

Do schools need psychology or psychologists? Looking for a good model of psychological counselling for the school practice

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Professional psychological services for children, young people, their legal representatives and teachers are an inseparable part of the educational systems of all developed countries. The social and psychological conditions in which the children grow up are more and more complicated and we can anticipate no improvement in the situation in the foreseeable future. The number of children who are affected by the complexities of modern life is always on the rise and, at the same time, their resistance to the demands made on them declines. Thus, a teacher's job is becoming more and more exhausting and overwhelming and the need for a good background is increasing.

In all these problems the consultant services, which are referred to as educational and psychological counselling in our country, are trying to help. The goal of these services is to help schools, mainly pupils and their parents and teachers in mastering their educational tasks. In general it is possible to say, that there are three valid types of consultancy work (counselling) in the frame of educational consultancy:

1.

Psychological counselling – consists of a team cooperating together with other experts aimed at mastering psychological problems and the development of his or her personality. In the school system a psychologist mostly cooperates with teachers, who specialise in working with children with special educational needs (in our school system we are used to calling them special teachers – further I will use the term Special Education Teacher).

2.

Special counselling aims at specific groups of clients with social handicap and disability with the goal of achieving the self-reliance and the integration of a client, at the same time an important part of it is the help in overcoming the accompanying psychological problems connected with the handicap.

3.

Vocational guidance is not only about the choice of appropriate study or a job, but also the so-called job education choice, which has its place at present schools in FEP in the field of Human being and work.

Speaking about educational and psychological counselling, we mean the services given by psychologists, special education teachers and other consultants working in various institutions.

These are the following institutions:

- School Advisory Facilities (670 counselling psychologists in the CR)
- School counselling places of work – it means the psychologists work directly at the schools (around 200 in the CR)
- Private psychological consultancies – mostly clinical psychologists
- Non-profit non-governmental organizations – belonging to the of Ministry of Work and Social Matters

And now returning to School Advisory Facilities:

In the Czech Republic the *School Advisory Facilities* are established according to Educational Act from the year 2004 on *Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education* and shall provide for children, pupils, and students and their statutory representatives and for schools and school facilities, information and diagnostic, advisory and methodological services, and shall provide pedagogical and specialised pedagogical and psychological services and preventative educational care, and shall assist in selecting a suitable future profession. School advisory facilities shall cooperate with the authorities in providing social and legal care for children, and also with bodies providing care for youth and families, medical facilities, or other bodies and institutions.

The written consent of a student or legal representative is necessary if the student is under the age of 18 before receiving any consultancy services at these advisory facilities. There are exceptions to this rule.

It is, of course, not valid in the cases given by the special law rules, for example by by Law on the Social and Legal Protection of Children.

Now I will call out these School Advisory Facilities. Such facilities as described in the Announcement number 72 from the year 2005 about Providing Counselling Services at Schools and School Advisory Facilities are:

“Educational-Psychological” Counselling Centre and Special Educational Centre. There is also Educational Care Centre participating in the educational counselling services.

1.

Let us turn our attention to **Educational -Psychological Counselling Centres**:

Teams of psychologists and special education teachers provide services in these guidance centres and also during their school visits.

Educational-Psychological Counselling Centres participates in the educational process, particularly in the cases, whereby the educational process is in some way made more complicated. The primary part of its activity is personal work with children and pupils of Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education facilities and with their parents as in the form of individual care as in the form of group work.

These centres are in charge of the following tasks of educational and psychological consultancy.

They

- Determine the pupils' level of preparation for Compulsory School Attendance
- Recommend the admittance of a pupil into a relevant school and class and an appropriate method of education

- Carry out required psychological and special education examinations for the pupils' entrance to schools, classes, units or study groups
- Determine the educational needs of pupils and students with disabilities
- Provide consultancy services to pupils with an increased risk of school failure or with potential personality or social development problems and simultaneously assist parents and teachers to comprehend the pupils' perspectives
- Carry out methodological support to schools
- Ensure the coordination of preventive efforts against socially undesirable phenomena at schools.

There are currently 141 Educational-Psychological Counseling Centres in the Czech Republic.

2.

An additional school advisory facility functions under the name a **Special Educational Centre**. It provides consultancy services to pupils with disabilities, their parents and teachers. The activity of the centre is determined by the specific disability needs of its clients and is often provided by visiting schools or families educating and taking care of these children

These centres :

- Investigate the special educational needs of the pupils with disabilities
- Perform special education diagnostics
- Work out assessment reports for the integration of these pupils and for their admittance or transfer to other schools
- Recommend further educational instructions
- Carry out special educational care for the pupils with disabilities
- Perform consultancy services aimed at helping to solve educational problems and problems in psychical and social development of children with special educational needs
- Consult with teachers and parents
- Provide methodological support to schools.

At present there are 127 Special Educational Centres in the Czech Republic.

3.

Educational Care Centres similarly participate in psychological consultancy in our educational system according to relevant legislation. These are the newest of the three advisory facilities in our educational system.

Educational Care Centres provide comprehensive special education care and psychological care to children at risk or with behavioral disturbances and with gaps in their social development and to children released from institutional education. These are the newest of the three kinds of institutions I have discribed.

At the present time there are 39 Educational Care Centres in the Czech Republic.

These three types of facilities, as I mentioned earlier, work together with schools and proper authorities, to deal with preventing socially undesirable phenomena and drug addiction.

One way to incorporate educational psychology into schools is to have a school specialist, **it means the school psychologist or a special education teacher directly at the school.**

This proposal was introduced in the National Educational Development Programme of the CZ Republic (White Book) from the the year 2001 and in the Long Term Target Development

Education in the Czech Republic, in which the conditions for introducing these experts into schools had been specified.

It has been recently supported by the Announcement from the year 2005 describing consultancy services provided at schools and at school advisory facilities. This material was completed with the “Conception of consultancy services given at school”, describing activities of all introduced experts and the character of cooperation with teachers at school in greater detail.

Consultancy services performed at school are referred to as school counselling. Even if there is no school psychologist or special educational teacher at the school, the educational advisor and methodological advisor gives the basic guidance and mediates further consultancy services.

Some school psychologists (about 50) in our country take part in the project “the Development and Improvement of the Integrated Diagnostic, Informational and Consultancy System in the Framework of Education and Vocational Guidance” (referred to as VIP-Kariera), which was launched in September 2005 and has brought together a lot of interesting experience.

One of the findings of this project is that there are very few experts among psychologists who would like to work at school. One of the reasons can be attributed to the fact that only part time work is offered in the framework of this project and not all schools are willing to hire such an expert additionally on a part-time basis.

This trend towards reinforcing educational and psychological counselling in our educational system has its advantages as well as disadvantages. The advantages can be considered expediting solving those questions that in this case need not deteriorate. The opportunity to work with the whole school system is another advantage for the psychologist working directly at the school.

On the other hand, the process of introducing psychologists into schools is slow and gradual and there is very little support (even if there is a new legislation in existence).

We must take the that psychologists need time to gain the trust of school staff into consideration in order to make any progress.

The methodological background for the participants of the counselling in educational system is of course needed. It is performed by The Institute of Educational-Psychological Counselling, which is established directly by The Ministry of Education. This Institute edits the “Educational-Psychological Reporter”, provides training and education, provides suggestions for changes in occurring legislation and hosts the conference “Consultancy days” every year. It creates an important support for our counselling system in educational field.

As I previously stated, psychologists working in other institutions who are not part of the educational system and operate in health or social services also come across educational problems.

They work, for example, at private clinic child psychology practices. They encounter children with ADHD, neuroses or with disorders of autistic spectra. This psychologist can form recommendations for teachers, but they must be officially certified by the

School Advisory Facility. The same procedure is similarly valid for psychologists at private consultancies, too.

There are also institutions dealing with educational problems belonging to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Work and Social Matters in our country.

By this, I mean non-profit non-governmental organizations which form school preventing programmes or are dealing with the early care of children with disabilities. These organizations have been in existence in certain areas and thus they cover grey areas mainly in meeting the needs of children with disabilities both pre-school and in school age and of their parents. Psychologists working in these facilities mostly work in teams with social workers and special education teachers.

The future plans of our educational and psychological counselling are concerned above all with placing psychology consultancies in schools, yet not only with that. Within the framework of my presentation there is not enough time to elaborate. However before closing my speech I would like to describe some of the challenges which educational and psychological counselling face and will face in the future in our country.

This is

- The need for a greater number of qualified school psychologists in schools
- Improved support given to school psychologists and special education teachers at schools
- Emphasis on postgraduate school specialists' courses and training
- Focusing more attention on collaborations between institutions from different sectors (I mean social and medical departments) – reducing bureaucracy
- The involvement of school advisory facilities in the community planning process
- The implementation of individual and team supervision to the educational-psychological counselling as a standard practice
- Overcoming of the continual belief by some teachers who feel threatened by school psychologists who say they “simply do not belong in schools”.

The number of special needs pupils is increasing at our schools. Teachers are repeatedly asked to acquire new and deeper educational-psychological knowledge and skills. It is evident, that the psychological training is needed by every participant in the educational process.

In simpler terms: **Schools are able to manage without psychologists, but absolutely not without psychology.**

Therefore, apart from increasing the number of school psychologists in schools, I believe that it is necessary to help teachers and school consultants to gain and utilize up-to-date psychological training and knowledge, which shall empower them in their challenging work.