



BULGARIAN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION SOCIETY

# Comparative School Counseling

Volume 1

Proceedings of the International Conference  
on Comparative School Counseling

**2021**



# Comparative School Counseling

Bulgarian Comparative Education Society

© 2021 Bulgarian Comparative Education Society  
© 2021 Individual Authors

ISSN 2738-8484 online



# Comparative School Counseling

Volume 1

Proceedings of the International Conference  
on Comparative School Counseling

2021

All rights reserved.

This edition is protected by the Bulgarian Copyright Law (adopted 1993, amended 1994, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019).

No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society and individual authors.

Title: Comparative School Counseling

Type: Conference Proceedings

Publisher: Bulgarian Comparative Education Society

Place: Sofia, Bulgaria

Year: 2021

Volume: 1

ISSN 2738-8484 online

Editorial Board:

Prof. Dr.habil. Nikolay Popov, Sofia University, Bulgaria

Prof. Emer. Dr. John C. Carey, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elizabeth Thomas, Christ University, India

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Megan M. Krell, Fitchburg State University, USA

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tim Poynton, University of Massachusetts Boston, USA

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Patrick R. Mullen, William & Mary, USA

Dr. Louw de Beer, North-West University, South Africa

Dr. Mark G Harrison, Education University of Hong Kong, China

Dr. Gillian L. S. Hilton, Middlesex University, London, United Kingdom



## Contents

### Preface

#### A Small but Colorful Mosaic of School Counseling Worldwide

7

Nikolay Popov & John C. Carey

### Part 1: School Counseling Policies

#### School Counseling: A Comparative Study in 15 Countries

9

Nikolay Popov & Vera Spasenović

#### When Practice Belies Policy Intent: Cases from Chile, United States, and Turkey

19

Ayşen Köse, Dayana Olavarria, Carol Cohen, Sharon Rallis & John C. Carey

#### Counselling in Schools and Universities in England: Battling the Effects of the Covid Crisis

29

Gillian L. S. Hilton

### Part 2: School Counseling Education & Training

#### A Comparative Study of Pre-service School Counselor Education between Australia, Malta, and Turkey

39

Ayşen Köse, Marilyn Campbell & Ruth Falzon

#### Training School Counselors in Challenging Times: A Faculty's View on Creative Strategies to Meet Practicum and Internship Requirements

51

Sade Smith & George Vera

<b>Training Pedagogy Students for Counseling in Educational Institutions</b>	<b>57</b>
Maja Ljubetić	
<b>School Counseling for Preparing ECD Practitioners in Addressing Children’s Learning Difficulties: A Possible Solution for Job Creation</b>	<b>67</b>
Maphetla Magdeline Machaba	
<b>Part 3: School Counseling Practices</b>	
<b>Considering the Challenges of the Further Development of School Counselling: Experiences from Slovenia</b>	<b>75</b>
Petra Gregorčič Mrvar	
<b>Enable Anti-bullying Program in Hungarian Schools</b>	<b>87</b>
Anna Siegler, Dóra Eszter Várnai, Tamás Hoffmann, Bence Basa & Éva Jármi	
<b>How Education Counselling Services Are Supporting Teachers and Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic</b>	<b>99</b>
Elizabeth Achinewhu-Nworgu	
<b>COVID-19 Outbreak, Mental Health and Psychological Counseling among University Students</b>	<b>109</b>
Gordana Stankovska, Ruvejda Brahma & Dimitar Dimitrovski	
<b>Revisiting Curriculum Change and Youth Development for Entrepreneurship through School Counseling</b>	<b>121</b>
Tebogo Jillian Mampane	

## Preface

### A Small but Colorful Mosaic of School Counseling Worldwide

Nikolay Popov & John C. Carey

This volume contains a collection of selected papers submitted to the Inaugural International Conference on Comparative School Counseling in 2021. The mission of this conference is to develop a new comparative research field that could be called Comparative School Counseling. As Popov and Spasenović note in their paper (p. 10):

*Comparative school counseling could be defined as a multi interdisciplinary research field where research methodology of comparative education is applied to school counseling policy, practice and education. Comparative school counseling shall comparatively describe, juxtapose and analyze various aspects of school counseling in contemporary education systems worldwide.*

*Firstly, such a research field could contribute to a better understanding of common features, similarities and differences in school counseling worldwide. Secondly, it could support the transfer and adoption of best school counseling practices and innovations between countries. Thirdly, it could help improving school counseling training programs at colleges and universities, especially in countries where such programs are not well developed. Fourthly, it could inform policy makers while creating laws, regulations, instructions and recommendations on school counseling. Fifthly, it could add value to comparative research methodologies in humanities and social sciences.*

This volume is divided into 3 parts and includes 12 papers written by 25 authors. Readers can find comparative and case studies, theoretical and empirical explorations, quantitative and qualitative methods, descriptive and analytical approaches, and interesting data on school counseling worldwide. Problems of school counseling in nearly 20 countries are discussed in the papers.

Part 1 is devoted to school counseling policies and consists of three papers. Popov and Spasenović present results of a comparative international study on some aspects of school counseling in 15 countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech



Republic, Denmark, Ireland, Malta, North Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Köse, Olavarria, Cohen, Rallis and Carey illustrate three cases from Turkey, Chile, and the United States to demonstrate how “Policies that are intended to facilitate school counseling practice often fail to achieve their intended results and sometimes have unintended negative consequences that actually impede effective practice” (p. 19). Hilton critically examines counseling provision in schools and universities in England and explains how school counseling could help battle the effects of the current pandemic crisis.

Part 2 focuses on school counseling education and training, and is comprised of four papers. Köse, Campbell and Falzon provide a comparative study of pre-service school counselor education in Australia, Malta, and Turkey. After investigating some important issues, the authors conclude that, “This peep into these three countries’ experience of school counseling reflects the need for excellence and integrity of the profession” (p. 48). Smith and Vera provide an overview of the Masters of School Counseling program at Barry University (USA) and describe the school counseling specialization course requirements. Ljubetić presents an example of how Pedagogy students in Split (Croatia) are trained for school counselors within a specific course on partnership between families and educational institutions. Machaba conceptually explores how early childhood development practitioners are prepared through counseling for job creation.

Part 3 concentrates on school counseling practices and has five papers. Gregorčič Mrvar explains the specific features of school counseling in Slovenia and emphasizes the obvious advantages. Siegler, Várnai, Hoffmann, Basa and Jármi present an example of how a European anti-bullying program is implemented in Hungarian schools. Achinewhu-Nworgu examines the role of school counselors in supporting young people and teaching staff during the pandemic. Stankovska, Brahma and Dimitrovski aim at considering “the need for implementation of a mental health assessment, support and psychological counseling among students” (p. 109). Mampane makes contributions to the conversation about career counseling for entrepreneurial skills within the school system.

Taken together, the papers in this volume create a small but beautiful, intriguing and colorful mosaic of school counseling practice from around the world. They foreshadow the advances in our understanding of effective school counseling practice, effective school counseling education and appropriate school counseling policy will improve as the newly conceived field of Comparative School Counseling matures and advances.

Prof. Dr.habil. Nikolay Popov, Sofia University, Bulgaria

Prof. Dr. John C. Carey (Emeritus), University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA



# Part 1

## School Counseling Policies

### School Counseling: A Comparative Study in 15 Countries

Nikolay Popov & Vera Spasenović

#### Abstract

This paper presents results of a comparative international study on some aspects of school counseling in the following 15 countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland, Malta, North Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The authors explain the multifunctional character of school counseling, give an idea of establishing a research field that could be called 'comparative school counseling studies', show the original terms in individual countries, and compare six aspects of school counseling: 1) legislative framework; 2) position requirements; 3) role of school counselors; 4) functions of school counselors; 5) interaction; and 6) ratio. The paper concludes with a long list of qualities school counselors are expected to possess. This is a document study chiefly based on examining, systematizing and comparing national documents (laws, reports, instructions, advices, position requirements, ministerial orders, recommendations, strategies, and statistics) on school counseling.

Keywords: school counseling, comparative school counseling study, school counselors' position requirements, role and functions of school counselors

#### Introduction

It could be said that school counseling is the most multifunctional position in the school system, with too many variable tasks, with a huge number of functions and a large circle of contacts. There is no other position in the school system that is given so many roles. A school counselor is expected to care about the mental, emotional, social and academic development of students; to prevent them from various risks; to discover, diagnose and understand the essence of problems students face. At the same time, a school counselor should be loyal to the school authority, to be collegial to school teachers, to mediate between students, parents and teachers in case of conflicts, to propose problem solving decisions, to define strategies for

improving the school organization and climate, to organize individual and group consultations for all participants in school life, and to look for support from social and psycho-medical institutions, and to even contact police and court offices when necessary.

This paper is a revised and updated version of three previous coauthored studies by N. Popov and V. Spasenović (Popov & Spasenović, 2018a, 2018b, 2020). The 2018 editions serve as teaching manuals to students in Bachelor and Master's programs and in-service teacher training programs.

The study examines school counseling in the following 15 countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland, Malta, North Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

## Comparative school counseling

The mission of the above cited publications and the purpose of this paper is to put the beginning of a process of establishing a comparative research field that could be called 'comparative school counseling'.

Comparative school counseling could be defined as a multi interdisciplinary research field where research methodology of comparative education is applied to school counseling policy, practice and education. Comparative school counseling shall comparatively describe, juxtapose and analyze various aspects of school counseling in contemporary education systems worldwide.

Firstly, such a research field could contribute to a better understanding of common features, similarities and differences in school counseling worldwide. Secondly, it could support the transfer and adoption of best school counseling practices and innovations between countries. Thirdly, it could help improving school counseling training programs at colleges and universities, especially in countries where such programs are not well developed. Fourthly, it could inform policy makers while creating laws, regulations, instructions and recommendations on school counseling. Fifthly, it could add value to comparative research methodologies in humanities and social sciences.

Main aspects of school counseling that could comparatively be comprised are:

- school counseling policy at national, regional and local level;
- school counseling education and training at Bachelor, Master's and Doctoral level – curricula, disciplines syllabi, practicums, exams, thesis defense, additional qualification, in-service licensing, etc.;
- school counseling practices and innovations at primary, secondary and tertiary level;
- school counseling as an occupation – legislation, position requirements, role, functions, interaction with other specialists and institutions, ratio (number of students per a school counselor).

Every comparative international study of school counseling usually faces many difficulties, including:

- the position of school counselor, although being similar across the world, often has different role, functions and tasks;
- in the school systems, in parallel with school counselors, there are many other school or out-of-school based specialists (such as school psychologist or psychotherapist, guidance teacher, speech therapist, social worker, career adviser, professional orientation consultant, etc.) whose functions are often mixed with those of school counselors; and
- in most cases, finding all actual national documentation that regulates school counseling is a very difficult process.

## The term

The term ‘school counselor’ has different names in the national school systems: student or education counselor (Austria), pedagogical counselor (Bulgaria), pedagogical-psychological counselor (Denmark), pedagogue-psychologist (Russia), expert associate (Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia), school counselor (Czech Republic, Malta, Slovenia, Spain, UK, USA), psychological counselor (Turkey), and guidance counselor (Ireland). In this paper, the term ‘school counselor / school counseling’ is used as a common term for all countries.

The original terms in the 15 countries are listed below.

Note: for Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Russia the Cyrillic letters are replaced with their Latin equivalents.

*Table 1: Original terms*

Austria	Schüler- und Bildungsberater
Bulgaria	Pedagogicheski savetnik
Croatia	Stručni suradnik
Czech Republic	Výchovný poradce / školní metodik prevence
Denmark	Psykologer / Konsulenter / Uddannelsesvejleder
Ireland	Guidance counsellor
Malta	School counsellor
North Macedonia	Struchen sorabotnik
Russia	Pedagog-psiholog
Serbia	Stručni saradnik
Slovenia	Svetovalni delavec
Spain	Orientador escolar
Turkey	Psikolojik Danışman
UK	School counsellor
USA	School counselor

## Comparisons of school counseling aspects

The following six aspects of school counseling are compared: 1) legislative framework; 2) position requirements; 3) role of school counselors; 4) functions of school counselors; 5) interaction; and 6) ratio.

### *Legislative framework*

In Bulgaria, Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey the governance of the school systems is generally centralized. Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey apply stronger centralization, which means that job requirements, professional activities and duties of school counselors are defined at the national (ministerial) level. The centralization in Bulgaria is soft, which means that school counseling details are decided on both national and school level.

In Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland, Malta, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States the governance of the school systems is decentralized. These countries can be divided into 3 groups:

- Countries with decentralized school system governance and centralized regulation of school counseling. Such countries are Austria, the Czech Republic, Malta, Russia, and Spain. School counseling is regulated by the ministries of education of these countries.
- Countries with decentralized school system governance and decentralized regulation of school counseling. Such countries are Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. The ministries/departments of education of these countries regularly publish documents on school counseling that are frameworks and give general recommendations, while the concrete regulation is performed by municipalities and local authorities. In the United Kingdom, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy offers training and accreditation of school counselors. In Ireland, these functions are performed by the National Centre for Guidance in Education.
- A country with decentralized school system governance and national non-governmental regulation of school counseling. Such a country is the United States, where the American School Counselor Association has created its ASCA National Model that should be followed by all American school counselors (ASCA, n. d.).

### *Position requirements*

Regarding the required type of higher education (specialty) applicants for school counselors must have, the countries can be divided into 3 groups:

- Countries where a degree in Education (or Pedagogy) is required. It is observed in Austria, Ireland, and Malta. The United States can also be included in this group due to the fact that the school counseling programs are often organized at faculties/colleges of education.

- Countries where a degree in Psychology (as a main or additional specialty) is required. Such countries are Russia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.
- Countries where applicants may have a degree in Education (Pedagogy) or Psychology. It can be seen in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Spain.

Regarding the academic degree applicants for school counselors must have, the countries can be grouped as follows:

- Countries where applicants may have both Bachelor and Master’s degree. These countries are Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, North Macedonia, Russia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The United States can also be included in this group because 45 states require a Master’s degree, while in 5 states a Bachelor degree is enough (ASCA, n. d.).
- Countries where applicants should have a Master’s degree. Such countries are Croatia, Ireland, Malta, Serbia, Slovenia, and Spain.























Regarding any specialization (additional qualification) applicants must have, the countries can be grouped as follows:
















- Countries where applicants for school counselors must have any additional qualification for school counselors in addition to their academic degrees. It happens in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland, Malta, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Various models of obtaining additional qualification can be seen – specializations in Bachelor and Master’s programs, in-service training programs, etc.
- Countries where no additional qualification for school counselors is required. It happens in Bulgaria, Croatia, North Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, and Turkey.

Regarding licensing (also met as certification or accreditation) of school counselors, the countries can again be divided into 2 groups:








- Countries with no licensing – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, North Macedonia, Malta, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, and Turkey.
- Countries with licensing required – Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Table 2: Position requirements

Austria				
Bulgaria				
Croatia				
Czech Republic				
Denmark				
Ireland				
Malta				
North Macedonia				

Russia				
Serbia				
Slovenia				
Spain				
Turkey				
UK				
USA				

Legend:

-  Education
-  Psychology
-  Education or Psychology
-  Bachelor or Master's degree
-  Master's degree
-  Specialization required
-  Licensing required

### *Role of school counselors*

Examining this aspect, it can definitely be said that the role of school counselors has many common characteristics in all countries. The role usually includes:

- supporting students in their psychological, academic and social development;
- consulting students, parents, and teachers;
- resolving conflicts between teachers and students;
- helping students to identify their abilities, capacities and interests;
- preventing dropout;
- supporting the school organization and the teaching/learning process;
- advising students about their career orientation and decisions;
- collaborating with school staff (principals, teachers, other specialists); and
- maintaining school counseling documentation.

### *Functions of school counselors*

The comparative review of a large body of documents (ASCA, n. d.; BACP, n. d.; Bundesministerium für Bildung..., 2017; Danish Agency..., 2014; Jurić et al, 2001; Ministarstvo prosvete i nauke, 2012; Ministerstvo školství, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2003; Ministry for Education and Employment, n. d.; Ministry of Education and Science, 2019; Ministry of Education and Science, 2016; Ministry of National Education, 2020; Mrvar Gregorčič & Mažgon, 2016; National Centre for Guidance..., n. d.) shows that the following functions can be outlined as common for all or most countries:

- identification function – diagnosing psychological, learning and social difficulties students have, and identifying gifted students and students with special needs;
- information function – giving information to all school actors according to their needs;
- support function – supporting personal development of students;
- consultation function – organizing individual and group consultations with students, parents, teachers and other school members;
- orientation function – helping students to get a better orientation about next level of education, vocational qualification or work market;
- prevention function – preventing students from possible risks and dropout;
- correction function – working with students who need additional help in coordination with other teachers and specialists;
- mediation function – solving problems between students, teachers, parents and principals;
- assessment function – monitoring the school process and assessing the quality of school work;
- development function – creating tools for optimizing the school work; and
- research function – getting knowledge of changes, best practices and innovations for improving the school work.

It should be clarified that this list of functions is rather relative. In some countries, these functions are subordinated – some are main, while others are sub-functions or activities/tasks. It was our intention here to outline the big scope of functions of school counseling.

### *Interaction*

It is clear that school counselors need to interact with a large circle of persons and organizations, such as: students, parents, teachers, principals, other school based or out-of-school based specialists (social workers, psychologists, speech therapists, doctors, etc.), municipal and state institutions, non-governmental youth and children organizations, centers for professional information, police and court authorities. In Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States school counselors are expected to contact universities and colleges, representatives of local business, and members of the local church. A specific feature in the United Kingdom is the cooperation between school counselors and the school pastoral system (BACP, n. d.).

### *Ratio*

The number of students at school per one school counselor ratio averagely varies between 250 and 500 students. The best standard (i.e. the lowest ratio) is announced in Croatia – schools with about 180 students must have 2 school counselors, schools with 180 to 500 students must have 3 school counselors, and schools with more than 500 students must have 4 school counselors. In the United States, the average standard is 250 students per one school counselor. In Malta, the



standard is 300 students. In Ireland, schools having up to 500 students must appoint at least one school counselor, while schools with more than 500 students must have one school counselor per every 250 students. In Spain, this number is 800, while in Turkey is about 1000. In Bulgaria, Russia and the other countries the usual standard is 500 students. However, in Bulgaria, the Ministry of Education and Science plans to decrease this number up to 400. The appointment of school counsellors in England is not statutory merely advised by the DfE but left to individual schools to decide and numbers of school counsellors have decreased since 2010 (see Hilton's paper).

## Conclusion

The paper shortly and comparatively presented some aspects of school counseling in 15 countries (14 European countries and the United States). It is clearly declared in national documents (laws, strategies, reports, regulations, instructions, advices, ministerial orders, recommendations, etc.) of all countries that school counseling is a very important position at schools that will play a more and more significant role in the development of education. According to the United States Department of Labor (2018) the number of school counselors in USA will increase with 13% until 2026, which is the highest increase among all professions.

It could be summarized that in the countries included in this study the school counselor is considered the specialist who shall: 1) support the psychological, academic and social development of students; 2) try to resolve conflicts between all actors in school life; 3) help students to face personal problems; 4) consult students, parents, teachers and principals; and 5) act as a coordinator of various school activities. It was mentioned in the Introduction of this paper that school counseling is the most multifunctional position in the school system. The huge diversity of functions listed above shows an abnormal spectrum of problems school counselors should try to solve.

There are also certain differences in school counselors' work. While in some countries the focus is on supporting students in their personal development and learning (Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom), in others the equal attention is paid to the successful realization of teaching and school work and the improvement of the overall functioning of the school as an institution (Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia). In addition, the dominant functions or duties of school counselors vary across the countries – in some cases it is mental health care (the United Kingdom), elsewhere academic and career guidance and counseling (Austria, Ireland), prevention (Russia), etc. In some countries, the United Kingdom and the United States are typical examples among them, there are career teachers/counselors/advisers in secondary schools who are responsible for career education and liaising with career providers.

It is evident in position requirements, ministerial instructions, school forums, and associations' advice used in the 15 countries that national education policy makers, principals, students, parents, and inspectors expect from school counselors to be: active, balancing, careful, communicative, competent, complex, confident,

creative, curious, defending, discreet, educative, experienced, exact, flexible, honest, inspiring, interesting, kind, learning, loyal, moral, motivating, multifunctional, objective, open, original, patient, positive, reliable, searching, seeing, sensitive, smiling, social, supportive, sympathetic, tolerant, understanding, useful, variable.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Prof. Dr. James Ogunleye (UK), Dr. Gillian Hilton (UK), Prof. Dr. Klara Skubic Ermenc (Slovenia), Prof. Dr. Gordana Stankovska (North Macedonia), Prof. Dr. Karen L. Biraimah (USA), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Susan M. Yelich Biniecki (USA), Prof. Dr. Kenneth F. Hughey (USA), Prof. Dr. Peter L. Schneller (USA), Dr. Victor Martinelli (Malta), Assist. Prof. Dr. Gordana Djigić (Serbia), Prof. Dr. Tatyana Korsakova (Russia), Maria Popova (Bulgaria/Germany), Dr. Siniša Kušić (Croatia), and Melika Illim (Denmark) for providing information and sources on school counseling in their countries.

## References

- American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (n. d.): <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/> (Accessed 28 January 2020).
- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (n. d.): <https://www.bacp.co.uk/> (Accessed 30 January 2020).
- Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung (2017): *Grundsatzertlass für Schüler- und Bildungsberatung*. Rundschreiben Nr. 22/2017 des Bundesministeriums für Bildung. [https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/ministerium/rs/2017\\_22.pdf?68k0bf](https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/ministerium/rs/2017_22.pdf?68k0bf) (Accessed 15 September 2018).
- Danish Agency for Higher Education (2014): *Guidance in Education – the educational guidance system in Denmark*. Copenhagen: Euroguidance Denmark.
- Jurić, V., Mušanović, M., Staničić, S. & Vrgoč, H. (2001): *Koncepcija razvojne pedagoške djelatnosti stručnih suradnika – prijedlog*. Zagreb: Ministarstvo prosvjete i športa.
- Ministarstvo prosvete i nauke [of Serbia] (2012): Pravilnik o programu svih oblika rada stručnih saradnika. *Službeni glasnik - Prosvetni glasnik*, br. 5/2012.
- Ministerstvo školství [of Czech Republic] (2005): *Vyhláška o poskytování poradenských služeb ve školách a školských poradenských zařízeních*, Vyhláška č. 72/2005 Sb. <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-72#p5> (Accessed 26 December 2020).
- Ministry for Education and Employment [of Malta] (n. d.): *Counselling Services in Schools*. [https://education.gov.mt/en/education/student-services/Pages/Psycho-Social\\_Services/Counselling\\_Services\\_in\\_Schools.aspx](https://education.gov.mt/en/education/student-services/Pages/Psycho-Social_Services/Counselling_Services_in_Schools.aspx) (Accessed 28 January 2020).
- Ministry of Education [of Russia] (2003): *Letter of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation of 27.06.2003, № 28-51-513/16 on methodological recommendations on psychological-pedagogical support to students*. Moscow: Ministry of Education. [In Russian]
- Ministry of Education and Science [of Bulgaria] (2019): Instruction No 15 on the status and professional development of teachers, principals and other education specialists. *State Gazette*, No 61 / 02.08.2019. [In Bulgarian]
- Ministry of Education and Science [of North Macedonia] (2016): *Regulations on basic professional competences of school counselors*. [http://mon.gov.mk/images/Osnovni\\_profesionalni\\_kompetencii\\_MON.pdf](http://mon.gov.mk/images/Osnovni_profesionalni_kompetencii_MON.pdf) [In Macedonian] (Accessed 22 September 2018).
- Ministry of National Education [of Turkey] (2020): *Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışma Hizmetleri Yönetmeliği*.

- [http://orgm.meb.gov.tr/meb\\_iys\\_dosyalar/2020\\_08/14231603\\_Rehberlik\\_ve\\_Psikolojik\\_Danismanlik\\_Hizmetleri\\_YonetmeliYi\\_2.pdf](http://orgm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2020_08/14231603_Rehberlik_ve_Psikolojik_Danismanlik_Hizmetleri_YonetmeliYi_2.pdf) (Accessed 23 December 2020).
- Mrvar Gregorčič, P. & Mažgon, J. (2016): Sodelovanje šolske svetovalne službe s posamezniki in institucijami v skupnosti. *Sodobna pedagogika*, No 1, 38-57.
- National Centre for Guidance in Education (n. d.): *Becoming a Guidance Counsellor*. <https://www.ncge.ie/ncge/becoming-guidance-counsellor> (Accessed 9 March 2019).
- Popov, N. & Spasenović, V. (2018a): *The school counselor: a comparative review in 12 countries*. Sofia: Bulgarian Comparative Education Society. [In Bulgarian]
- Popov, N. & Spasenović, V. (2018b): *Stručni saradnik u školi: komparativni pregled za 12 zemalja*. Sofija: Bugarsko društvo za komparativnu pedagogiju.
- Popov, N. & Spasenović, V. (2020): School Counseling: A Comparative Study in 12 Countries. *BCES Conference Books*, Vol. 18. Sofia: Bulgarian Comparative Education Society, 34-41.
- United States Department of Labor (2018): *School and career counselors: Summary*. Bureau of Labor Statistic. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/school-and-career-counselors.htm> (Accessed 15 September 2018).

#### Author affiliation

Prof. Dr.habil. Nikolay Popov, Sofia University, Bulgaria

Prof. Dr. Vera Spasenović, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Please cite this publication as:

Popov, N. & Spasenović, V. (2021): School Counseling: A Comparative Study in 15 Countries. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 9-18.

# When Practice Belies Policy Intent: Cases from Turkey, Chile, and the United States

Ayşen Köse, Dayana Olavarria, Carol Cohen, Sharon Rallis & John C. Carey

## Abstract

Policies that are intended to facilitate school counseling practice often fail to achieve their intended results and sometimes have unintended negative consequences that actually impede effective practice. This paper illustrates three such cases from Turkey, Chile, and the United States and analyzes the reasons behind policy failures. The paper also identifies some important considerations for effective policy development and implementation.

Keywords: school-based counseling, policy, policy development, evaluation, Turkey, Chile, United States

## Introduction

Policy articulates desired ways of being for a society. Ideally, policy is meant to serve the public good. Starting as a broad statement of values, policy describes a set of conditions preferable to those currently in place. Embedded within any policy we should be able to find a *theory of action*, that is, a causal statement that *if we do X, Y will result* (Rallis & Carey, 2017).

We offer three examples: 1) If we teach character strengths, root values, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills through classroom guidance lessons, students' academic, career, and social-emotional outcomes will improve (Turkey); 2) If we require schools to have psychosocial interventions, the social-emotional climate will improve; if the social emotional climate improves, learning will increase (Chile); and 3) If students who are emotionally dysregulated in class go to the "quiet" room, they can take space, use coping strategies, and with staff support, regulate their emotions (United States).

However, designing, enacting, and implementing such cause and effect policies is not a clear and linear process. Written policy tends to be general and broad, thus, open to multiple and varying interpretations across individuals and contexts. Policymakers ignore prerequisite factors such as funding, human resources, and training. Policymakers also often fail to formatively evaluate policy implementation to determine whether if the anticipated actions actually occur. Relationships between policy and practice become convoluted and unpredictable, so programs meant to implement policies often yield troubling results.

Around the world, the work of school-based counselors and counselor educators is shaped by *policies* that communities and governments create and attempt to impose in ensure effective practice (Morshed & Carey, 2020). At times, these policies actually support effective practice; often they constrain or impede practice. Mismatches between policy and implementation occur. The three policies above illustrate this conundrum.

## Case: Turkey

Classroom Guidance Programs (CGPs) are considered an important element of the comprehensive school counseling services. CGPs for all grade levels were designed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to improve social-emotional and career development, and the academic achievement of students (MoNE, 2018). The MoNE asserts that CGPs have been prepared based on basic principles of Turkish national education expressed in the National Education Basic Law No. 1739. The CGPs have been implemented for a long time in Turkey. The immediate key outcome indicators of the CGPs for all grade levels are clearly defined by the MoNE as “A program that aims to systematically present activities through group work in classrooms to meet the pre-defined program outcomes in the areas of students’ social-emotional, academic and career development” (MoNE, 2020, Article 3). The MoNE assumes that teaching certain skills, values, knowledge, and attitudes through the CGP will lead to academic, career, and social-emotional development of students.

In Turkey, the educational system is highly centralized, and therefore the CGPs framework and outcome indicators are determined by the MoNE. Classroom guidance teachers are responsible for implementing CGPs in collaboration with school counselors.

Although CGPs are prepared with good intention and with a solid rationale, they are not implemented in practice as intended. The examination system in Turkey is addressed in literature as one of the causes of this policy-practice gap. Nationwide central exams have an important place in the Turkish education system. Students must get a good score from these highly competitive nationwide central exams to be accepted into a school that provides high quality education. The literature indicates that teachers are usually under pressure to cover course curriculum in order to prepare students for the content of these examinations, and therefore, both teachers and students are reluctant to spend time related to the CGP (Öztürk, Esen & Siyez, 2020). Since success in these examinations is so critical for students, many things in the education system other than preparing students for the examination are of lesser importance.

As previously stated, classroom guidance teachers hold primary responsibility for implementing this program. Therefore, the knowledge and skills of these teachers are defined as key resources in the program logic model. Yet, from the literature, another reason for the gap between policy and practice is due to lack of competence of classroom guidance teachers in dealing with the subjects that constitute the content

of the program (Demirel, 2010; Öztürk, Esen & Siyez, 2020; Şarлак, 2019). For example, a wide variety of topics, such as ‘setting career and major selection goals’, ‘bullying’ and ‘teaching empathy’ are included in the program. However, classroom guidance teachers are not always equipped in these areas to provide assistance. In addition, teachers find instructional materials and activities used to teach the CGP objectives to be inadequate (Demirel, 2010; Öztürk, Esen & Siyez, 2020; Şarлак, 2019). It is clearly evident that the policymaker’s decisions are flawed by the assumption that teachers can easily teach the CGP subject matter with the guidance of exemplary activities which is provided.

Coordination and teamwork of classroom guidance teachers and school counselors is vital for the CGPs to be carried out as intended. The regulation states that “school counselors approve the classroom guidance plans, and monitor its implementation by the classroom guidance teachers”, and “implement activities that require special knowledge and skills in the field of psychological counseling within the scope of the classroom guidance program” (MoNE, 2020, Article 3). Moreover, school counselors are also responsible for giving support to classroom guidance teachers when they need any help in presenting the CGP content (MoNE, 2020). Even though input of school counselors is considered essential in the program logic model, the literature indicates that in many schools, counselor to student ratio is so high and/or school counselors are so overloaded with other duties, that they fail to give the needed support to the teachers and to monitor the program implementation (Karataş & Baltacı, 2013; Demirel, 2010; Öztürk, Esen & Siyez, 2020).

The unwillingness of classroom guidance teachers to implement CGPs is also a factor that hinders the implementation of the program (Karataş & Baltacı, 2013; Demirel, 2010; Gürgan, 2020; Şarлак, 2019; Tuzgöl Dost, 2020). Classroom guidance teachers display negative attitudes and beliefs toward the CGP for several reasons. For example, many believe the program creates so much paperwork, or they may not believe in its effectiveness. These negative attitudes create a low level of commitment, which in turn impedes the implementation of the program. Many times, teachers merely fill out the CGP documentation as required classroom protocol without actually fulfilling the activities at all. This, then, makes the CGP policy symbolic rather than a program serving a useful purpose.

## Case: Chile

This case describes the acts and policies that influence Psychosocial Interventions (PI), focusing on Educational Preferential Subsidies (SEP) Law (MINEDUC, 2008, No. 20248), School Climate Policy (NPSC) (MINEDUC, 2019), and School Violence Law (2011), and identifies and illustrates some of the issues of implementing social and psychological support within the schooling system. Problems related to the policies and to the practice are explored.

The SEP law provides extra funding to schools that serve most vulnerable students; in exchange, these institutions need to implement improvement plans and



accountability practices. Also, schools are required to increase academic outcomes and other school climate indicators or suffer penalties if goals are not accomplished (Bellei & García Huidobro, 2006). Particularly, SEP resources in the school climate area could be spent on “psychological support and social assistance to students and their families” (MINEDUC, 2008, p. 7). Hence, schools started to hire social workers and psychologists (psychosocial pairs or PP) to carry out the so-called PI.

The policy emphasizes that positive school climate is fundamental for ensuring students learning, participation in class, and obtaining positive academic outcomes (Thapa et al., 2012; Wang & Degol, 2016). In fact, it is relevant from a human rights perspective because building a favorable school climate contributes to students’ emotional, social, and academic development (UNESCO, 2013). Thus, the PP’s role can be crucial for developing supportive interventions for the most disadvantaged students (Gatica, 2016; Cádiz & Manriquez, 2015). Consequently, the SEP policy aimed to compensate for the greater costs of educating the socioeconomically disadvantaged. In a more specific manner, the PI policy logic is that disadvantaged students require extra support. At the institutionalized level, PI support is expected to build positive school climate and increase the measure on school climate, with the result that learning will increase.

However, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have criticized these school climate policies. For example, López et al. (2018) explain difficulties between definitions of school climate and evaluation indicators by MINEDUC. Additionally, the MINEDUC published the NPSC 2019; this last edition focuses on managing school climate plans, introducing some elements related to PI, describing the positions, and briefly regulating PP’s multidisciplinary work without clarifying a model of intervention.

Similarly, Magendzo, Toledo and Gutiérrez (2013) stated that opposing perspectives compose the Act of School Violence. One perspective is control and sanction, establishing roles, responsibilities, and protocols to avoid penalties. Another view is to encourage the democratic process, emphasizing negotiated agreements (Magendzo, Toledo & Gutiérrez, 2013). Likewise, the act produces a system of cost and benefits for schools, providing the reduction of school violence treatment to follow the administrative process to avoid fees (Carrasco, López & Estay, 2012). Hence, these two opposite perspectives coexist, creating a paradoxical scenario between building a positive school climate and implementing punitive measures.

At the level of practitioners, studies affirm that professionals warn that the accountability process altered PI to focus strongly on producing evidence of having accomplished the improvement plan (Cárcamo-Vásquez, Jarpa-Arriagada & Castañeda-Díaz, 2020; Obando & Aicon, 2019) and hindered proposed new models as solutions to the contextual problems (Carrasco et al., 2019). Furthermore, studies show a weak Ministerial and local administrative support for PI and a lack of specific guidelines (Gatica, 2016; Carrasco et al., 2019). Moreover, psychologists’ role tends to individualize the problems and follow a clinic-medical model (López et al., 2011). Similarly, Apablaza (2017) states that specialized teams introduced a new type of

knowledge, using the diagnosis to develop a *valid truth* about vulnerabilities, students, and families that displaces pedagogic expertise and develops dynamics of inclusion-exclusion.

Hence, the school climate policies present difficulties in conceptualization and measurement and introduce different mandates between supporting positive school climate and promoting sanction and penalty approach. Additionally, in practice, the PI is affected by the accountability process, a lack of institutional support, and an individualistic intervention model. Consequently, even when PI's introduction came from a policy with an inclusion and equity approach, developing research to understand the gaps between the act and the PI's implementation is still essential. Specifically, the link between the PI and its contribution to building a positive school climate remains unclear. This gap between the policies and the PI implementation needs further investigation because it affects school communities and influences students' trajectories.

## Case: United States

A small suburban public school district in the United States is committed to social, educational and community-based inclusion of students with emotional diagnoses. In support of this policy, the schools use a program called LINKS whose theory of action is: *if students are provided a safe, supportive environment that fosters positive connections with trustworthy adults, they will be able to apply learned skills to optimize their social emotional learning within their school community.*

In practice, the model does not work in the middle school. Two major problems exist with the program in that setting: 1) how students access the program; 2) what happens when students get to the space. Lack of consistency and teacher rationale present challenges related to how student get to the LINKS room. In some cases, if a student is acting out (refusing to do work, speaking loudly, or is disrespectful), the classroom teacher will send the student to the LINKS room. Teachers treat the decision as punishment while conveying the message that sending students to the LINKS room is better than sending them to the office. Thus, the teacher removes a *disruption*, not a student with disruptive behavior, from the classroom without addressing the problematic behavior. The student may be acting out because the work is too difficult, the student is bored or is seeking attention; however, the teacher avoids examining the behavior. By sending students to the program, teachers fail to examine and address antecedent behaviors or any possible triggers. "Go to LINKS" is an easy command that presumably allows the teacher to return her attention back to the class at hand and removes the responsibility from the teacher. For example, if directions are unclear and a student shouts, "This is stupid!", the teacher may simply tell the student to leave the room without asking why he said this. The teacher removes herself from the equation and may justify her actions by reporting the student was dysregulated and simply acted out. On the other hand, some teachers refuse to let a student go to LINKS when the student requests it. This teacher may



report the student was not dysregulated or will claim the student only asked to leave the room as a way to avoid work. In these cases, the student may then escalate behaviors until the teacher is compelled to address them. In this case, the student may be instructed, “Go to the office!” where *punishment* is then expected.

In both scenarios the motives are similar, and the results are the same. Either, the teacher does not respect student behaviors as a function of the classroom or ignores that the student may have an emotional disability. In the former, the teacher is not questioning why a student acts out but is reacting to the behavior, not the cause. In the latter case, the teacher does not understand what this student’s emotional disability is and how it presents in the classroom. Either way the teacher misses out on an opportunity to help the student understand her disability or use appropriate coping skills to regulate himself. In the first scenario the teacher is using LINKS as a punishment, not understanding why the student is acting out. In the second scenario the teacher is not using LINKS appropriately, denying the student access to therapeutic support by sending her to the office to be punished. In both cases the student’s needs are not being met. The student is not allowed appropriate access to the therapeutic classroom.

The second problem with this program is what happens when the student arrives in the LINKS room. At least four scenarios occur, only one of which is positive. The positive scenario is when the student arrives to the room a trained staff member greets him, helps him to de-escalate and use appropriate coping skills. Unfortunately, sometimes when a student is sent to the room, a sign on the door reads: “LINKS is closed”. This happens because the teacher hastily sent the student without calling to confirm that a staff member is present in the LINKS room. Other times, the student arrives to a staffed room, but the staff member does not choose an appropriate method for helping the student. Perhaps the student is angry, the staff member assumes he was disruptive, and simply tells him to do work. The student, in a heightened state, is unable to focus on the schoolwork and then gets into a power struggle with the staff member. In another situation, the student arrives to the room, and the staff member directs the student to sit for five minutes to “calm down”. This action is appropriate until the staff member repeatedly asks the student if she is “ok”, well before the five minutes expire, causing the student to re-engage in negative behaviors. With the exception of the first scenario, the objective of providing a safe environment that allows student to apply learned skills is not achieved.

The overarching failure of the policy of sending students to a therapeutic classroom when dysregulated is due to poorly trained staff. Classroom teachers are not instructed how to approach students with an emotional disability, when to use LINKS, and how to refer students. The paraprofessionals in the program are not trained in how to address students in different states of dysregulation. Finally, the adjustment counselor is not trained to train staff members how to be best approach each individual student.

## Analysis and conclusions

All three of these scenarios illustrate instances where policies fail to achieve their desired intent and actually detract from school-based counselors' ability to help students. We suggest that these failures resulted from two all too common policymaking practices: basing a policy on a "naïve" and under-developed theory of action or "logic model" and failing to formatively evaluate policy implementation.

The Chile and US cases represent prime examples of policymaking that is based policy on a "naïve" and under-developed theory of action. The Chile case illustrates how a fuzzy definition of key element of the theory of action (i.e. school climate) led to multiple interpretations of appropriate practice and widespread use of conflicting approaches—many of which would not actually be expected to align with the desired policy objective. The US case illustrates the use of a theory of action that is "naïve" in several respects including its assumptions that classroom teachers either already had or would automatically develop the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to make decisions about the appropriateness of sending students to a therapeutic classroom and to employ an effective process referral. It also naively assumed that school-based counselors in the therapeutic classrooms had the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to work effectively with a broad range of students who would arrive on a haphazard "schedule". Fleshing out the theory of action before formulating policy would have identified many of the complexities involved in implementation and would have identified needed supports (e.g. procedures to train teachers in referral practices) to help insure an implementation that would have led to improved practice. Engaging school-based practitioners (in this case especially classroom teachers and school-based counselors) in the process of elaborating a full logic model would have been especially helpful.

The Turkish case is a prime example of what can happen when policy is implemented without a formative evaluation. In this case, several factors conspired to lead to policy failure (e.g. teachers and students reluctance to allocate time for program participation because of the pressure to devote maximal time to instructional activities that seem more directly connected to academic achievement; and, school-based counselors' inability to fully implement the program due to conflicting responsibilities and work overload). These impediments to effective program implementation would have been readily identified in a formative evaluation of implementation leading to modifications in policy and/or its mode of implementation. This formative evaluation could have been conducted with a small group of schools prior to full roll out of the policy or as the first phase of policy implementation. While there are some costs in both time and money associated with such formative evaluation, the alternative is wasting educational resources on the widespread implementations that cannot produce their intended benefits.

In all three cases described in this paper policy failure was anticipatable before implementation and/or could be easily detected at early stages of implementation. Taking care to 1) fully develop the theory of action underlying school-based

counseling policy using input from stakeholders, and 2) formatively evaluating school-based counseling policy implementation at its earliest stages are two effective strategies for ensuring that policies actually result in intended improvements in practice and contribute to the public good.

## References

- Apablaza, M. (2017): Prácticas 'Psi' en el espacio escolar: Nuevas formas de subjetivación de las diferencias. *Psicoperspectivas. Individuo y Sociedad*, 16(3), 52-63.
- Bellei, C. & García Huidobro, J. (2006): ¿Remedio para la inequidad? La subvención escolar preferencial. *Revista Mensaje*, 547, 1-7.
- Cádiz, J. & Manriquez, L. (2015): Configuración del trabajo interprofesional en psicólogos y trabajadores sociales en establecimientos municipales enmarcados en la LEY SEP. Tesis de pregrado, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile.
- Cárcamo-Vásquez, H., Jarpa-Arriagada, C. G. & Castañeda-Díaz, M. T. (2020): Duplas Psicosociales. Demandas y desafíos desde la visión de los profesionales que intervienen en las escuelas de la Región de Ñuble. *Propósitos y Representaciones*, 8(2), e324.
- Carrasco, C., López, V. & Estay, C. (2012): Análisis crítico de la Ley de Violencia Escolar de Chile. *Psicoperspectivas*, 11(2), 31-55.
- Carrasco, C., Baltar de Andrade, M. J., Bastidas, N., López de Aréchaga, J., Morales, M. & López, V. (2019): Identidad profesional de una psicóloga educacional: Un estudio de caso en Chile. *Pensando Psicología*, 15(25), 1-27.
- Demirel, M. (2010): Evaluation of elementary and secondary school guidance curriculum. *Education and Science*, 35(156), 45.
- Gatica, F. (2016): Las intervenciones psicosociales en establecimientos educacionales municipales vulnerables bajo el marco de la Ley SEP: Diseño, implementación y logros desde la perspectiva de actores claves. *Revista Estudios de Políticas Públicas*, 2(1), 105-119.
- Gürkan, U. (2020): Problems in School Guidance Services in Balıkesir Province: Opinions of School Counselors. *Necatibey Faculty of Education Electronic Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 14(1), 577-605.
- Karataş, Z. & Baltacı, H. (2013): Ortaöğretim kurumlarında yürütülen psikolojik danışma ve rehberlik hizmetlerine yönelik okul müdürü, sınıf rehber öğretmeni, öğrenci ve okul rehber öğretmeninin psikolojik danışman görüşlerinin incelenmesi. *Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Kırşehir Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 14(2), 427-460.
- López, V., Carrasco, C., Morales, M. & Ayala, A. (2011): El encapsulamiento de los psicólogos escolares y profesionales de apoyo psicosocial en la escuela. *Revista Internacional Magisterio*, 53, 54-57.
- López, V., Ramírez, L., Valdés, R., Ascorra, P. & Carrasco-Aguilar, C. (2018): Tensiones y nudos críticos en la implementación de la (s) política (s) de convivencia escolar en Chile. *Calidad en la Educación*, 48, 96-129.
- Magendzo, A., Toledo, M. I. & Gutiérrez, V. (2013): Descripción y análisis de la Ley sobre Violencia Escolar (N 20.536): dos paradigmas antagónicos. *Estudios pedagógicos (Valdivia)*, 39(1), 377-391.
- MINEDUC (2008): *Ley de Subvención Escolar Preferencial (N° 20.248)*. Santiago de Chile: Ministerio de Educación.
- MINEDUC (2019): *Política Nacional de convivencia escolar: "La convivencia la hacemos todos"*. Santiago de Chile: Ministerio de Educación.
- Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (2018): *Counseling services program preparation booklet*. Ankara: MoNE.
- Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (2020): The MoNE Guidance and Psychological Counseling Services Regulation. *Resmî Gazete*, 14 Ağustos.

- Morshed, M. & Carey, J. C. (2020): Development of a Taxonomy of Policy Levers to Promote High Quality School-Based Counseling. *Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy and Evaluation*, 2(2), 95-101.
- Obando, E. S. & Aicon, M. L. (2019): Impacto de la Ley SEP en las escuelas: Una mirada crítica y local en torno al rol de los psicólogos de la educación. *Paideia*, 61, 57-81.
- Öztürk, B., Esen, E. & Siyez, D. (2020): Examining the views of class guidance teachers and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students about guidance and career planning course. *Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences*, 11(2), 492-512.
- Rallis, S. F. & Carey, J. C. (2017): Introduction to Policy Research in School-Based Counseling. In: Carey, J., Harris, B., Lee, S. & Aluede, O. (Eds.) *International Handbook for Policy Research on School-Based Counseling* (pp. 3-11). Cham: Springer.
- Şarlak, Y. (2019): Examination of the Opinions of Guidance Teachers on the Preparation of Guidance Services Program. Doctoral dissertation, Marmara Universitesi, Turkey.
- Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. & Guffey, S. (2012): *School Climate Research Summary: August 2012*. School Climate Brief, Number 3. National School Climate Center.
- Tuzgöl Dost, M. (2020): The state and problems of psychological counseling and guidance services in primary schools according to school counselors. *Electronic Journal of Social Sciences*, 19(76), 1673-1690.
- UNESCO (2013): *El Informe Situación Educativa de América Latina y el Caribe: Hacia la educación de calidad para todos al 2015*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Wang, M. T. & Degol, J. L. (2016): School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(2), 315-352.

#### Author affiliation

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ayşen Köse Şirin, Yedİtepe University, Turkey

Dayana Olavarria, PhD Student, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Carol Cohen, PhD Student, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Prof. Dr. Sharon Rallis (Emerita), University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Prof. Dr. John C. Carey (Emeritus), University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Please cite this publication as:

Köse, A., Olavarria, D., Cohen, C., Rallis, S. & Carey, J. C. (2021): When Practice Belies Policy Intent: Cases from Turkey, Chile, and the United States. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 19-27.



# Counselling in Schools and Universities in England: Battling the Effects of the Covid Crisis

Gillian L. S. Hilton

## Abstract

This paper examines counselling provision in schools and universities in England which has been growing since the 1960s. However, of late, despite high increases in children in school and young people in higher education, displaying higher levels of emotional and mental health problems, funding for schools has been cut and a decline in the numbers of counsellors available has occurred. This, despite serious concerns in government about children's mental health and various government initiatives, aimed at encouraging schools to provide such services for pupils and their parents. In many cases, the role of counsellor has been diverted to teachers or often, to teaching assistants or welfare workers, who have received little training in this area. In universities, problems have risen sharply since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, as campuses were closed and teaching delivered on line. This meant the ability to access one to one counselling for students also had to be provided online, not face to face. This was at a time when university students were facing numerous problems including isolation, some teaching staff unprepared for high quality online delivery and loss of part-time employment which for students, was vital in maintaining a decent lifestyle. New students starting in September 2020 faced a situation which was not what they expected to find in university life and this has resulted in a growth in stress, anxiety and ideas of abandoning studies. Those graduating are also facing the challenges of a rapidly declining job market and a highly uncertain future, with little in the way of support for mental health issues, as they are now outside the education system.

Keywords: counselling, schools, colleges, universities, mental health, England, Covid

## Introduction

The UK government provides advice to schools, the National Health Service, Local Authority (LA) Commissioners of Counselling and other facilitators of psychological support, who provide counselling to pupils in primary and secondary schools in England. Interest in this service started in the 1960s and increased in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, one past Chief of Ofsted Chris Woodhead, was known to hold the opinion that schools and teachers are not there to mirror the work of social service departments, but to educate children (The Times, 2006). He believed many teachers were too closely involved with giving emotional support, as opposed to educating their pupils and that former task should be left to experts, preferably educational psychologists and social workers. However, many

schools had noted an increase in children suffering from mental health issues and demonstrating the effects of emotional disturbance with altered behaviours, caused by the problems in their lives. The origins of these included, family breakdown, bullying, (cyber or in person) and the intense pressures to conform and to be popular with peers and successful in school, plus presenting the 'right' physical image, to name only a few. This had led to an increased suicide rate in young people, school refusal, family relationship problems, eating disorders and the desire to be popular and attractive and belong. This latter has in some areas, led to the move to a gang culture. Schools therefore saw an urgent need to offer counselling services to their pupils. Eventually however, the costs of providing this service in-house, as school/college budgets came under strain elsewhere, became impossible for some institution. This resulted in teachers having to deal with children with mental health issues with, in some areas, little or no support.

## Training counsellors

Counsellors in England can be trained after obtaining a degree (any subject) followed by acquiring a post graduate counselling qualification, or following an introductory counselling course, which leads to further awards, such as, a certificate, or diploma. There are many companies, in addition to colleges and universities providing such programmes and these can be followed face to face or online. However, most of them involve payment by the individual. Training involves placements, so that students learn to apply their theoretical knowledge, whilst being supported in their role. Counsellors need to be listed on an accredited register to be allowed to work in schools and like all school staff, have to pass police safety checks and hold the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance. Once in post in England, school counsellors work only during term-time. The posts are often part-time, so an individual may have to work for more than one school, or for a business that provides counselling services to several schools in their area. Some LAs have counsellors who work within that authority's schools, as needs arise. Those working with younger children tend to base their work or play, or use art to help children understand and express the problems they face. Whereas, with secondary students, the one to one approach of a listening ear is available. Counsellors also have to be ready to discuss problems with the parents, who may not wish to acknowledge there is a problem or conversely, be over anxious or demanding, insisting that their child's needs are prioritised. Training of these counsellors therefore has to include how to approach this type of situation. Incomes tend to be lower than for teachers, but there are good chances of promotion possible, including becoming a trainer of counsellors.

## Counselling in schools

The purpose of the provision of counselling in England's schools, is to provide such services 'as a psychological therapy to improve the mental health and wellbeing



of children and young people' (Gov.UK, 2016, p. 1). In its Guidance Document (DfE, 2016), the government acknowledges that the country has a problem with mental health issues in young people. This Document is not of a statutory nature; that is, its purpose is for guidance only on the use of counselling services in schools and why the government supports the idea of offering this service to pupils. Therefore, schools are not obliged to appoint a school counsellor, indeed many do not and use 'support staff', such as teaching or welfare assistants to fulfil this role. However, such people rarely have professional counselling or psychological training, to enable them to help with the mental health issues of students. LAs and state schools have access to an educational psychologist and these professionals are often involved with children with learning, or severe behavioural difficulties in schools. However, educational psychologists are in short supply and not readily available as many have long waiting lists of clients. In addition to the above-mentioned material, the Department for Education (DfE) also issued a document on *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools* (DfE, 2018) and the PSHE Association also offers support on mental health issues to teachers working in the area of personal social and health education (PSHE Association, 2019). This later document stresses the need for a safe learning environment in order to successfully teach such difficult subjects. The problem with PSHE for many years has been, that most teachers are not sufficiently trained in these aspects of the curriculum, but rather in the main subjects such as maths, English etc. Although PSHE is now statutory, there are few experts trained in this field and most of this teaching is undertaken by form teachers, or a team of senior teachers, many of whom have little specific training in this area either (Hilton, 2009).

The DfE advises that counselling services provided in schools are most effective where encompassed by a whole school approach to the emotional health and well-being of its pupils. Schools are urged (DfE, 2016, p. 12) to develop 'confidence, resilience and motivation in their students'. This the DfE suggests, will establish these traits in students and so, in their later working lives they will enhance the ability to contribute fully to society and therefore to the economy. Much of the document on counselling appears to be directed mainly at improving the mental health of young people. Obviously, concerns have been raised in recent years about the rise in bullying, gang activity and abuse of children by their peers, which may occur face to face, but most often on social media. This can and has led to suicide and also to the development of a gang culture, as individuals feel protected if part of a gang, even if this involves them in unlawful behaviour.

By 2017 it appears that one in eight children had recognisable mental health issues (NHS, 2018). This report resulted in the government issuing a green paper on improving children and young people's mental health and subsequently several health mandates, with the intention of addressing the problems of mental health amongst the young. The disturbing reports of children self-harming and attempting suicide alerted the media to the problem and questions began to be asked nationwide, as to what solutions could be offered. In the *Counselling in Schools* paper (DfE, 2016) the government had acknowledged the need for support in schools for young people,



but subsequently the lowering of school budgets and strain on finances has handicapped schools in appointing qualified counsellors. The pandemic of 2020 has added further concerns about vulnerable children being at home when schools were closed, with domestic violence incidents becoming more common and many deprived children not having the required access to technology, in order to continue their learning. In addition, Samaritans, the suicide prevention charity, has drawn attention to the rise in suicide amongst young people, with concerns over mental health rising steeply during the lockdown experiences. Their Head of Research reports (Parker, 2020) that young people are suffering from the loss of friends' support and as a result have anxious feelings and a stronger sense of frustration with lockdown, than that suffered by older citizens. This is exacerbated by the loss of their mechanisms for coping, which are their supportive friendship groups, plus their own inexperience in coping with life's challenges.

BACP has started a campaign in England to ensure that every secondary school and further education college in the country has a trained counsellor. Salaries vary however, and often positions are part-time only. The Institute of Public Policy research reported that fewer than half the secondary schools in England have a counsellor in place, worryingly less than in 2010 (BACP, 2020). In addition, counsellors are much more common in private schools than in ones run by the state, which the great majority of students attend; in particular children from deprived homes, or with behaviour or learning difficulties.

## Counselling provision for older students

Universities and further education colleges (FE) and sixth form colleges, also offer counselling for students and staff. This began in the 1970s and the need for services has increased over the years and particularly in the light of the pandemic crisis. Funding however, for counselling in FE and sixth form colleges has been reduced of late. The approach to counselling in all these settings is seen by BACP (2017) as offering the support needed by students, within the context of the place in which they study and sometimes live. The idea is to enable the clients to understand better their psychological and emotional problems and find ways to increase their coping strategies and self-understanding. This helps them to develop resilience (Broglia, 2015). Across the three areas of education involved, the type of counselling offered can differ. In FE and sixth form colleges, individual or group counselling can take place and eventually may involve parents and teachers, as it does in schools. In university settings students tend to be offered individual counselling services, or self-help approaches with professional guidance, or the support of peers (Broglia, Millings & Barkham, 2017). Recently, the use of telephone support or support online has been offered; this rising exponentially during the Covid crisis and closure of universities. Little is yet known about the efficacy of this approach, but during the pandemic of 2020, when universities were closed and lectures were online this was the only approach students could utilise, as face to face consultations were not possible.

During the start of the crisis students were, in many cases sent home until the start of the autumn term in 2020 and taught and assessed by online services. This was not only stressful for students, resulting in a rise in depression and anxiety, but also for the staff. They, at short notice, were expected to alter, (as were school teachers) with little notice, their presentation of materials and interaction with students to online delivery. In addition, staff were expected to work from home alone without on-site support. This way of working, though familiar to some tutors who taught distance courses to students resident around the country and the world, had not been a day to day occurrence for all tutors. Examinations were cancelled, course work was the area judged to award degree classifications and this for some students (those good at written or practical exams), possibly resulted in lower grades than had been expected. However, university students at least did not have to deal with the turmoil of the schools' GCSE and AL results. The use of an algorithm to alter national examination grading with the intention of promoting a fair result, caused massive outcries over what were considered unfair judgements. The regrading of many results had to therefore occur, causing untold stress to teachers and students alike.

For those moving away from home to study the problems of working in 'bubbles', or having to stay in accommodation blocks to study online, as face to face classes were suspended, resulted in much unhappiness and a feeling that they were paying for tuition that was not at the expected standard. In addition, there were, due to social mixing which was against university policy, a rising number of cases of Covid-19 within the student body, particularly amongst first years. One hundred and nineteen universities had Covid outbreaks by the end of October 2020 (Coughlan, 2020). This resulted in two-week lockdowns, causing students to feel abandoned, lonely and even lacking in basic needs, such as food and other necessary supplies (BBC NEWS, 2020). One university even asked for local residents to provide food parcels for the locked down students. This request did little to arouse sympathy in the local populace, who considered students' behaviour had in many cases been unacceptable, due to their disregard for rules about social distancing. These breaches were likely to cause impositions on socialising in the surrounding community, where students' disregard of rules on mixing was much resented by local residents.

For new students all this caused added stress to that normally felt by young people living away from home for the first time and having to cope with experiences for which they had received little, or no preparation. One new student in a university in the south of England, studying at home was concerned about the lack of face to face teaching and the inability to visit the university library to complete assignments (Lewington, 2020). However, after taking time to getting used to working online using Microsoft Teams, she found it a good experience overall. She enjoyed getting together on that platform with a small group of students, who worked together and encouraged each other, discussing materials and assignments. In addition, this blogger stressed the need for relaxation and social contact in order to control anxiety and mental stress. She made daily calls to close friends and with a group set quizzes each week for everyone to answer, providing fun and relaxation. Working together in

a group kept her motivated and was stimulating for her learning. The group in fact almost acted as counsellors for each other and prevented the possible loneliness she had worried about, before starting the course. In addition, she stressed that physical activity was also important and doing other things than studying, in order to keep a balance in her life.

*The Guardian* (Blackall, 2020) reported the many concerns and stresses suffered by university students as a result of the pandemic. Some had lost part-time jobs due to closures of cafés, pubs and shops. They were very concerned about this, as the jobs were what kept them able to attend the university; that income provided money for food, books and other necessities. Some said if they could not find other employment, they might have to leave their studies. Many worried about the quality of education they would receive in this new environment, whilst still paying the high price for what should have been face to face teaching and support. The social distancing restrictions also worried many, as they saw university as a way of making new friends, many for life and networking, especially if undertaking a Master's degree. This type of activity would be severely restricted due to the controls in place on social mixing. All the students felt stressed, uncertain as to whether to defer on carry on and as mentioned above, angry about the high costs for online study. It is clear that the need for support and reassurance had grown exponentially during the Covid crisis, but little has been said about increasing the provision of support and counselling to university students. Certainly, it is doubtful to see if university counsellors could do much to alleviate many of the problems students faced, such as the type of teaching, restricted social lives and loss of part-time employment.

However, the effects of the pandemic did not only manifest themselves with those starting university and facing lockdown isolation online, but also the possibility of catching the virus from other young people who refused to socially distance and behave sensibly. Many newspaper reports condemned the 'selfish' attitudes of the young who continued to mix, party and ignore the rules, believing in many cases they were not going to suffer badly if they caught the virus. Possibly the constant publicity that older people were the ones more likely to die, or be seriously ill, was too strongly circulated. However, many were afraid, feeling cut off from support and this led to a great rise in reports to mental health charities, of suicidal thoughts, loneliness and self-harm. As they were generally not on campus and often in small groups, who might or not be their close friends, counselling became even more important, but more difficult to access.

In addition, the crisis also impacted those leaving university having gained their qualifications. Many students did not have the joy and pleasure resulting from being watched by their families at degree ceremonies and having a sense of achievement they could share with friends, who have travelled with them through the university years. BBC Panorama (2020) reported the devastating effect of the pandemic on employment prospects. Young graduates featured in the programme spoke of careers ruined, due to cut backs in areas such as theatres, air transport and the hospitality industry. So, instead of starting new careers, many young people

found that the jobs they had hoped for had vanished due to lockdown and companies retrenching and cutting numbers of employees. This, the programme reported, had led to depression, a sense of helplessness and a feeling that their hopes and dreams had been dashed, with little chance of their being more opportunities in the future. The rate of unemployment and job losses even of part-time work used to help with living costs, had risen much more sharply for people aged under twenty than for older workers. Therefore, those attempting to start out on careers were instead, spending their time applying for numerous jobs each week, many of them not at graduate level. Experts on the Panorama programme suggested that this situation, if it continued would build up many problems for this group in future years. For these young people access to counsellors is even more difficult, as they have to either pay to be privately treated, or hope the National Health Service, already under massive pressure could offer mental health services, but these pre the pandemic had already been stretched to breaking point.

## Research interviews with a first-year university student and a PhD student

### *First-year student*

The first-year student had found the university experience interesting, but sometimes difficult after his first five weeks in halls of residence and beginning his studies. In common with many students, he did not enjoy the online learning, preferring face to face teaching. However, he felt lucky that doing a practical subject (chemistry) he had to be in the laboratory each day, meaning he did not have all his lessons online. He said he had struggled with those, as some of the tutors seemed badly prepared and not used to teaching in this way. This he felt, added to the stresses that students were already suffering from missing home, having to make new friends, learning to be self-sufficient and be self-responsible for working and submitting assignments. He said first years had been offered the support of fourth years as student counsellors, to help them settle in and he had decided to apply for that support. His student helper had already contacted him and he was grateful that he now had a more experienced student to ask for advice, about issues of which he was uncertain. Many universities use older students to support new ones and it generally proves a very useful aid in helping new students settle. This is a way of providing help and to some extent informal counselling, from the experienced to the inexperienced. It is commonly known as a 'buddy system'. He also talked of his concerns for a student living on the fourth floor of his halls of residence, who never seemed to mix with anyone, had it appeared, not made any new friends, as he had and appeared to play on his Xbox all day and not do any work. He had not considered suggesting that this particular student should self-refer to the counselling service, as he felt he did not know him sufficiently well to discuss personal problems. He discussed the anger of some students at paying full fees for lessons, that in some cases were recorded and just available to access if you bothered, with no one checking

up as at his FE college, that you had done the work. The process of self-reliance is to many young English people, something that they have not really faced, before going away from home to university.

### *PhD student*

The woman was in the process of doing final thesis corrections, before being awarded her PhD. She was in her early thirties and described the stress of living with two other students, also PhD candidates, in a small terraced house near to the university. They spent most of their time in their rooms, where they also slept and sometimes ate. There was one small sitting room where they could relax, break away from their studies etc. but it was so small that they had decided to have a rota system of who could use it and when. She felt isolated and dispirited, despite being about to be awarded her doctorate. There would be no graduation ceremony with her proud family in attendance and her delight at successfully completing years of hard work she felt, had been stolen away from her. Looking into the future she was afraid of not being able to find a job commensurate with her qualifications, after years of living on very little money, from part-time employment in menial tasks. Her future in fact she saw as bleak, until the country's finances recovered from the Covid crisis and no one could predict when that would occur. She was doing everything she could to be positive but it was very difficult. She did not want to return home or become a burden to her family and had not felt that her situation should be one to take to the university counselling services, as they could not alter the situation she and they were in at the present time.

Maybe the question which should be asked is, do we look after our children too well and prevent the adult emerging from the childhood state? Thereby making the need for universities to have to provide so much support, which in the past would not have been required by young people. Formerly, they had to learn early to be independent and be responsible for themselves. Certainly, those who in the past did National Service, were expected to cope with harsh military practices and few visits home, particularly if they were posted overseas. No counselling existed then and those young men had to cope as best they could, with whatever occurred and life was often harsh and fraught with difficulty for them. They were expected to manage the new life and mature during their service. Do we expect the same of our university students or do we still treat them as children?

## Conclusion

At this stage in the pandemic, as a further wave of the virus is taking its toll all over Europe, it is impossible to say what the long-term effects on the lives of young people this will have in years to come. Employment prospects have been decimated in the arts, retail, hospitality and travel for example. However, the need for teachers, scientists and technologists, has increased enormously. The problem is many of these young people have studied or are studying for what looked to be

promising career subject areas, which now lie in ruins. The future does not look bright for the Covid generation (as they are being called), with countries in serious debt, companies retracting and more people wanting employment than is available. We can only hope that the tide will turn and they will find more hope and opportunity in future.

## References

- BACP (2017): *University and College Counselling Services Sector Overview 003*. Lutterworth: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.
- BACP (2020): Fewer than Half State Schools in England Offer on-site Counselling. <https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/campaigns/school-counselling/9-october-fewer-than-half-of-state-schools-in-england-offer-on-site-counselling/> (Accessed 16.10.2020).
- BBC Panorama (2020): Has Covid Stolen My Future? BBC, Broadcast BBC1, 26.10.2020.
- BBC NEWS (2020): Covid: Manchester Metropolitan University Students feel 'completely neglected'. September 28. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-54324687> (Accessed 06.11.2020).
- Blackall, M. (2020): 'Very, very upsetting': students face tough decisions over university. *The Guardian*, May 20.
- Brogia, E. (2015): *BACP Universities and Colleges Annual Survey 2013/2014*. University and College Counselling. Lutterworth: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.
- Brogia, E., Millings, A. & Barkham, M. (2017): Challenges to addressing student mental health in embedded counselling services: a survey of UK higher and further education institutions. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 46(4), 441-455.
- Coughlan, S. (2020): Lockdown students told not to rush home from uni. BBC NEWS. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-54784539> (Accessed 06.11.2020).
- DfE (2016): *Counselling in Schools: a blueprint for the future*. London, Department for Education: Crown Copyright.
- DfE (2018): *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools*. London, Department for Education: Crown Copyright.
- GOV.UK (2016): *Guidance: Counselling in Schools*. London: Department for Education. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counselling-in-schools> (Accessed 15.10.2020).
- Hilton, G. (2009): Personal, Social and Health Education. In: M. Cole (Ed.) *Equality in the Secondary School* (pp. 232-246). London: Continuum.
- Lewington, J. (2020): Brighton Student Bloggers. <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/studentbloggers/2020/07/17/james-lockdown-experience/> (Accessed 25.10.2020).
- NHS (2018): *Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2017*. England: NHS Digital.
- Parker, K. (2020): When I got back from hospital, they kept my deadlines in place. *Times Educational Supplement*, 30 October.
- PSHE Association (2019): *Teacher Guidance: teaching about mental health and emotional wellbeing*. London: PSHE Association.
- The Times (2006): Chris Woodhead answers the question. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/chris-woodhead-answer-the-question-dws2vgbbkge> (Accessed 17.10.2020).

### Author affiliation

Dr. Gillian L. S. Hilton, Middlesex University, London, United Kingdom

Please cite this publication as:

Hilton, G. L. S. (2021): Counselling in Schools and Universities in England: Battling the Effects of the Covid Crisis. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 29-38.



## Part 2

### School Counseling Education & Training

# A Comparative Study of Pre-service School Counselor Education between Australia, Malta, and Turkey

Ayşen Köse, Marilyn Campbell & Ruth Falzon

#### Abstract

The goal of this study was to provide a descriptive comparison of pre-service school counselor education systems in Australia, Malta, and Turkey. We defined pre-service school counselor education as the range of compulsory training activities in which school counselor candidates have to complete before entering the profession. This paper investigated four main issues: the minimum formal educational qualifications required to enter training as a school counselor in the three countries; the core activities which candidates need to complete, such as field-based experience, practicums, internships as well as formal course work; the entry requirements for work ready participation, such as licensure, certificate, or examination; and any specializations required in the training for school counselors. To compare the education in the three different countries we used qualitative comparative methodology with nationally defined entry qualifications to the school counseling profession, as well as policy documents from selected school counselor training institutions. We found some similarities but many differences in the three countries in preparing candidates for school counseling. These findings can be used to inform other countries to adopt more efficient and effective practices for the education of school counselors and learn from one another to improve the quality of training so that candidates can be better prepared to assist our young people in schools to lead rich and fulfilling lives.

Keywords: school counseling, training, Australia, Malta, Turkey

#### Introduction

Research has shown that school counselors make many positive contributions which benefit all stakeholders in the school community (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014; Cronin, 2018; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Shi & Brown, 2020). The presence of such professionals with expertise in many areas is extremely valuable especially for students who face complex problems in the modern world. Thus, it is important that



school counselors receive a quality education and training themselves to be able to perform these duties. It has been shown that pre-service training determines professional competencies and many personal traits such as self-efficacy and motivation later on in the real work setting (e.g., Goodman-Scott, Upton & Colburn, 2020; Slaten et al., 2013; Springer, 2015).

The purpose of this paper is to provide a descriptive comparison of pre-service school counselor education systems in Australia, Malta, and Turkey. To compare school counselor education we used a qualitative comparative methodology with nationally defined entry qualifications to the school counseling profession, as well as policy documents from selected school counselor training institutions. In the current study, pre-service school counselor education is defined as the range of compulsory activities in which school counselor candidates must complete before entering the work force.

This comparative analysis highlights significant differences in how school counselors are trained in the three countries. Contextual, historical, legal and regulatory issues all impact on the training of these school professionals. The context of education, the different job descriptions of school counselors, the legal and regulatory bodies are first described for each country to enable the reader to place the different training requirements in context. The paper then addresses entry requirements into counselor training programs and into the profession, explains any specialization that is provided in school counseling, and finally discusses the similarities and differences in the training of school counselors in the three countries.

## Context of education in the three countries

Before comparing training programs for school counselors, it is important to understand the different demographics and contexts of education of the three countries.

### *Australia*

Australia is a vast continent, with more than 85% of the population of 25 million living within 50 kilometers of the coastline. However, in the largest geographical states of Western Australia and Queensland, there are many rural and remote schools. To understand education in Australia, one needs to understand that Australia is divided into six states (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, and Tasmania) and two territories (the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory). Schooling is a state and territory government responsibility. This is because when schooling became compulsory, there was no federation of states but rather separate colonies (Campbell & Colmar, 2014). This partly explains why school counseling and the subsequent training for school counselors can be so different in different state systems.

### *Malta*

Malta is a southern European Union (EU) Mediterranean archipelago, where the two main inhabited islands are Malta and Gozo. It is 80 km south of Sicily, 284 km east of Tunisia and 333 km north of Libya. With an area of 316 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of just over 450,000, Malta is globally one of the smallest and most densely populated states. For most inhabitants (90%) Maltese is their mother tongue, whilst the rest are either totally English speaking, bi-lingual or use Maltese and English interchangeably (Brincat, 2005; Camilleri, 1996). Significant migration from within the EU and from Northern and Eastern Europe, Africa and lately Italy, Sicily, Nepal and the Philippines, have contributed to a significant increase in population, new cultures and languages (DeBattista, 2016; del Peso Sánchez, 2015).

### *Turkey*

Turkey is a large peninsula located at the meeting point of Asia and Europe. As of 2019, Turkey's population was over 83 million with a median age of 32,4 years (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2019). K-12 school-aged children comprise almost 22% of the total population (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2020). Education is compulsory until the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, although pre-school education is not. Schooling is a national government's responsibility and the education system in Turkey is highly centralized. The Ministry of National Education is the highest government agency in charge of K-12 education.

## Job description of school counselors

### *Australia*

School counselor roles in Australian states are broadly similar (Faulkner, 2007). In general, the role of the school counselor is to assist students, teachers, parents, and school communities to enable students to fulfil their academic potential while maintaining good mental health and wellbeing by using preventative, proactive and reactive strategies. The role seems to be continually expanding to assist students with mental health concerns, assess students with learning difficulties and disabilities, provide behavior management strategies to teachers and parents, provide psychological assessment, career advice, information and counseling and professional development for teachers and colleagues (Campbell & Colmar, 2014).

### *Malta*

Maltese state schools are grouped into ten colleges. Each college has one middle, one secondary and a number of primary schools. Maltese school counselors fulfill five main roles: (1) running a Guidance and Counseling Services in all the schools within a college; (2) communicating on a regular basis with the service manager on issues of guidance and counseling; (3) providing career guidance; (4) collaborating with the heads of schools and staff regarding students' profile of needs

and abilities; and (5) referring to other specialised services. Counselors are also expected to work towards the implementation of the school development plan and school mission, together with other stakeholders (Cauchi et al., 2017). Students also have access to other professionals such as career advisors, youth workers, social workers and guidance teachers.

### *Turkey*

The role and functions of school counselors in Turkey is defined by the Ministry of Education (2020). Based on this regulation, the roles of school counselors are threefold: (1) developmental and preventive services (e.g., supports classroom teachers in implementing classroom guidance programs; teaches students to know themselves better; shares the information with students in the areas of social-emotional, academic, and career development through individual studies, group work, or publications); (2) remedial services (e.g., conducts group and individual counseling with the students at risk; refers to other specialized experts); and (3) support services (e.g., consults the teachers, families, administrators, and other agencies).

## Regulatory bodies

The three countries present significantly different regulation strategies as noted below. Such differences also reflect historical and cultural differences, and what influences the development of counseling in schools in each country.

### *Australia*

In most of Australia, registration as a psychologist and a teacher is needed to become a school counselor, although there are exceptions in some states. The psychology profession is regulated by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act which applies to each state and territory of Australia. The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) is the national organization responsible for implementing the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme across Australia. AHPRA works with 15 National Boards (of which the Psychology Board is one) to help protect the public by regulating Australia's registered health practitioners. Teacher registration is governed by a Board in each state.

### *Malta*

In 2015, counseling in Malta became a registered profession regulated by the national government (Counselling Profession Act, 2015) with a national Council of the Counselling Profession whose main remit is to issue warrants. The Law (Counselling Profession Act, 2015) details that entrance into the profession requires master's level training (Cauchi et al., 2017).

## *Turkey*

Psychological counseling is not a registered profession in Turkey. There are no specific laws or regulations for counselors or psychologists, not even a framework law covering all professions providing mental health services. The roles and duties of school counselors are regulated by the regulations of the Ministry of National Education. However, since there is no law for mental health professionals, the criteria for appointing a school counselor are sometimes changed by the Education Ministry as the Ministry tends to see school psychological counselors as teachers rather than as mental health workers.

## Minimum entry requirements for school counselor training

### *Australia*

Entry to a psychology six-year program (four years undergraduate and two years postgraduate) and/or a bachelor of teaching (four years) in Australia is usually by way of a good score on a candidate's final exams after Year 12 at school.

### *Malta*

To enter school counselor training in Malta, candidates must have a university bachelor degree, and one year's experience working in a human or psycho-social setting if reading one of the two master's available.

### *Turkey*

Guidance and psychological counseling undergraduate programs accept students based on a two-staged central examination held by the HEC's Center for Student Selection and Placement (CSSP). Therefore, getting enough points from the centrally managed, highly competitive national university entrance exam is the first step in entering the school counseling profession (Korkut, 2007).

## Training programs

### *Australia*

In Australia, the training program is a four-year sequence of study in psychology at a university as this is a requirement of the Psychology Board of Australia (PBA) followed by a two-year internship or a Master's degree (PBA, n.d.). For the state of Queensland, there is a difference as school counselors need to be registered teachers and then study at post graduate level in the discipline of guidance and counseling, or the six year psychology program (Queensland Department of Education, n.d.). NSW, WA, and Tas also require their school counselors to be teacher qualified (NSW Department of Education, n.d.; Tasmania Department of Education, n.d.; WA Department of Education, n.d.), although in their case it is likely to work in reverse with the psychology being the Bachelor degree and the teaching the post

graduate. Victoria also has registration requirements with PBA and APS thereby requiring the same educational requirements, however, they also permit nurses, social workers and occupational therapists to be Mental Health Practitioners (State Government of Victoria, n.d.). A practicum component is required as part of the six year psychology degree (APAC, n.d.). It is called a placement. The accreditation does not stipulate the duration of the placement. For teaching, the practicum is called field experience.

### *Malta*

The training to be a school counselor in Malta is only available at the University of Malta which offers a four-year part-time Master of Counseling and a two-year full-time Master of Arts in Transcultural Counseling. These courses provide graduate students with an in-depth knowledge base and practice skills in professional counseling, not a specialist school counseling program. Graduates are able to use the skills to competently serve individuals, couples, families, and groups in the community. This program also promotes the professional status, identity and visibility of counselors within different cultural contexts and seeks to extend students' abilities to consider counseling within the broader social context as well as within individual client work. Both programs include a 30-ECTS dissertation and practicum hours. The Master of Arts in Transcultural Counseling is offered in collaboration with an American University (Cauchi et al., 2017).

### *Turkey*

Training for a school counselor in Turkey is at a university standard with a practicum. However, the practicum is not standardized with which supervision methods to be used decided by the course lecturers' preference (Koçyiğit, 2020). The same situation is true for the vocational guidance practice course. These non-standardized supervision practices have been criticized in the literature (Meydan, 2014). Internship courses are however, nationally standardized by regulation in Turkey. According to this regulation, every prospective school counselor must have a documented internship experience as part of their formal undergraduate training.

## Entry requirements into the profession

### *Australia*

All states and territories require a professional registration in order to be able to be a school counselor. The majority of registrations are with the Psychology Board of Australia which sits under AHPRA. Given that this registration is required, many of the educational and practicum requirements are set by the PBA standards. Teacher registration is also essential in most states.

### *Malta*

The Counselling Profession Act (2015) states that a candidate can apply for a permanent, a temporary, or a restricted warrant. Once students have completed their Master's programs, they can present their official transcript and can apply for a temporary warrant with the Council for the Counseling Profession (2016). This warrant is entitled "a person to be registered in the register for counselors with a temporary warrant kept by the Council who can practice the counseling profession under supervision of a counseling supervisor and according to guidelines issued by the Council" (p. 3).

To then be able to apply for a full warrant, applicants must have:

*satisfied the Council that he has adequate professional training or experience in counseling for an aggregate period of not less than two years on a full-time basis, or has performed one thousand (1,000) hours of work under the supervision of a counseling supervisor, whichever is attained first, or the equivalent to that period on a part-time of not more than six years, after obtaining the Master's degree, or recognised degree... provided that when the person who is practicing the counseling profession on a part time basis does not perform one thousand (1,000) hours of supervised counseling under the supervision of a counseling supervisor within six (6) years, he may request the Council to be granted an extension of the said time. (pp. 3-4)*

### *Turkey*

In Turkey, currently there are no licensure or certification regulations for school counselors. However, if the Guidance and Psychological Counseling Program graduates want to be employed at K-12 public schools, they have to take a central, standardized, and highly competitive exam called the Civil Service Personnel Selection Exam (CSPSE) which has been held biannually since 2002. Even if candidates who take the exam and get the minimum required score for the position this does not guarantee their employment since vacant positions in the public school system are much lower than the number of applicants. Since CSPSE is a generic examination for anyone who wants to work in civil service, it cannot be considered a licensure examination for the profession. School counselors working in public schools work as "candidate school counselors" in the first year of their duty. After completing their first year, they take another generic exam. When they pass it, they are entitled to work as a school counselor. Those who prefer to serve as a school counselor in private K-12 schools are not required to take any of these exams. Private schools are allowed to hire candidates based on their own criteria.

## Specializations required in the training of school counselors

### *Australia*

Most candidates for school counseling read the Master in Educational and Developmental Psychology, as well as a Bachelor or Master of Teaching. Although

there is no specialisation of training in Australia, in practice, secondary school counselors need to have at least two units or subjects in careers counseling which primary and special education school counselors do not.

### *Malta*

Until Malta started offering Master's programs in 2008, the University of Malta only offered training specifically for school counseling and only available for teachers. The first three (2008-2016) MCouns. programs then focused on counseling but included three elective modules on health, child and adolescent, and community, of which students could choose one module. As from 2016, and to be in with the law regarding specialisations, MCouns. programs did not include these elective study units. The two Maltese masters then include content on transcultural counseling and a five-ECTS study unit on career counseling. One questions whether this module should remain in initial counseling courses or be regarded as a specialization. The specialization clause in the law (Counselling Profession Act, 2015) refers to 30-ECTS training courses and also brings into discussion what constitutes an area of specialization. In our opinion, specialization courses should be offered to all helping professionals as this would promote trans disciplinarity, role-release and teamwork, so necessary in the best interest of clients (Karol, 2014; Miller, 2016).

### *Turkey*

There is no specialization within the counseling profession either at undergraduate or graduate level in Turkey. Therefore, there is no distinct specialty area named "School Counseling". Both the undergraduate and the graduate programs are named as "Psychological Counseling and Guidance" and give generic counseling education. However, as stated earlier, Psychological Counseling and Guidance undergraduates can be appointed as counselors in public and private schools without any other specialization and certification requirements since undergraduate programs were designed primarily to meet the workforce need for trained school counselors in the historical development of the profession (Korkut, 2007).

## Discussion

School counseling is an evolving profession worldwide. Policies and practices for training school counselors also vary depending on the context of each country which all have individual strengths and aspects that are open to improvement. School counseling communities all around the world have a lot to learn from each other. That is why international comparative studies are important, as they allow us to examine what is happening in the teaching of school counseling in other countries, which in turn helps policy makers and counselor educators to understand effective ways of teaching school counseling.

The descriptions of Australian, Maltese and Turkish school counseling training in this paper show the importance of cross-cultural awareness of different realities in



the profession. Further, this diversity is influenced by how centralised or not the school, political and legal systems are in each country. For example, Australian schooling is a state and territory government responsibility, thus school counseling and the subsequent training for school counselors is different in each state, whilst Malta and Turkey have a centralised school system, where training is on the one hand independent from the government, with regard to academic but, in the case of Malta, also governed by the Counselling Profession Act (2015), as the University of Malta needs to ensure that its training respects and embraces the principles of this law.

There are different terms used for the profession in each country. In Australia, school counselor, school psychologist or guidance officer is used, in Turkey psychological counselor is preferred. In Malta, whilst the preferred informal term which is used in school is counselor, these professionals are, together with other professionals such as youth workers and social workers, officially referred to as Educational Support Practitioner (Principal, Senior or Trainee). Job roles also differ with Australian school counselors focusing on academic potential fulfilment, good mental health and career guidance through preventative, proactive and reactive strategies. Malta seems to follow the British model but the pastoral system has evolved to include Personal and Social Development (PSD) teachers, guidance teachers, career advisors and other professionals such as psycho-therapists, educational psychologists and social workers, where the Maltese school counselor works mainly with guidance teachers. Maltese PSD teachers address the preventive aspect addressed by Australian and Turkish counselors. On the other hand, like Malta, Turkish school counselors focus more on mental health than academic achievement. In this respect similar to Australian school counselors, Turkish school counselors address developmental and preventive services, group and individual counseling and consultations with other stakeholders. The job descriptions of Turkish school counselors seem to have a more similar profile to Maltese school counselors. However, the links of school counseling training to the discipline of psychology are more evident in Australia than in Malta and Turkey.

Regulatory bodies are certainly very different in each country. The three countries share the whole spectrum of possibilities with regard to regulatory bodies. Australia has a system where only psychology with teaching training is accepted for school counselors, where psychology is regulated by a national body and teaching by a state body but counseling per se is not regulated at all. On the other hand, in the Maltese context, counseling is a warranted profession (Counselling Profession Act, 2015) regulated by the Council of the Counselling Profession, which issues warrants according to the law. The Law (Counseling Profession Act, 2015) details that entrance into the profession requires master's level training in counseling (Cauchi et al., 2017). In Turkey, psychological counseling is not a warranted profession, with no law or regulation governing both psychological counselors and psychologists. The roles and duties of school counselors are then regulated by the regulations of the Ministry of



National Education and school counselors are tend to be perceived as teachers rather than mental health workers.

Counselor training in the three countries is at university post-graduate level but Turkey also offers undergraduate programs. Australia requires a minimum formal educational background in teaching and psychology. Maltese minimum entry requirements for working as a school psychologist is a Bachelor's degree in a human and/or social sciences, or an area of study deemed relevant, with MCouns. requiring one year's working experience and TCouns. no experience due to its collaboration with an American university. Turkish school counseling preparation programs are termed Guidance and Psychological Counseling.

The importance on practica (placements) is reflected in the programs of the three countries, with reference to research only present in the Maltese program and the possibility of internship programs available only in Australia and Turkey, since the Maltese masters' programs include enough hours of practice to allow for entry into the profession. Australian school counselors' accreditation requires a practicum (placement) component as part of the four-year degree of teaching and as part of the six year degree in psychology. Turkish programming is the responsibility of the Turkish Higher Education Council (THEC) up to 2020. As from the academic year 2021-2022, school counseling training programs will have institutional autonomy. This is a new development for Turkish undergraduate level school counseling training. Practica are mandated in the Turkish curriculum, but supervision is not based on any standards.

This peep into these three countries' experience of school counseling reflects the need for excellence and integrity of the profession. Further, the importance of practice seems to point towards the importance given to skills in the best interest of students. Comparative studies such as this one can be used as a means to find and extract best practices and generate a body of knowledge that may improve school counseling training. As well stated by Stigler et al. (2000) "...we may be blind to some of the most significant features that characterize teaching in our own culture because we take them for granted as the way things are and ought to be. Cross-cultural comparison is a powerful way to unveil unnoticed but ubiquitous practices." (p. 88).

## References

- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) (n.d.): [www.ahpra.gov.au](http://www.ahpra.gov.au)
- Australian Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools (APAC) (n.d.): [www.apacs.org.au](http://www.apacs.org.au)
- Brincat, J. M. (2005): Maltese - an unusual formula. *Macmillan English Dictionary 27*.  
<http://macmillan.dictionaries.com/MED-Magazine/February2005/27-LI-Maltese-print.htm>
- Camilleri, A. (1996): Language values and identities: Code switching in secondary classrooms in Malta. *Linguistics and Education*, 8(1), 85-103.
- Campbell, M. A. & Colmar, S. (2014): Current status and future trends of school counselling in Australia. *Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling*, 4(2), 181-197.
- Carrell, S. E. & Hoekstra, M. (2014): Are school counselors an effective education input? *Economics Letters*, 125(1), 66-69.

- Cauchi, M., Falzon, R., Micallef, P. & Sammut, M. (2017): Policy, Research and the Development of School Counselling in Malta: Lessons Learnt in a Small-Island Community. In: Carey, J., Harris, B., Lee, S. & Aluede, O. (Eds.) *International Handbook for Policy Research on School-Based Counseling* (pp. 365-381). Cham: Springer.
- Cronin, S. (2018): Does having a school counselor matter? A dissertation investigating school counseling in Minnesota. University of Minnesota.
- DeBattista, A. P. (2016): A small-island state within a changing security climate: The case of Malta. *Symposia Melitensia*, 12, 69-86.
- del Peso Sánchez, S. (2015): The evolution of immigration discourse in the Maltese press from 2005 to 2015: A case study of the Times of Malta. Trabajo Fin de Máster, Universidad Complutense, Madrid.
- Dimmitt, C. & Wilkerson, B. (2012): Comprehensive school counseling in Rhode Island: Access to services and student outcomes. *Professional School Counseling*, 16(2), 125-135.
- Faulkner, M. (2007): School psychologists or psychologists in schools? *InPsych: The Bulletin of the Australian Psychological Society Ltd*, 29(4), 10.
- Goodman-Scott, E., Upton, A. & Colburn, A. N. (2020): School counseling district supervisors' experiences and perceptions regarding school counselor preparation for practice. *Professional School Counseling*, 24(1), 1-11.
- Karol, R. L. (2014): Team models in neurorehabilitation: structure, function, and culture change. *NeuroRehabilitation*, 34(4), 655-669.
- Koçyiğit, M. (2020): An investigation of group supervision process of individual counseling practice course. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*, 8(4), 1116-1146.
- Korkut, F. (2007): Counselor education, program accreditation and counselor credentialing in Turkey. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 29(1), 11-20.
- Meydan, B. (2014): Psikolojik danışma uygulamalarına yönelik bir süpervizyon modeli: Mikro beceri süpervizyon modeli (A supervision model for psychological counseling practices: A micro-skill supervision model). *Ege Eğitim Dergisi*, 15(2), 358-374.
- Miller, C. Z. (2016): Towards transdisciplinarity: Liminality and the transitions inherent in pluridisciplinary collaborative work. *Journal of Business Anthropology*, 2, 35-57.
- Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (2020): *National Education Statistics. Formal Education 2019/ '20*. Republic of Turkey: Ministry of National Education.
- Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (2020): The MoNE Guidance and Psychological Counseling Services Regulation. *Resmî Gazete*, 14 Ağustos.
- NSW Department of Education (n.d.): <https://education.nsw.gov.au>
- Psychology Board of Australia (n.d.): [www.psychologyboard.gov.au](http://www.psychologyboard.gov.au)
- Queensland Department of Education (n.d.): <https://education.qld.gov.au>
- Shi, Q. & Brown, M. H. (2020): School counselors' impact on school-level academic outcomes: Caseload and use of time. *Professional School Counseling*, 23(1/3), 1-8.
- Slaten, C. D., Scalise, D. A., Gutting, K. & Baskin, T. W. (2013): Early career school counselors' training perspectives: Implications for school counselor educators. *Journal of School Counseling*, 11(20), 1-34.
- Springer, S. I. (2015): Aspects of site supervision as predictors of group leader self-efficacy for pre-service school counselors. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Montclair State University.
- State Government of Victoria (n.d.): <https://www.education.vic.gov.au>
- Stigler, J. W., Gallimore, R. & Hiebert, J. (2000): Using video surveys to compare classrooms and teaching across cultures: Examples and lessons from the TIMSS video studies. *Educational Psychologist*, 35(2), 87-100.
- Tasmania Department of Education (n.d.): <https://www.education.tas.gov.au>
- Turkish Statistical Institute (2019): *Turkey in Statistics, 2019*. Republic of Turkey: Turkish Statistical Institute.
- WA Department of Education (n.d.): <https://www.education.wa.edu.au>

#### Author affiliation

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ayşen Köse Şirin, Yedİtepe University, Turkey

Prof. Dr. Marilyn Campbell, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane Australia

Senior Lecturer Dr. Ruth Falzon, University of Malta, Malta

Please cite this publication as:

Köse, A., Campbell, M. & Falzon, R. (2021): A Comparative Study of Pre-service School Counselor Education between Australia, Malta, and Turkey. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 39-50.

# Training School Counselors in Challenging Times: A Faculty's View on Creative Strategies to Meet Practicum and Internship Requirements

Sade Smith & George Vera

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest mark current times worldwide. This reality poses diverse challenges for school counseling programs, faculty, and school counselors. Likewise, these unparalleled times continue to leave us all with many questions and minimal guidance on how the training of school counselors will be impacted by the public and private school COVID restrictions, particularly for those attempting to complete their practicum and internship requirements. However, school counselors are in demand more than ever to help meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. Therefore, this paper provides an overview of Barry University Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Masters of School Counseling program. The authors describe the school counseling specialization course requirements with a specific focus on training for students in the practicum and internship course. Additionally, they discuss several challenges and creative strategies that could be utilized in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recommendations for policymakers, faculty, programs directors, school counseling supervisors, and future development of school counselor training are depicted.

Keywords: school counseling, creative strategies, practicum, internship, policy, recommendations

## Introduction

The spread of the COVID-19 virus, often referred to as the coronavirus, forced many schools to implement emergency closures of all in-person courses. The rapid change in course delivery and social distance restrictions marked unprecedented challenges for many colleges and universities (Lederer et al., 2021). In addition, the rapid spread of the virus caused uncertainty for many local and national education accreditation boards who develop and impose standards that many primary schools, universities, and specialization programs adhere to. Consequently, this forced many universities to review and, in some cases, implement emergency shutdown plans to meet the needs of students (American School Counseling Association, 2021). However, many of those plans addressed supporting students' mental, physical, and social health within the primary school or university. For instance, plans and guidelines for working in a virtual or distance learning environment plan were

quickly implemented for school counselors (ASCA, 2021). However, limited attention focused on the continuous training of school counseling students to meet their practicum and internship graduation requirements during these challenging times.

Worldwide, school counselors' education has been facing diverse challenges related to its development as a worthy independent professional practice, its capacity to generate and communicate its body of knowledge across borders and create ongoing development opportunities for its practitioners (Vera & Jimenez, 2015). In addition to these challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has created new education and training challenges for school counseling programs, faculty, and school counselors-in-training. Likewise, these unparalleled times continue to leave us all with many questions and minimal guidance on how school counselors' preparation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will evolve to continue meeting the needs of school counselors-in-training, specifically those attempting to complete their practicum and internship requirements.

## School counseling specialization

Child and adolescent counseling in the school setting is an ever-increasing area for counselors. Today, school counselors are in demand more than ever to help meet students' academic, social, and emotional needs (Jones, 2020). Before the pandemic, students were already experiencing substantial mental health concerns, putting both their health and academic success at risk (Lederer et al., 2021). In addition to the substantial mental health concerns students already faced, the global pandemic of COVID-19 has brought about many new changes to countries worldwide, which could have long-term effects on our youth and adolescents (Pincus et al., 2020). Therefore, the school counselor-in-training must be able to deal with students referred by parents or program administrators and make appropriate recommendations.

Moreover, teachers often make referrals or require advice. The counselor must know how to work with the child and enable the teacher to interact with the student effectively. The caretakers in their lives often influence young children's behaviors. The school counselor must know how to help parents and other caretakers manage behavior and enhance development whenever possible. Similarly, the school counselors must know how to deliver effective developmental counseling programs outside of the traditional organizational setting. However, the particular skills necessary to work with children outside of the traditional organizational face-to-face counseling setting are often not explicitly taught as they are needed today. For instance, the need for new teaching delivery modalities of school counselor training includes face-to-face, online synchronous, and asynchronous course delivery. Likewise, there is a need for new teaching strategies and techniques suitable to online school counseling education for practicum and internship students. Therefore, the counseling faculty at Barry University implemented creative strategies to meet the training needs of counseling students.

## Barry University Counseling Program, school counseling specialization

Barry University's Counseling Program is accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP). CACREP accreditation recognizes that the content and quality of the counseling programs have been evaluated and meet standards set by the profession (Barry University, n.d.). This notable accreditation means:

- Students meet state license requirements in Florida and allow students to pursue opportunities in other states in the United States.
- Our programs have been evaluated and meet or exceed national standards.
- The focus of our programs is on professional counseling.
- Our graduates have met prerequisites for credentialing and are ready for entry into professional practice.
- Our graduates have a competitive advantage when seeking field placements and professional employment in today's job market.

Furthermore, Barry's school counseling specialization provides students with the knowledge and skills to develop, implement, and evaluate a PK-12 comprehensive developmental counseling program (Barry University, n.d.). Particular attention is given to the multiple roles and responsibilities of a school counselor in a school setting. Nevertheless, like many counseling programs at universities, the COVID-19 pandemic forced all course delivery to virtual synchronous or asynchronous modalities. This shift resulted in a new teaching delivery model for all courses, including practicum and internship.

For the School Counseling Program, we have been developing a FlexHybrid Learning Model to meet the needs of students while adhering to the CACREP Standards. According to this new flex learning model, students select whether to attend in-person or remotely. Some students may participate fully remotely, others may choose to participate entirely in-person, and others may choose some online and some in-person participation. Physical attendance is not required. Flex Learning allows the education experience through dynamic interactive technology. The University Department of Extended Learning drives this model, a Division of Academic Affairs, and the Counseling Department Directors to provide learning momentum, responsive instruction, personal communication, and technical support. It promotes a safe culture for students, faculty and staff while enhancing the student experience and learning.

For school counseling students in the practicum and internship courses, they gain experience both through the on-campus Care Center providing in-person or virtual counseling services using Webex. In addition to maintaining a practicum and internship at a local primary school designing psychoeducational lesson plans, implementing classroom counseling lessons, providing short-term individual counseling services, and consulting with parents and school administrators. From experience over the past year, counseling children and adolescents virtually pose

various challenges for some school counselors-in-training. However, there has been some success and creativity with telehealth school counseling, such as all school counseling students in the practicum and internship courses receiving telehealth training and certification within two weeks of moving to fully online courses during the start of the pandemic. Furthermore, students gained experience conducting virtual counseling sessions with students and clients in the Care Center. Before this school, counselors-in-training practicum and internship experience mostly focused on direct psychoeducation counseling lesson plans, counseling, and consulting in the school setting. With the pandemic, we have learned that school counseling can be done successfully in a virtual learning environment. Research surrounding these differences is needed on the best approach to providing school counseling services to children and adolescents in a virtual class setting.

## Recommendations

From the experience presented in the article, the following school counseling training recommendations are provided.

### (1) Policymaking

It is essential to facilitate ongoing dialogue among professional counselors, counseling associations, counseling training institutions, and policymakers to design public legislations that support school counseling service creation and counselor practitioner development. Establishing a school counseling public system and supporting policies and financial resources are most needed to guarantee school counseling service to all.

### (2) Counseling educators

Based upon current realities, it is necessary to develop continuing education programs that facilitate school counselors' fast adoption of telehealth and psychoeducational counseling modalities for school counseling services. The development and use of new technologies suitable to the school counselor services are urgently encouraged.

### (3) School counseling leadership

Program directors, school counselors, supervisors, and public officials should come together to consistently evaluate school counseling program quality and effectiveness, especially within the pandemic and post-pandemic reality, and make decisions about improvement according to the evaluation results.

### (4) Training programs

It is imperative to collaborate with state officials and school district officials to develop a counseling curriculum that attends to the development of a counselor's delivery of counseling services virtually. For instance, designing school counseling specialization course curriculum to include the use of virtual software and tools provided by public and private school districts to ensure school counselors are professionally trained and prepared to provide virtual counseling services in an in-person and virtual learning environment.



## References

- American School Counseling Association (2021): *Planning for virtual/distance school counseling during an emergency shutdown*.  
<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/8e31740f-d6af-4f62-a9e3-26563c488443/emergency-shutdown.pdf>
- Barry University (n.d.): Accreditation for counseling programs.  
<https://www.barry.edu/counseling-ms/about-program/fl-licensure-accreditation.html>
- Barry University (n.d.): School counseling. <https://www.barry.edu/counseling-ms/about-program/school-counseling.html>
- Jones, C. (2020): Schools want to hire more counselors amid budget woes. EdSource: Highlighting Strategies for Student Success. <https://edsources.org/2020/schools-want-to-hire-more-counselors-amid-budgetwoes/637049>
- Lederer, A. M., Hoban, M. T., Lipson, S. K., Zhou, S. & Eisenberg, D. (2021): More than inconvenienced: The unique needs of the U.S. college students during the covid-19 pandemic. *Health Education & Behavior*, 48(1), 14-19.
- Pincus, R., Hannor-Walker, T., Wright, L. & Justice, J. (2020): COVID-19's Effect on students: How school counselors rise to the rescue. *NASSP Bulletin*, 104(4), 241-256.
- Vera, G. & Jimenez, D. (2015): Educating counseling and guidance professionals from a pedagogy perspective: experiences from a Latin American undergraduate academic program. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 15(2), 247-261.

## Author affiliation

Assist. Prof. Dr. Sade Smith, Barry University, USA

Prof. Dr. George Vera, Barry University, USA

Please cite this publication as:

Smith, S. & Vera, G. (2021): Training School Counselors in Challenging Times: A Faculty's View on Creative Strategies to Meet Practicum and Internship Requirements. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 51-55.





# Training Pedagogy Students for Counseling in Educational Institutions

Maja Ljubetić

## Abstract

Counseling that school counselors provide in educational institutions is only one of their tasks within the very demanding and challenging school setting. Scientific research and pedagogical practice have shown that there is still considerable room for a more comprehensive post-secondary education of future pedagogues. At this level, special attention must be devoted to their training for quality counseling work. Given its sensitivity, responsibility and complexity, counseling work should be founded in the relevant theories that would provide the counselor with a firm foothold and orientation for conducting an effective consultation. Otherwise, all educational efforts could be counterproductive. The paper reports on the experience of training Pedagogy students for the counseling work within the course “Partnership of Family and Educational Institution” at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split (Croatia) in the academic year 2019/20. Acknowledging the complexity of counseling work, an (additional) elective course, which would enable students to acquire the necessary basic counseling competencies, should be introduced in the curriculum.

Keywords: counseling, tertiary education, pedagogue, practice, school counselor

## Introduction

The legislation in the Republic of Croatia very clearly and unambiguously defines the school counselor’s professional role in educational institutions (Primary and Secondary School Education Act, 2008-2017). However, it is almost impossible to list all his/her roles and tasks due to the great diversity of the types of institutions and their respective characteristics, e.g. kindergarten vs. primary or secondary school, the size of the institution, its location, support within the local community, spatial and material environment, staff requirements, etc., and the uniqueness of their culture and relationships. However, a consensus can be relatively quickly reached that a school counselor is perceived as an “advisor, advocate, agent, believer, collaborator, conductor, consultant, coordinator, diplomat, educator, enthusiast, expert, explorer, guide, initiator, leader... teacher” (Popov & Spasenović, 2020, p. 34) or more simply put the omnipresent “soul of the institution” (Ljubetić, Mandarić Vukušić & Pezo, 2017). It should be emphasized that pedagogues working in the Croatian education system in addition to their other tasks also provide counseling. In addition, it should also be pointed out that pedagogues-counselors working in educational institutions (kindergartens, schools) receive no specific education on or

training in counseling. If pedagogues cannot successfully respond to a specific situation in practice, then local community experts are involved. Graduate pedagogues sometimes, on their own initiative, attend training courses in one of the psychological theories in order to acquire counseling skills.

If we tried to rigorously group the school counselor's tasks, then they would be connected with: 1. children/students, 2. their parents/guardians, 3. educators/teachers, 4. principals and other members of the expert team (and other employees in the institution), 5. professional development activities, 6. cooperation with the local community and scientific institutions, 7. personal career, professional, and/or scientific advancement, and 8. other tasks. All of the above requires the school counselor to have personal and professional competencies (Ledić, Staničić & Turk, 2014; Bohlinger, 2008; Babić, 2007), which continue to develop through continuous (non-)formal and informal education after the basic graduate-level education. The first four groups of tasks require maximum commitment, time, energy, and expertise, and highly developed competencies, since the quality of the institution's culture (Čamber Tambolaš & Vujičić, 2019; Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014) and the overall atmosphere, which can be stimulating or inhibiting for the educational process, depends on the quality of the functioning of these subsystems (children, parents, teachers, management).

Zuković and Slijepčević (2017, p. 242) pointed out that "effective school counseling includes the knowledge of the general and unique characteristics of the development of an individual, but also the knowledge of school culture and school processes". Tertiary level teachers, who educate professional associates-pedagogues to effectively participate in the pedagogical practice, have to address two basic questions: does the current curriculum adequately prepare them for the challenges of future practice and what can be done within the relatively passive system of higher education to bring the contents and methods of their education closer to the needs of pedagogical practice? Nikšić (2017) probably faced similar dilemmas. Namely, in her research on pedagogues' attitudes towards counseling in schools, she found that, according to school pedagogues' self-assessment, counseling is the most challenging part of their job that requires most preparation. Research participants also pointed out that the Pedagogy studies had not provided them with practical conditions to apply the theory learned.

Considering the needs of practice on the one hand and the current education of professional associates-pedagogues on the other, it is evident there is a discrepancy with regard to the acquisition of counseling competencies. Pedagogical practice calls attention to the growing trend of children and young people, their parents and their teachers requiring (more) counseling as a result of increased gambling addiction (Ricijaš, Maglica & Dodig Hundrić, 2019; Maglica, 2017; Ricijaš, Krajcjer & Bouillet, 2010), addiction to modern technologies (Barling & Fullagar, 1983; Christakis et al., 2004), increased migration (Schlesier-Michel, Titzmann & Silbereisen, 2012; Yakushko, 2009), awareness that there exist individuals with different sexual orientations (Collier et al., 2013; Goodrich & Luke, 2009), etc. At the same time, there

are also young people who need counseling only occasionally, e.g. when planning their future, choosing studies, schools, or employment, facing the challenges of growing up, peer conflicts, misunderstanding between them and their parents and the like (Nurmi, 1991). Sometimes parents also need encouragement or support of professionals to perform their parenting role even better (Sahu & Baghel, 2012) as well as educators/teachers who need a focused conversation and professional support. It is clear that professional associates-pedagogues need systematic and comprehensive preparation and more intensive engagement to build and strengthen their counseling competencies so as to adequately respond to the growing needs of practice.

Observed from a supervisor's perspective in practice, it can be stated that building and strengthening students' competencies for counseling follows two directions. The first is counseling offered on a one-time basis or limited to a small number of meetings dedicated to clear, unambiguous, and very specific issues, which most often requires counselor's specific expertise and thus provides very concrete answers, e.g. how to study effectively, how to help your child to separate from the pacifier, how to help the child-pupil to correct a negative grade, etc. The second direction refers to time-consuming and content-intensive counseling that includes very personal questions, which are necessary to gain a deeper and broader insight into the person's personality and behavior in the counselor-client dyad and to clarify the family and school context, e.g. how to admit a gambling or drug addiction to parents, how to seek help; the teacher wants to help a child growing up in a dysfunctional family, but does not know how to approach the problem; the student is a victim of bullying; the student is insecure about their sexual orientation, etc.

If competencies are understood as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996; Selvi, 2010), it is clear that counselors are expected to have a range of very specific professional knowledge from different scientific disciplines (psychology, (social) pedagogy, etc.) and skills of conducting effective conversations with different stakeholders (students, parents, etc.). They also need to build attitudes (e.g. respect for all human beings regardless of gender, age, religion, orientation, etc.) and internalized generally accepted human values (tolerance, respect, appreciation, etc.). Selvi (2010, p. 167) points out that "teachers' competencies affect their values, behaviors, communication, aims and practices in school and also they support professional development and curricular studies".

To implement quality counseling, all of the above listed dimensions must be present. Therefore, professional associates-pedagogues must be provided with an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary tertiary-level education. It is also important to pay particular attention to the acquisition and improvement of communication skills as a prerequisite for quality counseling (Zuković & Slijepčević, 2017) and for (self-)assessment, which is a very effective mechanism for change and improvement of one's own personality and behavior. Counselors should particularly acquire this dimension, i.e. the permanent self-assessment ability. Otherwise they could do a lot of educational damage.

## Partnership of family and educational institution: structural changes

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Science in Split educates future professional associates-pedagogues for working in educational institutions, particularly in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and dormitories. A course titled *Partnership of Family and Educational Institution* is offered at this Faculty. The learning outcomes listed in the course syllabus state that students will, among other things, be able to: 1. Independently and effectively communicate with both parents and pupils and other participants in the educational process, and 2. Develop a concrete plan of activities aimed at building partnerships, a pedagogical education program for parents, and a counseling program with pupils (parents, teachers).

The ambitiously set plan is realized during one semester at the graduate level of studies through 15 hours of lectures, 15 hours of seminars and 15 hours of exercises. Students' (self-)assessment during and after the course (continuously conducted since the academic year 2006/07) has showed that students feel they lack competencies when providing counseling to pupils (depending on their age and the problems they face). Other employees in the educational institution and pupils' parents also lack these competencies. As counseling is only one of, but an extremely demanding and extensive pedagogue's professional task, the author of this paper tried to find an effective answer, design teaching contents and methods, and adjust (increase) the available number of lessons dedicated to developing competencies of pedagogy students.

Oral and written feedback provided by students over several years encouraged us to introduce structural changes in the course and to make a shift towards counseling:

*This is a very complex subject. It is slowly becoming clear to me how terribly demanding it is to be a pedagogue in an institution. I am a little bit afraid of whether I will be able to respond to the demands of practice and whether I will be successful at it. My biggest fear is whether I will be able to talk to parents. What if they are aggressive? (SI/1)*

*Despite all the theory we learned during the 4 years of study, I don't feel ready enough to talk to a pupil who has a more serious problem. (SK/2)*

*I am afraid of real practice and above all of talking to parents and pupils. What we have done so far in this course is not enough. It seems to me that we have just scratched the surface. (SK/3)*

*When I come to work in a school as a young pedagogue and I don't have any children of my own, and thus no personal experience, I don't believe that pupils' parents and fellow teachers will take me seriously, and I should be kind of an authority. (ST/4)*

*Until now, I thought that the pedagogue's role was a more administrative one, and now I see that it is something completely different. Constant work with people, and from these few examples of what we did in class I learned that it is not easy to help someone at all, even though you really want to. (SM/5)*

Mature, thoughtful, and critical student evaluations required immediate teacher intervention. Adapting the course to students' real needs (and interests) as well as to the needs of future pedagogical practice required a systematic analysis of the course and its design and elaboration within the given time, space-material, theoretical-practical and staffing conditions. The activities undertaken resulted in changing/adjusting:

- a) Time frame – by redistributing the content within the mandatory schedule, more time is devoted to effective conversation, i.e. counseling of future pedagogues.
- b) Spatial-material conditions – they are more flexible and have been adapted to meet the needs of pair work, small group work (3-4 students), larger groups of participants, etc.
- c) Theoretical-practical conditions – the theoretical framework of counseling in this course is based on William Glasser's choice theory. The method used is reality therapy, or more precisely, its elements adapted to students' competencies. It is important to point out that during one semester students cannot acquire competencies that choice theory and reality therapy students acquire during three years of formal education. Pedagogy students can nonetheless gain insights into the pillars of the theory and apply its principles to conduct an effective conversation. It is, therefore, continuously emphasized to students that they are being trained to lead an effective, not a counseling or therapeutic interview, which requires significantly greater competencies and a systematic formal education outside the Faculty.
- d) Staffing conditions – have not changed since the lecturer is a certified teacher of William Glasser's choice theory and reality therapy.

## Partnership and counseling under distance learning conditions

From the very beginning of the winter semester of the academic year 2019/20 in the course "Partnership of Family and Educational Institution" students were introduced to problem situations (e.g. a pupil who refuses to come to class, a pupil who fails to master the curriculum, a parent who does not accept child's failure, a parent who is aggressive towards the teacher, a pupil who is under the measure of intensified care and supervision by the Center of Social Care, etc.) and to the issues of counseling so students could: 1. face real challenging situations of future practice, 2. accept the importance of attending classes and continuously working on acquiring competencies in counseling, and 3. better understand the content of lectures and apply it in exercises (counseling) and in their term papers. Unfortunately, after only

a few lessons of direct teaching in college, we had to switch to asynchronous distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This type of teaching posed a new challenge (Bao, 2020; Shahabadi & Uplane, 2015; Hrastinski, 2008), especially for courses that required direct contact and teaching that should prepare students for counseling. However, this challenge was also turned into an advantage. The teacher produced written materials, which described the problem situation, provided details needed to understand the individual receiving counseling, and included detailed instructions (theory) necessary to conduct an effective conversation. Students had one to two weeks to conduct a counseling interview (depending on the complexity of the situation and the task). In the initial phase of distance learning, students conducted an imaginary conversation where both students played the role of counselor and the role of student/parent, then in pairs via Skype (with shared roles), and finally in groups of three (counselor, student/parent and feedback provider) communicating via some of the platforms. After completing the spoken part of the assignment, students provided the teacher with a written feedback in which they presented their conversations through dialogues and gave their reflection on their own respective roles. Having reviewed all assignments and having provided each student with an individual feedback, the teacher informed the whole group of the examples of excellent counseling practice, problematized and further clarified and explained certain questions that were difficult for some or most students, answered questions asked by individuals or groups, etc. At the same time, self-assessment was a part of each task, so it was an additional opportunity for students to learn. Although self-assessment is an effective technique that students usually do not accept with joy at first, they eventually realize its importance. A comment by a female student from the 2019/2020 generation illustrates this point. She said:

*I might single out self-reflection, as something more difficult... which was more challenging than other tasks at the beginning. I know that self-reflection is very important and useful for further progress, but it is always difficult to assess yourself and your work. However, as we have had the opportunity to face this type of task many times, it is no longer a big problem for me. (S/16)*

Although this form of teaching required a lot of effort and was time-consuming for both students and the teacher, the students assessed that the time available enabled them to learn and progress at their own pace. It also left them with enough space to study each counseling conversation, and correct the written version in accordance with the newly acquired knowledge and feedback received from the teacher on previous tasks. Joint efforts to overcome the challenges of counseling in the context of distance learning have resulted in a University Handbook titled “Co-construction of knowledge and acquisition of pedagogical skills in distance learning” (Maja Ljubetić and students of Pedagogy – generation 2016/2017). We believe that this handbook will significantly contribute to the acquisition of counseling competencies for future generations of Pedagogy students.



## What have we learned?

Towards the end of the distance learning and the realized course content related to counseling, students were administered a questionnaire on the importance of counseling and their experience as counselors, where they assessed their strengths, weaknesses, and their willingness to improve their counseling competencies. A few examples illustrate the most common student responses.

*Counseling is extremely important. We are the first ones, after kindergarten and school teachers that pupils and parents should turn to and that is why I will try to create a pleasant atmosphere in which both parents and pupils can relax. I want to build warm relationships, but on a professional level (so that the parents do not feel uncomfortable and that we exchange thoughts without prejudice or negative emotions, or that we easily engage in critical thinking, keeping in mind the child is the priority affected by our relationships and thoughts). I want to get to know their family culture slowly and carefully without pressure, that is, without them feeling threatened, attacked or criticized. I want to actively listen to them and show understanding, but think rationally and earn their respect. I want to let parents know that they are a big part of a child's life, so they need to be active participants in the upbringing and education. I want to do all this for my pupils because they motivate us to constantly put in effort and work harder. (S/23)*

*I am ready to learn a lot more. Only now is it clear to me how demanding, complex and responsible counseling is. I still don't feel completely ready, but I have a desire. (S12)*

*When I think about my future role as a pedagogue, I would like parents not to think negatively about the pedagogue and I wish there is no stigma related to "going to see the pedagogue", as if it were something negative. My wish is that one day, as a pedagogue, my parents will not hesitate to contact me when they encounter a problem. I would also like the pedagogue not to be perceived as an individual who only conveys information to pupils and does paperwork. I believe that this is a very responsible, complex and diverse profession, which as such should be recognized by the local community, and of course the pupil's family. In order to meet their expectations, I still need to acquire competencies in counseling, but I am well on my way. I know which direction to follow. (S/17)*

*Counseling is very demanding. It scares me a bit, but I'm getting better at it, although I'm aware that I still have a lot to learn. It's interesting. I'm just afraid I might be too sympathetic. Will that be an obstacle for me? (S/25)*

Students have recognized that the following qualities would enable them to provide quality counseling: patience, real willingness to help, self-confidence, acceptance, respect, and the abilities to actively listen, think critically, and create a pleasant and warm atmosphere, and, last but not least, as one student stated, "*I always do my best*" (S/23). Students most often consider self-doubt, withdrawal, pessimism, excessive sensitivity, fear of error, "*the belief that I am not taken seriously*



*given my age, which could have a negative effect on my performance” (S/23) and “a lack of self-confidence” (S/25) as their weaknesses in counseling. All surveyed students expressed their readiness to improve both their own general professional and their counseling competencies as well as to systematically work to reduce and/or eliminate their weaknesses. A student concludes:*

*Furthermore, I learned through assignments and elaboration of the theory that both counseling and partnership relationship with parents, children and colleagues in an educational institution are the key to success in pedagogue’s work and that it is necessary to work hard and be persistent no matter how many obstacles you encounter. (S/15)*

Looking from the teacher’s perspective, it can be concluded that the correct choice of teaching methods and content can achieve the desired outcomes in students in extraordinary circumstances and arouse their real interest in studying subjects that they value as being highly useful. Furthermore, counseling is a complex area of practical work whose quality implementation requires a strong theoretical support – an “anchor”. A good “anchor” provides the counselor with a sense of security and enables him/her to develop the skills necessary for simultaneously maintaining quality relationships and guiding interlocutors to seek possible solutions to their problem(s). Resman (2000) emphasizes that the counselor’s task is to direct the interlocutor towards different perspectives and possible answers, giving him/her the freedom to independently choose the solution s/he considers most appropriate.

## Conclusion

The issue of students’ and practitioners’ competencies required for quality counseling in pedagogical practice still does not receive enough attention given the complexity and responsibility that arises from this role. Existing courses should be analyzed and improved and new (elective) courses should be designed to include counseling in their respective syllabuses. This would enable Pedagogy students to acquire the competencies necessary for effective counseling of pupils and their parents and teachers. When conducting these changes, it is important to rely on one of the relevant contemporary theories as it will provide the counselor with security and support in the moments when s/he hesitates how to continue conducting an effective conversation. It is also necessary to appropriately supervise students as they acquire these competencies. Relevant theories are also important to practitioners as it enables them to further improve in practice.

## References

- Babić, N. (2007): Kompetencije i obrazovanje učitelja. In: Babić, N. (Ed.) *Zbornik radova znanstvenog skupa Kompetencije i kompetentnost učitelja* (pp. 23-66). Faculty of Education, University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek and Kherson State University, Ukraine.

- Bao, W. (2020): COVID-19 and online teaching in higher education: A case study of Peking University. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2(2), 113-115.
- Barling, J. & Fullagar, C. (1983): Children's Attitudes to Television Advertisements: a Factorial Perspective. *Journal of Psychology*, 113(1), 25-30.
- Bohlinger, S. (2008): Competences as the core element of the European Qualifications Framework. *European Journal of Vocational Training*, Thematic Issue: *The European Qualifications Framework*, 42/43, 96-112.
- Čamber Tambolaš, A. & Vujičić, L. (2019): Early Education Institution as a Place for Creating a Culture of Collaborative Relationships. In: Mezak, J., Drakulić, M. & Lazzarich, M. (Eds.) *Educational systems and societal changes: Challenges and opportunities* (pp. 69-71). Rijeka: University of Rijeka, Faculty of Teacher Education.
- Cheetham, G. & Chivers, G. (1996): Towards a holistic model of professional competence. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 20(5), 20-30.
- Christakis, D. A., Zimmerman, F. J., DiGiuseppe, D. L. & McCarty, A. (2004): Early Television Exposure and Subsequent Attentional Problems in Children. *Pediatrics*, 113(4), 708-713.
- Collier, K. L., van Beusekom, G., Bos, H. M. W. & Sandfort, T. G. M. (2013): Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression Related Peer Victimization in Adolescence: A Systematic Review of Associated Psychosocial and Health Outcomes. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 50(3-4), 299-317.
- Goodrich, K. M. & Luke, M. (2009): LGBTQ Responsive School Counseling. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 3(2), 113-127.
- Hongboontri, C. & Keawkhong, N. (2014): School Culture: Teachers' Beliefs, Behaviors, and Instructional Practices. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(5), 66-88.
- Hrastinski, S. (2008): Asynchronous and Synchronous E-Learning. *Educause Quarterly*, 4, 51-55.
- Ledić, J., Staničić, S. & Turk, M. (2014): Kako odrediti kompetencije školskih pedagoga. *Napredak: Časopis za interdisciplinarna istraživanja u odgoju i obrazovanju*, 154(3), 339-341.
- Ljubetić, M., Mandarić Vukušić, A. & Pezo, K. (2017): Pedagogues and Social Workers - Challenges of Collaboration. *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Forum*, 167-189.
- Maglica, T. (2017): Obilježja roditeljstva i odnos roditelja prema kockanju kao prediktori kockanja muške djece. Doktorska disertacija, Edukacijsko-rehabilitacijski fakultet, Zagreb.
- Nikšić, E. (2017): Savjetodavni rad školskog pedagoga. Suvremeni izazovi u radu (školskog) pedagoga. In: Turk, M., Kušić, S., Mrnjauš, K. & Zloković, J. (Eds.) *Zbornik u čast Stjepana Staničića* (pp. 252-268). Rijeka: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.
- Nurmi, J-E. (1991): How do adolescents see their future? A review of the development of future orientation and planning. *Developmental Review*, 11(1), 1-59.
- Popov, N. & Spasenović, V. (2020): School Counseling: A Comparative Study in 12 Countries. *Educational Reforms Worldwide*, BCES Conference Books, Vol. 18 (pp. 34-41). Sofia: Bulgarian Comparative Education Society.
- Primary and Secondary School Education Act (2008-2017): Republic of Croatia, Ministry of Science and Education. Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi. *Narodne novine*, br. 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10, 90/11, 5/12, 16/12, 86/12, 94/13, 136/14 - RUSRH, 152/14 i 7/17.
- Resman, M. (2000): *Savjetodavni rad u vrtiću i školi*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko-pedagoško-književni zbor.
- Ricijaš, N., Krajcer, M. & Bouillet, D. (2010): Rizična ponašanja zagrebačkih srednjoškolaca – razlike s obzirom na spol. *Odgovne znanosti*, 12(1), 45-63.
- Ricijaš, N., Maglica, T. & Dodig Hundrić, D. (2019): Regulativa igara na sreću u Hrvatskoj kao socijalni rizik. *Ljetopis socijalnog rada*, 26(3), 335-361.
- Sahu, A. & Baghel, B. (2012): Impact of Parental Counselling on Child's Personality and Scholastic Performance. *Research J. Science and Tech*, 4(1), 32-39.

- Schlesier-Michel, A., Titzmann, P. F. & Silbereisen, R. K. (2012): Psychological Adaptation of Adolescent Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Germany: Acculturation Versus Age-Related Time Trends. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 43(1), 59-76.
- Selvi, K. (2010): Teachers' Competencies. *Cultura. International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, 7(1), 167-175.
- Shahabadi, M. M. & Uplane, M. (2015): Synchronous and asynchronous e-learning styles and academic performance of e-learners. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 176, 129-138.
- Yakushko, O. (2009): Xenophobia: Understanding the Roots and Consequences of Negative Attitudes toward Immigrants. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 37(1), 36-66.
- Zuković, S. & Slijepčević, S. (2017): Komunikacijska sposobnost u funkciji savjetodavnog rada školskog pedagoga. In: Turk, M., Kušić, S., Mrnjauš, K. & Zloković, J. (Eds.) *Zbornik u čast Stjepana Staničića* (pp. 236-250). Rijeka: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

#### Author affiliation

Prof. Dr. Maja Ljubetić, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Split, Croatia

Please cite this publication as:

Ljubetić, M. (2021): Training Pedagogy Students for Counseling in Educational Institutions. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 57-66.

# School Counseling for Preparing ECD Practitioners in Addressing Children's Learning Difficulties: A Possible Solution for Job Creation

Maphetla Magdeline Machaba

## Abstract

This conceptual paper explores how early childhood development practitioners are prepared for addressing children's learning difficulties through counseling, to encourage entrepreneurship. Due to the limited discourse on how ECD practitioners are provided with guidance and counseling for job creation in South Africa, the text aims to highlight how ECD practitioners' preparation for addressing learners' difficulties can help create jobs in ECD centres. Due to the historical neglect, the ECD sector is faced with numerous challenges to quality, an under skilled workforce with low pay, and poor conditions of service in the Black rural areas. If the sector is to grow and be upgraded to enable practitioners to be entrepreneurs, it will need to become more attractive as a career option. ECD practitioners have to plan, organise and conduct activities to help pre-primary school children develop a wide variety of skills that include speech, reading, writing, motor skills and social interaction. Counseling and guiding ECD practitioners for job creation is a quality that will impact positively on society, thus creative staffing should be given serious consideration. The argument in this paper is whether ECD practitioners can be adequately capacitated through counseling to acquire adequate skills to create jobs. This qualitative paper analysed literature studies that include books and articles written on performance management systems in higher education, to establish how performance data is used to improve institutional staff performance. Findings reveal that capacitating ECD practitioners through counseling provides opportunities that will make a real and lasting difference in children's and society's lives. Recommendations are that the government and educational stakeholders should ensure counseling and support is provided to ECD practitioners to enable them to create jobs for more practitioners involved in addressing children's learning difficulties.

Keywords: counseling, ECD practitioners, entrepreneurship, learning difficulties, practitioner support, practitioner preparation, job creation, teaching skills

## Introduction

Early childhood development (ECD) is the phase between birth and the school-going age (pre-school), when children learn foundational cognitive abilities, attitudes, and skills, in preparation for primary schooling and the rest of their lives (RSA, 2001). The earliest years of life are pivotal for children and their societies. However, many children in developing countries are not able to develop to their full potential because of serious deficits in health, nutrition and proper training of practitioners

and the centre managers (Martinez, Naudeau & Pereira, 2012). The effects of poor practitioner preparation can be long lasting, reinforcing the intergenerational development of children and the transmission of poverty to the society. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), as well the South African government also indicate its impact on later educational achievements and the achievement of universal primary education (one of the Millennium Development Goals). Xulu (2016) states that many black learners face learning barriers and need well prepared practitioners. According to Xulu (2016), language barrier is a type of psychological barrier that affects communication, and hampers learner performance in school subjects. Children taught by well-prepared and counselled practitioners, perform better at school, have better employment opportunities later in life, and contribute more to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country, as opposed to children who do not experience a formal ECD education.

ECD practitioners create the foundation upon which all future learning will occur, and their work is both meaningful and valuable. Each society relies on practitioners to prepare our earliest learners for a lifetime of learning and discovery (Murray & Biersteker, 2014). Poor ECD practitioner preparation and experiences, and lack of counseling, can limit later cognitive development of the child, and impact negatively on the economy of the country. To address these problems, and to help create jobs, ECD practitioners' preparation should include counseling and creative ways of acquiring ECD teaching skills and addressing learning difficulties. Early childhood development practitioners are known by several names such as early childcare teacher, kindergarten teacher, nursery school teacher, and playschool teacher (Career planet, n.d.). In this paper the term ECD practitioner is used to discuss ECD practitioners tasked to perform indoor and outdoor tasks for addressing barriers to learners' experience in education. Most childhood barriers include, among others, language and numeracy. The intention, therefore, is to benefit children, families, communities, government, the ECD non-profit sector on how to provide, quality ECD practitioner preparation programmes. The South African policymakers would have to provide guidelines based on empirical evidence for the ECD programmes. Furthermore ECD practitioners will need counseling skills for addressing learning barriers at the beginning of the learner's education.

ECD centres are vital in the lives of children to equip them with foundational knowledge and skills to succeed through life. It is very essential that practitioners identify and intervene right at the beginning of the learners' careers so that the latter should have a sound foundation to build on in this regard (Van Niekerk, Ashley-Cooper & Atmore, 2017). According to the South African White Paper 6, the education and training system should promote education for all and foster the development of inclusive and supportive centres of learning that would enable all learners to participate actively in the education process so that they can develop and extend their potential and participate as equal members of society. If these principles can be realised, barriers to learning will be minimised. It is also government policy

that all learners be taught mathematics because it is a very important and necessary life skill that cannot be done without.

As policy makers consider expansion of ECD programs, they have to ensure that practitioner counseling and development optimise children's experiences while maintaining economic responsibility. In this regard, policy makers should consider setting professional development and counseling standards that are neither too low to jeopardise the value of the programs they are creating; nor unnecessarily high to be costly and make it difficult to recruit ECD practitioners (Early et al., 2006). The current paper concentrates on practitioner preparation through counseling to ensure more ECD centres and jobs are created to address learner barriers and ensure the remedy of this anomaly at an early stage.

## Becoming an ECD practitioner

In July 2014, the Minister of Social Development announced the South African government's commitment to make ECD a public good and to accelerate implementation of a comprehensive ECD programme from conception to formal school going age (Murray & Biersteker, 2014). This was to focus, in particular, on children in poor communities, access for children with disabilities and those in rural and informal settlements, and include both centre and non-centre based services (Murray & Biersteker, 2014). The Department of Basic Education expanded access to ECD to disadvantaged communities, such as rural villages and poor townships, however, most parts of the country did not have enough ECD practitioners, as enrollment in ECD classes was expanding rapidly, increasing the demand for ECD practitioners. ECD practitioners are valuable to society and should have a passion for early education. They work with children at the start of their educational journey and help them to understand and attain some of the most basic and foundational academic, social, cognitive and emotional concepts. The ECD sector requires practitioners who are counselled, trained or qualified, because ECD practitioners are a scarce skill in South Africa (Kotzé, 2015).

The skills and attitudes required of practitioners are love and care for children, ability to communicate well with children – one-on-one and as a group, a positive attitude towards children and their needs, and the ability to speak to parents with care. ECD practitioners in South Africa should have a qualification, and, several qualifications can be acquired before becoming an ECD practitioner (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012). The Further Education and Training Certificate in Early Childhood Development (NQF Level 4) qualification is the entry-level qualification for ECD practitioners. It serves as the equivalent of a Grade 12, and a Grade 9 certificate is required for entry. Qualifications are: The National Diploma in Early Childhood Development (NQF Level 5); Higher Certificate in Early Childhood Development (NQF Level 5); Advanced Certificate in Education – Foundation Phase and Early Childhood Development (NQF Level 6), a qualification usually followed by people who are already qualified as educators; Bachelor of Primary Education in



Early Childhood Development (NQF Level 7); and Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Development – Foundation Phase (NQF Level 8). These qualifications can be studied at a TVET (FET) College and some South African universities. Once you've graduated, you will be required to register with the South African Council for Educators (SACE) as a practitioner/educator (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012).

## Capacitating ECD practitioners

The need for quality ECD centres is also increasing because of the social changes in the labour market. Dual-income households are rapidly on the rise, with both parents having to work fulltime. In South Africa there is also a high rate of single-parent households, however all children, according to the NCSNET/NCESS report (1997), need qualified practitioners who are equipped through professional development and are prepared and supported for their role in the provision of education and support. Practitioners including classroom assistants, should be equipped and accredited through various pre- and in-service programmes, to be able to respond to learner diversity in the ECD context. There is a need for affordable, quality childcare services across the country (Le Roux, 2016), hence, in 2008, the South African government designated early childhood development as a national developmental priority (Richter et al., 2017). This meant that government programmes would focus on developing and counseling ECD practitioners to improve the quality of existing ECD centres, promote a standardised ECD curriculum, and encourage capacitated ECD practitioners to establish more ECD centres, where there is a need for them.

ECD practitioners need counseling skills and knowledge to identify the origin of the learning barrier from the learner's environment, at school or at home. These are, for example, language, socio-economic, inflexible curriculum, language and communication, attitudes, lack of access to basic services, poverty and underdevelopment, factors which place learners at risk. The trained and counselled ECD practitioners should have the necessary skills to look after and teach children. The ultimate goal is that everyone in an ECD centre in South Africa should be well developed and know what the rules and regulations to be followed are in this regard (Murray & Biersteker, 2014). Capacitated ECD practitioners can start their own ECD centres and get the chance to be their own bosses while making a living doing what they love doing. To register for an ECD centre in South Africa, the new centre owners need to consult the office nearest to the proposed Department of Social Development centre, and then the local authority (municipality), to obtain the right to use the centre after acquiring the necessary health clearance certificate for running the centre in that particular location.

## ECD practitioner support

ECD practitioner support has development as priority, followed by economic empowerment. Government has many grants aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and small businesses. All day care and ECD centres have to be registered at the local Department of Social Development branch. When registering for an ECD centre, you can simultaneously apply for departmental funding or assistance from the Department of Social Development. The Small Enterprise Finance Agency also provides financial support to small-scale entrepreneurs in outer urban or rural areas. The National Empowerment Fund is a government fund that helps previously disadvantaged individuals and communities obtain financial support (Van Niekerk, Ashley-Cooper & Atmore, 2017). The National Youth Development Agency provides funds for young entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 35. Local government offices can be contacted to find out if there are any funding or development opportunities for starting an ECD centre in your area. If you are starting an ECD centre in a disadvantaged area, you might be able to get donations, such as food, equipment, or toys (Van Niekerk, Ashley-Cooper & Atmore, 2017). The Department of Social Development can be contacted for help securing ECD centre donations, or to find local non-governmental organisations in the province that can sponsor the centre. Practitioners may qualify for donations if their centre is a non-profit organisation, and it focuses on supplying low-income families with ECD facilities, or they work with disabled children.

Registration requires consultation at the local municipal authority to obtain the right of use and the necessary health clearance certificate to run the centre in the proposed location. The local Departments of Education and Health or the Department of Social Development may indicate any other requirements such as a weekly food menu, a daily programme, a building plan of location (if appropriate), a signed and date copy of the business's constitution, a business plan (for funding applications), and a financial report for the past year (for funding applications) for the centre or a lease contract with the owners of the building, if leasing. After receiving provisional registration, the practitioner undergoes assessment by the relevant Department to make sure the ECD centre complies with the Department's standards and registration requirements in terms of infrastructure, health and safety, education curriculum, and human resource management (Van Niekerk, Ashley-Cooper & Atmore, 2017).

## Identification of learners who experience barriers to learning

Intelligence and other human capacities are not fixed at birth but, rather, are shaped to some extent by environmental influences and through practitioner teaching. Disabilities and other factors may render a child at risk for development and learning, so that the original barriers become more severe, and secondary challenges present. Early intervention programs can make a significant difference in



the developmental status of young children and can do so more rapidly than later remedial efforts after a child has entered elementary school. According to Papatheodorou (2005), a young child who has or is at risk of developing barriers, should get intervention as early as possible because the early years of the child are when the child is most susceptible and responsive to learning experiences. It is at this stage that initial patterns of learning and behaviour that influence the nature of all subsequent development are established.

Papatheodorou (2005) further purports that early identification of learning barriers provides a foundation for later learning academic success experiences for learners at risk. If learning barriers are not identified early, the learning barriers may continue and could lead to more learners dropping out of school, exhibiting behaviour barriers and developing greater academic deficiencies. ECD practitioners should be counselled to be creative in managing the learning programmes of the learners and assess the needs of the learners collectively and individually. They should provide flexible programmes that accommodate a variety of needs, drawing on the resources of the learners themselves. A key role would be facilitating a learning environment that fosters respect among learners and among the learning community as a whole.

## Research methodology

This paper employed a descriptive research methodology wherein literature analysis of documents was completed based on data extracted from secondary sources of information. The paper employed a qualitative conceptual approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008) to address the research question: How are ECD practitioners addressing children's learning difficulties, capacitated? And how will their counseling preparation help create jobs? The paper is located within the interpretive paradigm which served as an analytical tool to highlight how ECD practitioners teaching children with learning difficulties are capacitated and counselled; and how their preparation may ensure jobs are created. The constructive approach offers global views of ECD policies ensuring practitioner preparation, followed by the provision of counseling support services, the provision of resources and developmental strategies, and parental involvement and recognition. For learners to fully participate in society, practitioners must be equipped with a variety of teaching techniques that allow learners to meet their greatest potential. In support of the above scholars, Morin and Franks (2009) state that all learners, regardless of their barriers, backgrounds, personal characteristics, physical challenges must have opportunities to learn. This can only happen if the practitioner is capacitated (Morin & Franks, 2009) and counselled. In recognition of the increasingly important role practitioners play in addressing learner barriers, there is also a need for practitioners to apply their counseling skills by training more practitioners to improve the economy of the country. A partnership should be created between the ECD centres and the community to enhance the country's economy.

## Conclusion

ECD practitioners should be capacitated with knowledge of the various teaching methods, especially with regard to learners from disadvantaged communities coming to school for the first time (Morin & Franks, 2009). Some come into contact with the language of teaching for first time at school. If this problem is not attended to earlier, such children will experience learning difficulties throughout their lives. Early intervention implies some economic-social benefits in the prevention of developmental problems in young learners, may reduce more serious, burdensome barriers for society to cope with later, including accompanying costs. According to Pal (2009), disadvantaged children are more likely to perform poorly at school because of their "different home environments" (p. 8). These children are more at risk of experiencing learning difficulties because of their lack of out-of-school educational support. Therefore, poorly capacitated practitioners and lack of counseling may place these children in an untenable situation in their education, right from the beginning.

Similarly, Groark et al. (2007), found that practitioners who can identify learner barriers at an early stage, may help the learners with complex needs or particular types or patterns of difficulty in learning, succeed, in the ordinary school system. Early detection comes with good practice, creative teaching methods, an improved teaching and learning environment, that meets the learners' needs. The success of ECD practitioners and learners can be attained through practitioner planning and support of a collaborative working practice with parents. ECD practitioners have a significant role to play to ensure children develop self-esteem and gain acceptance. When the other learners in the classroom see that the practitioner accepts and loves all children, they will also accept one another. The educator as a role model and as a substitute to the parent has an important role to play in accommodating learners with barriers. The counseled practitioner should teach learners to develop empathy towards others, and coping skills in response to emotions such as anger, sadness, and anxiety. Learners should be educated in an inclusive environment where similarities and differences are celebrated.

## References

- Atmore, E., van Niekerk, L. J. & Ashley-Cooper, M. (2012): Challenges facing the early childhood development sector in South Africa. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 2(1), 121-140.
- Baxter, P. & Jack, S. (2008): Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559.
- Department of Education (DoE) (2001): *Education White Paper 6 - Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Department of Education NCSNET / NCESS (1998): *Quality Education for All. Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Early, D. M., Bryant, D. M., Pianta, R. C., Clifford, R. M., Burchinal, M. R., Ritchie, S. & Barbarin, O. (2006): Are teachers' education, major, and credentials related to classroom quality and children's academic gains in pre-kindergarten? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21(2), 174-195.

- Groark, C. J., Mehaffie, K. E., McCall, R. B. & Greenberg, M. T. (Eds.) (2007): *Evidence-Based Practices and Programs for Early Childhood Care and Education*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
- Kotzé, J. (2015): The readiness of the South African education system for the pre-Grade R year. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 5(2), 1-27.
- Le Roux, S. G. (2016): The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners. Doctoral dissertation, Maastricht University.
- Martinez, S., Naudeau, S. & Pereira, V. (2012): *The Promise of Preschool in Africa: A Randomized Impact Evaluation of Early Childhood Development in Rural Mozambique*. World Bank & Save the Children.
- Morin, J. E. & Franks, D. J. (2009): Why do some children have difficulty learning mathematics? Looking at language for answers. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 54(2), 111-118.
- Murray, C. & Biersteker, L. (2014): *TVET Colleges: Contributions towards HR Development in the Early Childhood Development Sector*. Ilifalabantwana: Lessons from the field.
- Pal, G. C. (2009): Teaching and learning mathematics. University School Resource Network 1-12.
- Papatheodorou, T. (2005): *Behaviour Problems in the Early Years*. New York: Routledge.
- Republic of South Africa (RSA) (2001): *Education White Paper 5 - On Early Childhood Education. Meeting the Challenge of Early Childhood Development in South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Richter, L. M., Daelmans, B., Lombardi, J., Heymann, J., Boo, F. L., Behrman, J. R. & Bhutta, Z. A. (2017): Investing in the foundation of sustainable development: pathways to scale up for early childhood development. *The lancet*, 389(10064), 103-118.
- Van Niekerk, L., Ashley-Cooper, M. & Atmore, E. (2017): *Effective early childhood development programme options meeting the needs of young South African children*. Cape Town: Centre for Early Childhood Development.
- Xulu, P. T. (2016): Exploring the importance of early childhood stimulation in rural Howick West in Pietermaritzburg, Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

#### Author affiliation

Dr. Maphetla Magdeline Machaba, University of South Africa, South Africa

Please cite this publication as:

Machaba, M. M. (2021): School Counseling for Preparing ECD Practitioners in Addressing Children's Learning Difficulties: A Possible Solution for Job Creation. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 67-74.

## Part 3

### School Counseling Practices

# Considering the Challenges of the Further Development of School Counselling: Experiences from Slovenia

Petra Gregorčič Mrvar

#### Abstract

The school counselling service is specific to Slovenian schools. The concept dates back to the second half of the 1960s, and since the mid-1990s the law has required every public preschool and school to have its school counselling service. This paper presents recent findings on the work of the school counselling service in the Slovenian education system, taking them as a starting point for reflection on its further development. Examining the findings, the author emphasizes the importance of the pedagogically developmental and preventative orientation of the school counselling service. It is crucial in achieving a higher quality of the work of educational institutions, for instance, the introduction of modern pedagogical principles, such as the principle of inclusiveness, the principle of interculturalism, the principle of children's and adolescents' participation. The developmental and preventative orientation of the school counselling service, which includes cooperation with actors inside and outside the school, is found at several levels: 1) the development of the educational institution as a whole; 2) direct cooperation in the educational process; 3) counselling and assistance provided to children, adolescents and parents; 4) the development and co-creation of systemic solutions in education.

Keywords: school counselling service, school counsellors, pedagogues, challenges and problems, cooperation, Covid-19 pandemic

#### Introduction

The school counselling service is specific to Slovenian schools with some unique characteristics, which are presented in the paper. Reviewing the international arrangements of school counselling services and school counselling reveals that the conceptualisation of school counselling services in Europe and around the world differ with reference to their formal set-up, the experts who work there (cf. Carey et al., 2017; Harris, 2013; Popov & Spasenović, 2018). The concept of the school counselling

service in Slovenia dates back to the second half of the 1960s, and since the mid-1990s the law has required every public preschool and school to have its school counselling service.<sup>1</sup>

### *Background of school counselling in Slovenia*

The father of the Slovenian school counselling service F. Pediček described its implementation into the Slovenian school system as the breakthrough of “anthropology-based pedagogical thought” (Pediček, 1992). He saw counselling as assistance in students’ holistic development. Today counselling intertwines humanist and systemic stances, which is the starting point for the proactive, developmental and preventative orientation of counselling. The school counselling service is a (pre)school sub-system, working together with other sub-systems (teachers, head teachers, parents, community) towards the fundamental goal of the (pre)school as a whole. The fundamental goal is the wellbeing of all children and adolescents, their optimum development, learning and a good-quality educational process regardless of their individual or group differences.

### *Characteristics of school counselling in Slovenia*

The formal framework for the work of the school counselling service in Slovenia is set out in the Organization and Financing of Education Act, 2017 (hereafter ZOFVI, 2017). The Act mandates a counselling service in public preschools and schools counselling children and adolescents together with cooperating with parents. It cooperates also with educators and school management in planning, monitoring and evaluating the development of the (pre)school and its educational work.

The key conceptual document for school counselling is the Programme Guidelines for the School Counselling Service (Programske smernice, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c), which were approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport in 1999. The Guidelines state that school counsellors participate in resolving pedagogical, psychological and social issues in schools by means of three central activities: activities of assistance, of development and prevention, and of planning and evaluation. Undertaking these three main types of activities, the school counselling service helps students, educators, management, parents and it collaborates with them in the following areas of everyday life and work at the institution: learning and teaching; school culture, school climate and order; physical, personal and social development; schooling and career guidance; socio-economic difficulties (ibid.).

---

<sup>1</sup> The school system in Slovenia is divided into three sections of education: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary education is provided by public and private preschools (kindergartens), elementary schools, elementary schools with an adapted education programme, music schools and educational institutions for children with special educational needs. Secondary education is provided by upper secondary schools and secondary schools. It is classified as general or vocational technical and secondary professional or technical education. The school counselling service is formally part of every public preschool and public school at the primary and (upper) secondary levels of education (i.e., including children and adolescents from 1 to 19/20 years of age).

According to the Guidelines (*ibid.*), school counselling as conceptualized in Slovenia has never been limited only to assisting students in their personal development and learning. As such, it provides not only student counselling, directly helping students with their development, but it also helps to the functioning of the educational institution as a whole in terms of planning, implementing and evaluating everyday educational work in (pre)schools as well as planning, creating and maintaining favourable conditions for a safe and encouraging educational environment that allows children/adolescents optimum progress. This means that when looking after the child's/adolescent's optimum holistic development, it is first necessary to ensure the conditions for this development, to organize adequately the physically and socially stimulating environment of the (pre)school. The help of a counsellor to students in their development and learning remains incomplete if his/her activities do not embrace the work of the educational institution and classes, consultation work with teachers, school management, parents and the external environment (i.e., the local community), as most of protective factors are found in everyday activities and the general culture of coexistence at school (Mikuš Kos et al., 2017).

Due to a complex interrelation of pedagogical, psychological and social issues, the school counselling service is at its most effective when it incorporates a team of different experts. Thus, it is important that counsellors of different professional profiles from different schools cooperate, and that professional school counsellors also cooperate with other experts from relevant external institutions (*ibid.*).

The school counselling service in Slovenia is interdisciplinary, which means that it is made up of counsellors with different professional profiles. These are pedagogues<sup>2</sup>, psychologists, social workers and others (Gregorčič Mrvar & Resman, 2019; ZOFVI, 2017). All of the profiles are professionally qualified to do school counselling work, but each brings specific knowledge, skills and competences to the work. According to the rules on norms and standards for the implementation of (pre)school programmes, each preschool must appoint one counsellor per 30 classes/educational groups, and each primary and secondary school must appoint one counsellor per 20 classes.

It should be pointed out that the work of school counsellors in (pre)school differs slightly in tasks, content and strategies of work, which is mainly related to the level and type of school, as well as to the developmental characteristics of children and adolescents.

---

<sup>2</sup> Pedagogues must complete a master's study programme in pedagogy in order to perform the tasks of school counsellors. The studies provide them with a quality social sciences and humanities education with an emphasis on the systematic knowledge of pedagogy and andragogy. They have knowledge of the scientific paradigms and orientations that are important for understanding and analysing educational processes and for understanding the connections between pedagogical phenomena, processes and society. They are qualified to co-create systemic and other documents in the field of education, to take on managerial/leadership positions in education and other social activities, and to carry out (school) developmental and counselling activities. (Gregorčič Mrvar & Resman, 2019)



## Research on the work of the school counselling service in Slovenia

### *Positive aspects of the operation of the school counselling service in Slovenia*

There have been a few representative empirical studies done of the school counselling service in Slovenia since the mid-1990s, when its functioning became formally regulated and each (pre)school started to employ one or more school counsellors. Those that have been done (e.g. Bezić, 2008; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; Resman et al., 1999; Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011; Vogrinc & Krek, 2012) demonstrate that the school counselling service is an important constituent part of each (pre)school. According to a study done among educators in Slovenian schools (Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011), the majority of head teachers and teachers take the counselling service to be an integral part of each school. Nearly three quarters of the teachers and most of the head teachers described their own collaboration with the school counselling service as either very good or good (ibid.; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020). Parents, likewise, demonstrated considerable knowledge of the work of the school counselling service and positive attitudes towards it. Similar responses and assessments were given by students (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020).

In addition, other positive aspects of the school counselling service's work have been observed. Practising school counsellors report that (Bezić, 2008; Vogrinc & Krek, 2012): undergraduate studies provided them with adequate theoretical knowledge; they are fairly satisfied with the system of further training; they are satisfied with the system of promotion to professional titles; they have relatively good conditions for work; despite the great stress, three quarters of professional school counsellors would not change their work even if they could, because they see their work as their mission.

### *Negative aspects of the operation of the school counselling service in Slovenia*

Preschools, schools and the school counselling service have been undergoing changes in the last decade that have had an impact on their work and the work of individual profiles in them. With the conceptual and systemic changes including, for instance: the design and evaluation of the school's plan of moral and character education; working with gifted children and adolescents; the continuum of assistance for students with learning difficulties; working with children and adolescents with special educational needs; working with immigrants; cooperation with cultural and arts institutions; the education of the Roma, etc., school counsellors have had to shoulder great professional burdens in recent years with numerous educational, coordination and administration tasks. This is also suggested by the findings of school counselling service evaluation studies (e.g. Bezić, 2008; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; Resman et al., 1999; Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011; Vogrinc & Krek, 2012), which confirm that professional school counsellors spend most of their time on remedial



work with students, that is, individual work with students with learning difficulties, special needs, education and discipline problems as well as those with problems in their physical, personal and/or social development, while they work less frequently with the entire populations of students or with individual classes. A lack of time is the primary reason for their infrequently doing preventative and developmental work as well as monitoring and evaluating work in educational institutions (Bezić, 2008; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020). They also report that in recent years the range of their tasks has increased, that the tasks are not clear to all those who find themselves in the educational institutions and that, consequently, the currently established norms are inappropriate (Bezić, 2008; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; Vogrinc & Krek, 2012).

### *School counselling in Slovenia during Covid-19 pandemic*

The work of the counselling service changed with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic last year. The educational process took place remotely and it was in many ways restricted and altered, which was also true of the developmental and counselling work of the school counselling service. The findings of a survey among school counsellors in Slovenia (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2021), which examined how the counselling service dealt with the issues, challenges and problems that arose during the implementation of distance education and counselling, demonstrate that during the pandemic counsellors were important actors in resolving various situations related to the relationship between adults and children/adolescents, to educational work and issues, teachers' dilemmas in the implementation of distance schoolwork, as well as to managing educational institutions. The consequences of the pandemic and the interruption in the regular pedagogical process in preschools and schools are expected to increase the need for assistance activities (i.e., remedial interventions) for some time to come (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2021; Savitz-Romer et al., 2020). Situations marked by uncertainty can trigger apprehension in both adults and children, there may be more mental irritability, feelings of anxiety, mental health problems, and suchlike. At the same time, we can expect more distress as the consequence of the already strained family relationships, higher unemployment of parents and carers. Going to preschool or school on a daily basis can be an important protective factor in children's and adolescents' development (Mikuš Kos et al., 2017). Therefore, the efforts of educational institutions, local communities and several professional organizations to provide children and adolescents in need with the necessary support in distance education are all the more worthwhile.

### *Reflection on current trends in development of school counselling in Slovenia*

It should be emphasized that an (exclusively) remedial/reactive orientation of the counselling service involves a "danger" of the service becoming an auxiliary or crisis service. That would lay emphasis on crisis counselling and a remedial concept, which favours individual and personal counselling and which reduces the work of school counsellors to providing individual assistance to the children/adolescents with

difficulties in learning, personal development or adaptation to the social environment (cf. Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020).

Such an approach does not bring appropriate solutions to work in (pre)schools. To illustrate this with the findings of an evaluation of work with students with special educational needs: an evaluation study on various forms of additional professional assistance to children and adolescents with special educational needs (cf. Vršnik Perše et al., 2016) showed that the concept of inclusion continues to evolve. The whole process related to additional professional assistance to children/adolescents with special needs still takes place by foregrounding individual assistance (most often outside the class), dealing with the child's deficits, obstacles or disorders. Lesar (2019) rightly points out that the focus on individual assistance to students with special needs reinforces medical discourse and the discourse of professionalism, which Fulcher described in the 1980s as the basis of disability discourses and problematic forms of the inclusion of children with special educational needs in school policies. This is a major obstacle to promoting an inclusive school culture.

Further to this issue, it is necessary to work towards a paradigm shift from the counsellor's remedial activities to developmental and preventative ones (cf. Bezić, 2018; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020). Nowadays, such efforts are clearly present in Slovenia (cf. Bezić, 2018; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020). It is emphasized that in the future developmental and preventative work of the counselling service at the level of classes, groups and entire educational institutions will have to be expanded. Developmental and preventative activities are part of the vision of the educational institution, the plan of moral and character education, the development plan and the annual (pre)school's and (pre)school counsellor's plan of work (Bezić, 2018; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020).

Only such a conceptualisation of the school counselling service – placing the developmental role not only in the direct function of the development of children and adolescents, but also in the function of the development of the educational institution, making the service the initiator and “engine” of its development – can justify its place inside the (pre)school and distinguish between the philosophy of personal (individual) and school counselling (Resman et al., 1999).

## The importance of the pedagogically developmental and preventative orientation of the school counselling service

We define and understand the school counselling service of the future as providing developmental work, oriented towards the development of the entire (pre)school. The developmental orientation of the counselling service means a long-term, proactive and preventative orientation that supports all children and adolescents, raises professionalism and transforms the school culture and climate. This, however, cannot be achieved with individual treatments during school counselling only. Rather, conditions for mutual cooperation ought to be established in

the educational institution among all the participants (children/adolescents, teachers, parents, the management). Only this will allow for good-quality educational work in generally and with all children and adolescents.

Pedagogically developmental and preventative activities are key to achieving a higher quality of work in educational institutions for several reasons (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2019, 2020). The developmental activities of the counselling service are indispensable in the introduction of modern pedagogical principles, such as the principle of inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Ermenc, Jeznik & Mažgon, 2019; Lesar, 2019; Mikuš Kos et al., 2017; The Salamanca Statement, 1994), the principle of interculturalism (Ermenc, Jeznik & Mažgon, 2019; Mikuš Kos et al., 2017), the principle of children's and adolescents' participation (Hart, 1992; Kodele, 2017), and the necessary paradigmatic transformative changes in education included in the new principles (Lesar, 2019). The developmental activities of the counselling service are crucial for a more successful implementation of modern approaches to instruction, such as collaborative learning, problem-oriented teaching, the introduction of e-learning (Dumont, Istance & Benavides, 2010) and education through art (UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education, 2006). Developmental and preventative work is essential for the establishment of conditions for the educational activities that presuppose compliance with the principles of safety, acceptance, equity, participation, respect, care for others and mutual assistance. The counselling service focuses on the activities and processes aimed at the entire educational institution as a community. It deals with issues of group dynamics, communication, the culture and climate of the educational institution; it establishes conditions for interdisciplinary cooperation. Last but not least, in situations where educational institutions have more autonomy, the counselling service takes over tasks in the field of quality assurance, which means planning, implementing and evaluating the educational process and the educational institution as a whole (Gregorčič Mrvar & Resman, 2019; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020).

### *The importance of the pedagogically developmental and preventative orientation during Covid-19 pandemic*

The developmental and preventative orientation of the counselling service is imperative in the current Covid-19 pandemic, when many questions and uncertainties arise in the educational work and processes. In a study on the work of the counselling service in Slovenian preschools and schools during the pandemic in the first wave of distance education (March 2020) (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2021), educators reported that resolving crises and emergency situations and issues of distance education opened up a number of positive responses and opportunities for prosocial action. The situation has stimulated reflection on the protection of particularly vulnerable people, offered many new opportunities for access to the activities that can enrich our everyday lives (access to art content, suggestions for physical activity during limited outdoor activities, tips for creative free-time activities) (ibid.; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020). The school counselling service is

certainly the part of professional support for children and adolescents that helps them make sense of and improve their lives during the epidemic, considering that teachers have been heavily burdened with the preparation of pedagogical materials and communication with students to carry on with day-to-day school tasks (ibid.).

### *Recommendations*

The outlined changes require a thorough consideration of the starting points of educational activity. We should certainly emphasize the importance of the multifaceted justification of the values of educational activity, such as the values of solidarity, positive recognition of all children/adolescents, child/adolescent representation in decision-making, empowering forms of assistance, care, emotional support (cf. Kroflič, 2003; Lesar, 2019). As previous research shows, it is not possible to develop (pre)schools in the direction of inclusiveness, interculturalism, participation and active active forms of learning without a well thought-through conceptual consideration of education.

These changes require the school counselling service to radically shift from a remedial and individual response to the problems of individual children/students to pedagogically developmental and preventative orientation, that is, to the development of the school's plan of moral and character education and comprehensive approaches to quality assurance in the work of educational institutions. The professional profiles of school counsellors make up a solid core of experts who can work together with school leaders and teachers to tackle contemporary professional challenges. However, they require more appropriate system support (appropriate norms, schedules, distribution of working hours) (Bezić, 2018).

In addition to the organizational issues related to job descriptions, working hours and norms, developmental and preventative activities also necessitate clear theoretical solutions and the identification of the main strategic goals of managing educational institutions. This should be done in accordance with the above-mentioned principles of inclusion, interculturalism, participation, restorative approaches and active learning. These principles should be reflected in the professional guidelines at the four levels of the work of the counselling service highlighted below. This is especially true for the professional profile of the pedagogue as a school counsellor, whose fundamental focus is on the environment and culture of the school, which primarily affects the child's/adolescent's development and learning.

### **The school counselling service's work levels in developmental and preventative activities**

The developmental and preventative orientation of the school counselling service, which includes cooperation with actors inside and outside the school, is observable at several levels (cf. Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; Gregorčič Mrvar & Resman, 2019): the development of the educational institution as a whole; direct cooperation in the educational process; counselling and assistance provided to

children, adolescents and parents; the development and co-creation of systemic solutions in education.

### *The development of the educational institution as a whole*

In this area the school counsellor's work primarily relates to the *pedagogical leadership of the educational institution and collaboration with the head teacher*. In the circumstances that give more autonomy to educational institutions and in which work quality largely depends on the institutions themselves, educators' and head teachers' work has become extremely varied. Head teachers' responsibilities consist of both managerial (administrative) and pedagogical leadership (ZOFVI, 2017, Article 49). The school counsellor's knowledge and competences greatly assist the head teacher in the latter, that is, in the pedagogical leadership of the educational institution and the execution of associated tasks (cf. Stone & Clark, 2001; Wingfield et al., 2010).

### *Direct cooperation in the educational process (during school instruction, group work)*

One of the most important contexts for each child/adolescent in the educational institution is the class, that is, the group where everyday educational work and processes are carried out. This makes *collaboration with (pre)school teachers* especially relevant for school counsellors (Programske smernice, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). Consequently, independently and/or together with (pre)school teachers, school counsellors, especially pedagogues do the *developmental, analytical and preventative work related to the processes of education, teaching, learning and playing in the class/group*. Having the knowledge of planning educational work and general didactics, pedagogues plan, present and practically demonstrate the use of the various *educational and teaching methods, didactic concepts and strategies* required by instruction.

### *Counselling and assistance provided to children, adolescents and parents*

School counsellors' counselling and assistance include *a variety of activities, tasks and projects intended for children and adolescents* in the educational institution. In this context school counsellors are important *consultants to teachers, head teachers, parents and families*. As experts in counselling, school counsellors participate in *direct counselling (individually or in groups)* or in implementing *developmental and preventative programmes in groups* in order to identify, together with children and adolescents, existing worries and problems regarding personal and social development. They organize active forms of assistance, such as interactive workshops, discussion groups, round tables, camps. School counsellors encourage students' independence and responsibility in education and in deciding on further education, changing programme or levels and employment.

### *The understanding, development and co-creation of systemic solutions in education*

School counsellors, especially pedagogues, are familiar with the history of and trends in the development of pedagogical theory and school practice in Slovenia and abroad, which makes them the right people to turn to on the issues of the development of educational institutions. School counsellors are qualified to carry out critical analyses of content and system solutions in education (including different education systems), to develop educational programmes and other curricular materials, to analyse whether the educational institution and individuals in it function in accordance with the regulations and to plan the measures that ensure the legality of work. They actively participate, for example, in experts' debates on the reform of the education system, in the preparation of textbooks and other didactic materials, and suchlike.

## Conclusion

School counsellors realize their programme and plan together with other educators in the educational institution, especially with the other profiles of professional school counsellors, (pre)school teachers and head teachers. They collaborate with other counselling profiles in interdisciplinary ways and carry out activities in expert teams in (pre)schools and external institutions.

It is necessary to emphasize the advantages of the Slovenian organization of school counselling, the core of which is internal/school-based counselling services, that is, services located in educational institutions. The position of counselling services inside educational institutions enables them to achieve a great deal in the field of development and prevention and to contribute to the creation of the institution's stimulating learning/development climate (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2019; Resman et al., 1999). Therefore, it is important to make permanent attempts at a paradigm shift from the counsellor's crisis and remedial activities to developmental and preventative ones (see Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020).

## References

- Bezić, T. (2008): Razvoj in spremljanje delovanja mreže svetovalnih služb. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 59(2), 60-80.
- Bezić, T. (2018): Zaključki devetnajste konference Prispevki strok za svetovalno delo v praksi. Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani, 23. in 24. avgust 2018. *Šolsko svetovalno delo*, 22(2), 28-36.
- Booth, T. & Ainscow, M. (2002): *Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning and Participation in Schools*. Bristol: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.
- Carey, J. C., Harris, B., Lee, S. M. & Aluede, O. (Eds.) (2017): *International Handbook for Policy Research on School-Based Counseling*. Cham: Springer.
- Dumont, H., Istance, D. & Benavides, F. (2010): *The Nature of Learning. Using Research to Inspire Practice*. Paris: OECD.



- Ermenc, K. S., Jeznik, K. & Mažgon, J. (2019): *Inclusion - a general pedagogical concept*. Integrationspädagogik in Forschung und Praxis, Bd. 24. Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač.
- Gregorčič Mrvar, P. & Resman, M. (2019): Vloga pedagoga kot šolskega svetovalnega delavca v vzgojno-izobraževalni ustanovi. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 70(1), 10-33.
- Gregorčič Mrvar, P., Jeznik, K., Šarić, M. & Šteh, B. (2021): Soočanje svetovalnih delavk in delavcev v vzgojno-izobraževalnih ustanovah z epidemijo covid-19. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 72, posebna izdaja (Special Edition), 150-167.
- Gregorčič Mrvar, P., Jeznik, K., Kalin, J., Kroflič, R., Mažgon, J., Šarić, M. & Šteh, B. (2020): *Šolska svetovalna služba: stanje in perspektive*. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta.
- Gregorčič Mrvar, P., Kalin, J., Resman, M., Skubic Ermenc, K., Lesar, I., Bezić, T., Erjavec Bartolj, A., Ažman, T., Smolič, A. & Koderman, M. (2019): Zaključki okrogle mize: Pomen in vloga pedagoga kot svetovalnega delavca v vzgojno-izobraževalnih ustanovah. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 70(2), 108-111.
- Harris, B. (2013): *School-based counselling internationally: a scoping review*. Lutterworth: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.
- Hart, A. R. (1992): *Children's participation: from tokenism to citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Spedale degli Innocenti.
- Kodele, T. (2017): Participacija učencev v procesu reševanja njihovih učnih težav. PhD dissertation. Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta UL.
- Kroflič, R. (2003): Etične in/ali pravne osnove vzgojnih konceptov javne šole/vrtca. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 54(4), 8-29.
- Lesar, I. (2019): Izzivi pedagogike pri vpeljevanju inkluzivnosti v šolski sistem. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 70(1), 50-69.
- Mikuš Kos, A., Zlatar, F., Uzelac, M. & Jamšek, P. (2017): *Priručnik za psihosocialno pomoč otrokom beguncem*. Radovljica: Didakta.
- Pediček, F. (1992): *Pedagogika danes*. Maribor: Založba Obzorja.
- Popov, N. & Spasenović, V. (2018): *Strucni saradnik u skoli: komparativni pregled za 12 zemalja*. Sofija: Bulgarian Comparative Education Society.
- Programske smernice. Svetovalna služba v osnovni šoli* (2008a): Ljubljana: Zavod RS za šolstvo.
- Programske smernice. Svetovalna služba v srednji šoli* (2008b): Ljubljana: Zavod RS za šolstvo.
- Programske smernice. Svetovalna služba v vrtcu* (2008c): Ljubljana: Zavod RS za šolstvo.
- Resman, M., Bečaj, J., Bezić, T., Čačinovič Vogrinčič, G. & Musek, J. (1999): *Svetovalno delo v vrtcih, osnovnih in srednjih šolah*. Ljubljana: Zavod RS za šolstvo.
- Savitz-Romer, M., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Nicola, T. P., Carroll, S. & Hecht, L. (2020): *Expanding support beyond the virtual classroom: Lessons and recommendations from school counselors during the COVID-19 crisis*. Harvard Graduate School of Education & Boston College Lynch School of Education and Human Development.
- Stone, C. B. & Clark, M. A. (2001): School Counselors and Principals: Partners in Support of Academic Achievement. *NASSP Bulletin*, 85, 46-53.
- The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (1994): Salamanca: UNESCO & Ministry of Education and Science, Spain.
- UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education* (2006): Lisbon: UNESCO.
- Valenčič Zuljan, M., Vogrinc, J., Cotič, M., Fošnarič, S. & Peklaj, C. (2011): *Sistemski vidiki izobraževanja pedagoških delavcev*. Ljubljana: Pedagoški inštitut.
- Vogrinc, J. & Krek, J. (2012): *Delovanje svetovalne službe*. Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta.
- Vršnik Perše, T., Schmidt, M., Košir, K., Hmelak, M., Bratina, T., Licardo, M., Kalan, M. & Lorbek, T. (2016): *Evalvacija različnih oblik dodatne strokovne pomoči, ki je otrokom dodeljena v skladu Zakonom o usmerjanju otrok s posebnimi potrebami : nacionalna evalvacijska študija : končno poročilo*. Maribor: UM Pedagoška fakulteta; RS MIZŠ: Pedagoški inštitut.
- Wingfield, R. J., Reese, R. F., Cirecie, A. & West-Olatunji, C. A. (2010): Counselors as Leaders in Schools. *Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy*, 4(1), 114-129.



*ZOFVI – Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja* (2017): Uradni list RS, št. 16/07, 36/08, 58/09, 64/09 – popr., 65/09 – popr., 20/11, 40/12 – ZUJF, 57/12 – ZPCP-2D, 47/15, 46/16, 49/16 – popr. in 25/17 – ZVaj.

#### Author affiliation

Assist. Prof. Dr. Petra Gregorčič Mrvar, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Please cite this publication as:

Gregorčič Mrvar, P. (2021): Considering the Challenges of the Further Development of School Counselling: Experiences from Slovenia. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 75-86.

## ENABLE Anti-bullying Program in Hungarian Schools

Anna Siegler, Dóra Eszter Várnai, Tamás Hoffmann,  
Bence Basa & Éva Jármi

### Abstract

Opposite to some international trends, the prevalence of bullying has recently been increasing in Hungary. To tackle the issue of school violence, various approaches emerge as a solution. ENABLE anti-bullying program was developed by the European Schoolnet and it was adapted in Hungary in 2016. The program targets 12-18-year-old students and uses the social and emotional learning (SEL) approach. This paper presents the Hungarian implementation process and how ENABLE activities support the transformation of explicit knowledge about bullying (e.g. definition, roles, consequences), the development of skills (such as intervention in bullying situations and supporting the victim), and finally shape anti-bullying norms and attitudes. General experiences and difficulties of the program implementation are discussed.

Keywords: prevention, bullying, ENABLE program, SEL

### Introduction

Bullying is a widespread phenomenon that can significantly affect young people's lives. Nationally representative data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC) shows that around 30% of Hungarian youngsters are involved in offline or online bullying. Regarding offline victimization, 28.4% of 11-18 year-old students reported to have been bullied at least once and 9.5% has been chronically bullied. The rate of regular perpetrators is 6%. When considering online victims, 17.8% of young people reported that they have been bullied online at least once, whilst the rate of those having bullied others online at least once is 12.7% (Németh & Várnai, 2019). With these rates, Hungary is considered to be moderately-highly affected by offline or online bullying (Inchley et al., 2020). Children who seem to be uninvolved in bullying situations can still be witnesses or be affected indirectly. Notably, bullying is a matter of public health, impacting the life outcomes of both bullies and victims, in varying ways (Masiello & Schroeder, 2014). Peer violence is a strong risk factor for several negative behavioural, health, social, and/or emotional problems, the experience of school bullying functions as a stepping stone towards undesirable life outcomes (Arseneault, Bowes & Shakoor, 2010). Therefore, a bullying prevention program could serve as a crime prevention program, as well as a form of promoting public health. Cross-national comparisons draw attention to the

importance of national efforts to address bullying as the prevalence of bullying behaviour decreased in countries where prevention and health promotion efforts are supported continuously (Molcho et al., 2009).

According to their comprehensive meta-analysis of the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs, Gaffney, Ttofi and Farrington (2019) state that anti-bullying programs have the power to significantly reduce bullying perpetration and bullying victimization. Their results suggest that anti-bullying programs reduce school-bullying perpetration by approximately 19–20% and school-bullying victimization by approximately 15–16%. The most effective programs have been found to be multicomponent, schoolwide programs that contain parent training, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, school conferences, videos, information for parents, classroom rules, and classroom management (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009), individual counselling and teacher training (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Prevention programs were found to be more effective in schools with more positive student-teacher relationships (Richard, Schneider & Mallet, 2012), targeting older students in middle or secondary schools versus students in primary schools (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). It was also observed that higher implementation fidelity leads to stronger program outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011), and according to Merrell et al. (2008) programs are much more likely to show effects on attitudes, self-perception and knowledge than on bullying behaviour.

There are several different programs or approaches available for schools. One of the popular approaches of school anti-bullying programs is the socio-emotional learning approach. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a structured way to improve a wide range of students' social and emotional competences and impact bullying at the individual and peer levels of the school social-ecology. SEL has been shown to be an effective component in comprehensive bullying prevention and other interventions targeting problems such as substance abuse (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007; Smith & Low, 2013).

Besides many advantages, school bullying prevention programs demonstrate some challenges as well. For example, it takes a long time for anti-bullying attitudes and norms to develop, thereby resulting in reduced levels of bullying and better school climate. For this reason, educational administration seeks solutions that can lead to visible results in a shorter time frame. One such strategy that has been proposed is the use of police officers in schools. Devlin, Santos and Gottfriedson (2018) evaluated the efficacy of school resource officers as an intervention against bullying in 480 schools in the United States. Their findings indicate that school resource officers do not have a reducing effect, similar to policies that use metal detectors and video monitoring to address school violence, which are also ineffective, because school violence is an issue that encompasses more than instances of injury by physical force, e.g. exclusion, manipulation, gossiping (Scott, Nelson & Liaupsin, 2001). Such results confirm that programs that focus on components such as teaching social and emotional competency skills, improving relationships between students and adults, and creating a positive school environment may be more effective.

## The ENABLE program

The ENABLE (European Network Against Bullying in Learning and Leisure Environments) program is an EU-funded project which combats bullying and contributes to the wellbeing of young people aged 11-14 through social and emotional development and peer education. The ENABLE high school program builds on the recognition that peer group relations notably influence learning processes and school belonging. While a hostile classroom environment distracts students' time and energy, the feeling of emotional and physical safety provides an optimal condition for development. ENABLE takes a holistic and sustainable approach to reduce bullying by involving students, staff and parents/carers. Using the social and emotional learning (SEL) approach, the program addresses how relationships can be maintained, restored, and how emotions play a crucial part in managing social life. The SEL approach encourages students to reflect on their own and their peers' behaviour, and contributes to the development of skills that support bullying prevention, e.g. self-regulation, assertiveness, social problem solving. The original program covers the following program elements: the SEL module, which is a set of 10 social and emotional learning activities (lesson plans), the Peer support module (that includes materials for peer support leaders and for peer supporters as well), parent's pack, ENABLE research and impact assessment tool, and resources for communication.

## Hungarian implementation

Based on the prevalence data of school violence in Hungary and schools' subjective experiences of increasing bullying, in 2016 the Hungarian Educational Authority decided to adapt the ENABLE program and introduce it to schools. During the Hungarian adaptation, some of the original program elements were changed, mainly due to fewer examples or adverse experiences of peer support systems. The main program elements in Hungary cover: SEL module (10 lesson plans) with resources, AB (anti-bullying) module (10 lesson plans) with resources, teachers manual and training manual for school staff, an information booklet for parents, an intervention tool to tackle acute cases of bullying, and an evaluation toolkit. Since 2019 annually 600 school psychologists or teachers have been trained in the program. The SEL module is recommended for classes in which a high resistance on behalf of participating students can be expected, where there is no experience for non-traditional class activities or elaboration of sensitive topics, and where students require the development of self-insight or basic SEL skills. The AB module predominantly targets the development of anti-bullying class norms and attitudes and it is recommended where there is an existing experience in elaboration of sensitive issues (e.g. in classes trained in drama pedagogy) and where students require more intensive activities. These two modules can be applied consecutively, starting with the SEL module.

## Program elements

### *Lesson plans*

The target group for the 10 lessons in both modules are 12-18-year-old students. The units are designed as a sequence and they are suggested to be carried out in the class every 2-4 weeks. The lessons contain diverse elaboration methods: individual work, pair work, small group work, frontal instruction, group discussion, watching videos, and using applications.

*Table 1. Content description of the two types of lesson plans*

Lessons	SEL module	AB (anti-bullying) module
1.	<i>Who am I?</i> : introduction of socio-emotional intelligence as an important and valuable skill	<i>What is bullying?</i> : the nature of bullying, definition of bullying
2.	<i>How are you?</i> : developing a vocabulary in emotions and inner states	<i>Why do people get bullied for?</i> : reasons for victimization
3.	<i>Reading emotions</i> : categorization and use of emotions	<i>Why do people bully others?</i> : reasons for perpetration
4.	<i>The nature of bullying</i> : bullying roles, definition, thoughts and feelings of victims, perpetrators, defenders, bystanders	<i>Myths about bullying</i> : misbeliefs regarding peer violence
5.	<i>It is not bullying, just...</i> : tackling moral disengagement	<i>Reactions to bullying</i> : emotional and behavioural responses, consequences of bullying
6.	<i>How to intervene in bullying situations?</i> : direct and safe intervention in bullying situations	<i>Indirect support</i> : bystander's role, supporting the victim
7.	<i>Supporting the victim</i> : reducing adverse effects of bullying	<i>Indirect support2</i> : developing a prosocial class climate
8.	<i>Steering emotions</i> : coping with negative emotions as a background of bullying	<i>Direct intervention</i> : safe intervention for different types of bullying
9.	<i>Foundations for change</i> : benefits of the program on individual and class community levels	<i>Reporting bullying</i> : promoting help seeking behaviour
10.	<i>What's next?</i> : goal setting for the future	<i>Our class</i> : developing and ritually accepting class level anti-bullying rules

### *Teacher's manual with resources*

Teachers, school psychologists or other experts working in schools can participate in the three-day training to prepare for the program implementation. They learn about the lesson plans in both modules, about the intervention tool, the evaluation methods and some techniques to introduce the program for parents, school principals or colleagues. Within the training, participants can practice the most important class level activities and they are provided with a teacher's manual. This manual contains detailed lesson plans and the necessary resources. The manual explains the main aims of each lesson, presents the estimated time for preparation and execution of the activities, the detailed instructions for warm-up, main activities

and closing summaries, possible alternatives for activities, further considerations, optional homework, and available multimedia tools.

### *Parent's pack*

Parents are important partners in school anti-bullying programs, and therefore it is of key importance to educate them about the appropriate attitude towards peer violence. In the ENABLE program, it is recommended to invite parents to the school and inform them about the bullying phenomenon, the program itself and how their children can benefit from the activities. Besides, parents' meetings or in case such meetings cannot be organized, an online information booklet is available for parents or caregivers containing the most important messages. The booklet explains to parents what bullying is and what it is not, how prevalent it is in Hungarian schools, what are the most important signs of bullying, what parents can do if their child is involved either as a victim or as a bully, what they can do against cyberbullying and how they can participate and support school anti-bullying programs.

### *Intervention tool to tackle acute cases of bullying*

This intervention tool is suggested to be regularly used in schools in order to tackle acute cases. The regular bullying case management ensures that bullying does not remain hidden, in fact, it will be tackled and if victims seek help it will be taken seriously, and so it is worth reporting bullying. Targeted discussions are led by teams within the schools and are aimed to express support for the victim, provide defence and enable him/her to talk about his/her needs in the situation. Then an effort is made to raise the awareness of perpetrators that bullying happened and give them an opportunity to put things right. Therefore, a restorative, confrontative approach is suggested for leading these discussions. The indicated interventions not only involve discussions with victims and bullies, but also includes selected prosocial classmates who are asked to get involved in supporting the victimized classmate. The school teams are able to run discussions with involved parties once the cases of bullying come to light. Both school staff and parents are given information about bullying and advice concerning how to detect it, which hopefully leads to more awareness and skill in identifying ongoing bullying.

### *Evaluation toolkit*

The evaluation toolkit has two main components: pre-post and peer-nomination questionnaires. Both evaluation tools are administered to the students at the same time in an online form, in the classroom during school hours. The data from these questionnaires are stored and analysed by Eötvös Loránd University.

First, the *input and output questionnaires* help the program impact assessment by monitoring change in prevalence, attitudes and competences. Control classes with similar conditions, but without intervention, also participate in the data collection in order to investigate whether the possible impact is really due to the program itself. The following topics are included in the questionnaire package: demographic

questions, perceived severity of bullying, the prevalence of online and offline bullying perpetration and victimization, intervention intention, bullying attitudes, a 3-item-empathy scale, items measuring social-emotional intelligence (e.g. I can talk about my feelings, I try to take other's perspectives), teacher support, classmate support, class climate, and the perceived effort of the school to reduce violence. The output questionnaires are planned to be administered after the 10-hour-school activity at the end of the school year.

The second evaluation tool is a *peer-nomination questionnaire* that is intended to be administered and handled by program implementers (class teacher or school psychologist) using the software eSzocmet. At the ENABLE teacher training, this form of evaluation is suggested for implementers to enable them to uncover the current bullying situation in their class: to identify those at risk and the students who should be mobilized to defend the victims. For the administration of the peer-nomination questionnaires, students have to provide their names, which are stored anonymously, and only teachers, can identify the students. To comply with ethical standards, parents are informed about both questionnaires prior to the data collection, and students can refuse the participation at any time. The questionnaire aims to reveal the hidden structures, subgroups, alliances in the class. However, besides common sociometric questions (positive and negative peer nominations to explore sympathy, community functions, popularity and different skills within the class), the questionnaire includes an additional three items measuring bullying involvement: e.g. peer nomination for the role of victim, perpetrator and defender.

## Program evaluation in Hungary

Since the beginning of the Hungarian implementation of the ENABLE program in 2016, two phases of the program evaluation have taken place. First, the pre-post questionnaire from the evaluation toolkit has been piloted in the 2017/2018 academic year, involving 776 students (case and control students) from 24 schools. This study provided an opportunity to review the adaptation of the evaluation instruments, compare the prevalence nationally and internationally, and specify the implementation process. Two years later, following the adaptation work of measuring instruments, the pre-intervention part of the evaluation process was administered at the beginning of the academic year 2019/2020 around October-November, by a total of 1.166 students enrolled in grades 6–10 (51.6% female) from schools in Hungary. There were 390 students from control classes, whilst 777 students from ENABLE intervention classes, participants ranged in age from 10 to 18 years ( $M=12.87$ ,  $SD=1.5$ ). Prevalence data were compared with data from available representative national surveys, while the responses of the experimental and control groups were compared using independent sample t-test.

On March 16, 2020, Hungarian schools were closed due to the COVID-19 epidemic. This change not only hindered the administration of the classroom-based output questionnaires expected in spring, but also interrupted the program



implementation. For these reasons, we could not carry out the program impact assessment as planned, instead we initiated a different progress evaluation method: feedback questionnaires targeting implementers. This type of evaluation helps to track the progress of program design and implementation, it provides an opportunity to reflect on the program. The program implementers were asked to provide feedback regarding their experience with ENABLE anti-bullying program. The questionnaire contained questions in the following topics: general circumstances of the program implementation (in which class, how many occasions etc.), the perceived reception of the program by students and school staff, the perceived effectiveness of the program from different aspects (e.g. in reducing bullying, in improving class climate), implementer's fidelity to the original lesson plans, the program's fitness to class' needs, and possible unexpected events during implementation. For the present study, percentage of relevant answers were reviewed.

## Results

In the pilot survey the prevalence for traditional bullying victimization and bullying perpetration was higher than on a representative sample of Hungarian adolescents (Németh & Várnai, 2019). According to our initial data we concluded that students having been bullied are more sensitive and demonstrate stronger anti-bullying attitudes and higher intervention intention. This suggests that the anti-bullying program should target non-involved students' attitudes first. When comparing pre and post data, we found that students who participated in the ENABLE program considered the schools' efforts for reducing bullying significantly higher than control students ( $t(247)=3,458$ ;  $P=0,00$ ). Throughout the academic year the number of students who would intervene in case of bullying raised significantly among ENABLE students (from the initial 46.2% to 52%), while it remained unchanged in control students (48.46%) (Siegler, Várnai & Jármi, 2019). It has to be noted that the number of students having been bullied or having bullied others also increased among both ENABLE and control students over time, which might have been due to increased sensitivity for bullying cases or increasing social fatigue during the school year.

In 2019 regarding traditional bullying, 41.6% of students reported that they have never been bullied, while 17.6% reported having been victimized at least two or three times a month. 78.1% of students have never been bullied online, the rate of regular (at least 2-3 times a month) online victims is 3.6%. Regarding perpetration, 52.7% reported that they have not bullied others at all, 6.9% have bullied others more than two or three times a month. About cyber perpetration we can state that 86.5% have never bullied others online, and 1.9% have done it regularly. These prevalence rates did not differ significantly between control and ENABLE students but prevalence rates in involved schools (and those from the pilot survey) seem to be somewhat higher than the national representative data, especially regarding occasional victimization or perpetration. It may refer to the higher involvement in

participating schools or it may be due to other methodology reasons (Németh & Várnai, 2019). Students consider the severity of bullying cases in their school of an average of 3.71 points on a five-item scale and there was no significant difference found here between control and intervention classes. In classes where students scored higher on the measures of empathy and socio-emotional intelligence, the intention to intervene in bullying cases was found to be higher. Again, classes with higher scores for socio-emotional intelligence are characterized by stronger anti-bullying attitudes. Results from both the pilot and the final data collection concluded that bullying attitudes significantly correlate with bullying involvement.

Finally, 28 program implementers filled in the program feedback questionnaires. Most of the implementers led the lessons together with the class teachers. Some implementers (17.9%) thought that students liked the lessons *very much*, and according to most of them (75%) students *somewhat* liked the program. The implementers thought that students' interest towards the program increased to a greater extent than principals' or fellow teachers' interest. Regarding program effectiveness, 85.8% of participants considered the program as effective and they thought that the program's biggest advantage lies in increasing explicit knowledge about bullying. 75% of implementers considered the continuation of the program and 50% thought it is worth the efforts (34.1% thought it is moderately worth the efforts). 46.6% of the participants reported that some students had difficulties getting involved in the ENABLE activities and discipline problems arose occasionally.

## Conclusion

Based on our evaluations and experiences, the ENABLE program is an effective anti-bullying instrument. Pre-intervention data showed that participating schools have a higher prevalence of peer violence which can be interpreted as an increased problem awareness. Although the program's impact assessment was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the currently available data shows that ENABLE is an appropriate program for educating students about bullying and that it promotes safe interventions in bullying situations. Students consider ENABLE as an important effort of the school to reduce bullying and they value it. During the adaptation of this anti-bullying program, evidence-based knowledge and specialties of Hungarian schools were taken into account. ENABLE covers the most important and effective program elements, such as class level interactive activities, teacher training and a detailed manual, evaluation tool, intervention tool to tackle acute bullying cases, and information for parents. The Educational Authority of Hungary supports this program and offers free training for 600 teachers or other school experts annually.

However, there are some conclusions to be drawn for successful program implementation. First of all, schools have to be dedicated to the program as it requires extra efforts from teachers and from the school as a community. Class level activities are best led in pairs (ideally the classteacher and the school psychologist). It

involves double human resources which have to be supported and valued by school principals. According to our results, the reason for possible program infidelity (change of the original lesson plans) originates from the lack of time. This means that implementers are not provided with an appropriate time frame: they either do not have time for 10 lessons or/and they have a shorter time frame occasionally (instead of double lessons or 60 minutes, they only have 30-40 minutes for one activity). As class-level activities contain role plays or situation games, it requires competent and highly trained school personnel. Less confident teachers rarely choose these kinds of activities and this may limit the use of the program, especially in special student populations.

The intervention tool for tackling acute cases of bullying is also an activity that teachers or school staff have to do as an additional duty. It is also a time-consuming process until students and the school community get used to the consistent management of acute cases. At first it may be hard for students to determine what needs to be reported and this may lead to over- or further underreporting of violent actions. It takes time until the community realizes that there is an agent for managing these cases who will intervene. However, for victims the reliability and transparency of school bullying management policy are very important in order to increase the intention for reporting. Ideally, the anti-bullying efforts of a school are proclaimed in a written anti-bullying action plan that is developed and accepted by the whole community. Universal and shared concerns on bullying can ensure the equal and transparent treatment of peer violence and this can be presented for parents as well. The research draws attention to the importance of schoolwide prevention efforts that provide positive behaviour support and involve all school staff in prevention activities (Ross & Horner, 2009). On the side of education administration, systematic follow-up of participating schools, constantly revised and updated program resources are key elements for further program development.

The ENABLE anti-bullying program is a developing project in Hungary. After the adaptation, it was piloted, updated and then schools started to implement it. A program impact assessment was planned and data was collected. Parallely, teacher training took place and new trainers joined the training team. Lately, based on similar initiations, a side project was started that tackles cyberbullying in the form of online activities. Besides this, the ENABLE program has many potentials to develop, for example, introducing alternative activities for lower school graders or for special schools enrolled by special populations. On the school level, ENABLE activities can be extended with other anti-bullying initiatives e.g. restorative organizations, drama activities, anti-bullying theatres.

## Acknowledgement

This research was funded by Grant No. 2018-1.2.1-NKP-2018-00006 of the National Excellence Program of National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NKFIH), and the first author was supported by the ÚNKP-20-3 New National

Excellence Program of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund (ÚNKP-20-3-II-PTE-558).

## References

- Arseneault, L., Bowes, L. & Shakoor, S. (2010): Bullying victimization in youths and mental health problems: 'much ado about nothing'?. *Psychological medicine*, 40(5), 717-729.
- Devlin, D. N., Santos, M. R. & Gottfredson, D. C. (2018): An evaluation of police officers in schools as a bullying intervention. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 71, 12-21.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D. & Schellinger, K. B. (2011): The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- Farrington, D. P. & Ttofi, M. M. (2009): School-based programs to reduce bullying and victimization. *Campbell systematic reviews*, 5(1), 1-148.
- Gaffney, H., Ttofi, M. M. & Farrington, D. P. (2019): Evaluating the effectiveness of school-bullying prevention programs: An updated meta-analytical review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 45, 111-133.
- Inchley, J., Currie, D., Budisavljevic, S., Torsheim, T., Jåstad, A., Cosma, A., Kelly, C. & Arnarsson, Á. M. (Eds.) (2020): *Spotlight on Adolescent Health and Well-Being. Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Survey in Europe and Canada*. International report. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.
- Masiello, M. G., Schroeder, D. & Giarcanela, A. (2014): *A public health approach to bullying prevention*. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.
- Merrell, K. W., Gueldner, B. A., Ross, S. W. & Isava, D. M. (2008): How effective are school bullying intervention programs? A meta-analysis of intervention research. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(1), 26-42.
- Molcho, M., Craig, W., Due, P., Pickett, W., Harel-fisch, Y. & Overpeck, M. (2009): Cross-national time trends in bullying behaviour 1994-2006: findings from Europe and North America. *International Journal of Public Health*, 54, 225-234.
- Németh, A. & Várnai, D. E. (2019): *Kamaszéletmód Magyarországon: Az iskoláskorú gyermekek egészségmagatartása elnevezésű, az Egészségügyi Világszervezettel együttműködésben megvalósuló nemzetközi kutatás 2018. évi felméréséről készült nemzeti jelentés*. Budapest, Magyarország: L'Harmattan.
- Richard, J. F., Schneider, B. H. & Mallet, P. (2012): Revisiting the whole-school approach to bullying: Really looking at the whole school. *School Psychology International*, 33(3), 263-284.
- Ross, S. W. & Horner, R. H. (2009): Bullying prevention in positive behavior support. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 42(4), 747-59.
- Scott, T. M., Nelson, C. M. & Liaupsin, C. J. (2001): Effective instruction: The forgotten component in preventing school violence. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 24(3), 309-322.
- Siegler, A., Várnai, D. & Jármí, É. (2019): *Az ENABLE program hazai adaptációjának hatásvizsgálata-reflexió a kezdeti eredmények és felmerülő nehézségek mintázatára*. Elhangzott: a Magyar Pszichológiai Társaság XXVIII. Országos Tudományos Nagygyűlése, Debrecen.
- Smith, B. H. & Low, S. (2013): The Role of Social-Emotional Learning In Bullying Prevention Efforts. *Theory into Practice*, 52(4), 280-287.
- Ttofi, M. M. & Farrington, D. P. (2011): Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of experimental criminology*, 7(1), 27-56.
- Vreeman, R. C. & Carroll, A. E. (2007): A Systematic Review of School-Based Interventions to Prevent Bullying. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 161(1), 78-88.

**Author affiliation**

Anna Siegler, PhD Student, University of Pécs, Hungary

Dr. Dóra Eszter Várnai, Eötvös Lóránd University, Hungary

Tamás Hoffmann, PhD Student, Eötvös Lóránd University, Hungary

Bence Basa, M.A., Totel Kft., Hungary

Dr. Éva Jármi, Eötvös Lóránd University, Hungary

Please cite this publication as:

Siegler, A., Várnai, D. E., Hoffmann, T., Basa, B. & Jármi, É. (2021): Enable Anti-bullying Program in Hungarian Schools. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 87-97.



# How Education Counselling Services Are Supporting Teachers and Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Elizabeth Achinewhu-Nworgu

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about changes in working conditions and roles of teachers and students as they have embraced new digital working practices. Whilst the move to online learning has been a necessary adaptation, it has also introduced new potential stresses for students and teachers alike. The need to support those experiencing stress during the pandemic requires the services provided by professionals such as school counsellors. This paper presents work carried out on stress-related issues and the role of counselling in supporting teachers and students reduce their stress levels during the pandemic. Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered on the experiences of counselling professionals, teachers and students. The research aimed to ascertain how the move to online learning has changed the way counselling for stress is provided, and to gauge its effectiveness in helping students and teachers to manage their stress during the pandemic. It was found that school counsellors have also had to adapt their ways of working during the pandemic, embracing the digital world to support their clients in managing stress. A key challenge that was identified is supporting students and teachers to recognise their stress levels and when they might need to seek the support of a counselling professional in the first place. Most of the participants in this small-scale study had experienced increased stress during the COVID-19 pandemic but had not sought counselling help. Those that had accessed online counselling support reported that the service did help in reducing their stress levels.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, school counselling, students, teachers, digital working practices

## Introduction

The national lockdown and social distancing policies and restrictions imposed by the UK government to reduce the spread of COVID-19 forced many professionals to rapidly adapt to new digital working practices. This sudden transition has increased stress levels among teaching staff and students alike, another source of stress among many other adaptations people have had to make in their lives such as adhering to strict rules and regulations staying at home and wearing masks. With the education world moving to online teaching and learning for much of the pandemic, school counsellors have similarly been required to adopt new digital working practices to support those in need of their services.



School counsellors are professionals who are specialised in the field of supporting those going through all forms of problems in schools, at work or home, needing some counselling to cope with it all. These services are available to students, teachers and management going through any form of problems that are beyond their control. The services could be provided with the family, or at work, school and university. Some of the roles could range from coping with stress, mental health, welfare, discipline, exclusion and inclusion and other support needed by the recipients. Counselling could be provided for adults and children, depending on individual needs and demands. For the purposes of this work, the focus is on how the counselling role supports teachers and students experiencing stress during the current pandemic, particularly stemming from their increased workload.

This paper examines the role of school counsellors in supporting young people and teaching staff with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, as counselling services moved to online forms of delivery (such as Microsoft Teams, WebEx or Zoom). It explores: the role of counselling in supporting staff and students coping with the stress faced using online learning technology; how school counsellors themselves are coping with the new ways of working; and draws on relevant literature to inform the research, drawing from theoretical concepts to critically analyse the nature of the problems and key challenges.

## Context

### *Stress*

Most people suffer from stress related issues that they may not be aware of and it impacts on their mental health and wellbeing, particularly if prolonged. Many factors have been attributed to stress related issues that stemmed from work, home or studies. The current pandemic is not making work stress or stress from studies easier with the lockdown making people work from their homes and the distancing rules imposed by governments all over the world, to reduce the Coronavirus pandemic that has rapidly spread across the world (WHO, 2020). The lockdown rules from stage 1-3 at present have resulted in digital working from home. It is obvious that human beings knowing fully well that change is not an easy one to embrace (Kulkarni, 2006), particularly a sudden change as faced today, it has come with positives and negatives leading to stress and mental health challenges for some teachers and students (Kyriacou, 2000).

Stress is defined as the body's response to a certain situation that may be caused by our environments or other circumstances (Ozyilmaz, 2020). Most stress faced by human nature could be expected and may have an impact on mental health or wellbeing. Stress can be faced at work, home or schools and the most important is the individual ability to cope with any form of stress. The adverse reaction experienced by people leading to inability to cope with workloads or demands placed on them is regarded as stress (Health & Safety Executive, 2016). According to Yeh, Tseng and Lim (2020), workplace stress can present negative, physical and emotional

reactions that may occur; due to an employee needs that an employer may not be able to meet (Kinman, 2011). The current demands of employee from the employers to cope with the changes in working practices using digital technology, due to lockdown resulting from the current COVID-19 pandemic, is already causing stress as most employers are struggling to cope with these needs and demands. In education environments, stress is experienced from staff and students at large as they embrace the current changings to online teaching and learning.

The key purpose here is to find out if teachers and students are stressed, causes at the current time and how the role of professionals – counselling from occupational health, welfare and school counsellors have helped them reduce their stress level. As stated by Khalique et al. (2018), worker stress can arise due to workload and family, coping with line managers, lack of cooperation with colleagues can cause stress for some people. When we talk about stress, we need to know the meanings and what causes it and then look at the strategic role of school counselling to help in managing stress at the current pandemic.

According to the Health & Safety Executive (2016), stress is the adverse reaction that people have when they perceive that they are no longer able to cope with the demands placed on them to do things. Stress can occur in many ways to employees and students which could result from the demands of workload that may be contrary to employee expectations, interests, skills and knowledge in meeting the demands of the job requirements (Soegoto & Narimawati, 2017). Stress has big implications for employees and employers and can have impact on employee performance (Tetrick & Winslow, 2015) and therefore also on organisational performance.

When thinking about stress, we need to differentiate between: the *causes* of stress, for example excessive workload; the *processes* through which individuals feel stressed, for example having to deal with colleagues or customers who are unhappy with an aspect of the individual's or the organisation's performance; the *means* through which specific work practices create these stressful situations, such as staffing levels, training, work environment and so on; and the *outcomes* of stress, such as employees feeling unhappy at work, productivity reducing, impacts on their mental health and wellbeing, unhealthy coping mechanisms (e.g. Alcohol) and time off work.

The current pandemic is a good example of the multi-faceted nature of stress, owing to the significant changes that affected every aspect of people's lives, including having to embrace sudden changes in work practices (the move to online teaching and learning), adjusting to working from home, having fewer social contacts, concern and anxiety for their own health and the health of loved ones who are more vulnerable to COVID-19 and so on. The ability to cope with the demands of an online delivery for staff and students has caused stress to some extent, although some have experienced it as a positive change (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2020).

In this paper, we explore the challenges of COVID-19, the issue of stress, causes and role of school counselling in relation to their support roles in counselling

those affected cope with their stress level. Whether the school counsellors are still effectively providing their supporting roles to deal with stress related issues is a matter of question with the current pandemic. The work will go further to share the experience of the students, teachers and two school counsellors, considering their confidential roles of the school counsellors being very careful on what they could possibly share to an outsider.

### *The COVID-19 pandemic*

In 2019, Coronavirus (COVID-19) was discovered in a market place in a city called Wuhan in China. The initial clinical results of the scientists proved that the transmitted virus could be easily spread to affect the entire world from a person to person (Zhu et al., 2020). The WHO announced it that the World was in crisis of a virus based on testing carried out with the rapid spread of the disease. The announcement resulted to the world lockdown to reduce the spread of the disease (WHO, 2020). The social distancing known as ‘mindful increase of physical gap between humans to limit the spread of the virus (Red Cross, 2020) has meant that the school counsellors and all involved in education to comply to the strict government rules and regulations.

The statistical evidence indicates that 95.1m cases and 2.03m deaths Worldwide from disease (WHO, 2020), with the high spread of the virus found in Italy, America, Brazil, UK and India having the largest number of reported cases. In the UK, the impact extends to all businesses, including education sector and services as well as the students leading to embracing online teaching and learning in schools and universities, as an alternative way to continue to educate students online by WebEx, Teams, Zoom and other available technologies to accomplish roles in education sector.

### *New working practices in education in response to the pandemic*

The need to control, track and monitor the virus from spreading more, most organisations including education institutions reverted to digital technology to facilitate teaching and learning activities including student support (WEF, 2020). It is obvious that the use of any form of the digital technology has helped to fulfil some of the roles of professionals such as the school counsellors from the previously face to face contacts in the office. The online digital technology has somehow benefited and helped both the recipients and institutions to learn new ways of working and learning. The digital technology being adopted for personal and organisational use and for education has made it possible to keep in touch with colleagues in case of use of teams, teaching and learning and in contact with the students in the case of WebEx and Zoom, friends and families at large (WEF, 2020).

The new digital technology has also brought about positive and negative impact on the nature of delivery and support for students and teachers. Some of the receivers’ have found the benefits while others have had negative impact in their journey of learning. One of the impacts of COVID-19 is stress related issue resulting

from government imposition of lockdown and embracing new ways of learning. The lockdown resulting from distancing has meant new ways of doing things, and for the teachers and students, it has increased their workload and stress level (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2020).

### *Implications for school counselling services*

The government policy of lockdown to reduce the effect of coronavirus has had tremendous impact on teachers' and student's workload as some teachers has complained that their workload has increased more than ever working from home. Students have found the change drastic, sudden and now are prepared for the change. Some have found it difficult to embrace, particularly for the international students who have little or no knowledge of digital learning from home countries; this obviously had an effect on their stress level and in some cases, their mental stability (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2020). In a situation of this, the role of counselling becomes more relevant to assist those in need to reduce stress levels. The key questions here to address:

- How can the specialist roles of education counsellors or therapists support teachers and students to reduce their stress level?
- Are teachers and students recognising the support role of school counselling to manage their stress level?
- How can the specialist roles of school counselling at this current COVID 19 pandemic and lockdown help to reduce stress for the teachers and students?

Many researchers are working day in day out to find out the level of support given to young people in schools to deal with stressors that could impact stress and mental health and how the role of school counselling can help reduce stress and improve mental health, particularly at this current time of COVID 19 pandemic crisis and lockdown.

An example from an ongoing research literature that has been developed by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), and Professor Mick Cooper and Dr Jess Bryant of the University of Roehampton in their research that targeted up to 10,000 counsellors and psychotherapists working in primary and secondary schools and further education colleges across the UK. The work focused on how the profession is responding to COVID-19 and how many practitioners have been able to continue their sessions with children and young people (ages 5–18 years old), in what forms they have been able to deliver counselling, as well as what barriers have prevented some counselling sessions continuing in order to inform policy. Their survey indicates that COVID-19 seems to have changed the landscape of mental health service delivery for children and young people considering that 100,000 would see a counsellor every year. One of the causes of mental health is stress. As the research indicates, the children and young people are no longer in schools, it became more of a concern about the levels of mental health support that they are now receiving—and likely to receive while restrictions are in place considering the importance of support for the young people with mental health and practitioners to

continue to support them through counselling sessions (University of Roehampton, 2020).

Although, the research focused on mental health, stress is one of the causes of mental health if prolonged and therefore, need to be arrested from onset, of which the counselling services of the professionals such as the school counsellors is realised in helping to deal with stress related mental health in education, homes, individuals and organisations. An important aspect of school counselling roles is that it provides opportunity for intervention for young people going through stress and mental health support, also, can act as a liaison with external services (Farmer et al., 2003). Counselling services help to reduce the stress some teachers and students go through due to problems faced, resulting from workload, discrimination, family problems and many others leading to stress. Counselling services are provided at workplace, homes and education institutions. However, one of the barriers in people owning up to receiving the services is pride, confidentiality issues, costs in the case of going private, availability and recognition of the existence.

## Methodology

The mini research originated from the stress level experienced by the participants resulting from the current pandemic and the role of school counselling to support people to reduce their stress level. Work relied on qualitative and quantitative data to share the experiences of professionals, teachers and students to ascertain how the digital world has altered the way they received counselling to cope with any form of stress, also if the services received has helped to reduce their stress level at the current pandemic era of COVID 19. Secondary data from varied sources using books on counselling, journal articles, reports and google scholar search provided prior knowledge on available literature. The qualitative method comprised of a semi-structured interview by WhatsApp, using 15 open-ended questions used to seek the opinion of the participants (Gearon & Parsons, 2019). The interview questions have encouraged the respondents to provide their information, although, strictly reassured them of confidentiality, considering the nature of counselling profession in relation to dealing with stress related issues. Ethical protocols were observed regardless of the size of the target group to comply with the research ethics, principles and Data Protection Act (2018), hence coding the participants' comments and this has helped to protect their identity.

## Findings

Comments below represent some of the findings selected from a few of the participants from the overall interview response.

*Q1. What is your view about the current pandemic and impact on your stress level?*

*A period of upheaval for me with increased workload, isolation due to lock down and not something to think about and the worst period of my life, as I have never experienced anything like now, horrible. (Student 1)*

*Q2. Have you experienced stress in your job or studies?*

*I have but now am worse, because of increased workload, sitting down at home with swollen legs is stressful. The worst is that, you don't know when it will end. (Teacher 2)*

*Q3. What were the causes of the stress?*

*What is on now, embracing online, not going out and working from home can be very challenging. I am an active person and can't stay a week without visiting the gym, now I can't. I need to stretch my legs after work. The stress is increasing with indoors and straining eyes online. (Teacher 3)*

*Q4. What is your understanding of counselling service and what type of service do they provide?*

*Counselling helps to give you some tips on how to cope with problems discussed with them. They are very private and you can air out your problems and cause of it to them. They can suggest ways to help reduce discussed problems but not sure if they can provide the final solution to it. For instance, some of them are specialised in their various fields, if your problem does not fall within their specialism, they cannot help, although they may recommend or refer your case. I have never used their services. (Student 6)*

*Q5. How would the specialist roles of education counsellors or therapists support to reduce your stress level?*

*The service can support you if you agree with their recommendations, but it is not easy to open up to them, which is why it is difficult to appreciate how the service can help. Stress is something that people may not know that they are going through stress and in some cases; it is left so late to deal with, hence landing people into a mental home. This is the area where their support can be very important to help in reducing any kind of stress if you can open up to them with no bias. (Teacher 4)*

*Q6. Do you or your students recognise the support role of counselling to manage stress level at this period of pandemic?*

*The role is recognised but how much people use the support is questionable due to issue of bias and confidentiality; people try to keep their problems private and not very open to share things which could be the case with the students and teachers. It all depends on individual, the degree of stress, referrals process and resources to be seen. (Teacher 6)*

*Q7. How can the specialist roles of school counselling at this current COVID 19 pandemic and lockdown help to reduce stress for the teachers and students in general?*



*Well, their service is important to all that are facing stress this pandemic period. But how do you receive the service with the lockdown? A person with stress related mental health may not find it easy to receive counselling service unless with some support from the career, how about the ones living alone? It is a big challenge at the present time. However, some have managed to see their clients using any available digital or virtual technology which works for me. (School counsellor 1)*

*The pandemic has created a new way of embracing our practice on line. Going digital still gives you similar counsel to recipients, also for privacy to see your clients in a privately booked online room. The digital World has become the norm for all organisations. We don't really have a choice at the present time with the government policy on lockdown; we need to embrace the change to do our jobs. It is same as teaching online for everyone at present. I book a private room as I would do seeing clients face to face. However, some support is better offered face to face, as you may not know who else is listening on the receiving side. It is a difficult time for all. (School counsellor 2)*

## Conclusion

The comments from the mini research indicates some stress related issues that required people to seek counselling to help reduce the impact. Some of these issues are related to the impact of COVID-19 in trying to embrace changes in working practices, particularly, embracing virtual work practices previously done by face to face contact in the office and the stress of working from home due to lockdown rules. This paper has explored the role of counselling in supporting people during the current COVID-19 pandemic, sharing prior and literature and participants' comments. School counsellors have had to adapt their ways of working during the pandemic, embracing the digital world to support their clients in managing stress. A key challenge that was identified is supporting students and teachers to recognise their stress levels and when they might need to seek the support of a counselling professional in the first place. Most of the participants in this small-scale study had experienced increased stress during the COVID-19 pandemic but had not sought counselling help. Those that had accessed online counselling support reported that the service did help in reducing their stress levels. However, a large scale research is required involving more counsellors, teachers and students focusing on each group at a time. The findings will inform further research and will be carried out in stages with each of the groups.

## References

- Achinewhu-Nworgu, E. (2020): Covid 19 – A rumour that came to reality – impact on International students using online delivery in their learning. Paper presented at the FLS Seminar, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020.  
<https://www.focuslearningsupport.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Abstracts%20from%20The%20Changing%20World%20International%20Virtual%20Seminar.pdf> (Accessed 15/02/2021).



- Farmer, E. M. Z., Burns, B., Phillips, S., Angold, A. & Costello, E. J. (2003): Pathways into and through mental health services for children and adolescents. *Psychiatry Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.54.1.60> (Accessed 28/02/2021).
- Gearon, L. F. & Parsons, S. (2019): Research Ethics in the Securitised University. *Journal of Academic Ethic*, 17(1), 73-93.
- Health & Safety Executive (2016): Work-Related Stress. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/> (Accessed 22/02/2021).
- Khalique, M., Arif, I., Siddiqui, M. & Kazmi, S. W. (2018): Impact of Workplace Bullying on Job Performance, Intention to Leave, OCB and Stress. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 33(1), 55-74.
- Kinman, G. (2011): *Pressure Points: A survey into the causes and consequences of occupational stress in UK academic and related staff*. London: Association of University Teachers.
- Kulkarni, G. K. (2006): Burnout. *Indian Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, 10, 3-4.
- Kyriacou, C. (2000): *Stress-busting for Teachers*. Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes.
- Ozyilmaz, A. (2020): Hope and human capital enhance job engagement to improve workplace outcomes. *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology*, 93(1), 187-214.
- Red Cross (2020): How to Social Distance During COVID-19. <https://www.redcross.org/about-us/news-and-events/news/2020/coronavirus-what-social-distancing-means.html> (Accessed 22/02/2021).
- Soegoto, E. S. & Narimawati, U. (2017): The contribution of stress management and good employee performance towards the success of a company. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 10(1), 154-160.
- Tetrick, L. E. & Winslow, C. J. (2015): Workplace Stress Management Interventions and Health Promotion. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 2, 583-603.
- University of Roehampton (2020): New study to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on school counselling services. <https://www.roehampton.ac.uk/news/2020/july/new-study-to-investigate-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-school-counselling-services/> (Accessed 28/02/2021).
- WHO (2020): Coronavirus. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1) (Accessed 22/02/2021).
- World Economic Forum (WEF) (2020): The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever. This is how. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/> (Accessed 28/02/2021).
- Yeh, L. T., Tseng, M. L. & Lim, M. K. (2020): Accessing the Carry over effects of both human capital and organisational forgetting on sustainability performance using dynamic data envelopment analysis. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 250, 119584.
- Zhu, N., Zhang, D., Wang, W., Li, X., Yang, B., Song, J., Zhao, X., Huang, B., Shi, W., Lu, R., Niu, P. & Zhan, F. (2020): A novel coronavirus from patients with Pneumonia in China, 2019. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmoa2001017> (Accessed 28/02/2021).

#### Author affiliation

Dr. Elizabeth Achinewhu-Nworgu, Ulster University, United Kingdom & Ireland

Please cite this publication as:

Achinewhu-Nworgu, E. (2021): How Education Counselling Services Are Supporting Teachers and Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 99-108.

# COVID-19 Outbreak, Mental Health and Psychological Counseling among University Students

Gordana Stankovska, Ruvejda Brahma & Dimitar Dimitrovski

## Abstract

The outbreak of the global pandemic COVID-19 understandably presents a challenging time for everyone around the world. Not only that this pandemic is a serious medical concern, but it also brings mixed emotions and psychosocial stressors for everyone. Measures taken to contain the spread of COVID-19 have affected the functioning of higher education worldwide. As most countries started pursuing physical distancing, most higher education institutions also had to shift to online learning within a very short time and change the way they function and communicate with their staff and students. These changes affected students' plans and priorities. Students are at increased risk for negative emotional responses that can interfere with both their learning and their daily lives. Staying at home and doing their studies, in the best cases by digital means, has already had emotional consequences for them. The coping with feelings of isolation, frustration, boredom, anxiety or stress brings a response of hopelessness, depression, loneliness and other mental health conditions. Mental health problems can affect students' motivation, concentration and social interaction – and these are crucial factors for students' success in higher education. Hence, the main aim of our paper is to establish the need for implementation of a mental health assessment, support and psychological counseling among students. Counsellors suggest strategies for managing and altering patterns of upsetting thoughts, feelings and behavior. In the midst of a pandemic, school counsellors did their absolute best to maintain relationship with students and continue to carry out their responsibilities, getting creative in the process.

Keywords: COVID-19 outbreak, stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, psychological counseling, students

## Introduction

*This is the time for facts, not fear.  
This is the time for science, not rumor.  
This is the time for solidarity, not stigma.  
We are all in this together.*

(Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO)

It is a frightening time. We are in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, with cities and even entire countries shutting down. Some of us are in areas that have already been affected by the coronavirus. Others are bracing for what may come. And all of us are looking at the headlines and wondering: “What is going to happen next?”.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advocate that it is critical to recognize stress symptoms resulting from the lockdown and the disease itself. During outbreaks of transmissible disease such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and equine influenza (Wu et al., 2009), damaging psychological implications have been documented (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). It is apparent that the unswerving psychological and social impacts of the pandemic are inevitable, and it is critical to take steps in building resilience and coping with such damaging consequences of a pandemic. As suggested by Grubic, Badovinac and Johri (2020), it is a timely call for studies investigating the impact of COVID-19 on students' mental health and the need of immediate interventions.

The global academic calendar has been thrown into a state of disarray by the coronavirus outbreak. Most schools, from primary schools to universities, have shut their doors and students have returned home with their parents and together they self-quarantined (UNESCO, 2020). The coronavirus affects students' mental health in so many different ways. Students are at increased risk for negative emotional responses that can interfere with both their learning and their daily lives. It has been found that anxiety and stress interact with specific learning skills, such as time management, concentration, learning methods and motivation to study. Being a student in a pandemic is a new experience and we are increasingly acquiring information in this regard.

## COVID-19 pandemic and outbreak

The first human cases of COVID-19 were identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China (WHO, 2020). Since then, the virus has spread around the world and by March 2020, most countries throughout the world started to report sharp increases in the number of cases. As we write this paper in late January, more than 99.4 million people have been affected around the globe and more than 2.1 million people have died (Worldometer, last updates January 24, 2021).

COVID-19 has and is likely to affect people from many countries, in many geographic locations. Isolation, contact restrictions and economic shut down impose a complete change to the psychosocial environment of affected countries. Many streets in cities around the world are empty. Flights to and from affected parts of the world have been grounded. Scientific or business conferences have been cancelled. People have to stay at home. Social relations have been strictly limited to close family members. Many countries have experienced a lockdown of schools. Quarantine can lead to decreased freedom and privacy, and consequently higher stress.

## Psychological impact of COVID-19 and lockdown among university students

Public health emergencies, such as the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in 2019 (COVID-19), are a stressful time for both people and communities. The

coronavirus has affected nearly every aspect of our lives, from school to work, to sports, to where we eat and what we do. Multiple restrictions have been imposed on public movement in order to contain the spread of the virus. People are forced to stay at home and are burdened by the heft of quarantine.

Lockdowns or quarantines are necessary protective measures for physical health, however prolonged impositions are detrimental. Therefore quarantine at home during COVID-19, and the closure of educational institutions have been reported as major reasons for students feeling disconnected from the society and their social circles (Killian, 2020). Perhaps most importantly, students are also facing social isolation and a loss of social support because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mandatory physical distancing measures and reductions of social gatherings have left many students feeling disconnected from their campuses where support and services are typically available. In some cases, students reported negative experiences while returning home during the pandemic crisis. However, with the exception of new studies, notably from China (Cao et al., 2020), there has been evidence of the psychological or mental health effects of the current pandemic on university students, who are known to be a vulnerable population. They experience high levels of stress, anxiety and fearfulness, along with a range of the emotional and behavioral issues.

According to Cao et al. (2020) 25% of university students experienced anxiety symptoms, which were positively correlated with increased concerns about academic delay, economic effect of the pandemic, and impacts on daily life. The students' needs of enhanced emotional support during the current pandemic have also been reported worldwide. Practicing social isolation by communicating with them and providing emotional support throughout these difficult times is very important. Hence, the main aim of our paper is to establish the need of implementing a mental health assessment, support and psychological counseling among students. Based on experience from past global serious viral experiences, the development and implementation of mental health assessment, support, treatment, and services are crucial and pressing goals for the health response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

## COVID-19 and stress among students

Stress is a mechanism of any internal or external demand upon the body (Dusselier et al., 2005). Stress is considered a state of individuals that results from their interaction with the environment that is perceived as too demanding and a threat to their well-being. The stressors are not only physical, but may also involve emotions.

In times of an epidemic, people tend to experience fear of getting infected with the viral disease, and this fear results in anxiety, depression and stress. Stress can be explained as a feeling of emotional and physical tension which arises from any event, which requires timely action in regard to mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students all over the world, have also experienced distress, because they have been physically disconnected from their professors, peers and key support system. As a result of physical distancing measures implemented as a response to COVID-19, tertiary education institutions have shifted to an emergency online learning format, which would be expected to further exacerbate academic stressors for students. Students may experience reduced motivation towards the studies, increased pressures to learn independently and reduced ability to rely on typical coping strategies.

At the same time students feel overwhelmed, because they worry about the health of their family and friends who may be exposed to the coronavirus, or that their parents might be unemployed. When stress is perceived negatively or becomes excessive, they experience physical and psychological impairment (Taylor et al., 2008). In addition, stress during an infectious outbreak can include:

- Problems with memory or concentration;
- Poor academic performance;
- Poor academic life;
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns;
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other harmful things;
- Increased level of abusive family situations.

Some research suggests that COVID-19 may differently affect students who identify as male and female (Fegert et al., 2020). For example, more female students indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely disruptive in regard to their stress and mental health, and that it has significantly disrupted their academic studies. In addition, a greater proportion of female students compared to males, report that social isolation has been difficult or very difficult.

Sahu (2020) found that students who were isolated or quarantined during pandemic diseases are more likely to suffer from acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder, and grief. Most of the students have developed post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms that include poor concentration, insomnia, anxiety or depression.

Faced with soaring needs and limited options, counselors have been finding creative ways to reach students.

## Anxiety among students in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic

Anxiety is a psychological disorder that is associated with significant suffering and impaired functioning. It is a blend of thoughts and feelings characterized by a sense of uncontrollability and unpredictability over potentially adverse life events (Seligman & Wuyek, 2007). The symptoms of anxiety are persistent and not restricted to, or markedly increased, in any particular set of circumstances. With headlines warring us of international terrorism, global warming, economic uncertainty, or viral diseases, such as COVID-19, we are all likely to be a little more

anxious these days. Anxiety interferes with our daily lives, our physical and mental health.

Specifically in regard to this study, early literature has documented the negative influence of a pandemic on students' psychological well-being, which has led to acute depression and anxiety (Brooks et al., 2020). Wang et al. (2020) investigated the psychological impact on university students in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of 7143 students studied, 0.9% had severe anxiety, 27% had moderate anxiety, and 21.3% had mild anxiety. The anxious feelings begin to interfere with their life and they find it difficult to complete their obligations, such as going to university and studying. It can also affect how they get along with other people. They experienced a range of physical, psychological, emotional and behavioral symptoms.

Odrizola-Gonzales et al. (2020) studied the psychological well-being of Spanish university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the sample, 34.19% of young people showed moderate to extremely severe depression symptoms, 21.34% showed extremely severe anxiety symptoms, and 28.14% exhibited moderate to extremely severe symptoms. They identified several stressors as key factors affecting the students' anxiety and psychological well-being: a parent or a friend being infected by COVID-19; educational disruptions; family income stability; reduced social interactions; and increased number of new cases.

Students with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 may experience fear of the consequences of the infection with a potentially fatal new virus, and those in quarantine might experience boredom and loneliness. COVID-19 has been recognized as a killer virus, which has prolonged feelings of perceived threats and uncertainty. Furthermore, mandatory contact tracing and 14-day quarantine, which are a part of public health responses to the COVID-19 pneumonia outbreak, could increase students' anxiety and guilt about the effects of quarantine and stigma on their families and friends. Similar concerns about the mental health, psychological adjustment, and support are now arising everywhere.

## Loneliness during a pandemic: the impact and implications

Loneliness is a universal emotional and psychological experience. Loneliness is also considered a normal experience that leads an individual to achieve deeper self-awareness, a time to be creative, and an opportunity to attain self-fulfillment and to explore the meaning of life (De Jong Gierveld, 1987).

Loneliness is not caused by being alone, rather by being without some definite needed relationship or a set of relationships. However, the experience of loneliness is likewise unpleasant and distressing. Loneliness exists in all age groups, so it is a common problem among university students.

Staying at home and studying from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the best case conducted by digital means, has already had emotional consequences for students. This social isolation leads to chronic loneliness and boredom, which if long enough, can have detrimental effects on physical and mental well-being. Loneliness is



assumed to break this essential construct and disrupt social integration, leading to increased isolation. In fact, stressful events related to this period of time during the COVID-19 outbreak are associated with changes in students' relationships: limited contacts with family and friends, necessity of leaving university and building new social networks. Hence, an unsuccessful process of adaptation to a new situation may result in social isolation and feelings of loneliness. Consequently, loneliness, a significant multidimensional phenomenon, has significant outcomes for mental health.

### The linkage between depression and COVID-19 outbreak among students

We are living in the dark time of health where we are surrounded by thousands of contagious viruses, bacteria and other pathogens in the environment that use our bodies as their long-term home. Once these microbes have insinuated themselves into our metabolisms, they frequently remain there for life, where they can slowly or rapidly degrade our physical and mental health. Pathogens living in an individual's body will reduce the person's mental and physical activities. Our bodies are considerably overburdened with persistent viral infections which often alter our physiology.

The burden of depression has been increasing, for the individual, the family, and for the society. Currently most people who are treated for depression are partially responsive or non-responsive. New tools are needed. One of these tools involves a focus on the infections that are often associated with depression. For some young people with depression, their feelings of sadness and unhappiness are long-lasting. Depression affects how they think, how they feel and what they do. Moreover, they feel irritable, sad and stressed most of the time.

For some young people depression develops after a stressful life event, such as the COVID-19 outbreak. It might begin with a feeling of sadness, distress or anxiety, however over time symptoms become more intense and begin to affect friendships, relationships and everyday life (Zhai & Du, 2020).

University students were more anxious and depressed during the initial outbreak of COVID-19 than they were during similar time periods in previous academic years according to a Dartmouth study (Dartmouth College, 2020). The research also found that stress increased dramatically during the onset of the public health crisis in early March.

"COVID-19 had an immediate negative impact on the emotional well-being of the university students we studied", said Jeremy Huckins, a lecturer on psychological and brain sciences at Dartmouth. "We found a large-scale shift in mental health and behavior compared to the observed baseline established for this group over the previous year". The changes coincided with the end of classes and final exams, already one of the most stressful times for students in any academic term. Lockdown stressors include less independence, doubts about the spread of the virus, lockdown

length, monotonous life style, lack of accurate information, monetary loss, and stigma. Therefore, the feelings of depression impair focus and concentration, memory, and motor skills.

Depression in this coronavirus pandemic is a normal reaction to certain life events. It is absolutely natural for each one of us to feel fear, sadness, loneliness and isolation during this time.

### The role of psychological counseling for managing stress, anxiety and depression during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

It is understandable that during times like this, people may be feeling afraid, worried, anxious, and overwhelmed by the constantly changing alerts and media coverage regarding the spread of the virus. Therefore it is very important to stay informed, to follow mental health and wellbeing tips and strategies, and to continue to look after ourselves and each other during this difficult time.

During times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, students are exposed at a greater risk for mental health problems, such as isolation, loneliness, anxiety, depression or stress, which can interfere with their studying process and their lives. Hence, the provision of emotional and mental health support is one of the most important factors in protecting students during and after a crisis. Students should be made aware of how to take care of their own mental health, and appropriate services should be made available for them.

The findings from numerous studies confirm the importance of the provision of psychological support to students. Universities affected by COVID-19 should be engaged beyond setting up mere intervention alternatives in crisis, and should invest in the creation of long-term strategies than transcend traditional approaches in an innovative and proactive manner (Shi & McBrien, 2019).

School counselors, psychologists and academic staff have been trying to help students. In the midst of a pandemic, school counselors did their absolute best to maintain relationships with students and continue to carry out their responsibilities, getting creative in the process. School counselors spent less time offering individual and group counseling for students than they did before the emergence of COVID-19 (Bartlett, Griffin & Thomson, 2020). Counselors were not able to speak as long as usual while working directly with students on social-emotional issues, post-secondary planning, and career development. In this unprecedented time, a school counseling staff delivers social-emotional support to students using a distance/virtual model. Psychosocial support can reduce negative mental health effects of a crisis for students. However, the provision of such psychological support virtually can be challenging. From the standpoint of care and support, it is very important to recognize three phases of a/an endemic/pandemic (before, during and after). Therefore we try to present the main psychosocial and psychological manifestations in an epidemic, broken down by phases and corresponding actions.

Table 1: Main psychosocial and psychological manifestations by phases and actions

Phases of psychosocial and psychological manifestations in the population	Mental health actions
<b>Before:</b>	<b>Before:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of inevitability, with a high level of tension in the population.</li> <li>• Maximization of preexisting characteristics (positive or negative).</li> <li>• Worry, fear, tension, anxiety, depression, insomnia....</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate risk to the population, with emphasis on vulnerable groups (children, adolescents, elderly people, persons who contracted the disease and survived, persons with chronic physical illness).</li> <li>• Locate personnel trained in mental health.</li> <li>• Establish psychosocial support and counseling groups.</li> <li>• Detect psychosocial risk factors.</li> </ul>
<b>During:</b>	<b>During:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of initiative.</li> <li>• Feelings of fear, worry, vulnerability.</li> <li>• Adaptation to changes in the usual patterns of life (restricted movement, wearing masks, reduction in direct physical contact, closure of schools or universities, online learning, reduced contact with peers....).</li> <li>• Anxiety, depression, stress, panic attacks, agitation, somatic disorder of psychological origin.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize virtual support groups for students, staff and caregivers.</li> <li>• Develop methods to educate students on ways to participate in the students-counselor relationship through virtual/distance school counseling.</li> <li>• Create a sense of belonging for students.</li> <li>• Understand students' behaviors and feelings and be able to recognize signs of severe distress.</li> <li>• Opportunities for students to practice positive coping strategies using art, drama and music.</li> <li>• Support students to be connected with others.</li> <li>• Incorporate breathing exercises and relaxation strategies into class, such as meditation, autogenic training or mental imagery relaxation.</li> <li>• Create a menu of personal self-care activities that the students enjoy, such as spending time with family, exercising or reading a book.</li> <li>• Create opportunities for mutual support in the community.</li> </ul>
<b>After:</b>	<b>After:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of a new epidemic.</li> <li>• Social and mental health conditions: depression, posttraumatic stress, violence, depression, alcohol or drug abuse.</li> <li>• A slow, progressive recovery process begins.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a mass communication strategy to facilitate recovery.</li> <li>• Implement individual and group-based mental health care for the affected young persons.</li> <li>• Support that new life projects should be fostered and encouraged.</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration.

Hence, as counselors, we suggest strategies for managing and altering patterns of upsetting thoughts, feelings and behavior. We help students understand the link between their thoughts, feelings and behavior. It helps them understand how the problems began and learn a more balanced way of thinking. By approaching situations in a more balanced way students will hopefully be more able to solve

problems that they are faced with and feel more in control of their life. This is very important for them in this pandemic time.

The creation of plans for crisis management by school counselors is necessary and important to keep students safe both during and after the crisis, and to have an opportunity to intervene more effectively in order to manage the crisis.

## Conclusion

In this review we summarized studies and experience which indicate important relationships between mental health, psychological counseling and viral diseases such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) among university students.

In an attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19, in the large majority of countries around the world, educational institutions have decided to temporarily suspend in-person instruction and transfer to a remote learning model of delivery. Within a short period of time, college students' lives have dramatically changed as they have been asked to leave their campuses, adjust to new living circumstances, and adapt to online learning platforms. The shift to online learning, particularly in courses that were not originally designed for on-line delivery has likely increased stress among students. Most young people do not have resources and mental strength to adapt to this type of situation. The fear and anxiety will increase, everyone has unreal thoughts about the new day and everyone feels isolated or depressive. Mental illness can affect students' motivation, concentration, and social interactions, and these are crucial factors for students' success in higher education (De Oliveira Araújo et al., 2020). Hence, a sense of hope instead of fear could allow counselors and students to better cooperate with each other which is a vital element in defeating this outbreak. We must work together with a sense of empathy, keep ourselves informed about the facts, stay connected to people we love and be kind to each other.

Among the many experiences discussed, regarding psychological counseling in an event of COVID-19 outbreak in the university, special attention has been dedicated:

- to the need to involve educational institutions, including the university, before, during and after the epidemic/pandemic;
- to provide early strategies for prevention and treatment of the psychological effects created by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- to provide instructions on how to cope with stress and other mental health problems created by the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- to integrate the psychological and mental health intervention within a framework of students' health.

One can conclude that in this period of time, counseling is very important for the education system. Every educational institution should have counselors to guide and help students, to create a good environment, which is motivational for students' growth.

Now more than ever, we should be paying attention to students' mental health.

## References

- Bartlett, J. D., Griffin, J. L. & Thomson, D. (2020): Resources for supporting children's emotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Child Trends*. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic> (Accessed 19 March 2020).
- Brooks, S. K., Webster, R. K., Smith, L. E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N. & Rubin, G. J. (2020): The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: Rapid review of the evidence. *Lancet*, 395(10227), 912-920.
- Cao, W., Fang, Z., Hou, G., Han, M., Xu, X., Dong, J. & Zheng, J. (2020): The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students in China. *Journal of Psychiatry Research*, 287, 112934.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html> (Accessed 28 May 2020).
- Dartmouth College (2020): COVID-19 increased anxiety, depression for already stressed college students: Study shows unprecedented increase in mental health challenges among undergraduates. *Science Daily*. [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/07/200727114731.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/07/200727114731.htm) (Accessed 27 July 2020).
- De Jong Gierveld, J. (1987): Developing and testing a model of loneliness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(1), 119-128.
- De Oliveira Araújo, F. J., De Lima, L. S. A., Cidade, P. I. M., Nobrem, C. B. & Neto, M. L. R. (2020): Impact of Sars-Cov-2 and its reverberation in global higher education and mental health. *Psychiatry Research*, 288, 12977.
- Dusselier, L., Dunn, B., Wang, Y., Shelley, M. C. & Whalen, D. F. (2005): Personal health, academic, and environmental predictors of stress for residence hall students. *Journal of American College Health*, 54, 15-24.
- Fegert, J. M., Vitiello, B., Plener, P. L. & Clemens, V. (2020): Challenges and burden of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic for child and adolescent mental health: A narrative review to highlight clinical and research needs in the acute phase and the long return to normality. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 14, 20-27.
- Grubic, N., Badovinac, S. & Johri, A. M. (2020): Student mental health in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic: A call for further research and immediate solutions. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 66, 517-521.
- Huckins, J. F., DaSilva, A. W., Wang, W., Hedlund, E., Courtney, R., Nepal, S. K., Wu, J., Obuchi, M., Murphy, E. I., Meyer, M. L., Wagner, D. D. & Campbell, A. T. (2020): Mental health and behavior of college students during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic: Longitudinal smartphone and ecological momentary assessment study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 22(6), e20185.
- Killian, J. (2020): College students, professors adjust to COVID-19 life. *NC Policy Watch*. <http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2020/04/01/college-students-professors-adjust-to-covid-19-life/> (Accessed 3 May 2020).
- Odrizola-Gonzales, P., Planchuelo-Gomez, A., Irurtia, M. J. & De Luis-Garcia, R. (2020): Psychological effects of outbreak and lockdown among students and workers of a Spanish university. *Journal of Psychiatry Research*, 290, 113108.
- Sahu, P. (2020): Closure of universities due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, 12(4), e7541.
- Seligman, L. D. & Wuyek, L. A. (2007): Correlates of separation anxiety symptoms among first-semester college students: An exploratory study. *The Journal of Psychology*, 141(2), 135-146.
- Shi, T. & McBrien, E. (2019): Creating a supportive online learning environment with emotional design. *OLC Blog*. <https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/creating-a-supportive-online-learning-environment-with-emotional-design/> (Accessed 19 December 2019).

- Taylor, M. R., Agho, K. E., Stevens, G. J. & Raphael, B. (2008): Factors influencing psychological distress during a disease epidemic: Data from Australia's first outbreak of equine influenza. *PBC Public Health*, 8, 347-354.
- UNESCO (2020): <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> (Accessed 1 June 2020).
- UNESCO (2020): Global Education Coalition: 290 million students out of school due to COVID-19. <https://en.unesco.org/news/290-million-students-out-school-due-covid-19-unesco-releases-first-global-numbers-and-mobilizes> (Accessed 3 April 2020).
- Wang, Y., Di, Y., Ye, J. & Wei, W. (2020): Study on the public psychological states and its related factors during the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in some regions of China. *Psychological Health Medicine*, 30, 1-10.
- Worldometer (2021): COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. <https://www.worldometer-info-coronavirus-pandemic> (Accessed 24 January 2021).
- World Health Organization (2020): Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019> (Accessed 18 May 2020).
- Wu, P., Fang, Y., Guan, Z., Fan, B., Yao, Z., Liu, X., Fuller, C. J., Susser, E. & Lu, J. (2009): The psychological impact of the SARS epidemic on hospital employees in China: Exposure, risk, perception, and altruistic acceptance of risk. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54, 302-311.
- Zhai, Y. & Du, X. (2020): Mental health care for International Chinese students affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. *Lancet*, 7(4), e22.

#### Corresponding author affiliation

Prof. Dr. Gordana Stankovska, University of Tetova, Republic of North Macedonia

Please cite this publication as:

Stankovska, G., Brahma, R. & Dimitrovski, D. (2021): COVID-19 Outbreak, Mental Health and Psychological Counseling among University Students. *Comparative School Counseling*, Vol. 1, 109-119.





# Revisiting Curriculum Change and Youth Development for Entrepreneurship through School Counseling

Tebogo Jillian Mampane

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the scholarship of youth career counseling for entrepreneurship within the school system. The aim is to advance the meaning and rationale for youth development through curriculum change in schools, discussing teaching practices to create employment opportunities and to improve the economy of the country. The paper will contribute to the debate on youth career counseling for entrepreneurial skills within schools. Among others, the author argues that the concept “youth career counseling” is not universally agreeable and that the composition of entrepreneurship is influenced by the curriculum, context and circumstances within schools. This paper employed a descriptive research methodology wherein an analysis of literature documents was done from secondary sources of information. This conceptual paper used the accountability theory to explain and describe the phenomenon, youth career counseling for entrepreneurship within the school context. The author argues that positive youth career counseling for entrepreneurship should meet employment needs and requires consideration of several curriculum factors to ensure learners achieve the desired employment skills. It is impossible to discuss career counseling without referring to quality teaching and learning as a school accountability framework. Career counseling requires teacher competence, relevant curriculum, appropriate learning environment, and, effective and efficient learning processes to achieve employment skills. Factors such as stakeholder collaboration are critical for the achievement of entrepreneurial skills.

Keywords: youth career counseling, curriculum change, entrepreneurship, teaching and learning, economic development

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore youth career counseling for entrepreneurship within schools simply because of the many facets of entrepreneurship that are not well researched, articulated, or understood (Zahra, 2007). The fundamental attempt by practitioners and academics to arrive at a universally agreeable definition and composition of entrepreneurship in itself has been foggy and inconclusive at best. Too many elements of the concept of entrepreneurship are simply misunderstood or little is known about them. There are also too many misconceptions about youth entrepreneurship going far beyond itself into other related areas of study such as sociology, anthropology, and the concept of

management itself. The following questions are posed: Are some curriculum contents relevant for improving youth entrepreneurship for some societies and communities more than others; if so, how did that come about? Is developing youth career for entrepreneurial skills an important element for the sustenance of communities; if so, how will the community measure the adequacy of these entrepreneurial skills? Does entrepreneurship relate only to commercial enterprises or businesses or can it refer to several other not-for-profits and not for business organisations and activities? Is entrepreneurship similar to management or is it a concept completely devoid from other forms of management? These and many more questions bring about the uncertainties in teaching, learning, and understanding youth development entrepreneurship. These questions and the quest to gain answers provide the impetus for this paper.

## Understanding entrepreneurship

According to Kreft and Russell (2003), an entrepreneur is an agent of change, who organises, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise, while entrepreneurship is the process of discovering new ways of combining and using resources to increase the market value generated through the combination of resources. The aim is to ensure resources can generate elsewhere, individually or in combination, for the youth entrepreneur to make a profit (Brush, Greene & Hart, 2001). In schools, an entrepreneur is the teacher who has to develop a curriculum that will ensure career counseling for youth development by using the school counseling resources for employment and for the creation of employment in the community. In so doing, the youth will be improving the economy of the country, and continuously employing and developing members of the society, to become competitive in the global world. The more people are developed, the better the size of the economic pie for everyone. A supporting observation to this is the example of Bill Gates, who as an undergraduate at Harvard developed BASIC, for the first microcomputer. He went on to help found Microsoft in 1975 (Lowe, 2001). During the 1980s, Gates IBM was contracted to provide MS-DOS operating system for its computers. Gates procured the software from another firm, essentially turning resources into a multibillion-dollar product. Microsoft's Office and Windows operating software now run on 90 percent of the world's computers. By making software that increases human productivity, Gates expanded our ability to generate output (and income), resulting in a higher standard of living for all (Boettke & Coyne, 2003). Another similar observation is that of Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart, another entrepreneur who touched millions of lives in a positive way. His innovations in distribution warehouse centres and inventory control, allowed Wal-Mart to grow in less than thirty years, from a single store in Arkansas to the nation's largest retail chain.

Along with other entrepreneurs such as Ted Turner (CNN), Henry Ford (Ford automobiles), Ray Kroc (McDonald's franchising), and Fred Smith (FedEx), Walton

significantly improved the everyday life of billions of people all over the world (Reynolds, Hay, and Camp, 1999). By using the same principle of entrepreneurial spirit, South African school counselors can alleviate the economic pressures into a good fortune the whole of South Africa can benefit from. Two notable twentieth-century economists, Joseph Schumpeter (1942) and Israel Kirzner (1997), refined the academic understanding of entrepreneurship. Schumpeter stressed the role of the entrepreneur as an innovator who implements change in an economy, by introducing new goods or new methods of production (Schumpeter, 1942). The Schumpeterian view is that the entrepreneur is a beneficial but disruptive force called “creative destruction”, in which new products are introduced to render the failure of others. The introduction of the compact disc and the corresponding disappearance of the vinyl record, is one of the many examples of creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1942). In contrast to Schumpeter’s (1942) view, Kirzner (1997) viewed entrepreneurship as a process of discovery. Where a person discovers previously unnoticed profit opportunities. The entrepreneur’s discovery sets into motion a process in which these newly discovered profit opportunities are then acted on in the marketplace until market competition eliminates the profit opportunity. Unlike Schumpeter’s disruptive force, Kirzner’s entrepreneur is an equilibrating force. An example of such an entrepreneur is someone who discovers that a recent increase in college student enrolment has created a profit opportunity in renovating houses and turning them into rental apartments. Economists in the modern Austrian School of Economics have further refined and developed the ideas of Schumpeter (1942) and Kirzner (1997) (Boettke & Coyne, 2003, p. 67).

During the 1980s and 1990s, state and local governments across the United States abandoned their previous focus on attracting large manufacturing firms as the main focus of economic development policy and instead shifted their focus to promoting youths for entrepreneurship (Eisinger, 1989). This same period witnessed a dramatic increase in empirical research on entrepreneurship. Some of these studies explored the effect of demographic and socioeconomic factors on the likelihood of a person choosing to become an entrepreneur. Others explore the impact of taxes on entrepreneurial activity. This literature is still limited by the lack of a clear measure of entrepreneurial activity at the US state level. Scholars generally measure entrepreneurship by using numbers of self-employed people; the deficiency in such a measure is that some people become self-employed partly to avoid, or even evade, income and payroll taxes (Bates & Bates, 1997). Some studies find, for example, that higher income tax rates are associated with higher rates of self-employment. This counterintuitive result is likely explained by the higher tax rates encouraging more tax evasion through individuals filing taxes as self-employed. Economists have also found that higher taxes on inheritance are associated with a lower likelihood of individuals becoming entrepreneurs.

## Youth development for economic development

The focus of economic development in the country has shifted more heavily towards youth career counseling for entrepreneurship. Youth development for entrepreneurship may be affected by the worth of the education system in terms of quality of learners (their personal circumstances, knowledge, family support, etc.); the quality of the learning environment (size of classes, facilities in the schools, positive teachers behaviors, etc.); the quality of the content of the curriculum (relevance to the local needs, etc.); and the process of attaining quality (competency of teachers and support given to teachers and learners) (Wei & Zhou, 2019). This increased interest in the youths' entrepreneurship role in the economy has led to a growing body of research attempting to identify the factors that promote entrepreneurship. The level of entrepreneurship differs considerably across countries and over the time. The absence of job opportunity for youth and the lack of skills in entrepreneurial efforts to uplift the economy and the problems of present day living, is viewed by some as indicating a needed change in the curriculum. A change in the curriculum, however, has certainly been observed in schools as addressing the question of whether the curriculum in schools still matches the changing competition, innovation, economic growth, job creation and well-being of the citizens.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (Bosma & Harding, 2008), there is a wide agreement on the importance of youth entrepreneurship for economic development. Through entrepreneurial curriculum, youth can be provided with accurate information about the current state of the economy in South Africa (AlKutich & Abukari, 2018). Now more than ever, with the economic decline across the globe, caused by the new pandemic of the coronavirus, it is imperative that schools across the world revisit their curriculum to ensure youth development results in employment and job creation. Youth development is not easy, nor will it happen without education to ensure success. After an economically costly lockdown, National Treasury anticipates that the country's unemployment rate could reach 40% and that young people will in all likelihood continue to bear the brunt (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2020). More than 60% of South Africans who have applied for government's special COVID-19 relief grant, are young people between the ages of 18 and 35 years (RSA, 2020). Current literature on youth development includes numerous general or specific recommendations for change. There is also, renewed attention to the methods by which curriculum change for youth entrepreneurship can be brought about. Whereas earlier attention to methods for change tended to centre on steps in the revision of courses of study or sequential stages in the organisation of curriculum improvement programs, more recent efforts have focused on defining the process of career change and exploring or studying some aspects of it (Chigunta et al., 2005).

## Curriculum change for future employment

Change is learning, and undermining this characteristic of change has led many education developers in general, and curriculum reformers in particular, to

adopt over-simplistic approaches in trying to change the existing practices and modes of thinking in schools. The economic changes in the country are challenging the existing curriculum realities that the country's youths are experiencing. A vibrant, growing economy depends on how well the process by which new ideas are quickly discovered, acted on, and labelled are successful or not (Hughes, 1986). According to Gwartney, Lawson and Clark (2005) entrepreneurial success can be attained by ensuring that failures are quickly extinguished, and poor resources are used elsewhere. This is the positive side of business failure. When the economy is going down, crime goes up, and the frustration among the youth dependent on family and parents, are a few of the signs showing that curriculum needs a change. The history of educational reform and innovation is replete with good ideas or policies that fail to get implemented or that are successful in one situation but not in another. Policy-makers, education leaders and teachers need to know more about the drivers of successful curriculum change in schools, which requires better use of "change knowledge" to address failure (Fullan, Cuttress & Kilcher, 2009, p. 9). Curriculum change should be a learning process for teachers and for school counselors. Good understanding of change and clear conception of curriculum are necessary conditions for improved implementation of a new curriculum for youth development. Critical issues in curriculum change are successful curriculum development, re-conceptualising curriculum and changing the way teachers teach and learners learn.

Curriculum change geared towards entrepreneur training is necessary for improving economic opportunity for youth, if properly implemented. The new entrepreneur curriculum and teaching standards have to match the needs of the South African economic environment and address South African problems. Re-conceptualising curriculum needs revisiting how the curriculum was traditionally organised. Usually the problem with curricula is that it is overloaded, confusing and inappropriate for the time, resulting in the challenges of youth unemployment. Curriculum should be transformed from a purely technical document to a more comprehensive idea that leads to school improvement, societal change and economic reform (Sahlberg, 2005). It should result in education that supports entrepreneurial skills training in schools. Therefore, teachers need support in developing approaches for creating professional learning communities, youth development, and learning from one another. Curriculum change is now a much more complex problem than the predominant curriculum literature of the 1920's or 1930's. Curriculum discussions often reveal dissatisfaction in results of earlier efforts at change, and thus requires the urgency for making changes speedily. Curriculum change is thus an indispensable condition for youth development and for sustainability of any society (Roesken, 2011).

Youth development is key to improving performance, economic growth and skills in entrepreneurship, and, requires supervision and support by educators, government and policy makers (Karimi et al., 2010). What is worrying is that twenty-six years since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, we still have one of the world's highest unemployment rate, accounting for around 6.7 million people. These

staggering figures are expected to continue rising as the effects of COVID-19 further cripples the economy and compromises prospects of employment for many people. The unanticipated economic and social upheaval of COVID-19 across the world, and to South Africa already vulnerable, has worsened youth unemployment. The privileges of economic freedom and self-determination, for which the youths of 1976 sacrificed, is not benefiting the youths (Marx, 1992), who still face major unemployment struggles in 2020.

## Youth unemployment

There has been persistently high youth unemployment rate in the history of South Africa. This has long been one of the most pressing socio-economic problems country wide. Some of the youth seeking work, are not well educated and they do not possess sufficient skills and previous work experience required by employers in the labour market. The economy demands skilled and experienced work-seekers, which makes it difficult and lessens the chances for young people to find employment, this ultimately results in some losing hope of ever finding a job (thereby becoming discouraged work-seekers, and rather starting criminal activities to make ends-meet (RSA, 2020). This further spiral them into having criminal records and further disadvantaging them from acquiring jobs. In the first quarter of 2020, 1,9 million of the young people without work were discouraged from looking for work. Some of these young people have disengaged with the labour market and they are also not building on their skills base through education and training – they are not in employment, education or training (NEET). The NEET rate, seen in conjunction with high rates of unemployment, suggests that South African youth face extreme difficulties engaging with the labour market (RSA, 2020). Certain factors such as lack of experience and length of unemployment may increase the vulnerabilities of these young people in the labour market. Most often employers prefer to employ those with previous work experience and a higher level of education. Unfortunately, for the youth, lack of work experience is a stumbling block that results in them finding it hard to secure employment. Those with jobs are often employed on unspecified or limited contract duration, and consequently do not have access to employee benefits such as medical aid, pension fund, paid sick leave and permanent employment (Benach, Muntaner & Santana, 2007).

## Challenges of youth development for employment

Although there are various reasons for youth unemployment such as population growth, lack of experience, inappropriate ways of searching for a job, and lack of career guidance in schools, the unemployment rate for first-time youth job-seekers in South Africa, is unacceptably high (Cloete, 2015). In 2019, the estimated youth unemployment rate in South Africa was at 55.97 percent (Jul 21, 2020). While Statistics South Africa states that the unemployment rate among young people with



tertiary education is getting lower, there is very little comfort to youths about to graduate. They are realising that going to school to acquire education will not sustain them in the changing world. The apartheid inequalities are abolished; however, the economic participation of Blacks is still low because of the impact of the previous inequalities which left them behind, and their current contextual situation (Western & Pettit, 2005). Most whites still have the privilege of residing near areas of economic opportunities, while most Blacks still reside far from work places, in the township, and away from economic opportunities. Their situation makes them struggle more as they have to pay more to reach workplaces. The township residential areas are still underdeveloped and are still living areas for Blacks, Coloureds, and Indians. This context, unfortunately, still affects the Black youths of today, leaving them with considerably few opportunities to excel in the economic environment (Lemon & Battersby-Lennard, 2011). The hub of the economy is mostly in urban areas, far from the youths' abode. Part of the solution to the South African economic divide may probably be the development of the youth in knowledge and skills in the entrepreneurial field, to help struggling youths find employment, and to improve the economy.

## Implications of youth development and entrepreneurship

Youth development through creativity is important to organisations' efforts to maintain a competitive edge. Through creativity, employees are able to generate value for multiple stakeholders and contribute to the survival of organizations (Amabile et al., 2005). Entrepreneurship plays a critical role in creating value and in generating wealth and jobs. Although entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial creativity/innovation are said to be related, entrepreneurs like Henry Ford, who was uneducated, ended up being a creative force behind an industry of unprecedented size and wealth that in only a few decades permanently changed the economic and social character of the United States (Lewis, 1976). He built a farm locomotive, then a tractor that used an old mowing machine for its chassis and then a homemade steam engine for power. Entrepreneurial innovation is explicated as "mental orientation (desire, wish and hope), inducing the selection of entrepreneurship" (Wu & Huarng, 2015). "ESI" is defined as one's confidence in one's capability and skill to achieve the start-up advancement of any business. Evidently, there are numerous factors, e.g. personal attributes, traits, background, experience and disposition, that can stimulate individuals' intentions to become entrepreneurs.

## Conclusion

Youth unemployment is a major national challenge that needs urgent and coordinated responses to address it. Considering that self-employment is partially a measure to improve the youths' economic wellbeing, it is important for institutions to train and skill the youth in the school system. This can definitely be done through



curriculum change that will equip the youth with entrepreneurial skills. While curriculum change may be one aspect of the total problem of youth development, there are other far reaching implications of the idea of curriculum change (Arogundade, 2011). The curriculum, depending on its nature, may be an important means for bringing about wider social change, for maintaining the status quo, for facilitating adjustment to new conditions or for leading in the definition of new goals for the attainment of economic growth, however, the research on principles underlying the process of curriculum change is still limited. The youth career counseling problem, and the importance of economic growth, suggest that review and analysis of youth employment may help to clarify this dynamic aspect of the curriculum field. It is thus vital that institutions develop a comprehensive strategy for youth counseling for employment, as part of a broader focus in schools to expand employment in South Africa (de Jongh & Meyer, 2018; Flynn et al., 2016). Most studies on the contribution of entrepreneurial activity to economic growth are done internationally and are published annually in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. These studies indicate that the differences in economic growth across countries can be explained by the type of career counseling activities allowed in institutions. Economic growth requires youth development through innovation and creativity, for economic growth. Government's curriculum policies should focus on ensuring institutions' teachings encourages creativity in individuals, to promote the economy of the country. Especially if the government allows for unlimited creativity (Bruce, 2002). Promoting individual entrepreneurs is more important than providing financial support. While financial support can help acquire resources, it does not create new ideas. Funding follows ideas, not vice versa. Governments should therefore monitor schools to ensure the successful achievement of curriculum change for career development in schools, to achieve economic growth.

## References

- AlKutich, M. & Abukari, A. (2018): Examining the benefit of school inspection on teaching and learning: a case study of Dubai private schools. *Teaching and learning*, 9(5), 37-48.
- Amabile, T. M., Barsade, S. G., Mueller, J. S. & Staw, B. M. (2005): Affect and creativity at work. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50, 367-403.
- Arogundade, B. B. (2011): Entrepreneurship education: An imperative for sustainable development in Nigeria. *Journal of emerging trends in educational research and policy studies*, 2(1), 26-29.
- Bates, T. & Bates, T. M. (1997): *Race, self-employment, and upward mobility: An illusive American dream*. USA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Benach, J., Muntaner, C. & Santana, V. (2007): *Employment conditions and health inequalities*. Project Report. Employment Conditions Knowledge Network (EMCONET).
- Boettke, P. J. & Coyne, C. J. (2003): Entrepreneurship and Development: Cause or Consequence? *Advances in Austrian Economics*, 6, 67-87.
- Bosma, N. & Harding, R. (2008): *Global entrepreneurship monitor*. UK: Executive report.
- Bruce, D. (2002): Taxes and entrepreneurial endurance: Evidence from the self-employed. *National Tax Journal*, 55(1), 5-24.

- Brush, C. G., Greene, P. G. & Hart, M. M. (2001): From initial idea to unique advantage: The entrepreneurial challenge of constructing a resource base. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 15(1), 64-78.
- Chigunta, F., Schnurr, J., James-Wilson, D., Torres, V. & Creation, J. (2005): *Being “real” about youth entrepreneurship in Eastern and Southern Africa*. SEED working paper, 72.
- Cloete, A. (2015): Youth unemployment in South Africa. A theological reflection through the lens of human dignity. *Missionalia*, 43(3), 513-525.
- De Jongh, J. & Meyer, N. (2018): Perceived Barriers of Employment among Young Labour Market Participants: Evidence from Selected Municipal Areas in South Africa. Paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference Contemporary Issues in Theory and Practice of Management CITPM 2018. Czestochowa University of Technology, Czestochowa, Poland.
- Eisinger, P. K. (1989): *The Rise of the Entrepreneurial State: State and Local Economic Development Policy in the United States*. USA: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Flynn, J., Mader, P., Oosterom, M. & Ripoll, S. (2016): *Failing young people? Addressing the supply-side bias and individualisation in youth employment programming*. IDS Evidence Report 216. Brighton: IDS.
- Fullan, M., Cuttress, C. & Kilcher, A. (2009): 8 Forces for leaders of change. *Journal of staff development*, 26(4), 8-13.
- Gwartney, J. D., Lawson, R. A. & Clark, J. R. (2005): Economic Freedom of the world, 2002. *The Independent Review*, 9(4), 573-593.
- Hughes, J. (1986): *The vital few: The entrepreneur and American economic progress*. Galaxy Books Series #819. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Karimi, S., Chizari, M., Biemans, H. J. & Mulder, M. (2010): Entrepreneurship education in Iranian higher education: The current state and challenges. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 48(1), 35-50.
- Kirzner, I. M. (1997): Entrepreneurial discovery and the competitive market process: an Austrian approach. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 35, 60-85.
- Kreft, S. F. & Russell, S. S. (2003): *Public Policy, Entrepreneurship, and Economic Growth*. West Virginia University: Entrepreneurship Center Working Paper.
- Lemon, A. & Battersby-Lennard, J. (2011): Studying together, living apart: Emerging geographies of school attendance in post-apartheid Cape Town. *African Affairs*, 110(438), 97-120.
- Lewis, D. L. (1976): *The public image of Henry Ford: An American folk hero and his company*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Lowe, J. (2001): *Bill Gates speaks: insight from the world’s greatest entrepreneur*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Marx, A. W. (1992): The State, economy, and self-determination in South Africa. *Political Science Quarterly*, 107(4), 655-675.
- Republic of South Africa (RSA) (2020): Briefing by National Treasury on financial implications of Covid-19 on both the economy and budget JT Standing Committee and Select Committee on finance and appropriations, 30 April 2020: Implications of Covid-19 on the economy.
- Reynolds, P. D., Hay, M. & Camp, S. M. (1999): *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor*. Executive Report. Kansas City.
- Roesken, B. (2011): *Hidden dimensions in the professional development of mathematics teachers: In-service education for and with teachers*. Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Sahlberg, P. (2005): Curriculum change as learning: In search of better implementation. In: *Curriculum Reform and Implementation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Policies, Perspectives and Implementation* (Conference proceedings), 8-10.
- Schumpeter, J. A. (1942): *Capitalism, socialism, and democracy*. New York: Harper.
- Wei, X. & Zhou, Y. (2019): The empirical research of the entrepreneurial behaviour and influencing factors of rural youth using “Internet+”. Evidence from the rural areas of

- Shenyang City. In: *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 490(6), 1-6.
- Western, B. & Pettit, B. (2005): Black-white wage inequality, employment rates, and incarceration. *American Journal of Sociology*, 111(2), 553-578.
- Wu, C. W. & Huarng, K. H. (2015): Global entrepreneurship and innovation in management. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(4), 743-747.
- Zahra, S. A. (2007): Contextualizing theory building in entrepreneurship research. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 22(3), 443-452.

#### Author affiliation

Tebogo Jillian Mampane, PhD Student, University of South Africa, South Africa

Please cite this publication as:

Mampane, T. J. (2021): Revisiting Curriculum Change and Youth Development for Entrepreneurship through School Counseling. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 121-130.



# Comparative School Counseling

2021

Volume 1

This volume contains a collection of selected papers submitted to the Inaugural International Conference on Comparative School Counseling in 2021.

The volume is divided into 3 parts and includes 12 papers written by 25 authors. Readers can find comparative and case studies, theoretical and empirical explorations, quantitative and qualitative methods, descriptive and analytical approaches, and interesting data on school counseling worldwide. Problems of school counseling in nearly 20 countries are discussed in the papers.

ISSN 2738-8484