

Counseling and Vocational Guidance to children with special educational needs

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Introduction

Counseling is a social institution laced with the culture of modern industrialized societies. It is a science or a profession relatively recent. The majority of the people who are engaged in professions which offer “humanitarian services” including educational and other institutions regard that counseling is part of their work. The content of counseling can be defined depending on the implementation to social, educational, professional. The content of counseling can be defined depending on the implementation to social, educational, professional. The Counseling in Special Education focuses on the cultivation of people’s social skills on the level of personal care and of interpersonal relationships in order to succeed the active participation to social life, the autonomous living and adjustment to the environment. Moreover, many specialists point out the necessity of counseling services at schools, which concern the students, the parents, the teachers but also the community in which the school unit belongs. This kind of Counseling aims to people’s enhancing prosperity who are involved into the educational procedure both the personal and social level (Athanasiadou, 2011) The spectrum of Counseling application in Education is wide: the enhancement of the students and their parents, the student’s development of skills, the restitution of the issues which complicate their increase, the professional guidance, the prevention, the information and the prompt and targeted intervention. The teachers and the counselors are called to ensure the providing of equal opportunities to all students avoiding the existence of any kind of discrimination (Morgan, 2015). Offering equal opportunities to all pupils requires the teachers’ and counselors’ appropriate educational training. This education regards on the one hand the management and the satisfaction of special needs and on the other hand of multicultural needs (Nelson & Guerra, 2014).

Research purpose and questions

The purposes of the present research are twofold:

- (a) the definition of the counselor’s educational role to the psycho-pedagogical procedure
- (b) the significance of the professional orientation towards students with special educational needs.

The purpose of this research is to examine the views of students with special educational needs and their parents about school opportunities. Additionally, to present the significance of the educational role in the field of Counseling and define the profile and the practices of a teacher-counselor in special education in the field of professional orientation.

The questions that arise are many.

- Who is the role of Counseling in the development of knowledge and skills of students with special educational needs?
- Which are the methods and educational practices of the counselor during the guidance (professional, educational) for the implementation of an effective and active plan?
- Which is the profile of the teacher-counselor?

Methodology

A total of 132 students with sensory and motor disabilities participated in the research, who attend Special High Schools and High Schools in Ipiros, as well as in general high schools and unified high schools in the case of children with visual impairments. The students in the research sample have a) vision problems, or b) hearing problems, or c) motor problems. A great advantage of the present sample of students is that it represents a particularly large part of the statistical population as the data were gathered from the special schools of Ipiros and 34 parents participated, answering a separate research improvised questionnaire. A total of 143 questionnaires were given to the parents, of which 34 were returned (about 24%), which is considered a satisfactory response rate of the parent population.

- The first part contains questions about the students' knowledge about the institution of S.E.P., and the services related to it (KE.SY.P., GRA.S.E.P.) and about the implementation of the S.E.P. course in the school context (application methods, degree of satisfaction with the course).
- The second part has two sections. The first section consists of 20 questions with a binary measurement scale, to which the students answer if the S.E.P. course is taught. in that particular school year.
- The last part of the questionnaire includes demographic questions.

Results

From the answers of all students with disabilities it was found that S.E.P. defined by the largest percentage (55.73%) as a course, which informs and helps students in the choice of studies and profession, while a percentage of 29% declared complete ignorance about it.

In much smaller percentages, the students define the S.E.P. as a course that helps the student to choose a profession by assessing his potential and characteristics using

psychometric tools (5.34%) and as a course that helps the student set goals and make decisions (7.63%).

To the question what do the students know about the KE.SY.P. and GRA.S.E.P. the vast majority of students (88.37% for KE.SY.P. and 75.77% for GRA.S.E.P.) declared complete ignorance. However, in lower percentages they reported that these services aim at educational and professional information and guidance of students. From the above, it can be concluded that a significant percentage of students with sensory and motor disabilities are unaware of the concept of the institution of S.E.P. and the greater percentage ignores the services that are provided in the context of its application. The knowledge of the rest of the students about S.E.P. they seem to focus mainly on its function as a course, whose sole objective, like that of KE.SY.P. and GRA.S.E.P., is the information and guidance of students in their educational and professional choices.

Regarding the KE.SY.P. it is noteworthy that only 6 students (4.9%) have visited a Counseling and Guidance Center, of which 5 stated that this visit helped them to a great or very great extent. Also 3 of the students who visited a KE.SY.P. they struggled due to the lack of technological support corresponding to their needs. Following mainly the advice of S.E.P. teachers, 46 students (35%) stated that they have visited a School Career Guidance Office. Of these, 16 students (12%) said that this visit helped them a lot. However, 10 students stated that they had difficulty due to a lack of suitable staff to provide counseling and information services, while 19 stated that they had difficulty due to a lack of technological support corresponding to their needs.

The fact that a significantly larger number of students have visited a GRA.S.E.P. compared to those who have visited a KE.SY.P., it is obviously related to the existence of GRA.S.E.P. in the school they attend (45% of students state that there is a GRA.S.E.P. in their school). It is found, however, that although most students who visited these services declared high levels of satisfaction, at the same time they reported difficulties during their visit, with the lack of technological support corresponding to their needs playing a leading role. The majority of students (63.3%) said they had decided on their future profession, with a significant proportion reporting careers related to IT, education and psychology. Also, students with disabilities seem to have the belief that they will manage to live financially independently.

As mentioned in “Findings”, the factor analysis yielded six factors. Students with disabilities seem to be generally positive about the Psychological benefits they get from S.E.P. and they also seem to have high expectations from S.E.P. However, they do not seem to be satisfied with the Information offered to them by S.E.P. Students with disabilities do not appear to be influenced by significant others in decision-making.

No statistically significant differences between the two genders were found for any of the six factors, so the two genders do not appear to rate S.E.P. in a different way. However, statistically significant differences were found between the three groups a) for the factor "Influence of significant others", where students with hearing impairments seem to have been influenced by significant others in their educational and career choices more than the other two groups of children. This is probably due to the fact that students with hearing problems are those whose disability is perceived by others under conditions alone, that is, their disability is less obvious than motor problems or visual problems. It is possible that this works in favor of hearing-impaired students, contributing to more positive self-esteem, more optimism about the future, less defensiveness and, therefore, healthier adjustment and better social skills. Consequently, these children "listen" to significant others much more than children with other disabilities and have learned to follow advice, as they receive outside help that they can value and trust. In short, these children may be less negative and less defensive about advice.

b) for the "S.E.P. Events" factor, where students with mobility problems seem to have less practical help from the S.E.P. in the context of their school than the other two groups of students.

The investigation of the correlations of the six factors with individual demographic and other measurements showed that of the six factors, only the Information factor was correlated with the educational level of the father (0.41), while no factor was correlated with the educational level of the mother. Therefore, the higher the educational level of the father, the more positive the students' responses in relation to the adequacy and the range of information they consider to be provided by the S.E.P. their children more and discuss/analyze issues related to the choice of studies, goals and the importance of career guidance, so that the child is ultimately well-informed on these issues, regardless of whether the information comes from the school or the father. Only two of the six factors correlate with parents' socio-economic level and parental support, namely the Influence of significant others factor and the Expectations factor.

The extent to which the students of the total sample are influenced by the advice of relatives, and in general "significant others" seems to be positively related to the socio-economic level of the family, which is likely to indicate that parents with higher incomes have a greater possibility for the educational and professional rehabilitation of their children and therefore influence the children's decisions more. Finally, it seems that the greater the sense of lack of freedom and isolation experienced by the students, the lower the expectations of the students from the S.E.P. and of their future occupation and the greater the extent to which significant others influence the decisions of students with disabilities. We would say that it is to be expected when the family has a strong influence, to adopt a priori the choices made within its context and to limit the autonomy of its members outside its contexts.

In relation to parental support, students seem to believe that their parents support their children's decisions and do not restrict their freedom, but do things for their children that the children could do for themselves. It is a very positive step for the independence of children with disabilities to feel that their parents do not restrict their freedom, however the attitude of parents to "do things" for their children instead of the children could be considered a "bad attitude" from on the part of the parents, as it expresses a protective attitude that is deep down based on the prejudice that the disabled person is not equal and probably cannot overcome whatever difficulties the disability imposes on him.

Conclusions

A significant percentage of students with sensory and motor disabilities are unaware of the concept of the institution of S.E.P. and the greater percentage ignores the services that are provided in the context of its application

We therefore see a tendency of students with disabilities to claim a place in the labor market by choosing professions based on modern reality and closer to their interests and capabilities. and overcoming stereotypes that contribute to the creation of ghetto occupations for the disabled

It is therefore possible that sufficient information is not offered at school, but it is also possible that "the more important the students find a element that is offered to them, the more they feel that they need it and consider that it is not offered to them to the extent desired"

Students with disabilities do not appear to be influenced by significant others in decision-making

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Recommendations

The above findings contribute to a better understanding of the needs of students with disabilities and their parents in relation to S.E.P. and, therefore, can lead to the design of more effective educational interventions to improve S.E.P. services. at all three levels (school class, GRA.S.E.P., KE.SY.P.).

Some basic propositions, as a result of the main conclusions, are the following:

1. S.E.P. to be taught in all special education schools normally
2. Implementation of training programs for S.E.P. teachers and advisors. for professional counseling and guidance for disabled people
3. Creation of appropriate infrastructure and provision of special equipment and means in GRA.E.P. and KE.SY.P.
4. Emphasis on information for people with disabilities
5. Organization of special skills teaching programs
6. Cooperation of S.E.P. advisors and professors with parents of children with disabilities

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