THE ROLE AND THE TRAINING OF TEACHER-COUNSELLORS

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Abstract

The example of teachers not seeking counselling was used. Some reasons for this situation were given as well as one possible way to change it by providing early information and training during the students’ regular studies. My hope is that if teachers have the necessary information, abilities and positive experiences, when they have problems, it should be easier for them to use counsellors than it is for others today.

Teachers were used as an example of how one group could be encouraged to make use of counsellors. However, similar strategies could be used with other groups whose jobs involve high personal stress (for example social workers, medical doctors etc.). The example of teachers was also used to show how change can be introduced within a system. Here it might be useful to develop the ability to work with a counsellor during the regular education, so that it becomes part of their understanding of their professional role.

The problem: people not using a counsellor although it were reasonable

The topic of this paper concerns the preparation of clients for counselling. In Germany the situation still exists that many people who could benefit from counselling, whether for personal problems, job problems, family problems or the like, do not find the help they need. One reason for this is the general lack of knowledge of the counsellor’s work and in some cases, prejudices against using a counsellor also exists. Likely there are several ways to change this situation.

In the following I want to concentrate on the example of teachers not seeking counselling, to demonstrate more fully some of the major reasons for this and to suggest ways this situation might be changed. Presumably, the basic ideas can be applied to other similar social fields.
Example: teachers not seeking counselling

Within the last 10–15 years, teachers in Germany have more frequently used counsellors – but primarily for those pupils having problems. Few teachers seek help for their own problems. (The counselling of pupils takes about 40% of the school counsellor’s time; the counselling of teachers and the school as a system about 2–5%). This is the point I want to address further.

I believe teachers regularly have difficulties where it would be useful for them to work together with a counsellor. Teachers, anyone, may have personal problems which can create teaching problems, which may provoke disturbed behavior in their students. Teachers often must endure aggressive or even abnormal behavior from emotionally disturbed children. Furthermore, they can have team problems. In Germany inexperienced teachers frequently get into trouble from the beginning, trying to change the school into a better institution. Naturally they fail and begin to consider either themselves or their colleagues dull and incompetent. Obviously many situations exist that teachers might better overcome with the help of a counsellor. Why then don’t they use one?

Why teachers do not use counsellors

We have learned much about teachers’ reasons for not seeking counselling from students (who were former teachers) during their postgraduate studies at our university, from teachers we counselled and who talked about their former barriers, and from our discussions with other school teachers about counselling problems. The following major reasons were identified:

- Teachers generally have little knowledge of the concrete work of a counsellor or about what to expect when they contact one.
- Teachers often don’t know that counsellors are available or where and how to find those counsellors with special training for special tasks (for example for team supervision, systems counselling etc.).
- Or, knowing that, they have often had no previous contact with counselling institutions and there exists a fear of the unknown.
- Teachers also fear having negative experiences and feelings – for example of feeling guilty when looking at their work with pupils or of becoming too emotional as a result of the counsellor’s interventions. Therefore the counsellor is often seen as a threat rather than a source of help.
- Many teachers still expect that a ‘good’ teacher must be able to cope with everything. Even if they don’t expect this of themselves, they assume their colleagues do and fear losing credibility if they do seek help.
- And sometimes (it is my impression from working with post-graduate