

Counseling Support in Adult Education

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Abstract

The article discusses the problem of counseling adults with special education needs, taking into account the new changes of paradigm within the field. A special emphasis is put on systemic theories and practices that aim to understand and support self-development through a holistic approach that analyzes the individual in interaction with his environment. Scenarios for the future of special education are proposed and the special role of the counseling professional is discussed.

Counseling Programs for Persons with Special Needs - lifelong assistance for independent living

Consequences of the change of paradigms in the education of the individual with special needs.

In special education a change in the underlying basic assumptions (paradigms) has occurred in the last 30 years. The change of paradigms in developmental psychology has formed a platform for a rapid world-wide change in special education beliefs and orientations. In developmental psychology the major change is from the idea of a development *from birth to maturity* to conceptions of *life long, continuous individual development* open for permanent change.

In special education, consequently, the basic change is from the conception of *constancy* of a handicapping life condition to the idea that the development of a person under individual conditions of deviancy and handicap cannot be predicted, but only approximated by the influence of a continuing education from conception to death, i.e. emphasizing the importance of an education of the child and the family in the community as early as possible and as effectively as possible. Thus special education nowadays is orientated to new, different goals, including life-long learning and support. This change to the idea of life long learning includes also a new professional orientation.

The change in basic concepts in special education:

from	to
constancy	change ¹
typology and classification	individualization ²
diagnosis centered approach	intervention and support
objectivity of description	subjective individual description
segregation	integration (inclusive education - SALAMANCA declaration of UNESCO,1994) ³

A further major change is the change in the underlying models of the individual in society in social psychology. Formerly, the individual was conceived as a person developing from birth to maturity more or less independent from his surrounding. In special education, this conception was presented as the idea of a constant deviance under the conditions of handicap, limiting his development.

Nowadays a *systemic approach* is applied, meaning that the individual as a system is in permanent interaction with his personal environment and that the systemic relations of the persons in his environment influence the development and this development influences these relations in reciprocity. The person is itself a systemic unit consisting of different competencies.

In the *special education* field, there is now a belief that the role of the parents and their influence and the role of the community must be highly regarded and valued. Parents and families in a community are very important agents of the personal development of a child with special needs. Much of the educational process is carried out by them. They must be informed and supported. The community is also responsible for the development of the person with special needs⁴.

The change in *thinking about persons* with special needs leads:

from	to
handicap-centred approach ⁵	systemic approach (the developing individual under the influence of his/her subjective environment = context).

The general frame of basic beliefs in the education of "retarded or handicapped" children has changed from a separate education in segregated institutions to an individual life-long learning and living under circumstances of a social life as "normal as possible". The values are equality of opportunities, individual learning, feeling of health (Ottawa Declaration of the WHO 1986) in living in a social network (dominated by the families) and furthermore a living in a world with the "least restrictive environment" in a living social network together with other persons.

¹ Constancy in the frame of the developmental psychology from birth to maturity meant that the condition of an individual with a handicap influenced (damaged) the outcome in relation to the severity of the illness in a constant way.

² The concept of "individual needs" includes an individual placement of a changing person in a life long social context.

³ You will find an abbreviated version of the Salamanca Declaration of the UNESCO, 1994 in the appendix.

⁴ Special needs does not mean that the same person

⁵ The search for the consequences of an illness, deviation or handicap follows the classification of symptoms according to ICD 10 or DSM IV classifications.

A scenario for the *future of special education* will likely include

- a continuing process of transformation of special institutions into regular school environments for supported "normal" learning
- an assistance for parents and families in the process of education of children with special needs
- a continuing effort of network support and counselling for families and individuals in the field
- more independent living in supported surroundings
- a stronger responsibility and participation of the community in guaranteeing a network of continuing assistance.

The role of *special education teachers* has changed:

from	to
teaching in special schools	special learning advisor to regular school teachers assistance and life long partnership with an individual in need of support and counseling
sheltered surrounding sheltered workshop	living in a social network open labor situation

The role of the life - long counselor can be accepted by teachers or other personnel in special education, but it seems more appropriate that social workers or laymen as experts can take over this role (when they get help and instruction). Professional agents in a social network from special schooling to living in integrated settings can be helpful, i.e. social workers or non-professional helpers with a special training in counseling. It also is possible that in the frame of job – rotation, elder teachers can take over the position of a supporting person in life long learning of students with special needs. It should be worth considering how many persons could work in this field of life long learning and support. Equally important could be the process of educating these counselors in special programmes in the frame of adult education⁶.

The frame of the counseling is to support the individual with special needs in leading a successful social life *constantly*. He/she should be educated and supported in

- learning in a regular school environment
- living in a life situation as normal as possible
- taking part in the life in a social network in the community
- to prepare for a job
- to succeed in a permanent job
- to live an independent life
- to achieve happiness
- to help overcoming the handicaps and barriers in personal developments

What is needed? We need at least the following:

- an improvement of the conscience of the families that they are responsible
- assistance from the community
- a skilled support by a network
- a substantial assistance by public media
- together with the helpful insight of the person with special needs.

A permanent process of continuous counseling and helpful guidance is necessary. This counseling can be offered either by special educational helpers as a start (from the first steps to prepare and enable the client to learn and live in a "normal" social network) or by a network of supporters prepared by the school administration and governed by local social agencies. These supporters should work for a restricted number of clients in a local area.

The *lifelong support of individuals with special needs* is an important task for social workers, but should not be their only work to avoid an exclusive concentration on these special groups of individuals. It should be included into the normal services for the local community⁷.

The *research about the effectiveness* of inclusive (integrative) education of handicapped and non-handicapped children (Hallahan & Kaufman, 1988) demonstrates that it cannot be expected that special methods or special procedures will be successful. The quality of the co-operation between team - members (and the clients) and clear objectives are more important than a special procedure or special agency. That leaves space for many individually different solutions.

The counseling should be

- distinct in helping the client to overcome his/her weaknesses by him/herself,
- clear - cut in the aims,
- including the family in the counseling (i.e. make use of systemic approaches to counseling and intervention)⁸
- on the basis of a network of social assistance in the community.

⁶ The subjects of this training could include: a better understanding of persons with special needs, learning to live independently, learning to live in a community, assistance programs for parents, foundations of family therapy and community work.

⁷ In collaboration with other public and non-profit agencies, organisations, local businesses, post-secondary institutions, scientific, cultural and other community entities, approximately 6,800 rural and inner-city public schools in 1,420 communities are currently participating as 21st Century Community Learning Centres in the USA (US Government, 2002).

⁸ The concept of systemic intervention includes the idea of a relation of the individual's competencies as systemic parts of an individual personality in the frame of the relations to significant persons in his personal social context. The aim is to influence the person in his context not by directly giving advice but to enable him to find his own solution by "perturbing" him/her.

The main aims of *programs for support* for persons with special needs are:

- improving school learning (reading, mathematics and computer learning);
- youth development activities;
- drug and violence prevention programs;
- technology education programs;
- family training;
- art, music and recreation programs;
- counseling and character education.

The basis of life- long counseling could be demonstrated by the objectives in the "Every Child can learn" Program (US Government, 2002): to improve local control and flexibility by establishing partnerships between local school authorities and parents; to support "out-of-school- learning"; to establish after-school-programs in reading and technology education; to build up confidence in parental activities and community involvement.

The *lifelong partnership of counselor and client* is a special aspect of a new and challenging standpoint in special education. Such an approach has started ("Education of all Handicapped Children ", 1975, "Every Child Can Learn" and "No Child left Behind", 2002; US Government) with a high degree of optimism. Not all hopes have fulfilled immediately. But the general direction of a humane aim to accept and help persons with special needs to live in a situation as normal as possible (integration), is clearly marked. The steps will be difficult, as the slow progress in inclusive education in Germany and other European countries clearly shows. And there are a great variety of different individual ways to the same goal (integration) open for different conditions in different countries.

In this frame local networks agents for life long learning for persons with special needs can work effectively. The underlying basis of their work could be the opinion, that the support of families with persons with special needs in their context in the community can be a fulfilling task.

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Appendix to EGGERT, Special education counseling

A. Salamanca Declaration

(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994, The Salamanca Statements on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education)

- "Every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
- every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,
- education systems should be designed and educational programs implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
- those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them with a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs,
- regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system."

B. Aims of the Program "Every Child Can Learn"

The aims of this program (Every Child can learn, US Government 2002) are:

1. It promotes local control and flexibility

Local control for local problems: empowering local communities and school districts to meet their diverse needs, whether it is for new teachers, better training, new schools, or better curricula.

2. It offers unique partnerships between local communities and the federal government

Gives states and districts the flexibility to find innovative ways to improve teacher quality, including alternative certification, merit pay, and bonuses for people who teach in high-need subject areas like math and science.

3. It gives families - children and their parents - more out-of-school learning opportunities so they are better prepared for academic success.

Develop centers that bring families and students together to learn new skills in an engaging and supportive environment. Students who spend no time in extracurricular activities are 49 percent more likely to have used drugs and 37 percent more likely to become teen parents than those who spend one to four hours per week in extracurricular activities.

4. Activity Helps Achievement.

Nearly eight in 10 teens who participate in after-school programs are high achieving students. Children and youth who regularly attend high-quality, after-school programs have:

- better grades and conduct in school,
- more academic and personal growth opportunities,
- better peer relations and emotional adjustment, and
- lower incidences of drug-use, violence and pregnancy.

Community Learning Centers provide expanded opportunities for children attending low-performing schools to improve academically and grow individually. Tutorial services are designed to help students meet local and state academic standards in subjects such as reading and math.

5. Reading is the essential skill.

Evidence strongly suggests that students who fail to read on grade level by the fourth grade have a greater likelihood of dropping out of school and a lifetime of diminished success. Five key components of early reading are important:

- Phonemic Awareness: The ability to hear and identify individual sounds in spoken words.
- Phonics: The relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language.
- Fluency: The capacity to read text accurately and quickly.
- Vocabulary: The words students must know to communicate effectively.
- Comprehension: The ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read

6. To improve student academic achievement through the use of technology.

Teach children how to use the technological tools available to them, and integrate that technology into the curriculum to improve student achievement. *No Child Left Behind* focuses on how teachers and students can use technology. Technology must enhance learning.

7. It encourages confidence and parental and community involvement in education.

The more parents and taxpayers know about the academic achievement of their children and overall condition of schools, including safety and teacher quality, the more likely they will want to be involved in the school and the public school system. Equipped with information on academic results, parents and community members can make better choices and decisions. *No Child Left Behind* requires states, school districts and schools to provide annual report cards on the following:

- student academic achievement disaggregated by subgroups,
- comparison of students at basic, proficient, and advanced levels of academic achievement,
- graduation rates,
- professional qualifications of teachers,
- percentages of students not tested, and
- Status if identified for school improvement.

8. It empowers parents and gets students the help they need. When schools fail to meet state standards for three years in a row, children from disadvantaged backgrounds will be eligible to obtain "supplemental services," including tutoring, remedial education, extra classes, summer school, after-school programs, and other supplemental academic services to help boost their achievement.

9. It involves the whole community in aiding the education of children. Private, non-profit, and faith-based providers are among those eligible to provide supplemental services to disadvantaged students. The status quo system will no longer have a monopoly on the use of taxpayer money spent on education.

10. School districts will provide parents with lists of places their children can go to get help.