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CAREER COUNSELOR'S/CONSULTANT'S ROLE FOR A PROFESSION

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Abstract: *The purpose of counseling is to offer students the possibility to explore, to discover and to clarify the optimal ways to live their own life, to a happy existence. Initially, counseling was wrongly identified with psychotherapy, only afterwards the two were clearly separated from a theoretical point of view. Between these two there are major differences: counseling is a proactive action, while psychotherapy is a postfactum intervention (as remedy, as therapy). Student and professional counseling represents all the optional and consultative actions realized through pedagogical means, general and specialized, subordinated to the technological dimension of the education and from the methodological point of view represents the psycho-pedagogical assistance of teachers, parents and students for a knowledgeable choice regarding school and carrier.*

Keywords: *counseling, career, profession, counselor, consultant*

1. INTRODUCTION

A good definition of the term *counseling* is found in a psychology dictionary, edited in Romanian, in 1981, where M. Golu defines it as *the action through which it is followed to suggest the model to proceed or to behave that has to be used in a certain situation or in general, in life and in day to day life.*

The counseling means: a relationship; listening to the other; preventing crisis; a person helped by another guided by certain theories and models.

The purpose of counseling is reached through information, discussions; collaborative decision making; offering it in the education field.

Career, a word with French roots, it is understood in Romanian as a profession, occupation and *in extenso* as a wellbeing, or as a good status in the society that is different

from careerism, perceived as a tendency to be hypocrite, with all the possible means.

Profession, respectively a career represents: *a succession of jobs or planned activities or not, involving elements of advancement, employment and personal development along a defined timeline.* (F. Clark, 1992)

The counselor is: a supervisor, agent of change, supporter of the disadvantaged, trainer, consultant, adviser, agent of development, mediator, evaluator, coordinator, psychotherapist, and researcher.

The career consultant is the person with specialty higher education that counsels clients regarding different professions, gives information and support.

2. COUNSELOR'S PERSONALITY

In the context of professionalization, the counseling and advising activity, team work with all the stakeholders is needed to create a bridge between the counselor and the client, to support efficient cooperation among work, family and community.

The counselor assures this connection through proposing, organizing and carrying the adequate activities of counseling and advising, that are centered on the beneficiaries' need, but also on educational programs that have the purpose to eliminate any obstacles faced along the way.

The list of difficulties that require intervention from the psychology counselor can be as follows:

- **adaptation difficulties:** problems of adapting to the social or professional environment, refusal of the work collective;
- **difficulties regarding career planning:** difficulties in taking career related decisions, unemployment perspective
- **relationship problems**
- **behavioral difficulties:** aggressiveness control and channeling its energy in positive activities, negative behaviors, intimidation;
- **personal difficulties:** identity crisis, problems in maintain friends' relationships, the incapacity to meet others' expectations, low self-esteem, drug use, depression, anxiety.

The main activities of the counselor are: being informed about the services offered in the field of counseling, sending educational and professional offers, using occupational standards and profiles; identifying the possibilities of mobility for education, of training and of work; psycho-pedagogical counseling and assistance, coordinating educational activities that develop the following competences: self-knowledge and personal development, interpersonal communication and relationships, learning and information management, career planning, entrepreneurial education and lifestyle management.

At the basis of his training are his **traits** and **attitudes**.

The traits of the counselor are synthesized by G. Egan, in its known model: the relationship capacity, empathy, authenticity, challenging, exploratory spirit, probing, questioning, personal development, altruism, creativity, humor. (G. Egan, 2006)

In relationship with his client, **the attitudes** of the counselor are: unconditional acceptance, empathy, positive thinking, congruency, collaboration, respect and responsibility. (E. Cocoradă, 2004)

Unconditional acceptance represents the recognizing attitude of client's dignity and personal value, with its strong and weak points, with qualities and defects, with positive and negative attitudes, sterile and constructive interests, thoughts and behaviors, without criticizing, judging, controlling and especially, without conditioning.

Positive thinking has the purpose to improve less developed aspects of the human. Through his activities, the counselor must focus on developing client's self-image and respect, his personal responsibility. The vision of the world must be in a positive note, being given by self-trust and other people's trust.

Collaboration is the ability of the counselor to involve a group of people in personal development decisions.

The respect-partnership relationship means that the role of the counselor is to help the client to find the most relevant information so he can take responsible decisions.

Congruency is about the consistency of counselor's behavior and beliefs, emotions and his personal values that defines the authenticity of one's existence.

Useful behaviors: using the tone of voice according to the client's emotional comfort needs, maintaining a good eye contact, using gestures that confirm that the client is listened, using smile, optimal physical distance, relaxed and open posture, a tone of voice that sends security.

Avoidable behaviors: lack of visual contact, staying far from the client, sarcasm, pointing fingers, closing your eyes, talking to fast or to slow.

Empathy is the ability to put you in the place of another person, to understand the he thinks, feels and behaves with others. Empathy is developed through assuming verbal and



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nonverbal communication skills, using open ended questions, avoiding criticizing the other person and negative feedback.

The communication skills represent the key to success in the process of communication and counseling and when we talk about communication techniques we have to acknowledge a list of desirable behaviors, but also a list of ones to avoid.

The nonverbal communication skills contain the following elements: *eye contact, body posture, pauses, voice's tone and intensity, physical distance, touch and warmth.*

Maintaining *eye contact* means the success of an honest and open communication. Usually, the eye contact with the client is beneficial and can lead to an honest, open and trustful counselor-counseled relationship.

The body posture is the first aspect that client notices at the counselor and it should transmit professionalism, security and relaxation.

Pauses in discussions with the clients have the role to encourage them to re-gather their thoughts.

The tone and intensity of the voice is the best way to reflect the emotional status of a person. It is recommended to have a congruency between counselor's and client's voice.

The gestures and facial expressions largely reflect the emotional status of the actors. The counselor must check for them to be in accordance with what messages he communicates. Also, *the personal gestures* must be monitored by the counselor, especially in situation in which he knows that his client has some tics.

The physical distance is about the degree of comfort of the individuals regarding the management of their personal space. The counselor has to offer to his clients the liberty

to choose the ideal distance and his office should have a sofa and at least one chair. The client will the furthest or the closest distance from the counselor depending on his degree of comfort.

Using *touch* – shoulder tap, hand shake – is dependent on the situation and on each individual client, so the counselor has to decide if using a gesture that involves touch is useful for the relationship or not.

The verbal communication skills contain the following elements: *active listening, coordination, reflection, challenging and summarization.*

Active listening is the active process of interception, processing and interpretation of the message, of the public and of the contextual stimuli in the framework of communication. It is the basic counselor's ability to encourage the client to talk openly and freely.

Reflection is expressing the counselor's understanding of the content, as well as the emotional state sent by the client. Reflecting client's feelings and experience gives him the belief that he is listened to and what he lives or expresses is important.

The reflection process is directly linked with the feedback that the counselor is offering. An efficient feedback has to: focus on the positive aspects, to be specific, concrete, descriptive, not evaluative, to offer compartmental alternatives; to address the behavior of the person and not the person in general.

Challenging is a technique of communication with high impact that brings the client to a certain level of conversation: openness and honesty. Out of this reason, the counselor is able to use it only after he gets to a solid relationship with his client.

Summarization is the way to gather and put together, to focus in an organized manner the most significant aspects of the interlocutor's speech. It is used to recap the content of a speech, to close a conversation or open a new one on certain topic.

The desired behaviors are: using terms accessible to the client, summing up the client's speech; using active listening, calling the client by his name, using humor, adopting a positive attitude towards the client, clarifying client's questions and giving objective feedback.

And **the avoidable behaviors** are: cutting of the client, giving useless advice, blaming or judging the client, using "why..." questions to many times, minimizing the client's stories and avoiding uncomfortable topics.

Identifying or naming the client's sentiments through "affective words" or "metaphors".

Usually, the *affective messages* that can be separated from the client's account include experiences and sentiments from one of the following domains: affection, anger and fear.

The affective words are grouped in 5 categories: joy, competency, love, happiness and hope.

The anger feelings are grouped in 4 categories: attack, rejection, defense and fight.

The fear feelings are grouped in 5 categories: fear, doubt, sadness, pain and avoidance.

The metaphors are expressed through phrases like: "I reached the bottom" or "I am like a bomb ready to explode".

Reflection can also express the results of behavior's observation by the counselor. For an efficient reflection it is recommended that the message to be analyzed from 3 points of view: the verbal content, the feelings it expresses and the nonverbal behavior of the client.

3. CAREER COUNSELOR'S/ CONSULTANT'S PROFILE

The career consultant is the person having higher specialty education that counsels clients on the subject of different profession of the working environment, offers information, provides consultancy and support.

Consultancy is an activity of solving a specialty problem by a specialist or organization, that consists of elaborating, arguing and explaining a solution or some viable alternatives.

The professional counselor works: at undergraduate level, graduate level, work and unemployment offices, in private institutions or other similar state institutions.

The target groups are: pupils, students, youth and adults.

The necessary competencies of the counselors are:

- **methodological competencies** – theoretical and practical training for using specific means for psychological investigation;
- workforce related competencies – having the knowledge about ways of training, employment procedures, occupations' description;
- competencies about using the communication techniques – these assures the quality of the relationship established between the counselor and the counseled, being an important factor for determining the efficiency of the activity;
- competencies of intervention and negotiation – the necessity to negotiate the condition of work's framework.

An AIOSP study regarding the required competencies for a career counselor reveals aspects like:

- professional and ethical behavior;
- capacity to lead and persuade;
- sensibility to cultural differences;
- capacity to use theories and research in practice: conceiving, applying and evaluation of career counseling programs;
- communication capacity;
- conciseness of professional limits;
- capacity to use computer and information technology;
- capacity to work in team of professionals;
- knowing the process of professional evolution during a person's lifetime.

A reference inventory of the professional competencies required for the career counselor profession it is offered by IAEVG (International Association for Educational and



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Vocational Guidance) established *11 key skills* and *10 specialized skills*.

The key competencies are available for all practitioners, no matter what the context in which they work and the specific skills are attributed to certain counseling work.

The key skills are:

- adopting an ethical behavior and a adequate professional attitude in fulfilling the roles and responsibilities of the job;
- knowing how to counsel and support the clients in the learning process for developing a career and in solving the personal problems of them;
- proving openness and interest towards the cultural differences of the clients and properly evaluating them to interact in an efficient way with all kinds of people;
- integrating theory and research for career guidance, professional development, counseling and consulting;
- capacity to conceive, implement and evaluate programs and interventions in the field of guidance and counseling;
- being aware of own capacities and limitations;
- being able to effectively communicate with colleagues and clients, using and adequate language;
- being up to date to new information regarding education, training, employment trends, workforce and social aspects;
- being open to social and multicultural aspects;
- being able to efficiently cooperate in a team of professionals;
- knowing the process of developing a career during the whole lifetime.

The specific skills in counseling are reflected in determining the self-assessment, in the purpose of clarifying the self-image, in

identifying options, taking decisions and in solving difficulties.

From the perspective of 21st century professionalization, the required skills for a good professional career are:

- competencies for a multicultural and intercultural perspective to answer to diverse clients;
- necessary competencies to prepare users to select and utilize available information with the help of new communication and informational technologies;
- ability to offer counseling to a greater number of people;
- global approach of counseling services offered to adults.

The counselor must prove professionalism and knowledge of the ethical code through:

- maintaining professional standards;
- admitting own limits of competency;
- offering counseling services only for the situations for which he is ready;
- being a competent professional;
- continuous improving;
- customization of the intervention according to the age, gender, ethnicity, social and cultural context, language and educational level of the client.

An ideal profile of a career counselor's skills with a master specialization, according to NCDA (National Career Development Association, USA), includes:

- knowledge of counseling theories and associated techniques;
- knowledge of the career development models;
- individual and group evaluation abilities;
- information and resources;
- promotion and management of programs;
- mentorship and performance growth;
- ethical and legal aspects.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In Romania, we can't talk yet about a clear legal framework, the counselor profession borrowing a series of ethical rules from psychologist, educators and sociologists.

We are expecting that in the near future, along with the adjustment of the legal framework, that a professional code of conduct to be defined, as a sign that this profession overcame the interim moment and gained its well defined space in the Romanian professional landscape.

Counseling/consultancy as it presents today is more of a social phenomenon than a profession just like any other.

It is, probably, one of the very few jobs that implies an interdisciplinary effort and a holistic vision on the child's personality, today's student, tomorrow's adult and specialist.

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