BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE: THE IMPORTANCE AND FUNCTION OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

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ABSTRACT

Over time the term counseling has been used and studied from different approaches and defined in different ways according to the researches and the field of study. As a huge concept, it covers three main areas: personal, educational, and vocational area; therefore, we have different definitions of counseling. At the educational level, there has been confusion about the role and importance of school counseling for a long time, where for some researches it was defined and studied as part of school Guidance program and addressed to other school staff, minimizing the role of a counselor. On the other hand, other approaches tend to use and understand school counseling as synonymous with Guidance meanwhile others view it as a profession that is part of psychological and psychotherapeutic nature. Nowadays, counseling as a profession is more emphasized and school counseling takes its place at all educational levels. Today school counseling is a need and necessary in every level of education taking into consideration the role and importance that has on the educational process and school program overall.

Keywords: Counseling, School Counseling, School Counselor, Role of School Counselor

1. INTRODUCTION

Counseling is a broad term and has existed very early on, defined and studied in different ways depending on the approach of the researcher or the field of study. Over time the term counseling has been used or understood as a synonym for the Guidance and the position of counseling and counselor has not been very clear. There has been a big discussion about the differences between Counseling and Guidance, so even nowadays we still can find questions and confusions about whether we need to see the counseling as synonymous with Guidance or to consider it as a main process on psychological and therapeutic aspect, or as part of Guidance counseling program on Educational spectrum. This is mainly because, as we mentioned above, counseling is a huge concept that includes three main areas: personal, educational, and vocational.

Thus, Caipang (2014), in order to make a clear difference between teachers, school counselors, and psychotherapists, states that a counselor does not know the subject matter in the interview while the teacher knows the subject matter and the outcomes. As she states the counseling is not psychotherapy because it is concerned mostly with normal anxieties. Psychotherapy operates in a medical setting while counseling operates in an educational setting. Psychotherapy as she states is deeper in scope than counseling while counseling is broader in scope. Some researchers have positioned counselor as a professional and counseling as a process between two peoples counselors and a client who is seeking help to cope with and solve problems or difficulties whether personal, educational, or professional. As Runcan (2013) states nowadays more often than ever before, people are confronting stress and issues, therefore becoming more and more helpless in dealing with by the person who is suffering; that is why many people resort to professional assistance in order to obtain support and aid during their entire counseling period.

Supporting this idea and this position of the counseling, Subasinge (2016), says that the counseling is psychological. In solving mental problems of students, firstly we need to identify them through measurement tools such as personality inspections, intelligence tests. As she states it doesn't emphasize

that students do have mental or psychiatric problems as she refers them but it denotes the ability of the teacher's psychological knowledge in dealing with such cases. Corey (2009), shares a similar view, saying that the counseling entails far more than becoming a skilled technician. It implies that a counselor is able to establish and maintain a good working relationship with the clients, drawing on his/her own experiences and reactions, and that can identify techniques suited to the needs of the clients.

According to the Institute of Guidance Counselors (IGC, 2016), the counseling process emphasizes the establishment of a strong, empathic, trusting relationship between guidance counselor and client. Accordingly, counselor insight and the integration of all sources of data and information, supports the client in self-exploration and the decision-making process. Ridley, et al., (2011), cited by ICG, (2016), says that the counseling competency includes cognitive, affective and behavioral components.

Meanwhile, in terms of education approach counseling has been seen and treated as part of the educational process, part of the overall school plan, and as a guidance service. Thus, Garret (1996), supporting this position of counseling on educational level says that the counseling program is an integral part of the total educational program.

Okumu (2017) defines counseling as the help some students receive from credentialed professionals to help them overcome personal and social problems that interfere with learning. As he states "Our emphasis is placed on helping all students, rather than selected counseling for some students (pg. 39)."

On the Module 2 for Counseling made by UNESCO (2000b), it is noticed that the need for counseling has become paramount in order to promote the well-being of the child. Effective school counseling should help to improve the self-image of young people and facilitate achievement in life tasks. Accordingly, counseling should empower children and students to participate fully in, and benefit from, the economic and social development of the nation.

2. WHAT IS SCHOOL COUNSELING?

The school, as an important social institution, is required to adapt quickly to changing patterns, and help prepare citizens for tomorrow's challenges. Counseling in the educational system should help boys and girls alike, to develop their capacities to the full. These include intellectual, social, physical and moral capacities (UNESCO, 2000; Kapur, 2018).

Nweze and Okolie (2014), states that school guidance and counseling programs have been introduced to assist students overcome the number of challenges they experience at home and school. But as they state, because of great pressure imposed on the family, parents tend to have little time with their children to give them the necessary guidance. The parents expect the school to provide solutions to the indiscipline in secondary schools caused by their children and assist them to make career choices as well.

While reviewing the school counseling and putting in evidence the importance of school counseling, Baugh (2018), says that nowadays we can feel the importance of counseling in various areas of human life, such as: development of personality, adjustment, maintenance of mental health, time management, decision making and individual differences. And this is mainly because, as he states, many students can't adjust to their environment or society which is changeable at all times and, according to him, the educational system is no exception.

According to Subasinghe (2016), Educational Guidance and School Counseling unit is the school-related unit aimed with the key objective of assisting in solving the students' problems and strengthening the studiousness efficiency of students as well. On the other hand, it is the educational guidance and school counseling process.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

We may think of school counseling as a new concept, which was introduced recently, but nevertheless, there are important arguments that tell us about a rich history and the evolution that school counseling has undergone as a profession. McMahon et al, (2016), states that school counseling has a long and proud history, and the story of professional school counseling, its influences, and major players are key components of the collective professional identity that unites all those within school counseling. Paisley and Borders (1995) described school counseling as continually evolving to meet the economic, educational, and political needs of the community (pg.116).

Baskin & Slaten (2013) offer us a detailed review of the early history of school counseling. According to them, the origin of school counseling started with the work of Frank Person (1909), with his idea of vocational guidance. As they report, Parsons believed that it was important to help all individuals, especially youths, understand and maximize their talents in the workforce. After his seminal book was published postmortem and the Vocation Bureau of Boston was started, the city of Boston and the state of Massachusetts began incorporating vocational counselors into pre – K12 schools.

Many factors helped in developing school counseling as a profession. There are numerical historical events, such as the Industrial revolution, that leaded to the emergence of professions to help peoples with social, personal and vocational concerns. These professions include the fields of social work, psychology, psychotherapy and counseling among others and the theories of practice adopted and developed by the counseling professions have roots in the scholarly research and practical guidelines established during the 19th and 20th century (Schmidt, 2011; Ramakrishnan & Jalajakumari, 2013).

Bein (2012), states that the school counseling profession of today's world is dynamically different than its historical beginnings. Some of the changes referring to him include contemporary issues, education, structure challenges and students which provides a complex backdrop for this as he calls helping profession.

At the core of this type of service, according to him, will always be a unique and distinct calling to help students and promote their academic, physical and emotional well-being as well. Today's school counselor as he believes is essential to the success of both the school and the student.

4. WHO ARE AND WHAT DOES SCHOOL COUNSELOR DO?

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), school counselors are certified /licensed educators who improve student success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2012), school counselors defines as educators who use their knowledge of students, counseling, pedagogy, curriculum integration, and the unique context of their school and community to influence students' learning and well-being. As stated there, school counselors may be facilitating whole-school workshops, leading small-group discussions, or providing one-on-one instruction. Accordingly, they systematically plan and facilitate activities and monitor students' progress to ensure that each student reaches the desired goals. They are also integral members of the instructional team of the school and work with teachers, administrators, and other members of the learning community to advance student learning. As they conclude, school counselors know that an effective school counseling program is one that meets the needs of every student and that is part of a continuum of programs that meet the needs of students and families throughout students' educational lives.

Answering the question about what school counselors do Scarborough (2015), states that one way to answer this question is to collect and analyze process data. In her research about the school counselor activities, she concludes that school counselors are trained professionals who meet with students individually and in groups to address concerns that may be interfering with the students' learning and personal development. Counselor helps through counseling (individual and group) related to personal and family concerns, school behavior, crisis, relationships, substance abuse, as well as follow-up on clients (students). School counselors are consultants when they spend time working individually or with groups of teachers and parents, or other mental health and school personnel, for the purpose of identifying and/or meeting the needs of students (pg, 280).

McMahon et al., (2016), states that school counselor educators can serve as leaders within their educational communities in order to promote systemic change that will remove barriers to student success. While Salzman (2011), when explaining the competence of school counselors says that as main functions and essential skill for school counselor are consultation and collaboration.

The school counselor sometimes encounters difficulties while trying to do their job. Sometimes they can find obstacles from their colleagues, teachers, class teachers, parents but and students as well. Reporting the student success and the problems of the student to the parents sometimes can be challenging and difficult. Many parents are not prepared and do not want to collaborate with counselors rejecting their children's needs. That's for the collaboration between school, parents and students is very important and much more with the school counselor.

As Linskensen & Coleman, (2011) sates, school counselors need to track changes happening in the world that require new ways of thinking in order to assist students in gaining those resources to adapt to the changes. They need as well to be integrated or equipped to integrate relevant activities into classrooms especially using technologically information.

5. THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL COUNSELOR AND COUNSELING SERVICE/PROCESS

For a long time, the role of school counselor wasn't clear enough and there was confusion about his/her responsibilities. It has often been perceived as the responsibility of the class teacher, pedagogue or school psychologist and the position and role of the school counselor, i.e. his identity, has not been clear. Throughout the past century, the role of the school counselor has evolved to reflect the changing face of society and needs of the students. In the early 1900s, as industrialization continued to change the workplace and career possibilities broadened, demand grew for career and educational guidance services in the schools. This responsibility generally fell on teachers, who often performed this role without formal training or definition of their duties. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 prompted the widespread use of full-time guidance counselors, but their roles often remained in the same vein as their teacher predecessors: remediation, reactive crisis management, and administrative and clerical duties (NBPTS, 2012, pg. 12).

Since each school is an independent institution and has its own program, school counselors are part of constructing the program and the main responsible, putting the student at the center of the program and focusing more on students' needs. With same statement about school counselor responsibility and their role Wolls and DePaul (2011), believes that counselors as school leaders are responsible for the coordination of resources and services that assist a student to be academically successful, to play a critical role in the development and implementation of school community partnership. As they state this partnership over the last decade has increased dramatically in the nation's school district, reflecting an awareness of students' needs for support beyond classroom instructions.

As Lindwal and Coleman (2011), emphasizes the school counselor has a very important and crucial role in school organization, structure, program and policy. As they state school counselors can be involved in school policies by ensuring that they reflect the values that are promoted by the school. Accordingly, school counselors also can influence school programs by ensuring that they are truly beneficial for students promoting students' straights and allow them opportunities to participate in larger school community. As the last but not the least role of school counselor enlisted by Lindwal and Coleman is that school counselor can recognize how he/she are part of the educational process through his/her interaction with each person and each thing within the school and the degree to which these interactions contribute to the establishment of an overall positive atmosphere.

According to Subasinghe (2016), a school counselor in a school has a significant role. He organizes the required background for development apart from the school curriculum. So, we can say that a school counselor has a very important role and functions in assisting student dealing with educational issues, and other problems related to their academic achievements as well. They help students by proving**:** individual student academic planning and goal setting, school counseling classroom lessons based on student success standards, short-term counseling to students, referrals for long-term support, collaboration with families/teachers/ administrators/community for student success, advocacy for students at individual education plan meetings and other student-focused meetings, data analysis to identify student issues, needs and challenges (ASCA).

As Okumu (2017), believes that although the roles of school counselors vary among settings, common tasks referring to him include:

1. Individual counseling,
2. Small-group counseling,
3. Large-group or classroom presentations,
4. Involvement in school wide behavior plans for promoting positive and extinguishing negative behaviors, and
5. Consulting with teachers, parents, and the community.

But even though they have big responsibility on implementing and the effectiveness of the school program they are evaluated as well, in order to see if the Guidance Counseling program has been implemented and student’s needs and expectations have been met.

In this direction, Gysbergs (2011) says that school counselors, working within the framework of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs, are being asked to demonstrate that their work contributes to student success, particularly student academic achievement. Accordingly, not only are school counselors being asked to tell what they do, but they are also being asked to demonstrate how what they do makes a difference in the lives of students, and they are being asked to be accountable and to be answerable for their work, as well.

6. CONCLUSION

We can say that school counseling today is a need and a necessity at all levels of education. During the school period, students encounter various personal, educational and academic difficulties with which they often do not know or have no clear idea of who to turn to for professional help. School counseling includes a wide range of competencies and services and at the same time responds to every request of students to enable them to understand themselves, their capacity and overcome the difficulties they face in life, whether educational, personal/social and professional and those in career choice.

Given the role and importance of the school counselor as emphasized here as a leader and compiler and at the same time implementer of the school program and counseling process, we can say that not only in theory but this role and importance should be seen in school practice.

Taking into consideration the contemporary approaches to the educational plan where, unlike earlier, the focus is now on the student, his needs and not just trying to meet the educational curriculum, thus the role, importance and position of the school counselor is more emphasized. That's for a school counselor is a person with abilities, professional preparation, education and certified counselor, which the teacher, pedagogue or school psychologist would not be competent to do his job and responsibilities.

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