



SCHOOL LIFE ADVISOR'S PROFILE AND CHARACTERISTICS IN THE GREEK EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract:

The School Life Advisors (SLA) in education are primarily tasked with resolving situations and behaviors that affect students in the school environment. The purpose of this work is to present the personal characteristics that a (SLA) must possess to deal with various cases of counseling approaches in education. This paper first describes the environment that prevails in schools and the usefulness of the teacher and the (SLA), while then reference is made to systematic consultation and the interaction between (SLA) and student. Then follows the main text of the work in which the individual personal characteristics of the (SLA) are described.

Keywords: education, consultation, supervision, school, student

1. Introduction

Nowadays, schools are a meeting place for perhaps the most diverse student population than ever before. Thus, researchers and education leaders are interested in achieving quality education [1,2]. The (SLA) in co-operation with the class teacher and the directors are the managers of the school class, and their role has been recognized as multifaceted while their work is complex and interesting [3,4]. The positive attitude of the school and the teacher towards the "different" student will also determine the positive perception of

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managing multiculturalism. The teacher's positive attitude toward students' different understandings of the world, institutions, education, religion, language, social organization, political structures, arts, and lifestyles will create value in students' knowledge and experiences [5]. The safety of the school system will heal the fears and insecurities of culturally diverse students [6] and the insecurities of those who feel afraid and threatened by different. In other words, today's school attendance is necessary to shape the conditions for students to develop personal and social skills in order to become capable of managing information and their difficulties through communication and creativity. Furthermore, results of the study of Vagrhesse and Kumar, [7] revealed that most adolescents face adjustment problems, and (SLA)'s strategic communication significantly impacted improvement in adjustment problems. Thus, several approaches [8-15], including inclusive education [16,17], which has philosophical, political, educational, and social dimensions, have been used to gain student's interest in the class. In their study, Kapsalis and Charalambous, [18] reported that "*human behavior is ultimately a function of many factors, such as social norms, habits, attitudes, and expectations*". The same behavior is likely to be characterized by different persons as smooth, normal, and desirable, or as problematic, disturbed, and undesirable [19,20]. The most common elements that are taken into account to characterize a behavior as normal or as problematic are first of all the attitudes and the norms of the society [21]. The same behavior could be treated differently, depending on the frequency and intensity with which it is expressed [22].

2. Systematic counseling and teacher-student interaction

The etymological analysis of the word counseling means, giving advices, guidance, informing and supporting someone else, [23]. The systemic approach to learning is contained in the phrase "it takes a whole village to raise a child" [24] expressing the need for interaction and interdependence of persons and relationships. Systemic counseling aims to change and consolidate successful cooperation between the members of the school community, encourage and strengthen their efforts, reduce stress, list alternative options for dealing with their difficulties, and increase self-confidence. The counseling approach does not seek psychoanalysis but psychological support. Systemic counseling by teachers of different specialties and scientific backgrounds leads to common ways of action and behavior that contribute to better communication among them, their students, and students' parents. The effective educational consultant's advisory actions have been grouped into various categories [25,26]. It is worth pointing out that student discipline is one of the most important issues [27,28]. According to Christakis, [19] the relationship between the teacher and the students has an impact on the student's behavior but also on their further development and their integration into society. The effectiveness of this relationship is mainly based on the teacher who will give clear instructions, and roles, and guide the student group both for the achievement of the learning objectives and for the social behavior that must be demonstrated [29,30]. Student-teacher interaction can

help overcome issues related to social stereotypes, minorities, and people with special needs.

3. The teacher as advisor

According to Hatzidemou, [3] the role of the teacher has many dimensions, such as coordinating, encouraging, supporting, consulting etc., and education and culture are perhaps inseparable [6]. Counseling actions are considered as successful when the counselor-educator communicates at a satisfactory level and in an appropriate way that gains the interest of the students. For this, both the development of personal skills and the personal characteristics of the (SLA) must be such that they promote interpersonal communication and are acceptable to students. The legislation framework of the (SLA) described in the government gazette sheet no. 4183/2020 [31]. The counseling dimension consists of the teacher's knowledge and willingness to offer to individual students or groups in order to improve their personality, develop the ability to solve problems, make decisions about their personal and educational/professional life, change dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors, supporting them, develop self-help skills by understanding the systemic saying "whoever has a problem also has a solution". Based on the above claims, it could be under consideration that the teacher as a consultant and (SLA) does not only offer advice to the students and their parents but facilitates and contributes to the authentic communication and expression of the students and "pushes" them through their thinking and tactics to personal investigation.

3.1 Skills-Abilities-Characteristics of an Educational Consultant

The (SLA) must possess various characteristics and skills [32]. An (SLA) is someone who can assess a child's talents, learning style, and ideal learning environment, explain the different types of schools and which students each school serves best, identify schools that fit student's needs, gauge whether a particular school is right for a child, explain the application process, calendar, and deadlines, help students and families prepare for campus visits, admission tests, and interviews, and offer advice and support throughout the admissions process [31]. A (SLA) is cooperated with the "Teachers' Advisors" who support the students of the 1st grade of Vocational High Schools (EPA.L.) within the framework of the Action "A New Beginning at EPA.L. - Support of EPA.L school units." Teachers, in addition to being effective, must also be effective counselors [33]. For this reason, and in terms of emotional load, it is considered that the teaching profession is a demanding profession [34]. According to Megalomistaka, [35], counselors, who know their limits, can control their anxiety and set realistic goals in counseling that help counselees achieve them.

Regarding the personality of the (SLA), characteristics that distinguish him/her are a pleasant and positive disposition, friendliness, explanatory competence, respect, unconditional acceptance, honesty, authenticity, self-disclosure, availability, impartiality, patience, self-control, determination, consistency, and practical care, expressed by the non-negotiable willingness to face issues without running away

[20,36,37]. Some of these features and the actions that must accompany them are listed in more detail below.

- Communication skills. The (SLA) must have excellent communication skills. This characteristic is perhaps considered one of the most important for a successful counseling approach, since according to Matsagoura [38], any form of ambiguity creates an environment of insecurity among students. According to Sideri, [39] three forms of communication can be distinguished in counseling. Non-reflective counseling, transitional counseling, and reflective counseling. Usually, teachers, due to ignorance, use the non-reflective method most of the time. The educational consultant's ability to "listen" is just as important as the contagiousness of what he says. This is why teachers must develop the skill of attentive listening to students and empathetic understanding, which requires developed empathy. The skill of attentive listening allows the teacher to have a comprehensive picture of the student's point of view, and the skill of empathic ability helps him to understand a situation from the student's point of view [40]. Casual listening and hasty answers do not solve students' problems. The counselor-educator must avoid evaluative judgments, interpretations, and deductions from the students' words [41].
- Empathy. The personal harmony of teachers is expressed by empathy, acceptance of others, honesty and responsibility in their role as educators who seek the cognitive and emotional development of their students. Thus, the (SLA) must be a good and active listener and put himself in the students' position with the problematic behavior or situation for a better approach. Empathy involves two stages: a) empathic listening and b) empathic transmission. According to Potamianos, [42] empathic (active) listening is achieved by the counselor's appropriate responses that show to the other person that they are being carefully listened to and understood by someone who accepts them at all times and is interested in them. Active listening skills such as eye contact, appropriate body posture, appropriate facial expressions, and vocal tone help create a cooperative climate amongst students and counselors. In addition, the counselor actively responds to what the student says in order to approach them, using open questions and clarifications [43]. Empathy presupposes an understanding of the counselee on a cognitive level (what he/she thinks and says) but also on an emotional level (what he/she feels) [44].
- Approach the counselee in various ways. The (SLA) must sometimes follow the role of the actor and sometimes the role of the director and create scenarios, support, weaken the boundaries, and ally with some of the members. Another approach is to encourage teachers to see other sides of reality, alternative behaviors, and thoughts.
- Seek information. Several times, issuing behavior is caused by the living experiences that the student acquires within the family environment. Talking with members of the family could offer great help in understanding the circumstances from which this behavior arises. According to Minuchin (2000) [45] manipulations

such as reconstructing family patterns, marking boundaries, escalating stress, assigning tasks to perform, capitalizing on symptoms, manipulating emotional mood, and providing support, training, or guidance can lead to a revision of attitudes within the family. The contribution of the (SLA) enhances the development of interpersonal relationships through school and family cooperation initiatives and actions.

- Create a climate of trust. The teacher consultant must aim to create a climate of trust both between the "issuing" student and the family. Strengthening the self-esteem of communication, and offering new experiences would also help significantly [46].
- Have an integral character. The style and ethos of the (SLA) are important for the course of his/her relationship with the students as well as the successful consulting approach.
- Be consistent. Consistency as one of the key characteristics of the (SLA) must refer to his/her time as well as his/her words and actions. On the contrary, the inconsistency in the observance of the rules and the imposition of sanctions, as well as the inconsistent and unpredictable application of the teacher of different principles and practices, creates uncertainty about what is expected of them which soon turns into discomfort or even indifference. Unexcused absences, frequent tardiness, insufficient preparation, broken promises, etc., unsettle the trust of both parties increasing behavioral issues [40].
- Be impartial. Impartiality is one of the most essential characteristics that an (SLA) must have. An issuing situation should be the subject of commentary and criticism towards third parties. An impartial (SLA) is also one who adopts a unified system of criteria and measures in his/her relations with students so that students can clearly recognize what is being asked of them and what kinds of behavior are acceptable or unacceptable. An impartial counselor cares enough about the student to see that they are all given equal opportunities for equal help and support.
- Have a sense of humor. Through humor, the (SLA) will be able to get closer to the students. However, in no case does it mean that he/she is allowed to laugh at students or use them as targets for his/her jokes. In this way, the (SLA) manages to reduce the distance between him/her and the student. Through humor in a classroom, a reduction in control issues is achieved by the teacher [20].
- To have patience, clarity, and explanatory competence. Clarity is the teacher's ability to provide clear expressions and behavior. Thus, the consultant should use simple and understandable language. Several times, issues arise during the counseling process, not because it lacks interest or substance, but because the counselor fails to communicate in an approachable way. Thus, the student ends up feeling bored and irritated. Patience results from the counselor's genuine interest in the student's world [20]. According to Malikiosis-Loizou, [33] the sharp reflection of parents' feelings, behaviors, and thoughts by the (SLA) helps them to better understand themselves.

- Have the appropriate training. According to Brouzos, [47] counseling, *"is a particularly important dimension of the pedagogic act, which requires special knowledge and studies"*. The University education of teachers may offer the appropriate resources so that they become excellent scientists. However, an excellent scientist is not necessarily an excellent teacher, since education is not only a learning procedure but also a psychological process. The (SLA) seeks, through self-awareness and social awareness, to maintain the balance of the school class so that he/she can, with knowledge and confidence, form relationships of empathy, acceptance, solidarity, participation and creation in the teaching groups. The focus can be directed towards detecting the thoughts and feelings of counselees, their relationships with others, their relationship with the counselor, with other persons in their environment, or with any other external factors [33]. According to Herr and Cramer, [48] it is also useful to identify the possibilities of direction and guidance during the interview, as well as to assess the issue of the counselees receiving the counseling intervention. Teachers as pedagogues are or should be also practitioners of counseling since counseling is a pedagogical act. Thus, a counselor should therefore be properly trained so that he/she can perform the difficult and demanding work of the consultant trainer [49]. In order to achieve all of the above mentioned, the (SLA) should participate in a meeting well prepared, but also with flexibility in order to face a change in his/her plans.
- To be free from stereotypical views. The (SLA) should respect the cultural background and diversity of the student. The (SLA) who is aware of his/her role and influence on students knows that his/her perceptions, stereotypes, and expectations greatly influence students' self-concept and attitudes. The separation in the educational consultant's perception of students into "good" and "bad", results in their unequal treatment, consciously or unconsciously. He/she should accept the diversity of students and their families, value their opinions and initiatives, and be positive in working with students and their parents without using defense mechanisms, resulting in the creation of meaningful interpersonal relationships that promote effective communication and honesty between the two sides [33].
- Be genuine and authentic in his/her intentions and feelings. Authenticity is the teacher's ability to be himself, to behave naturally and effortlessly, without using a professional or other persona. It does not judge, it does not evaluate, it does not educate, and remains simple and approachable and not trapped in the role of expert or scientist. Rogers, [50] characteristically stated that: *"All counselors at some point display a particularly 'negative' attitude towards the counselee, but although this seems potentially destructive, it is legitimate because it is a genuine therapeutic reaction"*. Another aspect of authenticity is the harmonious constitution of the educator's psyche. With him/her in this way, the chances of personal unresolved problems being involved in the counseling process are reduced, and the teacher better understands his/her feelings towards the parent or the student when needed.

- Be characterized by unconditional positive recognition-acceptance. This means that the teacher must be receptive and favorably disposed toward the student and the parent. He/she should not criticize and refer only to the negative elements of the student. This presupposes a favorable environment between the two sides so that there is freedom of expression about feelings, thoughts and behaviors [51].
- Be self-revealing. Self-revealing is the process of revealing aspects of the counselor's personality both to himself and to other people he/she trusts. When a person feels trust for his/her fellow man/woman and reveals him/herself to him/her, it helps to create a meaningful interpersonal relationship that will lead to closer and better communication [33]. According to Jourard, [52] "*a truly personal relationship between two people involves revealing oneself to one another with complete and spontaneous honesty*". Thus, a consultant must be distinguished for his willingness to share experiences, skills, and knowledge.

4. Conclusions

The school, in the present training, is perceived as an open system of organized human actions, interdependent systems (school - family - local society), and subsystems (classes - departments - school activity groups - teachers' association - school administration - parents' association - auxiliary staff, etc. etc.). The (SLA) is not a therapist but a facilitator of students' initiatives, an active member in the development and promotion of activities, observance of the group's operating boundaries, strict but fair, listens, feels, and understands the insecurities, and fears of his/her students, shows them his/her real interest so that the relationships that the school groups will develop are pedagogically and systemically therapeutic for its members. Furthermore, teachers as pedagogues are or should also be functionaries of counseling to create the appropriate conditions for the counselees to be able to think, investigate, test, and understand the "how" of the issue that concerns them and through this process of learning more functional ways of dealing with their own reality. Finally, the teacher, with the possibilities and obligations he/she has in the school community, can contribute with his/her way of communication and cooperation to the transformation of the school reality. As a result, today's school system is multicultural, and education procedure is not only learning but also a psychological process. Through the educational process provided not only knowledge but also education, such as the cultivation of the personality and the values of freedom, justice, and truth.

Author Contributions

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