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**COMPETENCES NEEDED BY CLASS MASTERS IN
COUNSELLING THE STUDENTS**

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Abstract

In the present study we aimed to investigate the perceptions, attitudes and expectations of school counsellors towards minimal competences needed by class masters in the field of counselling students.

The methodology employed in-depth interviews based on structured guide with active school counsellors in the field within Arges County. The qualitative analysis of the responses aimed primarily to identify a minimum set of competences in educational counselling that class masters should possess. The second aspect focused on the class masters' ability to carry out counselling activities in class, during the counselling classes.

According to the results, school counsellors say that class masters should „*have complex competences in the field of psycho-pedagogy, that of group management and, at the same time, to know thoroughly the particularities and specifications for each school age, to have a good ability of self-analyse, self-control and organizing*”, while having regard to their own development through self- knowledge and personal development in order to improve our own communication style.

The counselling activity accomplished in class by class masters is evaluate by school counsellor as rather weak, for two reasons: firstly due to time reason, only one hour/week allocated of the counselling and guidance in the case of secondary education institutions and without this hour schedule in the case of high school institutions, and secondly insufficient time for class masters from secondary schools to approach counselling and guidance activities in the context that the curriculum has a reach contents.

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1. Introduction



With the specificity of its activity, the teacher is required to have a broad cultural perspective, an extensive information in different areas of activity and an insatiable thirst for knowledge upon which to respond appropriately according to the varied interests of its students.

According to the activities specific for a class master stipulated in Annex 1 to Order of Minister number 5132/10.09.2009, this one has an important role in the counselling process because he is the coordinator of this activity in the classroom with the group of students whom he guides. In its double quality as teacher and class master at the same time he has supplementary tasks but also more numerous methods and ways to realize them. The class master takes part directly in the conduct of the counselling and orientation of students as the teacher and, as a class master, he ensures the other teachers' coordination in order to know, educate, inform and lead students from an educational as well as professional areas.

The fact that between a real class master and the class students a special empathic relationship is being created, and that there are cases when he knows more about the students than their own parents which is due to voluntary confessions, because they use their imagination, life experience, kindness and all other soul qualities, general knowledge, intelligence and adaptability to specific situations to coordinate this special activity which results in a lower measure or quite not at all from the official documents.

Analysing the attributions and responsibilities of the the class master, we are led to ascertain the fact that he informs the students upon the educational and professional offers, but also ensures a favourable environment for self-information with the purpose of a correct self-guiding. The class master's activity ends with the formulation of the guiding suggestion, which must meet the joint effort of the possibilities, aspirations of the student and also the wishes of the student's family and also the social demand.

Because the role of the class masters is connected to focus on the welfare of their students, to intervene in solving situations that they face and that of tracking their progress in the schooling space, our interest is focused on the minimum competences in the field of counselling that they should possess.

Secondary and high school teachers are faced with what it is called „the puberty crisis”, respectively „adolescence “crisis. Puberty and adolescence represent difficult periods in life, as they are characterized by essential bio-psycho-social nature; it represents the period of interrogations, great successes, but also failures, in which personality knows an important development. (Dumitru, 2008, p. 100)

2. Paper Theoretical Foundation and Related Literature

In the educational practice, we can find the situation which under the denomination of *Counselling and Orientation*, the traditional counselling classes take place, which take over most of the advisory area objectives.

The relationship between the classes of the psycho-pedagogical counselling ant that of traditional counselling remains confusing at the moment at the level of official documents and educational practice.

The novelty of this curriculum is stated in *The National Curriculum for Compulsory Education. Reference Framework* (1998) and the methodological guide *Counselling and Orientation* (2001) adds the original aspect of it.

Counselling and orientation do not represent a "new object of education in its classical sense but a mechanism of information exchange between partners..." According to the documents quoted above, these activities are performed by school psychologists in collaboration with "teams of teachers' designated by the Board of each school that must aim for "applications, practical developments, experiences and attitudes that need learning to be practiced in real life." (Jigău, 2001, p. 7).

On the other hand, these classes are only present in the curriculum of some schools, most often conducted by school psychologists. In other schools, traditional classes of counselling take over most of the area of counselling objectives without being carried out with the specific methodology, which negatively influences effectiveness. Where these classes are still present, they have the same imprecise status; in some schools these are subjects where students receive grades, according to the coordination classes. (Cocoradă, 2004, p. 12).

Thus, coordination takes up the Counselling and Orientation contents, which involves educational counselling conducted by qualified teachers for guidance and counselling activities by taking part to the course on „*Counselling and Orientation*”.

Professor Gheorghe Tomşa (1999) draws attention on the fact that counselling actions must not be mistaken by lessons or other forms of teaching activity, they are not and they cannot be treated as study subjects. Counselling is not being taught, but it is performed under the form of practical work-shop sessions, during which a special relationship develops, the counselling relationship.

The counselling and orientation class is stipulated in some official documents as it follows:

- ✓ Pre-school learning: curriculum area Education for society from the new curriculum 2008 (the programme for early education for 3 to 6/7 years children);
- ✓ Primary school : according to the framework planning in force, the number of hours of counselling and guidance: between 0-1 hours / week;
- ✓ Secondary education: according to the framework planning in force, the number of hours of counselling and guidance: 1 hour / week;
- ✓ Minister of Education Order number 5132/10.09.2009 concerning the activities specific for a class master;
- ✓ High school education: mandatory curriculum no longer includes tutoring classes, with the intentions that the activity of the tutoring teacher to include organizing extracurricular meetings involving specialists from different fields of interest, tours and meetings with individual students or parents. One result of this is the reintroduction of the History study class on the 11th grade, in the case of technological high schools. So, Geography will remain in the 11th grade syllabus for these high-schools. The provisions are approved by ministerial order and targeting the 2009-2010 school year.
- ✓ 2006-2007 the Minister of Education organized a national training stage for trainers in order to prepare a number of two trainers in each county with the purpose of implementing the connected

school syllabus to the curricular area Counselling and Orientation. These county trainers have developed training sessions at county / local level with those involved in the implementation of the syllabus "Counselling and orientation" for the 1st to the 12th grades, SAM (school of arts and crafts), technological high schools.

- ✓ Order of Minister nr. 5286 / 09.10.2006 approves school programmes for Counselling and Orientation field for 1st to 4th grades and 5th to 8th grades.
- ✓ Order of Minister nr.3337/2002 concerning the activity developed by the counsellor for projects and educational programs within school and extracurricular pre-university educational institutions.

3. Methodology

In this paper we proposed to draft and to validate a set of competences specific for class masters in secondary and high schools by perception of school counsellors (guidance specialists).

Thus we conducted in-depth interviews on the base of a structured guide with 10 school counsellors from secondary schools in Arges County. The interview guide was structured in sections so as to cover topics related to: minimum of competences needed in the field of educational counselling that class teachers should possess in order to prevent difficult situations in school, to work with students in the classroom, etc., and the evaluation of the class masters' capacity to do counselling activities in the classroom, in the present context of the counselling class.

4. Results and Findings

4.1.Minimal Competences Required for the Class Masters in Counselling Students

Regarding the minimum competences needed for the development of the counselling activity, which can prevent certain problematic situations, school counsellors declare that class masters must *"have the complex competences in the psycho-pedagogy domain, that of group management and also to know thoroughly the particularities and specificities of each school age, to have a good capacity for self-analysis and self-control, organizational skills"* while taking into account their own development through self-discovery and personal development in order to improve their own communication style.

„ Each of us comes in front of pupils with his own emotional luggage, his unique way of being, specific behaviours and an unconscious pattern that, in many cases, might oppose the present pedagogical requirements, worthy to be promoted (against the models). To be self-conscious, in each moment of your teaching activity and outside it implies a very good self-knowledge and self-control, all being gained through a lot of will, keeping permanent contact with information from the field of education and the personal desire to evolve, to overpass your own limitations through study, trainings, courses.”

On the other hand, the role of an educator must be achieved also under the aspect of *"methods and techniques of training and education of healthy habits and attitudes that contribute to effective learning,*

capacity for integration into community life, the behaviours and sanogenous attitudes", elements that the teacher should be aware of throughout the teaching activity.

A number of specific characteristics, especially of those who choose the profession of school counsellors should be included in the set of features of class masters: empathy, active listening, assertiveness in communication and lack of aggressiveness, especially to parents or tutors.

The school counsellors who answered this question think that, as well, having or developing counselling competences had to support and complete the abilities of class management, communication, informatics, social, and organizing that a teacher should possess and perfect along his teaching activity.

4.2. Issues Relating to Counselling Work Performed in Class

School counsellors consider that the classroom counselling performed by class masters is rather weak for two reasons:

- The time of 1 hour/week given to counselling and orientation activities in the case of secondary schools and its complete lack from the timetable in the case of high schools.
- Not enough time for class masters in secondary schools to approach counselling and orientation activities with rich contents.

These have as a consequence the lack of unity concerning the completion of these counselling activities as an organized activity in high schools and other institutions of learning, which leads to discrepancies in the relations between class masters and their students, but also in the students' relation to their colleagues of the same age.

The unanimity of opinions that the time for counselling and orientation is not enough to complete all of the above mentioned are confirmed by what we said previously:

"Time is not sufficient, the contents of the coordination class are rich, and these classes are sometimes affected by other discussions and activities with no relation to it."

No. firstly, the coordination class is not included in the students' timetable, they don't stay at school for it. Secondly, there are teachers who do not possess sufficient knowledge from different fields in order to prevent/ intervene efficiently in different situations."

"Yes, in a little measure because there is just one hour of counselling/ week and certain situations require more hours of individual/ group counselling. As well, it requires a high level of objectivity, hardly to attain by a teacher with whom students meet for their classes and to whom, from different reasons, they refuse to confess or to ask his advice in a certain matter."

In an article in 2011 loaded on <http://www.scoalaedu.ro> excluding the coordination class from the timetable, in 2 years after applying Order of Ministry number 3410/16.03.2009 the situation is according to the following students' confessions:

„Since the coordination class is no longer obligatory in high school curriculum, opinions on its importance are split, some of my colleagues consider that the class

was useful, others useless. Personally, I think that coordination classes had their utility, students got closer and our class master was our older friend. Of course that sometimes coordination classes were treated as a joke by students because they got absences. The presence to class...depends on each class master . The coordination class was the minimum necessary for the teacher-students communication. Many classes from the Romania learning system have communication problems, which may be solves in a weekly hour of discussions. (Student, 10th grade)”

“The class master has to role to train you during school years. He is the one who guides you, helps you to find your way. The coordination class is sometimes more necessary than any other class, because the class master has a special position, unique, working with the student’s psychic that is still forming. During coordination class, the class master and the students can talk freely on any matter. The class master’s role is not only that of educating from the teacher’s desk, but supposes a complex connection to the students and their families. Now, this communication is broken. The class is optional, outside the timetable, so no one is interested. Now the only contact with the class master is the specialty class, and the class master became an ordinary teacher who only teaches his subject. The small pieces of advice that we receive during the class are not enough for a student. (Student, 10th grade)”

“During high school our coordination classes didn’t practically exist. Even from the beginning the class master showed his lack of interest for this part, so necessary for our training, starting little by little to replace the coordination class with the subject he taught. Not long after that the coordination class transformed into 5 minutes at the beginning of maths class when we motivate absences, learn about 2 or 3 grades and some discussions about sincerity.

I think that the coordination class, or moreover its lack, taught me one thing in life, that is no one care about your problems as long as they are not affected by them and you have to manage yourself as you can, learning from your own mistakes. Maybe for some colleagues it would have been better to have been taught by a class master a few things about absences, low grades, learning, bad behaviours (smoking, alcohol) that they themselves experienced in order to realize when it is to late to change. Moreover, during the years tensions appeared between teachers and students, tensions that our class master didn’t try to remediate, but he didn’t even know about them, thus we came to the proverbial gab between teacher and students, which has only negative consequences for both parties.” (Student, 12th grade)”

These confessions offer a supplementary confirmation of the school counsellors’ affirmations and they sustain that the present situation is the same as 2 years ago. The lack of knowledge from the field of counselling among class masters is seen by school counsellors who offer themselves available to support class masters as long as they are aware of their limits and realize the necessity of a good collaboration with the “school psychologist “as a start in order to succeed in their work with students.

„Not really, and not all! Of course, there are exceptions, teachers who completed permanent training courses in the field of psycho-pedagogy and psychology, sociology, and at the same time they have that gift, or pedagogical tact necessary for a fine observer of students' behaviour, feeling and at the same time using his obtained knowledge in order to apply the best strategies necessary to solve specific situations that appear, but, there are rare cases where one cannot find these, in this century, in the context of necessary of actual education”.

5. Discussion

The school counsellors that were interviewed stress out the importance of developing school counseling competences for teachers through training programs and courses in order to prevent difficult situations in school and to work efficiently with the students in the classroom.

In this context the minimum of competences that teachers should develop are related to school psychology and psychological intervention at all necessary levels, of developmental psychology but also of management aspects - the management of time, learning styles. Also, if teachers become familiar to the methods and the techniques of personal optimization for pre-adolescent and teenage students, as well as the encouragement of applying these techniques when working with students are considered elements that need to be developed.

What they said stresses out the emotional aspect- the knowing of methods and techniques specific to emotional management and expressing them represent very important elements that contribute to a teacher's better approach in prevention situation, in solving conflicts but also as a base in creating assertive communication abilities.

6. Conclusions

The activity of school formative counselling is held in school by all teachers, not only by those who have the responsibility a group of students, or the specialists. This work, which requires the teacher's energy, time and attention, is complex and if it is not ensured by the educator it can lead to a lack of success or failure. The teacher's presence as counsellor is a daily need for each student. The present study draw attention on the necessity of continuous training for teachers, mainly of forming/developing school counselling competences in the field of school counselling: psycho-pedagogical, group management, self analysis and self control, organizing, communication, empathy, etc. The present study can represent an efficient informative tool whose results may be integrated in administrative and educative approaches for many categories of beneficiaries or decisive factors. The given data can form the bases for relevance of future training programmes.

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