RISK GROUP CHILDREN: CHARACTERISTICS OF THEIR SOCIAL-PEDAGOGICAL COUNSELLING

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Abstract
Social-pedagogical counselling is one of the key forms of social-pedagogical assistance. In dealing with the issues of quality educational assistance, the characteristics of pedagogical and psychological counselling and the problems of schoolchildren’s training and learning difficulties at different age stages are most frequently discussed. However, the characteristics of social-pedagogical counselling in the solution of other than learning social-pedagogical problems of risk group children receive insufficient attention. On the basis of the qualitative research outcomes, the article discloses the characteristics of the social-pedagogical counselling of risk-group children. The summary of the theoretical and empiric research proves that pedagogues and social pedagogues identify partly limited opportunities of social-pedagogical counselling when addressing the problems of risk group children.

KEYWORDS: counselling, social-pedagogical counselling, risk group children.

Introduction
The aspiration of welfare states to take care of children and youth’s socialization is reflected in different national and governmental programmes which emphasize the need to provide equal opportunities for everybody in the access to quality education, enable them to live a full-fledged life, and to pursue personal expression. It is obvious that the implementation of the aspiration calls for targeted assistance programs and the appropriate training of specialists. Assistance to risk group children, its availability, and its increasing effectiveness currently remains a relevant problem reflected in the key strategic educational documents. The effectiveness of social-pedagogical assistance in Lithuania is proved by different statistical data: the decrease in the scope of bullying in national schools, the number of dropouts from the school system smaller than the average of the EU, etc. On the other hand, intensive globalization, the increasing scale of social mobility, and the changing demographic, economic, and cultural situation in the country keeps formulating new challenges for the system of education. The data of the recent years indicate the increasing scale of social inequality and an increasing number of risk group families in the country.

The monitoring of the functioning of educational assistance and the improvement of the quality of its services have been systematically analyzed in research papers of sociologists, educologists, and education managers. The research carried out both in Lithuania and abroad indicates that social-pedagogical assistance is to be targeted, i.e. it ought to address specific social-pedagogical problems (i.e., absenteeism in school, bullying, delinquent behaviour, etc.) Leliūgienė, 2002; Kvieskienė, 2003; Prakapas, 2002; Karmaza, Grigutytė, Karmazė, 2007; Berns, 2009; Dikčienė, 2009), and it calls for team work (Merfeldaitė, Indrašienė, Merfeldaitė, Pivorienė, 2011, Webb, 2006); different measures of social-pedagogical assistance are analyzed, as well as prevention activities, the activities of various educational, social, NGO institutions and organizations, their experiences, and the competences of specialists and volunteers providing social-pedagogical assistance (Klainiene, Litvinas, Gelžiniënė, 2011; Klainiënė, Šmitienė, 2013).

Lithuania feels a shortage of scientifically-based research and recommendations for the provision of social-pedagogical services to risk group children that would offer purposeful/specific recommendations for the performing of social pedagogue’s individual functions. Social pedagogue’s counselling is one of the services provided by them to children and youth with the aim of helping to solve the arising social-pedagogical problems (Regulations of Provision of Social-Pedagogical Assistance, 2010, Social Pedagogue’s Job Description (2011)). Research papers reveal different aspects of assistance provision to risk group children and disclose the psychological and social-pedagogical characteristics of the said children and the spectrum of the problems experienced by them: the problems of absenteeism in school, delinquent behaviour, addictions, and other (Kvieskienė, 2003; Leliūgienė, 2011; Justickis, 1984; Paulauskas, 2007 Lengvinas, 2011, Theriault, 2009, Valickas, 1997; Ayers, Quinn, Stovall, 2008, etc.). To quote E. Vileikienė (2005), during the last decade, increasing attention has been paid to juvenile delinquents and their infringements and crimes. It is mainly high-risk children and adolescents that are
characterized by delinquent behaviour. For such schoolchildren, it is important to assure appropriate and timely social-pedagogical assistance

Social-pedagogical counselling, especially that of risk group children, has not been analyzed in depth. Specialist literature on the analysis of assistance to risk group children tends to focus on psychological counseling and the opportunities and approaches of psychological assistance (Navaitis, 2007; Jovaiša, 1999; Lagūnavičius, 2003, etc.), the problems experienced by risk group children and youth and the forms of provided assistance (Leliūgiienė, 2002; Černeckiienė; 2007, Dikčienė; 2009, Sutton, 1999; Johnson, 2003; Gončarova, 2002; Theriault, 2009; Ovčarova 2001; Tureikytė, Lilinskiene, 2004, etc.).

The aim of the article is to disclose the characteristics of social-pedagogical counselling of risk group children and youth at school. The object of the research is social-pedagogical counselling of risk group children

Research methods: content analysis, qualitative research (interview method).

Counselling activity is closely related to the psychological, social, pedagogical, legal, and other forms of assistance to an individual. Different terminological dictionaries define counselling, or consulting (Lat. consultatatio), as a meeting; conference of experts or specialists on some issues; deliberation or discussion (2003). Depending on the type of assistance provision, the conception of counselling may vary. Assistance to schoolchild with the aim of resolution of relevant problems of education, learning, work, or relations with others is defined as psycho-pedagogical counselling (Jovaiša, 1999). Several types of pedagogical counselling are identified, including didactic and hodegetic. Didactic counselling is related to the resolution of the learning, creativity, and memory training problems at school. Hodegetic counselling is related to the overcoming of the impediments in the training of one’s world awareness and world outlook in order to improve individual’s communication and the building of positive relations. Social-pedagogical counselling is associated with psychological counselling during which the problems of individual’s socialization and social adaptation are solved and mutual contacts and trust-based relationships are built (Kočiūnas,1995; Navaitis, 2007; Bokhorst, Westenberg, Oosterlaan, Heyne, 2008) as well as with legal advice for which the knowledge and use of legal documents during the meeting is important (Vosyliene, 2009). As indicated by J. Černeckiienė (2007), M. Prever, (2010), the success of social-pedagogical counselling is witnessed by the acquired and maintained mutual trust. Differently from the social work view on counselling as one of the ways of intervention, a specific interaction of an individual and a social worker with the aim of positive changes (Jonsonas, 2001; Prever, 2010, social-pedagogical counselling is related to an individual’s (self-) education, with the dynamics of the interaction being of special significance. In the counselling, the counselling contact is of special importance which is defined as “ a unique dynamic process when one individual helps another use his inner resources for positive improvement and an effort to live a meaningful life” (Leliūgiene, 2003).

During the social-pedagogical counselling, an exclusive role is played by the competences of the counsellor and their content. It has to be noted that social-pedagogical counselling is provided not only by social pedagogues, but also by teachers and pedagogues. Counsellor is to know the principles of social-pedagogical counselling and the nature of the addressed problem (Jovaiša, 2009; Lagūnavičius, 2003), he is to be able to get to know a client (Černeckiienė, 2007; Žukauskienė, 1999), to know oneself and one’s needs and not to identify oneself with a client (Kristianis, 2002; Theriault, 2009; Bokhorst, Westenberg, Oosterlaan, Heyne, 2008), to be emphatic (Wolberg), to assess the impact of the reference environment on client’s decisions (Lagūnavičius, 2003 et al.), to create conditions for client to take a free and independent decision (Lagūnavičius, 2003 et al.), , to be aware of his own problems (Botyriūtė, 2006; Kristianis, 2002; Prever, 2010) , T. Kristianis ( 2002); moreover, respect and mutual trust-based relationships are necessary (D. Botyriūtė, 2006 ).

As indicated in social-pedagogical literature, a significant condition of successful counselling is thorough preparation for it. Pedagogue is to plan the environment of the counselling conversation, to consider its content (to plan additional information, whenever appropriate, the structure of the counselling session and alternatives, and the issues necessary to discuss), and to get the necessary technological and supportive equipment. The discussions of the structure of social-pedagogical counselling identify 6 to 8 structural parts: the stages of the establishment of a contact; the discussion of the situation; the identification of the problem; the naming of the aims of the counselling; the discussion of alternatives; coping with fears or misconceptions; drafting an action plan; and distribution of responsibilities (Johnson, 2001; Dikčienė, 2009). All those structural parts of counselling are important in dealing with children and youth, however, depending on the chosen trend of the counselling, the psycho-social characteristic of
child, and the social-pedagogical problem, the time and attention devoted to different counselling stages may differ. L. Jovaiša (2009) named three possible trends of pedagogical counselling: direct, indirect, and mixed. In direct counselling, the counsellor accepts the responsibility for advice and the taken decisions, therefore, it is the counsellor who predominates in the conversation and takes an active part in the contact. In the indirect counselling, the roles essentially change, i.e. child is being made active, he is encouraged to communicate, to discuss problems, to look for solutions, and to assume full responsibility for the outcomes of the solution. In mixed counselling, efforts are made to maintain a balance between the two communicating parties and to find the most rational solution.

In providing assistance to risk group children, three basic stages are identified in social-pedagogical literature: the stage of research, evaluation, and planning; of problem solution and aim implementing; and of final assessment (Kvieskienė, 2003). One who plans social-pedagogical counselling is recommended to take into account the aims of the stages and to implement them both during a specific counselling session and in the cycle of sessions. Some psychologists (Bončikutė-Petronienė, 2008, Navaitis) emphasize that, in the process of social-pedagogical counselling, the fact of voluntariness, independent decision, and assumption of responsibility is important, therefore, the intended outcome may be recorded in a special agreement between the counsellor and the client.

**Research outcomes.** The research method was empiric (qualitative) research, expert method, and a semi-structured interview method. A convenience sample was used: to investigate the phenomenon in detail, a smaller sample was decided upon, and different aspects of experience were examined in depth. Social pedagogues working at school were interviewed. Social pedagogues of 15 schools took part in the research, and they were asked questions about social-pedagogical counselling of risk group children and asked to compare the character of counselling, the structure, the aims, the means, and the conditions compared to other cases of counselling; moreover, they were asked to identify the most frequent problems in the social-pedagogical counselling of risk group children. The respondents were women with university education and the experience of work at school of over 5 years.

As established during the research, the respondents related social-pedagogical counselling to individual talk, communication, and an effort to help solve the problem (Fig. 1). It is to be noted that all the respondents named the counselling activity as the essential function of their job: “I think it is one of our, as pedagogues, basic duties. I believe the counselling is a very broad concept and includes the counselling of children and their parents” (SPS).

![Fig. 1. The respondents’ view on the aims of social-pedagogical counselling](image)

In the discussion of the character of social-pedagogical counselling, the respondents noted that sometimes they found it difficult to distinguish it from psychological counselling. Half of the respondents related the counselling not so much to the solution of a specific problem at a current moment, but rather with a potential impact on the children and youth’s socialization development and their future. Therefore, they named social-pedagogical counselling as an essential means of individual assistance to children and youth. Only one third of the respondents noted that social-pedagogical counselling was important in providing assistance to a group. The said position is reflected in some research works (Sutton, 1999; Leliūgienė, 2011; Lagūnavičius, 2003 and other) that place emphasis on counselling as a unique and dynamic process when one individual helps another to use the latter’s inner resources to improve in a positive way and to live a meaningful life (Leliūgienė, 2003).
In the analysis of the aims of social-pedagogical counselling, the following sub-categories were identified: the provision of information and knowledge; the identification of the children and youth’s social-pedagogical problem, and personal (self-) education (see Fig. 1). It is worth noting that the surveyed social pedagogues related the provision of information to the necessity of “providing/handling on best practices” (SP13, SP1, SP5, SP8); the aim of the counselling to identify the causes of the problem were related by them to “the counsellor’s duty to find out, understand, and assess“ the client’s problem. Very frequently they used the 1st person form: “I must“. It is obvious that the respondents associated social-pedagogical counselling with an active position of social pedagogue as a counsellor: “it is important for a social pedagogue to notice a problem on time, to try to look into it in depth, and to look for the best solution“ (SP13). One should state that, in the activity of counselling, social pedagogue tends to choose the direct strategy, and less frequently, a mixed one.

In the category of the initiative of social-pedagogical counselling, four sub-categories were identified: the schoolchildren came on their own initiative; they were sent by other teachers; the initiative was taken by a social pedagogue; and the initiative came from the parents of children and youth (see Fig. 2). Next to an active counselling position of social pedagogue, all the respondents noted that risk group children “very seldom” approached social pedagogue as a counsellor, seeking to discuss their problems or with the aims of self-education, motivation, or other. More frequently, children who did not belong to risk groups would come for that kind of advice, while it was mainly form masters or other teachers who talked to social pedagogue about risk-grup schoolchildren. Only a few respondents stated that the parents of the children approached them about the counselling of their children. As noted by the surveyed social pedagogues, the children of risk groups were sent to them for counselling very frequently: “the form masters or teachers send them every day”, “sometimes I get four pupils per day”, “it happens that one and the same child is sent by several teachers on the same day”, or “four of five schoolchildren per week”. The numbers and the frequency quoted by the respondents witness that social pedagogue’s counseling at school is frequently perceived as an effective interventional means resulting, and supposed to result, in a quick effect: “the teachers send them to me from their lessons” (SP5); "the form masters send them after some incident in a classroom" (SP11).

The social pedagogues defined the type of the schoolchildren they counselled most frequently: “risk group children”, “adolescents who avoid attending school”, or “12 to 16-year-olds with behaviour problems“. They also noted that they had counselling cases of schollchildren under 12 and over 16.

In the category of the problems solved during the counselling of risk group children and youth, five sub-categories were identified: absenteeism from school, addictions, delinquent behaviour, communication problems, and social skills. In the counselling of 12 to 16-year-old risk group children, the social pedagogues named the following most frequently addressed problems: not attending school, aggressive behaviour, bullying, addictions, problems in the relationships with peers, parents, teachers, etc. (see Fig. 2). The main issue addressed during the counselling was not attending school. As noted in the studies of the reasons of not attending school (Rupšiene, Barkauskaite, 2001, etc.), it was important to establish the reasons of not attending school on time and to remove them. The said reasons included: a weak relationship of a schoolchild and his family with school; a lack of learning motivation; failures experienced in the learning process; a lack of learning abilities; a lack of social skills (problems of communication with teachers and peers); a negative impact of the immediate environment (friends from the street, addictions), and other. Most of the above named reasons of not attending school were also named by the surveyed social pedagogues, however, they emphasized that the first problem faced when counselling risk group children about missing lessons was a lack of motivation for learning. Another two outstanding fields of social-pedagogical counselling were schoolchildren’s delinquent behaviour and its different manifestations and schoolchildren’s addictions.

One can state that all the respondents knew the principal rules to follow in the process of counselling; they were sufficiently frequently discussed in research and methodological literature and identified by L. Jovaiša (2009): not to interrupt (to allow to speak), not to criticize, not to assess, not to moralize, not to intimidate, and not to betray (to maintain confidentiality). However, the respondents stressed schoolchildren’s unwillingness to communicate during the counselling sessions, their problem refuting, etc. (see Fig. 2).

The analysis of the respondent answers proved that all of them paid great attention to communication and the establishment of the mutual trust-based relationships. When talking about the typical structure of a social-pedagogical counselling session, they stated they were the active party of the conversation and they tried to propose problem solution alternatives: “an analysis of the situation is going on, and I ask
questions related to the problem in question, I try to help the child solve the problem, and advise on the best kind of action in the situation”. One can state that, due to the chosen trend of direct counselling, schoolchildren remain passive, they do not admit their problems, and they avoid active communication. Frequently mixed counselling takes place, with both parties taking an active part: “First of all, I ask the child to characterize the situation, its causes and effects, and the child’s own feeling, either orally or in writing. And then we talk. We discuss the things together” (SP13). The respondents did not choose indirect counselling, or chose it very seldom, due to the shortage of time (see Fig. 2): “I’d very much like to have more time for counselling, so that the child would have an opportunity to analyze his own problem by himself, as he sees it, and as he would like to change the things for the better” (SP2).

In the category of risk group children and youth’s counselling problems, four subcategories were identified: a shortage of time allotted for counselling; schoolchildren’s unwillingness to communicate with a counsellor; schoolchild’s refusal to admit a social-pedagogical problem; and a shortage of counselling skills. As indicated by the respondents, they tended to choose the trend of social-pedagogical counselling, given the behaviour of the schoolchild, and they tried to break the ice and to help him “understand himself and his own problem”. They stated that direct and mixed counselling “provided a faster result”. In the discussion of the cases of risk group children and youth, they admitted they felt a shortage of counselling skills, especially when dealing with problemtic schoolchildren having communication, emotional, and behaviour problems (see Fig. 2).

A review of the obtained research outcomes led to a conclusion that most of the respondents identified child’s unwillingness to speak as the principal difficulty in the counselling process: “... it happens that it is simply impossible to make child speak, he won’t open up” (SP1); “... some children are very reserved, unwilling to communicate, and full of hostility” (SP8). On the other hand, as observed by the experts, the problems are fewer when the child comes on his own initiative, or when he accepts the proposal of social pedagogue to meet and discuss problems in a counselling session.

In the category of the character of social-pedagogical assistance to risk group children, two subcategories were identified: social-pedagogical counselling as the principal means of assistance and counselling combined with other means of assistance. As witnessed by the obtained research outcomes, as many as half of the respondents combined counselling with other ways of assistance and collaborated with other specialists (Fig. 3): “I closely collaborate with a psychologist” (SP6); “Yes, I do collaborate, and mainly with psychologists”.

In the category of factors contributing to, or interfering with, the quality of social-pedagogical counselling of risk group children and youth, 6 subcategories of factors conducive to quality counselling and 6 subcategories of factors interfering with quality counselling were identified. The experts expressed their opinion of the factors conducive to, and interfering with, social-pedagogical counselling; they frequently noted that one and the same factor may both help and impede, as, e.g., the time allotted for counselling (Fig. 3). The shortage of time for counselling mainly interferes with the obtaining of the

![Fig. 2. Characteristics of social-pedagogical counselling of risk group children and youth](image-url)
desired outcome, and, vice versa, if one can have a sufficient amount of time (up to 1.5 hours) for a counselling session, the result tends to be better.

Despite the complexity of counselling, the experts noted that social-pedagogical counselling was provided in a better quality and more effective way; due to individual counselling, the cases of “relapse” were less frequent. When discussing the issue of insufficient time for counselling, the experts noted that the number of problems to be solved every day and the workload at school was too huge: “There is a great shortage of time that one could devote to one child, as there’s only one social pedagogue at school, and it is difficult to manage to consistently deal with every problem“ (SP10). On the other hand, the experts had to admit that they were short of counselling-related knowledge and skills: “Social pedagogues are barely introduced to counselling methods and know too little about them“ (SP8); “a shortage of social skills is felt“ (SP5); “We were not trained“ (SP4)

Conclusions

Social-pedagogical counselling is one of the essential forms of social-pedagogical assistance that combines the elements of pedagogical, psychological, and legal advice seeking to provide comprehensive assistance to children and youth and to solve relevant socialization problems.

There is a shortage of research publications on the analysis of parameters of social-pedagogical counselling. The outcomes of the conducted research revealed the significance of the quality social-pedagogical counselling in providing social-pedagogical assistance to risk group children and the necessity to identify the elements of social-pedagogical counselling that effect its quality.

The conducted research proved that social pedagogues were creative in combining the elements of psychological, pedagogical, and social counselling and were developing a unique counselling structure. The research brought out the characteristics of social-pedagogical counselling of risk group children and youth at comprehensive school: the adolescents were mainly sent to counselling sessions by form masters or subject teachers, therefore, the aims of counselling differed: adolescents themselves would mainly come to discuss specific school activity-related issues: timetables, different events, free food, the choice of career, etc.; the age of those who came or were sent for counselling fluctuated between 12 and 16; during the counselling time, mainly social-pedagogical issues were discussed, such as non-attendance of school or inappropriate behaviour towards peers and teachers.

The counselling of risk group children and youth were often combined with other means of behaviour correction (class meetings or advice of other specialists). Most frequently, when dealing with the problems of social risk group children and youth, social pedagogue would collaborate with psychologist, less frequently, with form master or teachers, and in some cases, with other officials: police officers, specialists of protection of child rights, etc.
The greatest difficulties faced during the counselling sessions were adolescents' unwillingness to speak, their refusal to admit a problem, a shortage of respective knowledge of social pedagogue, and a shortage of time. Social pedagogue's counselling skills are insufficient to counsel risk group children. With the aim of improving social-pedagogical assistance for risk-group children, it is necessary to develop the research in the social pedagogue’s field of activity, to identify and approve the structure of social-pedagogical counselling, and to provide practical recommendations. In the counselling of risk-group children and youth, the pedagogues feel a shortage of indirect counseling skills, as well as the knowledge and skills to more promptly identify the pedagogical and psychological problems and to help schoolchild cope with them.

References

RIZIKOS GRUPĖS VAIKŲ SOCIALINIO PEDAGOGINIO KONSULTAVIMO YPATUMAI

Santrauka

Socialinis pedagoginis konsultavimas, tai viena esminių socialinės pedagoginės pagalbos formų, jungiančių savoje pedagoginio, psichologinio, teisinio konsultavimo elementus, siekiant visapusiškos pagalbos vaikams ir jaunimui, sprendžiant aktualias socializacijos problemas.
