The Career Guidance Program PROFTEENS in the Inclusive School in Slovakia

Eva Gajdosova
Pan European University, Bratislava, Slovak Republic

The study presents the characterization of the Career Guidance Program PROFTEENS used in the inclusive school in Bratislava, the Slovak Republic and provides information about the forms and methods used in the work of the counselor and the school psychologist with the mainstream students and the students with the special needs. The article also provides its advantages for the students, for the school psychologist and for the counselor.

Keywords: inclusion, inclusive school, guidance and counseling, career guidance program

Introduction

UNESCO defines inclusive education as a process reacting to the diversity of the needs of all the pupils by means of increasing their participation in education.

Daniels and Garner (1999), experts in the field, stressing the notion of inclusion point out the fact that the shift from integration to inclusion does not only mean a terminological shift which would be a result of political correctness, but it means a principal change of the perspective. It means a shift from a deficit model which is based on the premise that the difficulties and problems have their origin in the child, to a social model which states that barriers in learning exist in the very school structures and, more generally stated, in the attitudes and structures of the whole society. The inclusive approach stresses the premise that each child has the right to participate in everything that is offered in an ordinary class.

Also, according to Vančová (2008, p. 10), the application of the principle of inclusion means “creation of conditions for people with a disorder to fully participate in all social activities which are open to people without any disorder”.

The inclusive form of education represents the possibility of joint education of students with special educational needs together with mainstream students (Schmidtová, 2013). In real educational situations, this means that the jointly educated students in one “inclusive” class can be mainstream students and:

- Students with health disorders,
- Students who are ill and have impaired health,
- Students with developmental disorders,
- Students with behaviour difficulties,
- Students from a socially deprived environment,
- Talented students (Internal Methodological Material of the State School Inspection, 2014).

Nevertheless, as further stated by Schmidtová (2013), although today, in the territory of the Slovak

Eva Gajdosova, Ph.D., Professor, Faculty of Psychology, Pan European University, Bratislava, Slovak Republic.
Republic, we have the so-called pro-inclusive education, so far it is actually perceived with mixed feelings by all the parties concerned, which stems from the ideas on the direction of education on the systemic level that have not been fully specified. The author also stresses that the current situation in education requires the implementation of a humanistic-creative philosophy of holistic approaches to education with regards to all the students, in particular to students with special educational needs.

The important problem of the inclusive education is also the long term career guidance and counseling for the mainstream students and for the students with special needs and students preparation for the adequate decision making dealing with their future professional career.

Method

It was our basic goal to realize the Career Guidance Program PROFTEENS (Gajdošová, 2014) in the inclusive school in Bratislava, Slovakia.

The education in this school is characterized by using the humanistically orientated forms, methods, and procedures in education, by applying positive psychology at school, by building a new relationship between the teachers and the students, with stress on the positive aspects and on the potential of the students, with the services of school psychologist and special teachers directly within education, with not only the cognitive development, but also socio-emotional development of all students. The personality of each student of the school, their uniqueness, originality and specificity are respected during education. In the process of education, each student is treated individually, taking into consideration the specific features of their psychic setup, the capacity of perception, memory, thinking, problem solving, their will, temperament, giftedness and talent, and the methods, procedures, and the approach of the teachers are adopted to the above. In the school, there is a distinct tendency to search for the strong points and the potential of each student, including students with a handicap (Gajdošová & Bisaki, 2015).

So we decided to improve the career guidance and counseling process in the 9th grade of this school by using our own prepared Career Guidance Program PROFTEENS and thus to prepare these 15 years old students for their first choice of occupation and secondary school,

- by making them to think about what they would like to do in their lives and what they would like to achieve,
- by showing them who they are, what are their abilities, characteristics, interests, and attitudes to life and themselves like, where are their strong points and where are their reserves,
- by helping them to decide for further study at a secondary school, in their choice of the type of school, their choice of study lines and future professions,
- by enabling them to find out what sorts of occupations would be the most suitable for them in the future with a view to their predispositions, so that they would trust themselves in their preparation for it.

The Career Guidance Program PROFTEENS consisted of five basic modules:

1st module: Entering the world of work,
2nd module: Getting to know oneself,
3rd module: Getting acquainted with the world of work—secondary schools, apprenticeship and study lines, professions,
4th module: Individual and group counseling,
5th module: Decision-making and choice of profession.

The followings were the procedures, methods, and techniques applied within the program:

A. Identification of personalities and personal predispositions of pupils:
   - psychodiagnostic methods (general and special abilities, personal characteristics, interests, level of cognitive development, upbringing styles in the family),
   - attitude scales,
   - rating and self-rating scales,
   - non-standardized interview,
   - observation,
   - projective techniques.

B. Program activities:
   - social-psychological training with the tasks and exercises in the form of psychological games.

C. Consultation—counseling work with the pupils, parents, and teachers:
   - individual counseling,
   - group counseling.

The above activities were realized by the career counselor and school psychologist in the 9th grade of this inclusive school in Bratislava. At the inclusive school with small number of pupils in the classes, it was only 23 students in all participating in the program PROFTEENS.

The program consisted of 20 lessons, which represented 10 meetings with the pupils, corresponding to the structure of the five basic modules.

**Results**

The following results have been achieved:

- A complete career guidance program PROFTEENS has been modified for the pupils of inclusive school who face the 1st orientational occupational choice of 15 years old pupils in 9th grades of school with a detailed structure of meetings with the pupils and the concrete contents, activities, methods, and techniques used in the sessions.
- The program was structured into 10 two-hour sessions with the pupils, within which the participants took part in the prepared psychological games, aimed at improved self-cognition and effective communication; they underwent psychodiagnostic testing and took part in the counseling interview and consultation together with the parents. In the closing part of the program, on the basis of the information obtained, the pupils themselves were making decisions concerning their future, further studies and professions.
- The pupils were personally informed on the results of the program and the results in psychological tests, but besides them also their parents, who were invited to the meeting by mail, as well as the educational counselor of the school and the headmaster. Several effective consultation-counseling activities have taken place. The choice of the secondary school (in Slovakia for the 16 - 19 years old students), the line of study, or profession got then reflected in the pupils’ applications to the schools. We, as well as the teachers of the schools, were pleased to find out that on realization of the program there were pupils who considered further study at secondary schools, especially secondary apprentice or vocational schools, but there were cases of the choice of a general
A methodical material called “Career Guidance Program PROFTEENS” has been prepared, with a subtitle “Guide for the Career Counselor in the Inclusive Primary School”, with a detailed specification of individual exercises that the counselor or the school psychologist may independently apply in the process of occupational choice of the students in the inclusive school.

In the months of November and December 2018 two trainings for the career counselor and the school psychologist were realized. They were entitled “Professional Orientation and Occupational Choice of the Youth” and the goal was to improve the preparation of these experts for the effective realization of the program in concrete practice of the inclusive primary school.

It can be stated that the set goals of the project have been successfully achieved. It has been confirmed that the mission of the program prepared was fulfilled and the program was effective in:

-orientation of the students of the inclusive school to the study at the secondary schools,

-providing the students with the possibility to ask questions concerning their professional careers, to think about their future, their lives in the society, their professional activities, occupations, professions, training and study,

-teaching the students how to learn more about their qualities, their positive points, talents, but even their reserves,

-making the parents of the students consider further study and training of their children,

-providing the parents with new information on personality characteristics and abilities of their children,

-orientation of the parents to more intense co-operation with the school—the counselor and the school psychologist and the class master of their children.

The realization of the Career Guidance Program PROFTEENS in the inclusive school confirmed several of its advantages, both for the pupils and the realizers—the school-psychologist and the career counselor.

Program PROFTEENS advantages for the students:

- The program of occupational choice based on one’s own experience concerning one’s predispositions, as well as on information on professions gained in the form of play, suited the students, the activities were interesting for them, they liked to participate in them, and they were enthusiastic about them;

- Through psychological games, psychodiagnostic tests and questionnaires, or projective techniques, the program made it possible for the students to enrich their knowledge of themselves, their abilities, skills, interests, and personality characteristics necessary for the right choice of the secondary school and occupation;

- The program considerably broadened the information horizon of the students as to the world of work; it provided them with more information on occupational/professional spheres and activities, on schools, apprentice or study lines, professions and professograms;

- The program in a higher degree engaged the students in self-evaluation, self-assessment, especially in connection with the choice of school, the line of study or occupation and made them consider the question “What do I want to be?” rather intensely;

- The program made it possible for the students to consider, with the help of the expert—the counselor or the school psychologist, which school or study line, which occupations would be most suitable for them from the point of view of their personal predispositions, as well as the requirements
of the schools, the labour market, and social practice.

The advantages of the program PROFTEENS for the school psychologist or the counselor:

- The program provided information on interest preferences of students concerning the occupational/professional spheres and activities, secondary schools and lines of study;
- The program thus made it possible to divide the students into decided ones, not yet decided, indecisive and unengaged ones and to find out which pupils are problematic as far as their choice of occupation is concerned, so that they require long time attention, systematic assistance and counsel on the point of the counselor;
- The program has also made it possible to observe the stability and lability of professional interests of students and the development of their interest orientation;
- The program has freed the school psychologist and the counselor from the burden of routine tasks and made it possible for them to concentrate on those aspects of the counseling process, where creativity, sensitivity, and flexibility are applied, with a great possibility to work with the so-called “personal” aspects of the decision-making process in the choice of occupation.

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