

Primary School Teachers' Guidance Role and Competencies in Taiwan

Yii-nii Lin

Center for Teacher Education
Institute of Learning Sciences
National Tsing Hua University
Hsinchu City, Taiwan

Yueh Hua Chen

Counseling Office
Taipei Municipal Qingjiang Elementary School
Taipei City, Taiwan

Abstract

Primary school is the valuable time for the psychosocial development of children, effective guidance can enhance the learning and development of school kids. The guidance and counseling work has been identified as crucial because the occurrence of psychosocial problems are getting younger in age and students' problems and symptoms become more diverse and complicated at primary schools in Taiwan. Teachers have been viewed as playing the key role of preventive guidance work on campuses. The relevant laws and regulations in Taiwan showed that teachers have to provide guidance work to assist students. Primary school teachers' guidance work are greatly demanded demonstrating the significance for teachers to be equipped with guidance competencies and application capability. Students of teacher education program should take guidance competency courses and practical training. Schools should also provide guidance training to enhance guidance competencies of in-service teachers.

Key words: primary school teacher, guidance, guidance role, guidance competency

Primary school education in Taiwan is six years long and is part of the compulsory education. The low birth rate in Taiwan is manifest according to statistics announced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) (2016), there were 1,883,533 primary school students in 2004, down to only 1,252,706 in 2015. Children are expected to be taken care of carefully due to a low birth rate in Taiwan. The increasing social pressure in Taiwan leads to children's psychological and behavioral problems such as negative emotions of anger, depression, frustration, and problematic interpersonal relations and self-concept (Chen & Cheng, 2013). The sources of negative emotions among fifth and sixth graders in Taiwan include peer and teacher confrontation, academic pressure, parental conflict, family pressure, and personal characteristics (Chao, 2009). A survey conducted by Child Welfare League Foundation (2016) points out that children in Taiwan face pressure in life, the sources of their vexation originate from academic learning, friend-making, appearance, family, and difficulty to communicate with adults. Psychological and behavioral problems of school children are more complicated, diverse and at lower ages, so the guidance and counseling work at primary schools are getting more critical (Chao & Wang, 2007; Wang & Tu, 2009) to assist students have healthy and happy life.

Primary school students are guided by their homeroom teacher, the homeroom teachers and students are in close contact, and are the important resource of guidance/counseling work on campus, and the major force to prevent students' psychological and behavioral problems. Most primary school teachers think that the homeroom teachers are in the front line of student guidance (Cheng, 2002), for the homeroom teachers get to observe and understand students' problems and behaviors to carry out the preliminary preventive guidance (Hsu, 2013). This article reviews the related literature of primary school teacher's guidance work, and discusses, integrates, and makes suggestions regarding teacher's guidance regulations, campus guidance/counseling model "WISER", the importance of teacher guidance, role and competencies of teacher guidance, challenges of teacher guidance, and teacher's guidance competency training.

The related regulations of primary school teacher guidance in Taiwan

Article 7 of Taiwan Student Guidance and Counseling Act (TSGCA) (2014) stipulates that teachers are responsible for providing guidance/counseling to students; Article 12 stipulates that teachers are responsible for instituting develop psychological guidance measures; Article 14 stipulates that teachers at primary and high schools should receive at least three hours of in-service training on guidance/counseling competencies. Article 13 of Enforcement Rules Governing Primary and Junior High School Act (ERGPJHSA) (2016) stipulates that “Guidance and counseling of primary and junior high school students should balance the organizational and individual development of students, take into consideration of the characteristics of schools and students, and comply with related rules and regulations.

The school principal and faculty members should all be responsible for the student affairs and guidance/counseling work.” Primary school teachers in Taiwan shoulder the responsibilities and obligation of student guidance. Full-time counselors and/or guidance teachers at the counseling offices jointly work with teachers and staff on the student guidance/counseling services to facilitate students’ academic leaning and adaptive development (Huang, 2012).

Campus Guidance/Counseling Model "WISER"

The tertiary guidance/counseling system model “WISER” (Guidance Manual for Elementary Schools, 2011) was stipulated by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan. The W indicates preliminary preventive guidance guided by the principles of “whole school”, “workable and mutual benefits”, and “working smart”, the school principal should lead faculty and staff to conduct campus-wide guidance/counseling work. ISE represents secondary intervention featuring “individualized intervention”, “system collaboration” and “evaluation”, and are in charge by the counseling offices. R implies tertiary therapeutic counseling work, that is “resources integration” to be executed by the counseling offices. Off-campus counseling resources are the student counseling centers established by each county level government.

Guidance/counseling work at schools should be the responsibility of all members and all organizations on campus (Yeh, 2013). Teachers should promote the preliminary preventive guidance work on campus (Hsu, 2013), this is the groundwork of school guidance/counseling. Teachers take care of the psychological and behavioral needs of students on the frontline, and assist students’ psychosocial adaptation so that they can grow and develop well.

The importance of primary school teacher guidance

With Taiwan society’s rapid transformation, primary school students are exposed to information far beyond their intellectual development and loading capability (Hong, 2001). The early development of children is critical to their psychological health in the future. Taiwan school children’s psychological health problems are getting more complicated and at lower ages, so the primary school guidance work should deal with the needs of children at an earlier stage to ensure the psychological health of children. The birth rate in Taiwan is very low and it brings a significant impact on education (Hsiao, Tung, & Hwang, 2009). For example, some children do not have siblings, the peer interaction at school thus becomes critical to their interpersonal relations (Chang, 2010). The primary school student guidance/counseling is critical to solve student’s problems in time, if these problems were dragged on to the junior high schools, they would become even more complicated and need more manpower, time and efforts to deal with. Experts affirm the importance of primary school guidance and counseling work (Wang & Tu, 2009). Now guidance work at Taiwan primary schools is in high demand (Wang & Tu, 2009) which manifests the importance for teachers to be equipped with guidance competencies and application capability (Yang, 2015).

Guidance role and competencies of teachers

The functions of teachers include establishing positive and supportive class atmosphere, and promote students’ academic learning and adaptation. Teachers have to work with professional counselors and/or guidance teachers to design and execute class guidance projects facilitating learning and development of students; Via teaching, group guidance, class-wide activities, and class management skills to facilitate a class with student-teacher trust, peer trust, and mutual support so as to enhance student’s self-identity, emotional development, academic learning, career development and social adaptation.

TSGCA (2014) clearly stipulates that school principal should lead the preliminary preventive guidance on campus, and teachers and professional counselors should work together to provide guidance and counseling. Effective preliminary preventive guidance is the groundwork of guidance work on campus, and should be conducted primarily by teachers to promote the psychological health, social adaptation, and development of students (Guidance Manual for Elementary Schools, 2011).

Teachers recognize the importance of preliminary preventive guidance (Chen, 2016), teachers with guidance competencies comply with the guidance roles and functions stipulated in TSGCA (2014) and Primary and Junior High School Act (2016). Research shows that competencies of guidance/counseling are positively correlated with capability to apply guidance/counseling in practice (Tsai, 2002). Those who have received guidance/counseling training or with guidance/counseling experiences have significantly higher guidance/counseling application rate, higher display of competencies, better children issue guidance/counseling experience, and higher effectiveness in taking part in further training in guidance/counseling (Tsai, 2002). Primary school teachers who own higher degree of guidance competency have better teacher-student relationships (Shiao, 2009). Professional counselors who have been teachers, or teachers with guidance/counseling competencies are better able to combine teaching and guidance/counseling in practice (Wu, 2005). Therefore, teachers should strengthen their guidance/counseling competencies, especially better listening and response capabilities when interacting with students (Hornby, Hall, & Hall, 2003; Kottler & Kottler, 1993; 2000).

Challenges of teacher guidance

Dilemmas related to guidance and counseling for primary school teachers in Taiwan are listed below in sequential order: (1) administrative work takes up too much time, (2) stigma associated with guidance and counseling, (3) do not have enough time for guidance, (3) paper work takes up too much time, and (4) parents are not willing to cooperate (Tsai, 2002). Primary school teachers recognize that difficulties related to student guidance include (1) lack of sufficient time to conduct student guidance, (2) too many student issues to take care of, and (3) lack of sufficient guidance resources (Hsu, 2003). Difficulties for primary school teachers to facilitate class guidance include (1) parents are not willing to cooperate, (2) teaching takes up too much time, and (3) lack of time (Chiu, 1999).

Primary school teachers proposed several methods of improving class guidance including cutting down on number of student in each class (Tsai, 2002), teaching hours (Cheng, 2002; Hsu, 2003; Tsai, 2002), and administrative responsibilities (Tsai, 2002); conducting further training on guidance (Chiu, 1999); increasing full-time counselors and guidance teachers (Cheng, 2002; Hsu, 2003; Tsai, 2002); realizing parental education (Hsu, 2003); involving joint efforts of administrative staff; and establishing counseling concept among all campus staff (Cheng, 2002). To summarize, primary school teachers identify that more time and more comprehensive guidance competencies are needed in order to provide student guidance.

Guidance competency training in teacher education and educational system

Teachers often need to respond to urgent conditions of students, guidance practical training can prepare teachers to effectively handle students' psychological and behavioral issues. Those who took guidance and/or counseling courses in the teacher education program recognize that they are more effective in guiding students at the formal teaching fields compared with those who didn't and the difference is significant (Chang, 2004).

In Taiwan, a majority of teacher education students/trainees only took one guidance related course (two credits), the guidance related training is apparently insufficient. Primary school teachers seldom took guidance competency training during the teacher education stage (Tsai, 2002). It is imperative that the teacher education institutions to include guidance competencies in the program to better prepare our future teachers (Chang, 2004). In addition, students of teacher education program should also include guidance in their half-year internship training period including observing, conducting individual and group guidance, role playing, understanding student referral-flow and ways of intervention of special or crisis clients, and learning how to work with professional counselors and/or guidance teachers on assisting student clients.

In addition, schools should provide guidance workshops for teachers and the training contents should focus on practical training (Cheng, 2002). Further training on guidance competencies is rather important for primary school teachers (Chiu, 1999). In response to the diverse and complicated problems of students (Lin, 2015), each school can provide guidance competency training accordingly, covering topics such as communication skills with parents and students, class management skills, behavioral techniques (Chiu, 1999) and deviant behavior corrections and modifications (Cheng, 2002). Each school can design their own guidance competency training programs based on students' psychosocial needs and development agenda.

Conclusions

The birth rate in Taiwan is very low, so school kids are expected to be taken care of carefully and patiently. The occurrence of psychosocial problems and deviant behaviors are getting younger in age, thus teachers should provide effective guidance to enhance the learning and development of school kids.

According to the relevant laws and regulations of guidance and counseling in Taiwan, primary school teachers' guidance work are highly demanded manifesting the importance for teachers to be equipped with guidance competencies and application capability. Primary school teachers in Taiwan recognize that more time and guidance competencies are needed to assist students, as a result, it will be beneficial to improve the primary school guidance quality when teaching hours, number of students in each class and administrative responsibilities are cut; and further guidance training, full-time counselors, guidance resources and joint efforts of all campus faculty and staff are in place. Students of teacher education program should take guidance competency courses and receive practical training to effectively deal with various psychological and behavioral issues at teaching fields. Schools should provide guidance workshops and training to enhance guidance competencies of in-service teachers. Teachers should improve guidance competencies, foster accurate attitudes and concepts, and effectively execute preliminary preventive guidance work on campuses.

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