SUPPORTING THE WHOLE CHILD: WHAT IT MEANS AND THE ROLE OF COUNSELORS TO ATTAINING IT

by:

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Home is where a child’s foundation is built. Home is where holistic aspects of a child are formed. Home is where a child gets his or her motivations, draws his or her aspirations and goals. While home seems to offer everything that a child needs, children are sent to schools for further growth and development. School days are not just memorable, they are eternal. That is why school is known to be every child’s second home. The teachers are like parents guiding the children in their mistakes. While it is true that parents are the ones who are responsible for the children’s basic education, teachers and parents are the real partners to building a nation of efficient and successful people of the community. In every school, there comes a school counselor who works with teachers for students’ holistic growth and development. This notion is what makes the foundation trio “Parent-Teacher-Counselor” of each child inside the school.

Counselors, as part of every child’s foundation trio, place a huge impact to every student’s growth during school years. School age is where children find friends, discover, explore, and learn to socialize. In this day and age, it is evident that most students are having problems with their study habits. Personally, I have experienced handling students referred by teachers in their concern with regards to poor study habits and skills. Some teachers say that their students’ laziness and irresponsibility towards studying is because of peers. Peers can be positive and supportive. They can help each other develop new skills, or stimulate interest in books, music or extracurricular activities. Kids often give in to peer pressure because they want to fit in. According to Moldes et. al in 2019, peer pressure often seems to have various effects toward the student academic
performance in school. It is how their peers affect them whether in a positive or negative way. Teenagers need to seek comfort from others that they found in the presence of their peers, and they are not even aware on how their peers influence them academically. However, in the case of the students that I have encountered, the students were provided with negative influences from their peers. Some of them have engaged to alcohol and substance abuse, tardiness, and recurrent absences which have directly affected their attitudes towards studying. One of the students that I have handled of poor study habits was because of family problems. The parents of that certain student lost their business which led to declination of the student’s self-esteem because of the changes in their socio-economic status. The teacher has reported the student of tardiness and absenteeism. Also, the teacher observed the declination in the student’s performance in class and test scores. According to a study, the effect of socio-economic status on study habits was found to be insignificant (Khan, 2016). In another study which was brought out by Oluwatimilehin & Owoyele in 2012, the study habits and socio-economic status of an individual go hand in hand. They may be regarded as the two faces of the same coin; they are proportional to each other. If either of these factors is absent or has been lacking, it leads to an incomplete personality development of an individual. This is where the importance of the role of counselor should be recognized. The collaboration among the parents, teachers, and counselor should be on top of the planned intervention.

Another issue that the youth currently face is problems with relationships. Adolescence is the period of life between childhood and adulthood. According to psychologist Erik Erikson, adolescents go through the psychosocial crisis of identity versus role confusion, which involves exploring who they are as individuals. According to Furman & Shaffer in 2003, a romantic relationship is an important element in an adolescent life. Adolescents spend much of their time thinking, talking, and engaging in romantic relationships. Strong positive or negative emotions in adolescent are more commonly caused by romantic relationships as opposed to other kinds of relationships such as with friends, parents, or school staff. It is often believed that romantic
relationships may negatively affect adolescent’s academic outcomes because the time spent with a romantic partner might distract one from schoolwork (Razonable, 2017). Having that fact said, this is the phase for every individual when dating and fondling quickly push schoolwork and sports into second place. Campbell & Oliver (1994) also pointed out some problems which are found in a romantic relationship, namely: stress and worry about the relationship, social and nonsocial sacrifices, increased dependence on the partner, fights, time and effort investment, and feeling worse about the self. These problems found in a romantic relationship were said to be the cause of anxiety of the students. In line with these facts, I, personally, have been receiving referrals from teachers with regards to their students having conflicts with one another because of relationship problems. Some cases turned to unexpected teenage pregnancies but ended up with break ups. I had this one situation where two boys had their arguments turned physical over a girl. These instances place a huge impact on their academic performances. Just like with the aforementioned youth issue, this student concern also requires collaboration among the parents, teachers, and counselor.

Having mentioned those current student issues in this generation, we have to put into consideration that school counselor does not only address problems when they already exist. The guidance and counseling program has to be proactive rather than reactive. Today, we should be aware that not only educators, but counselors, understand that they have an even bigger, more complicated job: to provide resources that enable each student to arrive in class ready and able to learn. This mindset is called supporting the whole child. According to the education nonprofit Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, or ASCD, the whole child approach means that each student is “healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.” For the organization, this goes way beyond learning in a classroom setting. The goal is to go beyond thinking of academic success just in terms of annual assessments, test scores and similar measures, to a broader view of the “long-term development and success of all children.” Like what has been said recurrently in this writing, counselors are part of a team to holistically help
the children or students grow. A lot of people may think of guidance counselors as just the people who distribute pamphlets and send out transcripts or maybe the people who cater students who go physical with one another. But in the contemporary educational environment, it has to be emphasized to everyone that guidance counselors actually play a vital role in the overall success of a student population.

Now, for each of the abovementioned youth concerns in this age, the guidance and counseling services has to offer a variety of interventions to help students understand their situations and assist them in making decisions to address their problems. As a counselor, the first and most crucial part in counseling is to build the rapport with the counselee. In addressing student problems with study habits, the counselor could start with building professional relationship with the student. Once the rapport between the counselor and the counselee is established, the counselor can now proceed to working with the counselee. Exploration of the client’s problem is a crucial part of the process here. Getting to know the possible reasons and real situation of the client could help the counselor empathize and understand the client in a different perspective. This stage of counseling leads to the third part of the whole process wherein the counselor understands the client’s problem in a deeper level. Understanding client’s problem through empathic and active listening is the key to arrive to a comprehensive and accurate action plan that sums up the entire intervention program for a specific student problem. It is important to note that action plan or intervention program has to be custom-fit for a specific client. A follow up is also important for the counselor to see the impact of the intervention to the client’s concern. Guidance counselors are responsible for designing and implementing programs that target not only college or career preparedness but also overall academic performance and personal development. The guidance counselor has to be the one who is responsible for students’ holistic growth and development.

While it is true that the connotation that guidance counselors are just people who give sanctions to students with unpleasant behaviors still exists, it is undoubtedly truer
that school counselors alongside teachers and parents build and groom young aspirants to becoming professionals and beneficial citizens of the nation. Guidance counselors can make a difference to students’ lives. Guidance counselors can make an impact into making each student healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

References: