



ISSN: 0976-3376

Available Online at <http://www.journalajst.com>

**ASIAN JOURNAL OF
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

Asian Journal of Science and Technology
Vol. 08, Issue, 11, pp.6593-6597, November, 2017

RESEARCH ARTICLE

TEACHERS' AS COUNSELOR IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 26th August, 2017

Received in revised form

09th September, 2017

Accepted 27th October, 2017

Published online 30th November, 2017

Key words:

Counselor,
Inclusive Classroom and Teacher.

ABSTRACT

The Guidance and counseling services are very important for the holistic development of children. The provision of Guidance and Counseling services is unavailable in most of the schools due to varied reasons. The lack of availability of counselors is one of them. New B.Ed. curriculum lays emphasis on preparing a teacher who can handle inclusive classrooms. Inclusive classrooms will have students across disabilities and waiting for a counselor to solve the problems of the students will not be possible, hence the teacher needs to be equipped with ways of handling such situations themselves. The changing scenario of the Tech Savvy Indian society makes counseling inevitable for students at Senior Secondary level. In the Indian scenario, the policies are in place but not properly implemented. The significance of the role of a teacher as a counselor or the importance of a counselor is not understood by the parents or society as whole. Parents are not comfortable visiting a counselor as they feel that visiting him means their child is suffering from some mental disorder. One way of handling this problem is to empower teachers with the counseling techniques as they are more acquainted with students.

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INTRODUCTION

Guidance and counseling services are very important for the holistic development of children. The provision of guidance and counseling services is unavailable in most of the schools due to various reasons. The lack of availability of counselors is one of them. Revised B.ED. Curriculum lays emphasis on preparing a teacher who can handle inclusive class rooms. Inclusive classroom will have students across disabilities and waiting for a counselor to solve the problems of the students will not be possible. Hence here teacher needs to be equipped with ways of handling such situations themselves. The problems and needs in society are nothing new, but today they seem to be proliferating at an unprecedented rate. Today, quite a large number of adolescents find themselves in midst of various adjustment problems. The feeling of loneliness, insecurity, maladjustment with the society especially with the teachers, peers, elders, parents etc. and low academic achievements, may be the cause or the effect of the above. Undesirable influences through films, media (both electronic and print) the peer influence, sexual problems, are very often seen among students of this age group. We see the result of the confusion and disappointment in the form of increasing rates of anxiety, distress, unrest and even suicides among students. With the changed concept of education, the school has to take

responsibility of maximizing one's potential. All these indicate the need for a system of counseling. It should be understood that counseling has a challenging role to play in every developing economy. The changing scenario of the tech-savvy Indian society makes counseling inevitable for students at Sr. Secondary Level. Myths regarding school Guidance and Counselling are plenty. Many teachers think that anything to do with discipline problems among students, no matter how simple, needs the help of a counselor of the school. The common expression among classroom teachers is "It is the work of the Guidance counsellor." The visit to the counselor is not welcomed by the students and parents both. Every teacher must realize his responsibility as a Guidance Counselor and also function as one. Guidance is an integral part of being a teacher, charged with the overseer of a classroom full of educable minds. He is put there to manage the educational development of individuals exhibiting unique personalities and potentials different from one another. He has to address to learners' needs and resolve their troubles and difficulties right in the class. Guidance by the teacher means good teaching and efficient classroom management. If he cannot guide his students, surely he cannot teach them.

There are just a few basic principles a teacher has to instill in his heart and mind while he does guidance and counseling:

- Guidance and counseling gives assistance to the students in making wise choices, plans, interpretations and adjustments as he faces the life's crises.

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- It is student centered being concerned with the optimum development of the students and the fullest realization of his potentials for individual and social ends.
- It recognizes the worth and dignity of the student and his right to personal assistance in times of need. It must respect the right of every student to seek help and any of the guidance services offered.
- It focuses in helping the student realize and actualize his best self rather than in solving isolated problems

Hence we can say go on teachers, it is your work to guide and counsel. Every teacher is indeed a Guidance counsellor.

Importance of Inclusion in Two yr. B.Ed. Program

Pre-Service Teacher Education program has been trying to help prospective teachers to develop counseling skills for a number of years. In order to develop the skills, experience and confidence to be inclusive of all children, teachers need to learn about and practice inclusive education during initial teacher preparation. They also need to be given opportunities for continuing in-service professional learning throughout their careers. As a lack of understanding about what 'inclusive education' means can be a barrier to inclusion (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor & Valle, 2011), the first step in preparing teachers to meet the demands of the inclusive classroom is to define the term, 'inclusive education'. This term is used extensively throughout educational literature, often in differing ways. The UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education (2009) states that an inclusive education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more open and accepting; in other words, if schools become better at educating all the children who live in their communities. For some, inclusive education is solely about ensuring that students with disabilities have the same educational opportunities as their peers. However, in much recent literature, 'inclusion' takes on a broader meaning, which suggests that barriers to inclusive education must be considered at any point in time when the participation of students is restricted. Issues may arise for students as a result of a wide variety of reasons including disability, gender, behaviour, poverty, culture and refugee status (Shaddock, Smyth King & Giorcelli, 2007).

We see that in the modern society, right from the changes in the family background to the challenges of permissive society there are innumerable situations that need immediate help from the counselor. If guidance is not provided, the individual may drift from one stage to another without any purpose and will be forced to live an aimless life. He/She might end up make one's life full of drudgery. It is therefore imperative, that we help our future generations to face stress of any kind and magnitude. We must prepare them physically as well as psychologically and ensure that they do not succumb to the changing demands of this dynamic world. Since the adolescence stage is a developmental one, therefore the need of guidance and counseling at Secondary School stage has been emphasized in the National curriculum framework (2005) as "guidance and counseling by trained professionals must be made available to children". Interventions to enhance self/career awareness, career exploration and planning are also essential, besides, this stage coincides with adolescence, a period in an individual's life that is marked by personal, social and emotional crises created due to the demands of adjustment

required in family, peer group and School situations. The provision of these services in Schools would help create the support system required to cope with increasing academic and social pressures. Various recommendations and policies have been framed by the government from time to time to improve the guidance and counseling services provided in the schools. The Secondary Education Commission (1952-54) recommended that "guidance, covers the whole gamut of youth problems and should be provided in an appropriate form at all stages of education through the co-operative endeavor of understanding parents, teacher's, headmasters, principals and guidance officers". According to the Kothari Commission (1964-66), the aim and scope of guidance services have a much wider scope and function than merely that of assisting students in making educational and vocational choices. Report of the working group on Secondary and Vocational Education for XI five-year plan (2007-2012) stated that guidance and counseling, both as an approach and as a service, can be an important strategy for promoting universalization of Secondary Education in terms of its pro-active as well as remedial role. These services could help in promoting students' retention and better scholastic performance in curricular areas, facilitating adjustment and career development of students, developing right attitudes towards studies, self work and others.

In the Indian scenario, the policies are in place but not properly implemented. The significance of the role of teacher as a counselor or a counselor is not understood at all. Parents and the others who need to approach a counselor have a stereo type mindset that their child is suffering from some mental disorder. Although this may sound outrageous but it seems true a lot of times which hampers in dealing with this problem. Empowering the teachers with the counseling techniques would help both these problems as they are more acquainted with the students and the parents are also more comfortable with this idea.

Common misconceptions about guidance and Counselling

There are a number of misconceptions about guidance and counselling. We need to be aware of them as most of the people including the teachers believe in it. Some of the important misconceptions are listed below:

- Guidance and counselling deals only with severe psychological problems, hence, are not required for school children.
- Guidance is always provided in group form, as many students have more or less similar issues on which they need guidance.
- Counselling is always counselee-centred, and the counselee plays a proactive role.
- There is a single theory of guidance and counselling that can be applied to all scenarios.
- Every teacher can be a counsellor without undergoing any counselling training, as it does not require specific skills.
- Counselling for personal, emotional, and social problems is the responsibility of the parents, not the teacher.
- Counselling is only for children who are experiencing problems, and not for children who are bright and happy at school.

- A counsellor can provide a readymade solution to all problems.
- Guidance is a service or process that should be employed to address an emergency situation. (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2012)

What are the advantages and limitations of teachers as counselors?

Teachers as counselors can compensate for high counselor-student ratio that makes it impossible for school counselors to solve the problems of all students and also to know them personally. Teachers in the garb of a counselor strengthen the teacher-student relationships and also create a supporting learning environment. This helps both Teachers and School counselors to work together in helping students in their academic and personal needs. Most of the teachers are unwilling or unable to work effectively with the students in the role of a counselor, to be a successful counselor the teacher should be prepared for it in the pre-service program clearly defining the purpose and reflecting it in the curriculum and should be supported by the School counselor and administration as and when required by the Teacher.

Are Teachers qualified to be counselors?

Though the Teachers may lack professional training of counselors, they have a long experience of helping students with their personal problems. They interact with the students daily and are in a position to provide personal help and direct them accordingly. Effective teachers possess the traits of a counselor as they have ability to empathize with students, have patience and are flexible with exemplary inter-personal skills, open to new ideas and are aware of the individual differences. Effective Teachers promote positive group interactions in their classes and have a good rapport with the students and parents. Thus we can say that Teacher's do play the role of a counselor. Various commissions have talked about the Educational reforms and initiatives to raise academic standards and to upgrade the quality of Schools but very little attention is given to improve guidance and counseling services, which needs to be looked into; as effective learning can take place only in a supportive environment for which development of guidance and counseling services is a crucial component. When faced with a problem students tend to turn to those whom they are familiar with and are sure of receiving help from them. We know that students are likely to turn towards their teachers after their parents, for every kind of help; hence involving teachers directly in guidance and counseling services can be effective and helpful.

Why do schools need a teacher as a counselor?

In India most schools have; far from enough school counselors or others specialists to provide a comprehensive program for developmental guidance. Counselor is busy dealing with children who have serious emotional and behavioral problems and majority of the students are unable to meet the counselor even once in a year. As counselors' hands are normally full as a result of dealing with high-risk students who have special needs or emotional problems and most other students are lucky if they can gain access to the counselor, yet all students, especially at the middle school level, need the support of a friendly adult who cares about them personally; someone they can confide in, who can help them deal with the problems of growing up, keeping up with their studies and planning their

careers. Elementary school teachers, who work closely with young children in a single classroom, generally accept the idea that developmental guidance is an integral part of their responsibility towards students. Middle and Secondary school teachers work with a larger number of students and usually spend no more than an hour a day with each class. They tend to emphasize on developing academic skills and have little time to spend on getting to know their students or talking about students' needs, interests or problems. Yet adolescents at the middle and high school level need personal attention and guidance similar to young children. A trusted high school teacher is often the student's first choice as someone to turn to in discussing personal problems. Teachers, especially in middle schools and high schools, often feel so overwhelmed with their schedules and responsibilities that they do not have the time to build close personal relationships with their students. To be an effective counselor a program must be incorporated in the regular pre-service curriculum, so that the teacher becomes competent to advise and orient the students and parents. The teacher then can devote at least two sessions per week to developmental guidance activities, during which students can explore their personal interests, goals and concerns with a supportive group of peers. Teacher can hold regular student and parent conferences and keep track of their students' academic progress with the help of consulting with other teachers, school counselors and support personnel.

Teaching is much more than delivering lessons in the classroom and dealing with the students. It is not just the matter of learning some skills and competencies. Rather it is the development of a whole perspective or attitude in which the holistic nature of the teacher's personality and role emerge. After all, dealing with the students is an interpersonal situation in which students are looking for sources of satisfaction of their basic social and emotional needs as well. To ensure child's total development, the teacher is duty bound to provide varied educational and aesthetic experience for which he/she needs to develop the competence to plan and organize a variety of co-curricular activities including games, sports, excursions etc. S/he should be in a position to meet the informative needs and provide them assistance to develop life skills and tackle their personal problems on their own. Thus along with academic functions, teachers need to define the personal and emotional dimensions of their role as well. A teacher may face certain difficulties in matters relating to his/her roles and the tasks s/he is supposed to carry out. Besides students, s/he is also expected to provide guidance to the parents and community especially in relation to children's education and upbringing. In this scenario, it becomes important to gauge the attitudes of the teachers towards guidance and counseling in the schools because they have to assume the responsibility of guiding and counseling the students as well as identify students for referral cases. The teachers need to be equipped to share this responsibility with the counselor and the parents. The responsibility of young minds lies in their hands. Hence this task has to be carried out with a clear vision and perspective.

General Steps in Helping a Student

- To provide a safe, secure and nurturing climate in which the child can grow as a healthy, whole individual
- Recognize the student's need for intervention and build rapport
- Provide an appropriate time to truly listen to the child
- Help the person identify and clarify the problem

- Illuminate options and alternatives for problem solving
- Help create goals to facilitate improvement or change
- Encourage the student to succeed
- Enhance child's perspectives, well-being through educating about the problem
- Refer to others if in-depth skills are needed
- Keep the student's confidence sacrosanct unless abuse is involved or it is believed that the student might hurt self or others
- Listen to the inner messages that come through interaction with the child.

What should be included in pre-service guidance and counseling curriculum?

A developmental guidance and counseling curriculum can be structured to include units that focus on the following themes:

- getting acquainted/orientation
- Study skills and habits
- Self-assessment
- Communication skills
- Decision-making and problem-solving
- peer relationships
- Motivation
- Conflict resolution
- Personal hygiene and wellness
- Career awareness and development
- Educational planning
- Community involvement

These units may be organized sequentially in the curriculum. For example, orientation and study skills units would be scheduled early in the year to allow students teachers to get to know the school when they visit it for observation in the first year of the program. A self-assessment unit would follow, enabling the student teachers to map out their personal strengths and identify the areas where they need to grow. While some of these topics can be covered in a single class period (such as "getting acquainted"), others can become recurrent focal points for group discussion, such as motivation, conflict resolution, communication skills and study skills. Some sessions should be carefully structured to build group cohesiveness or to introduce important developmental concepts. Other sessions should be left open-ended, allowing discussion to focus on student teacher's particular interests and needs. Student teachers must clearly understand and embrace the essential concepts of developmental guidance underlying the program and the curricular goals. They also need preparation in guidance and interpersonal skills; so that they can effectively facilitate class discussions that help students think about personal problems and explore alternative courses of action. Second, the time commitment needs to be adequate. Group meetings of once a week or less are not likely to allow valuable helping relationships between teachers and their counselor to develop, nor do they give teachers the opportunity to establish continuity or consistency. It will work best when it is scheduled every school day, or at least two or three times a week; otherwise, teachers tend to view it as an added encumbrance, peripheral to their major duties.

Certain Imperatives

Course on counseling at various levels are now available in most parts of the world, many of these courses are suitable for teachers to attend. In order to prepare themselves for

counseling skills an understanding of counseling theory will be helpful to teacher, whenever possible, it is also valuable for teachers to observe skilled counselors in action as well as to have supervision from qualified counselors when putting their counseling skills into practice.

- Each teacher of the school should be trained as competent counselor.
- Teacher as a role model is very close friend of a student, so teacher should be observer, guide and pathfinder for the students.
- Short term courses of guidance and counseling related with the pedagogy of the concerned subject should be designed to train teacher
- A micro level course of counseling should be designed for in-service teachers to train them in different techniques of counseling, so that they would be able to solve the problems of children in their classroom.
- Every state department of education/state bureau of guidance should ensure creating a cadre of trained guidance personal guidance officers.
- Guidance centers would need to be created/further strengthened for providing guidance and counseling services at cluster/block/school levels.
- Sensitization programmer for principal / head of school at state level and enrichment programmer for trained guidance personal should be a regular feature. (Samuel B. Batara, 1995)

In spite of various recommendations by government about appointment of a counselor in each school; there are many schools who have not appointed counselors. And those who have appointed counselors, they hardly give proper periods to them for the purpose of counseling.

Conclusion

The aim of education is just not providing academic learning; rather it is expected to help the children to grow in all the spheres of life i.e. educational, vocational, social, personal, moral, and physical and so on. Education just does not make individuals literate; it helps them to develop harmoniously by inculcating in them the qualities like knowledge, discipline, ability of decision making, understanding of themselves and others, thus making them useful and productive citizens. It focuses on the all-round development of the children and addresses all the developmental needs at all levels so that they develop as well-adjusted individuals. On the lines of education, guidance and counseling is concerned in helping an individual to become well-adjusted in his life, by being comfortable in his present situation, by planning his future and making intelligent choices. Guidance and counseling basically facilitates the all-round development of the children. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) views guidance and counseling as a part of curriculum. In this view, guidance and counseling functions can be carried out through the curriculum by integrating guidance philosophy and practices through curricular offerings thereby adopting a proactive and preventive approach. Educational, career and personal-social development of children can be promoted by creating stress-free environment for learning, encouraging students to understand themselves, relating subject matter to self and needs of students, helping children learn independently and cope with demands and challenges, facilitate development of healthy peer relationships through group activities and classroom climate etc (NCERT, 2015).

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