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**STRATEGIC LANDMARKS IN CURRICULAR COUNSELLING
FOR TEACHERS**

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Abstract

The article is a presentation of the professional experience of the author regarding curricular counselling of teachers within Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance. The specialist support provided to teachers by curricular counselling facilitates the development of teachers' professional skills, meeting the needs of adult learning within the school organization. Curricular counselling is a type of adult counselling whose primary concerns are the profession, workplace, lifelong learning, professional and social advancement, self-directed learning, self-efficiency. The place and role of curricular counselling in the activity of psycho-pedagogical assistance of teaching staff is revealed by the presentation of the organizational framework for carrying out specialized support activities for teachers, the strategy of collaboration between the institution offering counselling services for teachers and the beneficiaries - school units, over several school years, using the curriculum-based research method and other school documents. The case study is aimed at presenting the attitude of the teachers / school units in Hunedoara County towards innovation in the teacher counselling activity, respectively curricular counselling. Presenting curricular counselling as a field of professional expertise that meets the needs of teachers' professional development in the school organization is supported by statistical data showing the interest of school organizations and teachers towards this kind of professional support.

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1. Introduction

The current national and international educational policy, as well as research in the education and psychology sciences, (Băban, coord., 2001, p.11-19) present counselling as a new, growing field, revealed through the development of the theory of counselling as a field of study in the education sciences alongside educational management, curricular theory, training theory and assessment theory (Chiş, p. 200, in Chiş, Ionescu, coord., 2009), as well as through the existing situation at the level of the educational practice. The concern for approaching curricular counselling at the theoretical and applied level is a necessity for improving the quality of the counselling services offered to teachers.

1.1. Curricular counselling for teachers - theoretical considerations

The diachronic analysis of the functioning of the educational assistance / psycho-pedagogical assistance services in the Romanian education system shows that the first mentions regarding the functioning of such services appear in the legislation starting with Education Law No. 84/1995, previously (1991), mentioning the activity by order of The Ministry of Education, and later the activity of the county centres for psycho-pedagogical assistance and the centres for resources and educational assistance was regulated by procedures of organization and functioning based on ministerial orders, the beneficiaries of the counselling / psycho-pedagogical assistance activity being pupils, parents and teachers.

In the legislation in force, Order no. 5555 of October 7th, 2011, Chapter I, General provisions, Art.2 (2) the County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance "is a specially integrated educational institution specialized in offering, coordinating and monitoring specific educational services provided to children / pupils, teachers, parents and community members to ensure everyone's access to quality education as well as the necessary assistance in this respect." Thus, at County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance level, specific educational services are provided for teachers so as to ensure access to quality education, as well as the necessary assistance in this respect, among the main objectives being to inform and counsel teachers in order to optimize the didactic-educational activity.

The preoccupation for the professional development of the teaching staff is considered by the specialists in the field of educational sciences as having a fundamental importance: "The efficiency of the staff is conditional on that of the curriculum. The most important part of the team (the teachers) is the key to success. Their efficiency is not only provided by initial training. In just a few years of career it will become inadequate, on-going training being necessary. If the process of lifelong teacher education is not ensured, the curriculum is endangered. In fact, educator training must exist, as a separate chapter, in any curricular development. "(Negreţ-Dobridor., p.28, cited in Cerghit, Neacşu, Negreţ-Dobridor, 2001).

The concept of curricular development is in close and constant interaction with that of curricular management, the latter being considered an "active and interactive process based on a coherent and unitary set of principles, functions, norms, strategies, methodological and procedural systems designed, integrated and contextualised in the curricular/educational process, respectively in the planning/ (re)elaboration, implementation and assessment of the curriculum, so as to bring about the achievement - at high-quality performance standards - of objectives of varying degrees of generality, involving several decision-making bodies at interrelated hierarchical levels, resulting in specific competencies and attributions at the strategic, tactical and operational levels of educational management. "(Bocoş & Chiş, 2013, p.34-35).

In this context, we consider curricular counselling as an area of professional expertise / intervention which can meet the needs of professional development of teachers within the school organization. The school unit becomes the learning organization, an organization which, through the provision of curricular counselling, becomes the place where educational agents are involved in a process of permanent development, depending on self-exigencies and the exigencies of primary and secondary beneficiaries of education. Curricular counselling is a type of adult counselling whose primary concerns are the profession, workplace, lifelong learning, professional and social advancement, self-directed learning, self-efficiency. Curricular counselling is a collateral activity involved in the curricular management, which occurs in the design, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum at the macro-, meso- and micro- educational level (Bocoş, & Chiş, 2013, p.92). Counselling the agents of change (the teachers) is an effective way to promote educational novelty/ innovation, and the successful implementation of curricular reform projects. Teachers are members of the professional community, learning, through curricular counselling, to reflect on their own experiences, understand their own way of thinking so as to become more effective by focusing on the ability to understand the problem-situation they are facing.

2. Problem Statement

The curricular counselling activity, carried out at the level of the educational practice of Hunedoara County, is organized at the level of one of the educational services of Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance - the Service of Information and Curricular Counselling, officially regulated by the Internal Regulations of Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance, starting with school year 2011/2012, but the activity has been mentioned in other school documents since school year 2010/2011.

Curricular counselling is organized and carried out by the educationalist as the responsible party, author and only person who carries out the operational procedure that regulates the activity at the level of the Service of Information and Curricular Counselling. The Service of Information and Curricular Counselling within the Resources and Educational Assistance Centre of Hunedoara County creates at the beginning of each school year an offer comprising the services of information and curricular counselling for teachers, sent to pre-university school units in Hunedoara county. The services of curricular counselling are free, and beneficiaries include teachers of any subject. Each school unit appoints a teacher who will be responsible for the activity of curricular counselling, who cooperates with the representative of the Service of Information and Curricular Counselling in what concerns the organisation and carrying out of the activities over the entire school year (identifying needs of curricular counselling in the school unit, signing the partnership agreement in order to be able to carry out the activities, planning and carrying out the activities in the school unit, etc). The partnership agreement between Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance and the educational unit is signed as a result of requests from the teachers.

3. Research Questions

Is curricular counselling a new and useful type of service for counselling teachers?

- In what way is ensured the carrying out of curricular counselling services for teachers in Hunedoara county?
- Which are the types of school units in Hunedoara county where curricular counselling is carried out?
- What are the strategies for organising and carrying out activities of curricular counselling in Hunedoara county?
- Are there any other types of teacher counselling services in partner school units of Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance except for curricular counselling?

3.1. Is the interest of teachers in curricular counselling maintained over several school years?

- What is the number of teacher requests for curricular counselling over a period of four school years?
- Is there active involvement on the part of the requesting teachers in the activities of curricular counselling?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to present a model of good practice in organising and carrying out the activity of curricular counselling for teachers by Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance – Service of Information and Curricular Counselling. Therefore, over the course of the research I have had the following in view:

- 4.1.** Identifying the element of newness- curricular counselling – in offering counselling services to teachers within Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance.
- 4.2.** Revealing strategies for organising and carrying out services of curricular counselling for teachers within the Resources and Educational Assistance Centre of Hunedoara County.

5. Research Methods

The research carried out is aimed at presenting the attitude of the teachers / school units in Hunedoara County towards innovation in the teacher counselling activity, more precisely towards curricular counselling, promoted at Hunedoara County level through Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance.

5.1. Presenting the research methods used and the way they were utilised over the course of the research

The research methods used for carrying out the research are the method of case study, the method of self-observation and the method of studying the official curricular documents and other school documents (Bocoş, 2007, p.69-70, p.108-109, p. 114-119). The method of case study was used in order to

analyse the current situation as far as curricular counselling is concerned, over a period of four school years at the level of Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance. The method of studying official curricular documents and other school documents was used throughout the research in order to ensure the accuracy of the data presented and to establish the place and the role of curricular counselling services for teachers within the other types of services offered by the institution. The method of self-observation contributed to offering original, new professional information, gathered by the researcher over the course of organising and carrying out the activities of curricular counselling.

6. Findings

The diachronic analysis of the activity carried out at the level of the Service of Information and Curricular Counselling within Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance, as a provider of curricular counselling services for teachers, shows the following:

6.1. Participation of teachers in group, individual and distance curricular counselling activities

The curricular counselling activity is realised in the school units where there are requests, according to a mutually agreed-upon schedule, between the teacher educationalist and the beneficiary teaching staff. The main strategy for carrying out direct activities is group counselling, on problems of common interest to the teachers and, in addition, individual counselling is also used. The diachronic analysis of group, individual and distance curricular counselling activities, over a period of four school years, shows that in the school year 2012/2013 there were a number of 144 beneficiaries, 90 in the school year 2013/2014, an increase of 106 in the school year 2014/2015, the largest number of participants (183) being registered in the school year 2015/2016. Interest is still maintained (2016/2017) and certification of participation in the activities is achieved by issuing certificates for the beneficiaries. A teacher can benefit from one or several individual or group curricular counselling appointments, as well as information and distance counselling, according to the identified needs.

Distance counselling is the most extensive activity of the Service of Information and Curricular Counselling as a necessity due to the high number of requests (teachers and school units), time availability and timetable of teachers and due to the distance of some of the school units from the headquarters of Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance, which involves increased costs. The organization of curricular counselling has evolved towards the modernization of the counselling services by managing space, time, and financial resources more efficiently. Direct information and counselling have been complemented by resources specific to information and communication technology. The counsellor – counsellee interaction is done through an ICT tool (Internet, e-mail, telephone), which brings services closer to users, but there are also dysfunctions due to the insufficiently developed ICT skills of teachers, limited access to the Internet and technology, and the low active involvement of the beneficiaries in the counselling process.

6.2 Issues addressed in the curricular counselling activity

The most frequent issue addressed in the curricular counselling activity concerned curricular building activities, especially curricular adaptation for the integration of students with special educational

needs in mass education, construction of learning experiences and their correlation with learning situations, learning difficulties emerged in curricular processes.

The registration of the activity data is carried out by the educationalist, through the creation of databases with the beneficiaries and the issues addressed, and by recording the activity in the individual and group counselling sheets, activity register and activity reports.

6.3 Presenting the interest of school units and teaching staff in Hunedoara county in curricular counselling

Table 01. Partnership agreements signed by Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance with pre-university school units in order to be able to carry out teacher curricular counselling activities.

| School year | Pre-school educational units | Primary educational units | Lower secondary educational units | Upper secondary educational units |
|-------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2012/2013 | - | - | 1 | 4 |
| 2013/2014 | 3 | 1 | 15 | 17 |
| 2014/2015 | 3 | 1 | 17 | 18 |
| 2015/2016 | 4 | 1 | 22 | 23 |

The research carried out shows that, in the school year 2015/2016, the last one of the four school years analysed, among the educational units presented in Table 01, one school unit is for primary-private education; 25 school units also offer other types of teacher counselling through the psycho-pedagogical assistance office belonging to the Resources and Educational Assistance Centre of Hunedoara County network; 16 school units belong to a rural environment, and 34 to an urban environment. The greatest involvement in curricular counselling activities is registered in the urban environment. For school year 2016/2017 there are 53 partnership agreements in force signed by Hunedoara County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance with the school units concerning the field of curricular information and counselling.

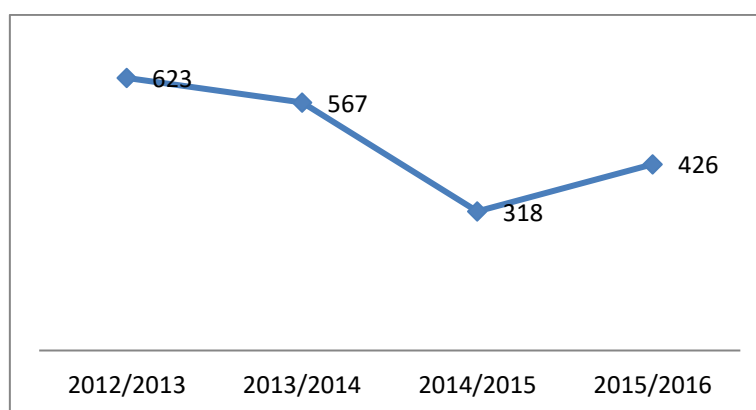


Figure 01. The requests for curricular counselling from the teachers employed in pre-university education in Hunedoara County

Figure 01 presents the number of teachers' requests for curricular counselling registered at the level of the Service of Information and Curricular Counselling at the beginning of each school year. There is a decrease in the number of requests for school year 2014/2015, followed by an increase, which is also maintained for school year 2016/2017. Each of the teachers requesting curricular counselling opts for discussing one or more professional issues.

7. Conclusion

Through curricular counselling, the teaching staff benefits from specialist support for optimal correlation between exploring and capitalizing on their own resources and professional capabilities and the resources of the school organization to meet the needs of the beneficiaries. The curricular specialist provides specialist assistance to teachers in their dual quality – adult lifelong learners and their role as providers of learning programs. Curricular counselling has the role of developing the professional competence of the teaching staff through the help and guidance offered to them by the school counsellor - educationalist. The specialist support provided to teachers by curricular counselling facilitates the development of teachers' professional skills, meeting the needs of adult learning within the school organization.

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