

COUNSELING PARENTS - SOLUTIONS TO OPTIMIZE THE PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND SCHOOL COUNSELOR

Corina Iurea

Educational Sciences Department,

Petroleum-Gas University, Bd. Bucuresti, 39, Ploiesti, 100680, Romania

corinaiurea@yahoo.com

Abstract

School counselor - family relationship has a particularly important role in the social, mental and intellectual evolution of the beneficiary education (the student).

The investigative approach confirms the idea that Counseling Programs in/ and school - family partnerships are useful to parents and students because they offer information; they form skills and develop the necessary experience to identify an optimistic and realistic way to build their existence. Counseling is meant to be proactive, involving the prevention of students' personal and educational crises. Counseling parents is necessary both for its role in raising and educating children and for the democratization of education by training them to participate in decision making regarding to children's education.

Keywords: *counseling parents, professional partnership between parents-school counselor, counseling program*

1. Introduction

School and family are two institutions that need one another; they must (re)find their path towards authentic collaboration based on trust and mutual respect, on the love for children, in order to make room for an open and permeable relationship, favoring the exchange and communication of ideas by counseling programs in school-family partnerships.

Creating professional partnerships constitutes a challenge in finding solutions to complex issues society is facing.

In making a partnership between counselor and parents, professional interventions are required, which can be achieved through cooperation and educational activities for parents by means of counseling services. A partnership between counselor and parents is not possible without educating parents first, how one cannot speak of educating parents in the absence of their collaboration with school and the school counselor.

Any system of education, no matter how scholarly it would be, remains helpless if spattered against the indifference, opposition and divergent opinions from parents. Attracting them as partners in the process of educational counseling and in the act of education, unlocking the educational potential of family and the coordination of school and family efforts towards common objectives constitutes a target for any system of education in any society.

The counselor supports the family in the process of knowing their own child, in identifying and unlocking his potential in overcoming constraints, in keeping a balanced, harmonious family climate. Intervention is effective if the information is provided through a direct contact, established mutually between specialist and parents. The partnership between counselor and parents shall be governed by the principles of: confidentiality, professional responsibility, trust, respect and effective communication.

Specialists show concern for parents of children with difficulties proposing, through their services, ways of professional intervention for both parents and children, in order to strengthen the relationship between them (see Eftimie, S., Suditu, M., Mărgărițoiu, A. 2010).

The complex action of counseling parents aims to suggest a way to act or a way to behave that should be adopted in a given situation in daily life. Counseling is a relationship governed by principles, characterized by applying one or more psychological theories and a recognizable set of communication skills folded on the intimate concerns of the subject (parent, child), on its needs, interests and aspirations. Counselor's task is to provide parents with the possibility to explore, find and clarify ways of living, of connecting with their own children, resorting to more resources and heading towards a better existence and life experience.

Counseling is also a learning process aimed at guiding the client to action. Problematic behavior (observable, measurable and apparent) is the result of inadequate learning. During counseling, the parent feels invested with the power to accept and recognize problematic life situations, to find alternative solutions and create own strategies for solving problems.

2. Methodology

The study shows the impact of a counseling program for parents started by the school counselor, on the relation between parents-children-school. The design of such a program has highlighted the importance and the role of counselor in the school.

2.1. Objective

The exact formulation of the objectives in the intervention plan is the first step in the approach:

- **Educational purposes:** adaptation to school life, discipline and responsibility for children, increase in school performance, improvement of absenteeism, reducing school abandonment.
- **Family purposes:** developing assertive communication between parent and child, establishing balance in family relationships, accepting and accommodating the child's need for counseling (understanding the issue), time management.
- **Emotional purposes:** strengthening the self image and self esteem, resolving the emotional difficulties of the child and the disputes between generations, controlling aggressiveness, self-assessment.

Practice has shown that the most powerful influence on a child's personality development is family. A constant relation between family and school is for the benefit of children both from an academic as well as a behavioral point of view. Difficult school issues like absenteeism, dropping out, school failure, have the following consequences among parents: school is accused of being guilty of children's failure; parents identify with children and break the ties with school. Under the same circumstances, school considers the child a source of problems and most of the times, ignores the potential of the family in the process of solving difficulties.

School counselors initiate beneficial partnerships between family and school, which ensure the success of students, from the individual, educational and social point of view. Unfavorable conditions such as: an increase in divorce rates, low living standards and low income, transition to a market economy, the crisis of moral values, promoting a pragmatic attitude regarding children determined changes in family values, of the attitudes toward the independence of children and changes at the level of educational practice. Families have a need to know the proper methods of education, to take advantage of counseling services to deal with these situations.

The initiative of the school counselor to carry out a counseling program for parents was triggered following a survey study (questionnaire and interview with parents) performed in two schools e counselor's coordination. The results have been decisive and started the media coverage for the Counseling Program for parents, the presentation of the program's objectives and the scenario of activities. In the initial phase there were 37 participant parents.

2.2. Sample and Hypothesis

Sample: 37 parents (27 women and 10 men, aged 28 to 55 years of age, took part in counseling meetings). It is found that a significant percentage of mothers (78%) participated in the counseling meetings. The sample has been under the guidance of the school counselor, which in certain sessions teamed up with other specialists (doctor, social worker, homeroom teacher). Children of the parents participating in the counseling program are aged between 8 to 16 years (it must be noted the significant percentage of adolescents (61.7 %) with counseling

needs and also the genre of children: 10 girls and 33 boys (boys' percentage is significant at 74.6 %).

Hypothesis: if we identify the factors that can give rise to difficulties in the family and the behavioral disorders of the child, then the role of the counselor is to mitigate the effects of these social risk factors and adopting methods and techniques adapted to each situation.

2.3. Procedure

Information on the social risk factors were collected by interview in the initial phase of the study and contributed to the design of the counseling program themes: lack education and vocational training, unstable employment, unemployment, wavering income, unsystematic supervision from the social and educational point of view, poor cooperation with school; conflicts, lack of cohesion within the family. Prevention of these factors, occurring simultaneously or separately requires a detailed interdisciplinary documentation on each item in the list (including other indicators of social or psychological prediction). These factors are associated frequently with a series of educational and family reason:

- vulnerable family: poverty, promiscuity, lack of education
- deterioration of the family situation from the material, social and psycho-emotional point of view
 - disruption of relations within the family
 - devaluation of educational institutions
 - social environment
 - marginalization
 - mental illness, mental retard
 - reduced concern from the part of the teachers
 - inappropriate educational level.

For persons in risk situations, the networking spirit and the community spirit are particularly important aspects in developing their civic skills and for the assimilation of role models for future generations (see Mărgărițoiu, A.,Eftimie, S. 2012).

Number of counseling sessions: 7 meetings, organized as group sessions, but in specific situations individual counseling has been used in school, in a classroom or in the counselor's office.

The objectives of counseling sessions (have been established on three axes: educational, domestic and emotional, after analyzing the needs of parents, as expressed in the centralized answers following the interpretation of the results of the questionnaire applied in the initial phase)

Their statistical exposure is presented as follows:

Educational objectives:	Family objectives:	Emotional objectives:
--------------------------------	---------------------------	------------------------------

adaptation/ integration within the class of students (21.2%);	managing free time with the child (10%);	improve self image, self esteem and confidence in oneself (34.2%);
reducing absenteeism (8%);	assimilation of ways of interrelation between parent and child (5%);	development of the capacity to face conflicts between generations (12.7%);
discipline and responsibility, negotiation (10%);	building the proper entourage (4.5%);	managing aggressiveness (12.8%);
reducing the risk of dropping out (9%);	improving and adapting family relationships (vertically: mother-daughter, father-son, mother-son, father-daughter, grandmother-grandson; horizontally: husband - wife (19.2%);	solving the emotional problems of the child (12.6%);
developing the teacher - student relationship (8.4%);	improving assertive communication between parent and child (35%);	self-knowledge (13.2%);
collaboration with the counselor (4.2%);	accepting the stalemate in the child's situation (12.6%).	motivation (5%);
effective learning management (4.2%).		respecting the child's needs (9.25%);
		anxiety/ capacity to deal with obsessions (4.2%);
		freedom of speech (4.2%);
		security of the school environment (4.2%);
		learning relaxation exercises (4.2%).

Table 1. Objectives of Counseling

The counseling methods and techniques used in counseling sessions were selected based on the objectives and the requirements of each case encountered during the program. The counselor has selected and used:

Teaching methods	Counseling/ psychological methods	Exercises
Brainstorming 4.2%	Anamnesis - free associations 14.8%	Know yourself 6.8%
Demonstration 2%	Self-portrayal 10.2%	Self-identity map 6.3%
Debate 80%	Active listening 6.3%	Classification of feelings,

		emotion 10.65%
Conversation 80%	Auto-suggestion 2.1%	Priorities ranking 14.4%
Dialogue 16.8%	The questionnaire 100%	Choosing values 6.3%
Explanation 4.2%	Stress assessment scale 2.1%	Social atom 4.2%
Speech 6.3%	Empty chair technique (parent-child, mother-father) 4.2%	Conflict map 14.2%
Case study 9%	The interview 100%	Life line 4.2%
Cluster technique 6.2%	Anger management 2.1%	The action plan 10.3%
Homework 8.4%	Negotiation 6.3%	Bridges between present and future 6.3%
Narration 6%	Decision-making 4.25%	"Ordinary day" scenario 9%
Mosaic technique 3%	Case study 100%	Letter to my son/ daughter 8.4%
The exercise 8.4%	Simulation 4%	"Time wheel" 2.1%
5 minute essay	Metaphor 2.1%	"The role of the ideal mother/father" 4.2%

Table 2. Counseling Methods and Techniques

2.4. Data analysis

The counselor combined traditional teaching methods with psychological methods and adapted some techniques in the field of psychotherapy as working instruments in group and individual counseling for parents. Reality centered approach, behavioral approach and humanistic approach represented the theoretical foundations selecting and processing the working methods and techniques.

Counseling sessions for parents valuable information. All information obtained are recorded and sorted following statistical evaluation, in an inventory of discussion themes as follows:

Identified difficulties	Type of support requested	Living conditions and economic situation	Spare time (parents mentioned in order of frequency)
educational: 13 situations: 13 cases	helping children cope with school difficulties: 25 cases,	9 parents are living in spacious houses, luxury residential areas, having a very good socio-economic situation; they pay large sums as monthly fees to a private school	using a computer (games, work - 22 situations)
emotional 10	improving networking	37 parents live in	sport - 18

situations	and communication between parents and children - 24 cases	blocks of flats with 2, 3, 4 rooms	situations
emotional and educational: 9 situations	helping children cope with emotional difficulties - 14 cases	1 parent lives in precarious conditions and is looking for a house,	meetings with friends - 4 situations
behavioral and educational: 5 situations	helping children cope with school difficulties - 25 cases	2 fathers are unemployed	listen to music, watch movies - 6 situations
behavioral: 10 situations	supporting children's integration in the classroom - 6 cases	1 parent is looking for a second job	walks in the open air, games 4 situations
behavioral, educational and emotional: 8 situations	improving relationship with spouse - 1 case	8 stay at home mothers	traveling 4 situations
educational and physical: 2 situations	providing information for parents: on education, efficient learning techniques, ways to relax, ways to find a job - 4 cases	5 parents/guardians are pensioners (2 mothers, 2 fathers, 1 grandmother).	shopping 3 situations
emotional and behavioral: 1 situation	helping children cope with behavioral difficulties - 5 cases		reading 4 situations
physical, educational and behavioral: 1 situation	developing relations between teachers and parents - 1 case		drawing 2 situations

Table 3. *The Inventory of Discussion Themes*

3. Results

Interventions lead to a development in confidence, self esteem and personal dignity, as well as the communication and problem solving skills. The implementation of the group program emphasized the self esteem and team spirit. Results, in the case of parents, can be spectacular and transformative, as they became aware that success and fulfillment can be measured in a number of ways. Others are aware of the fact that a series of personal attributes, such as perseverance, confidence and character must be valued and, with some effort, can also be proved.

The counselor has reached the objectives set for conducting the counseling sessions. These objectives may be measured through the following aspects:

- parents feel the need to keep in touch with the school counselor. They believe the support provided by the counselor is important in improving the

parents-children relationship, with a view to ensuring effective integration of children in the school environment (11 cases).

- in 7 cases, it was insisted on recognizing the mother- daughter / son (parent-child) feelings.

- parents appreciated the counseling process because they have received emotional support, in such a way that in their turn were able to help the children in solving school difficulties and improve school results. Benefits were: reduced absenteeism and improvement of school performance, with positive effects on children.

- in 2 cases, parents wanted to involve all members of the family in the context of counseling sessions.

- there is a situation in which a mother discontinued the participation in the counseling sessions due to economic and social difficulties.

In some cases, parents have expressed a negative attitude towards school, considering that school is guilty of the child's failure and not the family.

4. Conclusion

In comparison with parents' expectations, counseling sessions were an obvious success, the counselor appreciated it positively and the results reflected the quality of the school counseling process and the school - parent partnership.

The counseling program helps parents who feel helpless in the fight with their own children, for the parent - child relationship has turned, in some families, into a battlefield. Neither one nor the others are winners, therefore the counselor must find solutions to turn them into individuals whose full victory is education.

The school counselor - parent partnership is intended, in the first place, for parents - as main partners in the educational process. The counselor suggests an organized, formal and non-formal framework for the counseling sessions, partnerships to inform about and increase children's performances in the education process.

Counseling parents represents a contemporary necessity of school, considering the crisis that family goes through in the Romanian society and whose symptoms consist of restructuring traditional family values, confusion regarding the educational means used in the relationship with children and the simultaneous reduction of the role and authority of school (see Vrășmaș, E. 2002).

The counseling program is modern, competitive and will contribute to increasing the value of the educational act, it will ensure compensatory activities for both children and parents and establishes a high motivational level for the participation in the interpersonal development activities that value every moment and take account the fact that "each learns from each".

When family and the school counselor cooperate effectively, a positive learning experience ensues, whose prime beneficiaries are children. Any parent wishes for their child's success and it is in their power, the school counselors and

teachers' ability approach them and ensure academic success, for school and parents prepare them for life.

For most parents, school remains the institution in which they continue to place their highest trust for their children's education. Their interest for counseling programs is motivated by an increase in quality/ performance/ results of the education process, by development, social integration and health of the child.

References

- Cosma, T. (2001). *Ședințele cu părinții în gimnaziu. Idei suport pentru diriginți*, Editura Polirom Iași.
- Eftimie, S., Suditu M., Mărgărițoiu A. (2010). The Impact of Mass Media Upon Aggressiveness, Conferința internațională Mass Media și educația, Buletinul Universității Petrol – Gaze din Ploiești, Seria Științele Educației, vol LXII, nr. 1A/2010, (cotat B+), Editura Universității Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești, pp. 121-126.
- Ionescu, M., Negreanu, E. (2006). *Educația în familie. Repere și practici actuale*, Ed. Cartea Universitară, București.
- Mărgărițoiu, A., Eftimie, S. (2012) The Impact of a Counselling Program for Abused Children, the 4th World Conference on Educational Sciences, WCES, 2-5.II.2012, Barcelona, in *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences Journal* by Elsevier, Vol. 46, indexed in Science Direct, Scopus, Thomson Reuters Conference Proceedings Citation Index (ISI Web of Science), pp. 4746-4750.
- Neculau, A. (2001). *29 trepte pentru a-I cunoaște pe ceilalți*. Editura Polirom, Iași.
- Vrăjmaș, E., A. (2002). *Consilierea și educația părinților*., Editura Aramis, București.