (Srna, 2012)

The above points to the fact that the term counseling is not a singular one, but has a much wider meaning and use, and that it is not easy to give a general definition of it. However, one can emphasize the definition, created in 2010 by consensus of 29 counseling organizations, which defines the term counseling as "a professional relationship that enables different individuals, families and groups to achieve mental health, well-being, education and careers". (Zuković, 2017) In this sense, it also seems plausible that the essence of counseling can be described as helping individuals or groups recognize their strengths, reflect on their actions and lifestyles, and be able to make their own decisions about the direction and way of changing the quality of one's life. (Corey, 2004)

3. Pedagogical counseling

In terms of pedagogical activity, counseling activities are denoted by different terms-counseling, pedagogical counseling, pedagogical-counseling work, school counseling, developmental pedagogical activity, counseling-educational work (Hechler, 2012; Jurić, 2004; Mandić, 1986) etc. It is important to emphasize that the philosophy of counseling, from a pedagogical point of view, goes beyond the scope of the act itself, which implies contact

between the counselor and the person/persons involved in the two-way counseling process. From the perspective of counseling in educational institutions, the act of counseling is a comprehensive element of a set of designed educational activities aimed at children/ students, educators/ parents, parents and other actors in the educational process. (Jurić, 2004) Counseling in this way is defined as a factor of pedagogical activity, that is, as an educational tool that enables each person to maximize their abilities and capacities. (Hechler, 2012) This means that counseling is also a process of teaching the user how to overcome their difficulties and find their own solutions (Corey, 2004) and realize their personal opportunities and potentials. (Hechler, 2012)

4. Objectives and characteristics of pedagogical counseling

Pedagogical counseling is a process aimed at developing social skills or self-awareness, increasing self-esteem and assertiveness, developing personal freedom and expression. (Nelson-Jones, 2007) Certain authors define it as a technique used in situations where it is necessary to act to change or improve the condition of an individual who has no direct control over the application of a particular need, with the person having to make certain changes in his life and surroundings. In this regard, the authors point out that the counseling process involves the application of the principles of mental health, psychological principles and other social science principles through cognitive, affective and behavioral interventions to achieve well-being, personal development or pathology correction. (Gladding, 2012) In relevant literature, pedagogical counseling is considered an approach to life skills development, characterized by four key points:

- 1) Most of the difficulties students face, due to their prior learning.
- 2) Apart from the influence of external factors, the essence of the problem lies with the students and is the result of a lack of thinking skills.
- 3) Effective counseling implies that the counselor, within the framework of good counseling, advises students on the necessary thinking skills.
- 4) The ultimate goal of pedagogical counseling is self-help, i.e. capacity, students not only to resolve and overcome current difficulties, but also to adequately deal with and overcome future difficulties. (Zuković, 2017)

5. The role of the pedagogical counselor

In general, the role of the pedagogical advisor is to mediate between the individual and the school system. The responsibilities of a pedagogical advisor include:

- care for the mental development and health of students and school staff;
- timely resolution of emerging conflicts between students and teachers;
- informing the school principal about the students' psychological status and teaching staff;
- preparing and keeping documentation of the activities of the pedagogical advisor;
- keeping a professional secret;
- effective implementation of individual and group advisory work;
- use of valid instruments (tests, examinations and other instruments)

One of the roles of a pedagogical counselor is parental counseling. In that regard, the counselor, by the nature of the matter, undertakes a number of different roles. Some of these roles are formal and very explicit, others less formal and implicit. Sometimes one role is

clearly expressed, and sometimes most of its roles are intertwined. It is important to mention some of these roles:

1. **The counselor as an extended arm of the social system** - assuming formal responsibility that by law belongs to him and his institution, concerning children and their parents.
2. **The counselor as an expert** - He is professionally trained in advisory work, possesses the necessary professional competencies and therefore has responsibility for leadership and the course of counseling. Accordingly, he assumes the role of active researcher and teacher, using various strategies and skills for effective counseling.
3. **The counselor as a partner** - The partnership between the counselor (as a specialist in the process of change) and the parents (as experts in their life experiences) enables them with common strengths to move forward together. In such a relationship, the counselor assumes the role of "associate stimulator" and "friendly leader" who is prepared to point out errors and to illuminate potential solutions.
4. **The counselor as a "third parent"** - this is a less formal role of counselor, in which the professional position is interfered with the child's personal care and the need to express concern at certain times. The counselor can expect that parental care of the child will be portrayed in a completely different way and may not always be in line with his or her views and attitudes. To avoid such differences adversely affecting a child's condition, it is essential to strive to create a constructive community on both sides.
5. **The counselor as a model** - this role is one of the most effective and requires highly developed counselor awareness about the influence on counseling users. It is not justified for the counselor to expect parents to take the problematic situation or conflict with their children seriously and, at the same time, verbally or non-verbally, to show mistrust or contempt for those parents. It is therefore important for the counselor, through the role of model, to show harmony between words and deeds. In order to successfully fulfill these roles, it is important to be able to counteract one's own prejudices in dealing with parents, be culturally sensitive, get rid of the categorization that "the usual, the typical" is always functional and work to differentiate one's own "I" from the professional attitude and approach. (Jul, 2014)

Parents face many challenges during the development and growth of their children and sometimes they need professional support to:

- Reexamination of educational styles
- Choosing the right style of parenting
- Harmonizing the educational styles of both parents
- Overcoming the crisis period
- Helping set boundaries for the child
- Understanding the psychological stages and processes that children go through as they grow older
- Resolving conflicts in an appropriate manner
- Overcoming difficulties in adapting to children's needs
- Better understanding among family members
- Work on personal development (Wooten, 2018)

Pedagogical counseling focuses on issues related to upbringing, learning and parenting. The purpose of pedagogical counseling is to improve parenting skills. Counseling can be done with one or both parents. In this way, parents can resolve their dilemmas regarding their child's upbringing, gain knowledge, and identify where they might make the wrong steps in the process. It is about enhancing the strengths that parents possess, learning new ways to solve adolescence problems, and reducing mistakes, introducing parents to any emotional

blockages that may exist with their child, thereby causing problems in learning and in achievement in general. Parents are faced with a specific problem that they are unable to solve and usually want to learn the skills that will help solve the problem. Counseling is focused on improving relationships, with a focus on improving communication and finding a new problem-solving strategy. During counseling, parents have the opportunity to openly express their thoughts and feelings, as well as clearly identify appropriate roles in the family and rules of conduct. Counseling lasts from 60 to 90 minutes once a week, while total counseling can last from a few sessions to several months. (Wooten, 2018)

Some authors emphasize the importance of adopting and implementing the five concepts that help the counselor fulfill his or her role in working with parents effectively:

- 1) Connectivity;
- 2) Trust;
- 3) Support and trust;
- 4) Internal cognitive restructuring;
- 5) Investing in resiliency development. (Zuković, 2017)

All of this involves embracing a postmodern understanding of parental counseling, which leaves much more room for the experience and perspective of parents. Specifically, the postmodern approach shifts the emphasis on the role of the adviser as an expert, as the advisor as a practitioner. (Jul, 2014) Depending on the role of the practitioner, the counselor accepts the attitude that parents know best about their children and that they have creative potential for someone who solves a problem, which means that the parents need him as much as he needs them. (Zuković, 2017)

6. Functions of a pedagogical counselor

The functions of a pedagogical counselor are discussed in various connotations and sources; Popkochev identifies the following four basic functions of a pedagogical counselor:

1. Diagnostic,
2. Advisory,
3. Preventive and
4. Corrective Development Function. (Nikolaj Popov, 2018)

He lists the tasks involved in each of these four functions in a very detailed, precise and systematic way. In summary, the following basic functions of a pedagogical counselor can be identified using the job description:

1. **Assisting function**- includes providing assistance and support in the field of mental development and health of children and students, enabling decision-making related to further education and employment, adapting students to the educational and social system.
2. **Diagnostic function** - includes determining the initial state at the beginning of the school year; identifying difficulties in students' cognitive, socio-emotional development and behavior; identification of gifted students as well as those in need of additional educational support; assessment in the field of vocational guidance and guidance.
3. **Counseling function** - includes:

- Individual counseling with:
 - students - about problems related to their behavior, relationships with peers, parents and teachers, personal development;
 - teachers - problems arising from interaction with students and peers;
 - parents - problems in their relationships with their children, developmental problems..
 - Group work involving:
 - training aimed at developing social skills and achieving social relationships;
 - solving problems related to health risks;
 - developing the skills needed to deal with various forms of violence.
 - Counseling school management and school staff on:
 - developing school rules, programs and projects;
 - school climate;
 - solving problems related to school development.

4. **Mediation function**- manifests itself mainly in situations where there is conflict resolution between students, teachers, parents and school leadership.

When it comes to the collaboration of the pedagogical counselor with different subjects, it is about: students; teachers; departmental heads; parents, other family members, guardians; director, assistant director, deputy director; municipal and state institutions; NGOs; other professionals: speech therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist, doctor; police. (Nikolaj Popov, 2018)

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