

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING IN THE PHILIPPINES AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by:
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Guidance and Counseling is a profession that comprises the use of an integrated approach to the development of well-functioning individuals by helping them to utilize their potential to the fullest and plan their future in accordance with their abilities, interests, and needs. It includes functions and services such as counseling, appraisal, research, career and placement, group process, teaching and practicing of guidance and counseling subjects, particularly subjects given in the licensure examinations and other human development services as stated in the Republic Act No. 9258 otherwise known as the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004.

To contextualize the practice of guidance and counseling in the Philippines, the Philippine Standard Model was proposed by Salazar-Clemeña, Rosemarie in 2010. The center of the model and the focus of the school counseling program are the students. The counselor works with other stakeholders which consist of faculty and administrators, parents, and the community to assist each student. The model also covers four areas identified by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) which are the foundation, delivery system, management system, and accountability system.

However, a huge scarcity of Registered Guidance Counselors is observed in the country in 2018 where there were only 3,783 individuals listed on the board, an equivalent of 6.85% of the total 46,959 needed RGCs for schools alone (Valdez D., 2018). The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) announced that 286 board exam passers were added in 2019 which sums to 4,069 Registered Guidance Counselors in the country. Unfortunately, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) announced the

postponement of the board examination for guidance counselors for two (2) consecutive years, 2020-2021 will be rescheduled to this year, August 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

As a consequence of insufficiency, schools find difficulty allocating personnel who will professionally handle Guidance and Counseling services. To address the need of schools with no RGCs, the institution continues to delegate personnel who will assume the functions of guidance and counseling as Guidance In-Charge. This practice of delegating in-charge for Guidance and Counseling ensures the students of the services they need for holistic development, and it is incumbent for schools to maintain the quality of services rendered.

In spite of that, the quality process and services in schools are currently experiencing a major challenge due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Various sources articulate that the Covid-19 is a pandemic whose spread is so worrying (Nugroho, 2020). As a result, the government is working with all parties to reduce the rate of the Covid-19 spread by issuing a policy that citizens carry out physical distancing. With this policy, all student activities that are usually carried out in schools must now be transformed into online activities from their own homes. The application of social distancing also has an impact on the application of systems and learning processes in schools.

In connection, the Commission on Higher Education recently released CMO 08, s. 2021 entitled "Guidelines on the Implementation of Flexible Delivery of Student Affairs and Services (SAS) Programs during the Covid-19 Pandemic" to enhance the delivery of Student Affairs and Services (SAS) programs to provide equitable learning opportunities and help the students adjust to the learning environment during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as prepare them on the resumption of classes under the new normal conditions. Thus, strategies for offline and online flexible delivery of Guidance and Counseling Services of the University are suggested depending on the available resources and capability as well as students' needs.

The works of Guidance Practitioners are generally commendable for the efforts they provide to the students. What may appear significant rather is what the school can do to address the challenges of student concerns during the pandemic and how to be updated with the current trends of providing guidance and counseling in online and direct services. According to Caipang (2014), the increased complexity of modern life, the enriched and expanded curricular offerings in college, recent trends in education – emphasis on science and technology, emphasis on developing qualities of the youths, changing patterns of family life, the uncertainty of world condition and the great complexity and variation of individual differences are the factors and conditions existing which gave rise to the need of guidance.

These challenges are even magnified by the increasing social and personal pressures acquired by students, such as the dilemmas of dysfunctional family relationships that result in delinquent behaviors of children; the proliferation of drugs and malicious elements that destroy life; the unstoppable effects of commercialization that demand wiser career-choosing; the expansion of the virtual world that obscures personal identity; and the many depressions that the youth are facing. With these in mind, it follows then that schools must provide an advanced framework for Guidance and Counseling. Regular training for guidance practitioners, constant assessment of student needs, continuous updating of the Guidance and Counseling Program, and collective support for its implementation are crucial in the making.

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