

Missionary Interferences in Social Activity.

The Role of the Social Assistant in School

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Abstract:

The presented paper focuses on the work and role of the school social assistant in helping students with learning or family problems. The activity of the school social assistant along with the professor of religion contributes not only to the optimization of the moral education necessary for the man correctly formed.

Keywords: *school social assistant, families at risk, school success, school counseling*

In the present time, considered to be a modern period of construction and valorization, offering guiding marks that are related to stability and axiological certainty is a means of obtaining what is called a moral education.

In a stage in which the internet conquers more and more of the students' free and active time, the junction with the transcendental normativity constitutes an important actional mark of the educational practices. To this respect the role of the religion teacher, of the social theologian assistant in school, together with the other teachers is a formative one, with important educative valences, to avoid gaps in the consolidation of the values necessary to a correct upbringing of man. The creditable effort of many religion teachers to offer themes on the religious contents of the Christian faith is necessary in the nowadays cultural context. The interpretation of the realities from the social environment to the Christian values issued within the homely, school church environment may contribute to the formation of man's statute and to his insertion within society.

The ascension on the scale of spiritual values may surpass the usual sphere of the social with the aspiration to the absolute Christian values. Such a type of relation allows self-knowledge, responsibility, a qualitative leap in the evolution and improvement of the existential status of human being. It is the way to man's perfection, to progress, to advancement. The religious values contribute to the focus of the human being more or less negligent or in critical situations on what we call a path of good. In order for these spiritual exercises and corrections to be effective it is necessary that they begin in early childhood and continue in school, in society.

The religion teachers in school initiate activities with an educative character both within school and outside it, fulfilling in the same time the role of school social assistant, underlining the contribution of the three instances that participate to the formation of a human being with Christian values: family, Church and school. The activity of the school social assistant could complete this range of interventions assuming the courage to provide for the needs of the person assisted. The importance of the class of religion in school comes to complete the spiritual formation of the student according to the Christian principles that stand at the basis of the ethical code and the necessity of the school social assistant could improve the material and psychological comfort of the student, so that the didactic process reaches its target.

The experience of the countries in which social assistance has a long existence proved the necessity and importance of the school social assistant and of his office within school. In our country, the organization of social assistance in schools is in incipience, and its presence is at a very low frequency in the form of pilot centres. It is estimated at this point the enactment of this form of organization and providing the offices with specialists in the field of school social assistance, who may contribute to the solving of the social problems of the students and school success.

The tight school curricula, the social problems that society faces and which have an impact over the evolution of the student, on his individual activity and on the community of students, protruded the existence of the social assistant and of the counseling office within school.

1. The school counseling office and the activity of the social assistant

The role of the social assistant in school involves carrying out programs with an educative character, which correspond to the needs of the students' families both in normal circumstances and in crisis. To this respect, the activity of the social assistant is oriented, on the one hand towards actions with the students, and on the other hand it is focused on activities involving parents.

The programs developed in the counseling office have as target the activity with the students, with the family, informing and sensitizing the teachers of the school on the existing problems, in order to improve school productiveness, the students' behavior and reducing the absenteeism. To this respect, the activity of the social assistant in the counseling office involves:

- Informing the parents on the problems existing within the school and collaborating with the group and parents committee;
- Identifying the children with problems and the families with a risk factor (target population);
- Verifying in the field and collecting supplementary data regarding the problem-students, through social investigation and reports on home visits;
- Coursing the process of individual and group counseling (in case there are students with similar problems);
- Developing plans of intervention to solve the problem cases and keeping evidence charts of the progress recorded after the individual or group counseling sessions;
- Evaluating the role of the family through the level of integration into the group of parents;
- Developing media campaigns in school on themes of individual hygiene, abortion, violence, prevention of STDs, AIDS etc., on age groups (according to CNPC PHARE, Pilot project Iassy, School no. 43 "Dimitrie Sturdza", 1977).

The school counseling office necessitates adequate facilities with media and demonstrative materials. It is necessary that the place where the counseling session takes places presents elements that warm up the atmosphere, is clean, pleasant and away from exterior noise. The presence

of the office within school needs to be mediatized and presented to the students by the teachers and parents, informing them on the purpose within the target group.

The school counselor, the social assistant respectively, whose qualities must be of engagement, sociability, balance, objectiveness, communication has the role to identify the categories with social risks that he encounters:

- In families with problems (poverty, unemployment, improper houses, single-parent families, reconstituted families, families with health issues, families where there's an alcohol addicted etc.);

In families with school difficulties, high rate of absenteeism, behavior disorder, chronic disease etc.

The methods used by the counselor in such cases are:

- Informative, represented by educational sources: films, flyers, magazines etc.;

- Educative, respectively groups of discussions, direct dialogue with the parents, correspondence, visits at home, case studies;

- Parents' attendance in classes, role plays to simulate concrete situations, social contacts with the groups of parents with similar or different problems;

- Individual, during counseling sessions, depending on the specific situation, discussions in order to establish diagnostic or regarding the economic circumstances of certain problems;

- Group, based on sessions or programs of mutual help, interactions between the parents, counseling on various themes, debate of certain problems, investigations in order to analyze the parents' reactions towards certain activities and the importance of several values for the family.

The school counseling office must comprise in the human resource network:

- A permanent team of intervention, formed of the social assistant and psycho-pedagogues;

- Specialist in other departments such as jurist, school doctor, psychologist, pedagogue, speech therapist etc.;

- Representatives of the Parents' Committee, as support persons, who may step in together with the permanent team and the team of specialists to solve the problems.

The purpose of the office is to improve the relationship parents-children-school. The types of services may be, on the one hand, granted to the family and on the other hand to the children. Of the services granted to the family we mention:

- Contacting the family through home visits;
- Informing the parents on the educative and psycho-social problems through:
 - a. Information on the effective legislation and the existing possibilities;
 - b. Creating a link with certain services (addresses, telephones, program, direction etc.)
 - c. Offering school orientation, informing the parents on the schools that are part of the network.
- Documenting on various themes depending on necessities;
- Identifying the psycho-social and educative difficulties;
- Identifying alternatives to solve the problems.

Services offered to students consist of:

- Free discussions on personal and school problems;
- Informing them on educational and psycho-social problems:
 - a. Effective legislation;
 - b. Rights and duties;
 - c. Offering information regarding various services: addresses, telephones, programs;
 - d. School network, a guide for information and school and professional orientation.

Work with parents requires group activities in the form of sessions, courses, information, group counseling or, in certain cases, individual counseling. Group meetings on various themes may be organized: "To teach children how to learn", "Preparing for exams", "Tensions within the family and methods to solve the problems", "Caring for the child", "Sexual education" etc.

Within these themes the counselor may present films, audio materials, followed by discussions based on them. The main conditions of the success in exams are emphasized, as well as those for the school success when there is the case, then parents try to become aware of the

rules required and try to identify them in the manner their children learn when they support them in their preparation for exams.

One may also put together flyers for parents such as “To learn how to learn to pass an exam”. Another method of intervention are the classes for parents whose children have different problems, organized with the help of the non-governmental organizations.

An example to this respect is the group for parents that face difficulties in educating their children, formed of 20 members with two trainers (according to the pattern of the group of parents organized by Holt Romania FSSCF Iassy within the Project “Centre for Childhood and Parenthood” supported by the representatives of UNICEF). The purpose of the course focuses on achieving certain abilities necessary for bringing up and educating children in order to obtain positive results and to improve communication. For example, the themes of the course may be: “Granting attention”, “Appreciation”, “Establishing limits”, “Saying No and Forbidding”, “Ignoring”, “Isolation”, “Punishment”, etc. Each theme proposes objectives that will be fulfilled during the work sessions. Each session has a theme that will be developed within two hours.

2. Examples of activities of the social assistant with the students

The role of the school social assistant involves, besides counseling the families actions of social protection or help for the family, such as the program “bread and milk” offered by OU 96 from 2002. Thus, the students from the 1st to the 8th grade both in the state and private educational system are offered milk and breadstuffs of a certain fixed daily amount.

Besides the activities carried out with the parents we may also mention activities carried out only with the children, such as:

- Group meetings on the theme “To teach students how to learn”, within which there is a division of the tasks between the student and the social assistant in order to obtain good results in school. Group meetings on themes such as “Adolescence” or “AIDS – illness of the century” etc.

- Individual or group counseling sessions. Individual sessions may be focused on the student’s behavior or on his school performance.

For a better understanding of the manner in which the school social assistant must act, we will now present an example taken from reality.

We present the intervention case of the social assistant in the situation of the student named Maria. She is an 8 years old girl, who was recommended to see a doctor because she presented behavioral problems at school and at home. She was the result of a normal pregnancy and of a birth that took a couple of hours. But the little girl showed the physical features of the fetal alcohol syndrome. Maria started school and had difficulties in relating with other children of her age, she couldn't control her impulses and she was very eager to make physical contact, especially with the adults. Also, she was also having difficulties at school in achieving new information and in adapting to new situations. Maria lived with her mother, age 35, with her father, age 45, and with an older brother of 10. Her mother is unemployed and the parents are always complaining of the fact that Maria spoke continuously and required their attention, thus constituting a source of conflict within the family. The parents are both consuming alcohol, and Maria's mother is dissatisfied with this aspect and she wants to quit drinking because she thinks this causes her troubles.

The intervention scale, in the case of this example, from the perspective of the school social assistant requires:

- Initial evaluation;
- Objectives;
- Targets;
- Plan of intervention.

The direction and order in which the data is gathered in the field and the intervention from the perspective of the social assistant in the case of Maria are:

- Analysis of school results;
- Analysis of the student's chart coming from other organizations;
- Discussions with the teachers, principal and auxiliary staff;
- Observing the student during classes;
- Observing the students outside school;
- Discussions with the parents, with the family;
- Counseling the students;
- Following the evolution of the case together with the parents.

The action of the school social assistant focuses directly on Maria as a client and also on the mother, in order to help her quit drinking and

possibly on the father. Parental behavior must also be evaluated towards the other child, Maria's brother.

In his interventions the school social assistant may also use the Pincus and Minahan pattern (1973, according to Zastrow, 1985) when conciliating behavior issues.

From the example presented we may clearly see the complexity of the activity of the school social assistant and the importance of his intervention in solving the social problems of the community of students.

The enactment of the presence of the social assistant in all the school units or in most of them in our country will contribute to the improvement of the students' behavior, reduces absenteeism and increases school performance.

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