

## COUNSELING CLASSES SEEN AS SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING ACTIVITIES FOR THE STUDENTS

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### **Abstract**

*The paper below is a synthetic presentation of all the forms, characteristics, particularities of the counseling activities performed by a homeroom teacher in his capacity as coordinator of a class of pupils in the Romanian pre-university education but also a review of the methods, the techniques and tools necessary to carry out such an activity. For the pupils in the age category corresponding to the secondary education, the counseling activities carried out by teachers or school counselors are necessary for their socio-professional development.*

**Keywords:** *counseling classes; counseling teachers; school and professional counseling/guidance; pedagogical counseling; counseling and personal development;*

### **Introduction**

Approaching the counseling classes as counseling and guidance activities (for school and professional guidance, for personal / individual and social development, for career guidance, etc.) requires the knowledge of pedagogical concepts. In this regard, we consider the following concepts:

***The management of education*** (in the context of the education system) and training (in the context of the education process) is seen as a type of pedagogical leadership asserted in the post-industrial, postmodern, informational, knowledge-based society.

***The pedagogical resources*** involved in any education and training activity designed from a curricular viewpoint at the level of the education system and process.

***The curriculum*** is seen as a special, superior model of "educational project", applicable at all levels of the system and the educational process.

***The competence*** is seen as a psychological dimension of the aims of education, especially involved in substantiating the general and specific objectives of the curriculum.

***The curriculum plan***, built from a curricular standpoint, in which the counseling class must be integrated at the level of a certain curricular area, determined by a certain type of competence / or a certain type of intelligence / or a certain model of knowledge.

## **Pedagogical counseling**

### **Counseling and personal development**

These fundamental or operational pedagogical concepts ensure the understanding of the homeroom teacher's activity (school and professional guidance / counseling, stimulation of the pupil's personal development, career counseling, etc.) as *a group social activity*, carried out in class and / or in open school context. Such an activity involves „increasing the socio-pedagogical tasks of the school and supporting the development process” of pupils from a cognitive and non-cognitive point of view, from an aptitude and attitude point of view. At the same time, it aims to “overcome the problems raised by family or school relationships” in the context of school and extracurricular training, but also to solve special situations, with reference to “the prevention of personality crises of pupils”, the school failure, deviant behavior or eliminating the sources and causes of school dropout (Schaub&Zenke, 2001: 8, 9).

***The pedagogical counseling*** - is a special formative action, necessary for the counseling teacher in carrying out any activity of education organized *formally (counseling class)* and non-formal (initiated as a formal leader of the class of pupils, the teaching staff of the class and the partnership with parents and with other representatives of the local educational community). It is integrated in *the activity of psycho-pedagogical and social assistance* of pupils, teachers and parents, carried out through operations of information – guidance–orientation. This applies at the level of:

- a)** The conception of the pedagogical design (of the pupils, but also of the teachers and parents);
- b)** The school and professional orientation (of pupils and parents);
- c)** Counseling and personal development;
- d)** Career counseling (of integrated socio-professional and community graduates).

The pedagogical counseling involves the integration of the three operations (*information – guidance – orientation*) into a complex action of “lifelong counseling” which is no longer “fragmented for reasons of institutional organization, age stages or status of different categories of beneficiaries”(Jigău, 2009: 9). At school level, in the secondary education (secondary and high school / vocational), *the pedagogical counseling*, provided by the counseling-teacher, is designed according to two general objectives:

- a)** The professional orientation of students (in collaboration with class teachers and representatives of the local educational community / parents of pupils, etc.);
- b)** The school and professional counseling, approached in terms of “personal development” and “career counseling” throughout life (Cristea, 2015: 533-538).

These *general objectives, specified* by stages and years of education, are achieved through contents and forms that ensure:

- a) *The educational counseling*– “of children, adolescents, parents and other educators, explaining the reasons for behavioral deviations, family deficiencies and learning problems”;
- b) *The school counseling*– which aims at “schooling issues: transfer decisions, course changes, school choice, learning difficulties, discrepancies between premises and requirements, expectations and renunciations”;
- c) *The professional counseling*– “in order to choose the profession, by giving advice” to pupils, parents and teachers;
- d) *The career counseling*– necessary throughout life, which requires "psychological, medical, sociological and pedagogical knowledge that boosts education" at all ages (Schaub&Zenke, 2001: 47, 48).

*The school (and vocational) counseling* ensures the process of adapting the pupil to the requirements of the secondary (and university) education from the perspective of lifelong learning, socio-professional and community integration throughout life. Its value in *the educational activity of the counseling-teacher* is proven in an open context, from *a historical, psychological, psychotherapeutic and pedagogical perspective*. (coord. Noveanu, author Tomşa, 2007: 207-211).

From *a historical perspective, the counseling action* was launched in the U.S. during the first decade of the twentieth century, “in the process of institutionalizing vocational guidance and selection (Vocational Bureau, Boston, 1908). F. Parsons' research in the field of career guidance is based upon three operations:

- a) The diagnosis of pupils' skills;
- b) The provision of information on available trades;
- c) The placing of graduates “in a profession appropriate to their skills and interests”.

*The counseling* is especially involved in performing the third operation. It intervenes at the level of the continuity between *school counseling* and *professional counseling* through the use of psychological tests, based on a “psychophysiological-aptitude” concept.

*The evolutionary stages of counseling* in the U.S. are historically identified in relation to the emphasis on:

- a) The “mental health testing”, considered “an important function of psychological evaluation” (1914-1918);
- b) Advising pupils in order for them to make optimal professional decisions (1920-1930);
- c) The extension of counseling services in all social departments (1939-1945);
- d) The allocation of funds for the training of counseling specialists (1950-1960);
- e) The counseling performed at the level of social groups (after 1960-1970).

*At the theoretical and methodological level, the “trait and factor conception has been replaced by the humanist theory” of client-centered counseling based upon Carl Rogers' non-directive conception.*

During the second half of the twentieth century the profession of *counselor* is recognized “as a profession within psychology”, which raises special issues from the perspective of the necessary pedagogical openings. The evolution of school counseling will be influenced by *the “humanistic theory” of client-centered counseling* based upon Carl Rogers' non-directional conception, but also by *the theory of human development* or some *psychological theories of learning*.

Towards the end of the century, the three *ways of conceiving school counseling*– behavioral, *psycho-dynamic and humanistic*– require a *unitary*, predominantly pedagogical approach. In this approach it is necessary to highlight the essential features that divide the counseling action from the psychotherapy action. From a *predominantly pedagogical perspective*, necessary in the activity of any counseling-teacher, the school counseling:

- a)** Represents a *development process with formative value*, different from the psychotherapeutic model focused on intervention in crisis conditions;
- b)** Constitutes a *proactive* action necessary in the prevention of crisis situations and in the anticipation of new school, professional, community extracurricular success, etc. ; but fundamentally different from the psychotherapeutic action, imposed “reactively, as a reaction to crisis situations”;
- c)** Employs a “broader and more complete responsibility” of the teacher (in our case the counseling-teacher) which aims not only to help the pupil but *to optimize the entire educational activity* related to all "actors of education" (pupils, but also teachers, parents, representatives of the local community, etc.), different from the psychotherapeutic action, based only upon the help of the “client” in a critical situation, of crisis, etc.;
- d)** Supports the “indissoluble link between the various problems of the counseled subject” (pupil, teacher, parent, etc.), the psychological, pedagogical, social, cognitive, non-cognitive, individual, group problems, etc., as opposed to the psychotherapeutic action, involved in resolving the client's crisis only through psycho-therapeutic or psycho-medical means;
- e)** Concerns the deep dimensions of the pupil's personality (but also of the teacher, parent, etc.) psychological (cognitive and non-cognitive), pedagogical (moral, intellectual, technological, aesthetic, psychophysical), sociological (civic, cultural, economic, community, natural, group, micro-group, etc.) as opposed to the psycho-therapeutic action focused only on internal and external resources that favor the psycho-therapeutic or psycho-medical interventions and treatments.

*From a psychological view point, the school counseling is an action based upon empathic communication between the educator-counselor (counseling-teacher) and the educated (pupil, teacher, parent, counselors), primarily concerned with paying attention and respect to another person temporarily in the role of client”(in the situation of being counseled). The school*

counseling, psychologically engaged, is based upon "the persuasion and respect for the counselor's freedom of choice." The sensitive issue is that of the interference between the psychological approach and the psychotherapeutic approach of counseling. The two approaches generate the very tendency not to make any distinction between psychological counseling and psychotherapy, a trend launched by Carl Rogers (1942). The subsequent interpretations propose "a systematic analysis of the relationship between the two areas." (C. H. Patterson, 1974) confirmed by the Association of American Psychologists which highlights the operable differences according to:

- a) The nature of the "client's" problems (requiring psychotherapeutic intervention in case of extensive or deep crisis situations);
- b) The objectives pursued as a priority (of cognitive and non-cognitive development of the personality of the counseled person)
- c) The methodology used (dominated by certain techniques in the case of the psychotherapeutic approach).

*From a psychotherapeutic viewpoint*, the school counseling has the following characteristics:

- a) The orientation towards critical, special problems, which cannot be solved only through school or psychological counseling;
- b) "Obtaining profound changes in the personality structure, especially in the affective-motivational and volitional spheres";
- c) Probing the area of the *client's* past and the individual unconscious;
- d) The "framing in more rigorous methodological coordinates", as opposed to the techniques adopted by counseling, which are much freer in conditions of interaction and cooperation.

*From a pedagogical viewpoint*, the school counseling tries to design *an integrative model* that combines "the specific techniques of the three general approaches of counseling and (*behavioral, psycho-dynamic and humanistic*) psychotherapy". It evolves as an "intensive process of providing psycho-pedagogical (and social) assistance to pupils and other people involved in education (teachers, parents, tutors, school authorities)." It can be perfected as *an action of pedagogical / school counseling: a) pro-active; b) preventive; c) triadic*, employed at the level of the unit between pupil – teacher – parent, between the class of pupils – the school organization – family / local community.

***The career counseling*** is a special way of achieving pedagogical counseling, which is on the rise in *the knowledge society and economy*. It demands from the counseling-teacher for guidance given to the pupil and the future graduate for "professional career development".

At the level of the methodology used, it ensures the jump from *the psycho-metric paradigm* (emphasis on psychological tests) to *the dominant educational paradigm* that aims at (self) training- (self) permanent personality development in the context of *career development*, a

necessary change against the transformations registered in the area of information technologies, occupational fields, economic, cultural, civic, community interests, etc.

It results in the emergence of a new paradigm, typical of the information society, which emphasizes “the management and cognitive processing of information with a focus upon the global counseling of *the client’s career*. (Jigău, 2007: 13).

*The career counseling* has as **general objective** the support of the formative process of development of the integrated socio-professional graduate, at the level of the line of interaction between *the personality characteristics* (of the counseled person) and the evolutions (technological and social) in the occupational field.

*The specific objectives* are as follows:

- a) The promotion of an efficient methodology;
- b) The substantiation of the career decisions of the educated person, socio-professionally integrated, in the conditions of self-knowledge of his or her own resources for the evolution of his or her personality, reportable to the “future occupational directions”;
- c) The understanding the world of work, from a cultural, economic, civic, moral, community perspective, etc., in the context of the globalization thereof;
- d) The extensive and intensive support of the *educated person* socio-professionally integrated “for the elaboration of an individual plan for the career development that facilitates his or her successful socio-professional insertion.” (Jigău, 2007: 7.8).

*The basic principles of career counseling* are as follows:

- a) The career development as a continuous process of options, changes and decisions;
- b) The decision-making at the level of career development planning from a lifelong learning perspective;
- c) The career choice and development by involving a multitude of motivational, aptitude, school, objective factors (social values, functional needs, etc.) and subjective (self-image);
- d) The reporting the career to an open social context that influences the opinions, expectations and decisions of the socio-professionally integrated educators, parents, teachers and representatives of the educational community;
- e) Eliminating the “myth of a single appropriate profession that is damaging and inaccurate” in the dynamics of changes in the information society, the knowledge-based economy;
- f) Consolidating the positive self-image as a premise of the optimal development of the personal career;
- g) The *proactive* attitudinal positioning of the integrated socio-professional educator “which increases the probability of success in the career development” (Jigău, 2007: 24, 25) (Kapes&Mastie & Whitfield, 1994).

*The consecrated methods in career counseling* can be used by the special counseling-teacher for:

- a) *obtaining the information* necessary for the pupil (the future graduate, the socio-professionally integrated graduate): psychological tests, observation, the questionnaire, the interview, the anamnesis, the autobiography, the self-characterization, the school record, the focus group, the opinion poll, the docimologic tests, the biographical data analysis, the analysis of activity products, the SWOT analysis, the portfolio, etc.;
- b) *the communication* with the socio-affective integrated educator: the conversation, role play, simulation, exercises for the development of communication/relationship skills; the narrative method, the Philips 6/6 method, the portfolio; the guides, the occupational profiles, the conferences, the reading, the image analysis (video, movies, etc.), the analysis of radio and TV shows, the educational software, etc.;
- c) *The labor market investigation*: the exercises for developing the skills needed to identify and capitalize on the essential information; computer communication technologies; educational fairs; job fairs; mini-internships in companies, surveys; case study / analysis;
- d) *The personal marketing and the information management*: the elaboration of the curriculum vitae, the letter of intent, the letter of recommendation, the presentation at the interview, the analysis/writing of a media announcement, database / about professions, institutions, jobs, etc.;
- e) *The career planning and development*: the personal project, the action plan, the evaluation of alternatives, the value clarification exercises, the skills balance, etc. (Jigău, 2007: 29, 30).

***The counseling and personal development*** - is a specific objective engaged in secondary education in the perspective of *training-moral development* and *socio-professional integration* of pupils in the context of lifelong learning needed in *the information society*, based upon knowledge. "The *counseling and personal development* discipline included in the framework plan for the secondary education as a common core subject in the Counseling and guidance curriculum area, with one class per week allocated in each of grades V-VIII" (see the Curriculum for *Counseling and Personal development*, grades V-VIII, according to Annex No. 2 of the Order of the Minister of National Education, no. 3393/February 28, 2017).

*The curriculum*, built from a curricular standpoint, is focused upon the formation and development of general and specific skills, depending on which they can be:

- a) Established the "content areas" specifying "*contents*– "approached from the perspective of specific competencies";
- b) "Suggested learning activities that provide a possible picture of the contexts in which these skills are acquired", which form the basis for the development of lessons articulated in training units or learning units.

***The competences*** - represent "the structured set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, developed through learning that allow solving problems specific to a given field, in open contexts":

- a) General, in this case, during V-VIII grades;
- b) Specific, in this case by years, semesters, learning units, etc.

In terms of the cognitivist psychology and constructivist pedagogy, validated at the level of education policy, the competence is acquired as a qualitative product of some:

- a) *Declarative / theoretical knowledge* / to know (concepts, axioms, laws, principles, rules, theories, formulas, *essential data*);
- b) *Procedural / applied knowledge* / know-how (skills and abilities / cognitive strategies for solving problems and problem-situations);
- c) *Attitudinal / conditional knowledge* / knowing how to be (attitudes and values that condition the acquisition of theoretical and applied knowledge).

**General competences**—“aim at the pupil's acquisitions throughout the secondary education” (grades V-VIII). These aim to:

- a) “Adopting positive self-skills and a healthy and balanced lifestyle”;
- b) “The harmonious relationship with others in school and extracurricular contexts”;
- c) “Reflecting on the motivation and effectiveness of strategies for the learning progress”;
- d) “Making decisions related to continuing studies and career by capitalizing on information about self, education and occupations”.

**Specific competencies** - formed “during a school year, derived from general competencies”; “they represent stages in their acquisition” (general competences). Based upon them, in the curriculum, “examples of learning activities” should be proposed; they “constitute ways of organizing teaching activities, in order to achieve competencies.”

**The school curriculum** “proposes, as an example, different types of learning activities that capitalize on the concrete experience of the pupil and that integrate teaching strategies”.

The teacher is able to:

- a) Use the examples of activity proposed by the school curriculum;
- b) Complete the examples of activity proposed by the school curriculum by:
  - b.1) contextualization, personalization;
  - b.2) the adaptation to the needs of pupils in didactic conditions of differentiation and individualization.

### **Conclusions**

The activity of counseling / school and professional orientation is a complex and very important activity for the becoming of the socio-professional personality of the pupil / graduate (counseled) and at the same time a mission generating responsibility for the counseling-teacher (counselor) which involves:

- a) The pupil's school and professional options - at the end of each school year / at the end of a level or cycle of studies - the necessary counseling from the perspective of the pupil's moral and deontological / vocational training-development;

- b)** The school and professional options of the family - at the end of each school year / at the end of a level or cycle of studies - the necessary counseling from the perspective of the moral and deontological / vocational development-development of the pupil;
- c)** The evaluation of the pupil's and the family's option by referring to the information from *the pupil's observation sheet* and from *the pupil's school / characterization sheet*; its interpretation from a moral and deontological formative perspective, in order to stimulate the capacity for social and individual learning / self-learning throughout life;
- d)** *The final recommendation / final advice of school and professional orientation*—a non-formal decision, finalized by the consultation of the pupil, the teaching staff and the family.

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