

Robert Gjedia
State Education Inspectorate
Tirana/Albania

The Evaluation of Psychological Service in School

Abstract

One of the main school responsibilities remains the provision of the psychological service, recently sanctioned in the new law of Pre-university Education, 2013. The psychologist's role in the school is seen as a necessary task. This service is provided through the process of handling different problems, the identification and treatment of children with psycho-social, needs as well as the design and the implementation of precautionary risk programs, according to the needs of school community. Our society is free and open towards the innovation, but at the same time it is very sensitive towards the social, economic, spiritual and individual difficulties. In this process the psychologist should be close to children, teenagers and the problems they are facing. In addition to that, the psychologist gives an important contribution to the students in successfully facing the curriculum, its goals, objectives and content. The psychologists in close collaboration with teachers enable the students to successfully accomplish their education. The need for designing the guideline "The inspection and self evaluation of psychological service in school" came as a result of the lack of an evaluation system at school, relating to the motivation and the improvement of the psychologist activity. It is the first time that the psychologists have an appropriate professional tool, which is detailed in measurable indicators and instruments involving all the elements of the psychological service, based on contemporary methodology of inspection and evaluation of educational services. In this context the guideline offers great opportunities that help in achieving the self-evaluation process and the external evaluation of the psychological service in school. This process need time, efforts and professional engagement. Moreover it needs a fruitful combination of school self evaluation in annual basis with the external evaluation carried periodically by the State Education Inspectorate. This material, as the co-author of this manual, presents the content and the methodology in order to clarify the way in which this manual of the evaluation of psychological service should be used and serve. The manual is conceptualized in five essential fields of inspection and self evaluation.

Field number 1: Evaluation

Field number 2: Planning

Field number 3: Consulting and collaboration

Field number 4: Advising

Field number 5: Professional development of school psychologist

The diffraction of the content of this manual is oriented by the professional standards of the school psychological service in school. These standards are taken in consideration, combined with the international co operations in this field.

Apart from the aspects of the inspection and self evaluation, this guideline tends to help and improve further the professionalism of psychological service in schools.

Key words: *Inspection; Self Evaluation; Psychological Service; Instruments; Evaluation Standards*

1-Introduction: Presentation

The process of self-evaluation (Self-evaluation means the internal evaluation) and external evaluation, relating the psychological service (The school psychologist means also the female person who holds the position) in schools, requires an appropriate scientific methodology which should be clear, reliable and contemporary. This methodology provides real data, reflecting the strengths and the weaknesses, as well as the opportunities raised for the school psychologist to provide a professional qualitative service first, as well as meeting its needs in order to assure a better performance in the future. On the other hand, an important aspect remains the fact that the same methodology and the same indicators are used simultaneously by the school psychologist, the school internal evaluation team and the external evaluation team (State Education Inspectorate: State Education Inspectorate is the official institution that is responsible for the external evaluation in the pre-university educational institutions, as well as other educational services). This approach compares these evaluations that tend to improve the psychological service in school and determine the level of its performance. The goal of the Inspectorate is to encourage step by step the implementation and the installation of the culture of the self-evaluation in the institutions of pre-university education. This is a challenging professional way which requires knowledge and mastering of the ethic and professional standards of evaluation. In addition, it requires commitment and responsibility demonstrated by all representatives involved in the process, such as the internal evaluation teams, the school psychologist in particular, and the managerial authorities of the educational institutions.

What are the methodological elements used in the process of the self-evaluation and external evaluation, in terms of the psychological service in schools?

The definition of the fields and sub - fields of evaluation regarding the psychological service in school.

The field (State Education Inspectorate is the official institution that is responsible for the external evaluation in the pre-university educational institutions, as well as other educational services) is conceptualized as an essential direction or dimension of the activity of the school psychologist. The field is directly related to the implementation of professional standards as well as the process of his professional activity. The definition of the fields is based on the educational legal acts and the normative provisions, regarding the psychological service in the institutions of pre-university education.

It is agreed to define 5 essential fields which derive from the professional standards of the psychologist. The fields are considered and judged by lectures and field experts as main dimensions that connect straight forward to the service, the school psychologist provides.

Field number 1: Evaluation (State Education Inspectorate is the official institution that is responsible for the external evaluation in the pre-university educational institutions, as well as other educational services.)

Field number 2: Planning

Field number 3: Consultation and collaboration

Field number 4: Counseling

Field number 5: Professional development of school psychologist

- The sub-field is a subdivision, and a necessary element that indicates and completes the content of a certain field where the school psychologist operates. In actual terms, in the field of psychological service defined as “Evaluation” the subdivisions of the field are: a) The process of evaluation, b) The ethics in the evaluation process. These subfields tend to identify what happens with the evaluation provided by the school psychologist. Moreover it provides a complete panorama of all the elements this field involves. These subfields are seen as opportunities to identify, to observe and evaluate in detail the activity of the school psychologist. As mentioned above the subfields fulfill two functions:

- a) divide the field into organic and necessary elements
- b) enable the recognition and an objective evaluation of the situation of the psychological service, in the institutions of the pre-university education.

2. The definition of a system consisting of valid, useful, sufficient, measurable and practical indicators.

- The indicator is expressed with an affirmative measurable sentence that indicates how the level of the field should be. Through the indicators we are able to evaluate the quality of the psychological service the school provides.

The indicator features are:

- they are designed to every subfield accordingly.
- they are always measurable, in terms of facilitating the process of self-evaluation and its inspection.
- affirmations, that specify the field to be measured.

Chart displaying examples of fields, subfields and indicators.

Number	Field	Subfield	Indicators (examples)
I	The evaluation	The process of evaluation	The school psychologist develops (designs) evaluation procedures according to the plan, implementing the necessary professional steps.
II	The planning	Planning procedure	The school psychologist operates a range of activities planned in advance
III	Consultation and collaboration	The concept on the consultation	The school psychologist provides consultation for the teachers.
IV	Counseling	The counseling procedure	The school psychologist operates ethically respecting the clients, their privacy and the highest interest of the client and the institution.
V	The professional development	Updating with the last professional development	The school psychologist is updated with the innovation and the contemporary experiences regarding the psychological service in school.

The observational instrument (The observational instrument describes the indicator) is a sentence that defines the way the targeted indicator is implemented, developed or displayed. By using the observational instruments, information is collected in order to provide necessary data for the indicators of the psychological service.

The scales of evaluation are the levels used to assess the psychological service

based on its fields. The levels of assessment are four: very good performance corresponds to number one, good performance corresponds to number two, sufficient performance corresponds to number three and poor performance corresponds to number four. The four scale evaluation scheme is widely used in the evaluations carried out by several professional services in the European educational systems. Moreover, this system divided in four scales, enables an objective evaluation and involves all the levels a psychologist can achieve through the service he provides according to the indicators.

The evaluation standard is defined as the description of the situation, the psychological service is provided in every field. The standard determines the evaluation, according to the levels mentioned above. The evaluation is the result of data processing that derives from the observational instruments of evaluation relating to every indicator as well as the data gathered by the applied methodology during the process of self evaluation, or inspection in general.

The final evaluation of the field is always based on the importance and the weight of the indicators in the framework of the psychological service.

Field number 1: Evaluation

The evaluation constitutes one of the main fields in the activity of school psychologist. The evaluation intends to gather and integrate data concerning the issue of the psychological service, school performance and the progress of certain interventions in the framework of psychological welfare and education. The evaluation cannot be mistaken with testing. It constitutes an effective use of instruments/techniques in order to gather data, to modify and improve the instruments in use, their interpretation and reporting or their further use. (Tests constitute one of the instruments used for collecting data and evaluating).

The evaluations carried out by the psychologists, are developed through the observation of hard copy or on-line school documentation, through observation and interviews, focus groups, surveys and tests designed for this purpose. During the process of evaluation the psychologists take into consideration the applied scientific criteria for data interpretation and the rules for outputs administration. Used by unqualified psychologists, the evaluations provide us with wrong data which lead to wrong interpretations associated with unwanted impacts in the process of education and psychological well being.

In his evaluating task the school psychologist integrates the data taken by the academic evaluation combined with those of behavior in order to have an objective panorama of the phenomenon that concerns the student and the school.

The subfields that compose the “Evaluation” are:

- a) The knowledge and the capability to evaluate
- b) The evaluation procedures
- c) The ethics while evaluating.

Field number II. Planning

The psychological service in school is provided in an organized, coordinated and planned way through a chain process of activities. The group of professionals in charge plan in advance their agenda based on the identified needs and the data taken from the evaluations. The school psychologist masters the appropriate knowledge over the models and the methods which ensure the necessary information for identifying the strengths and the weaknesses, the problems raised and the measurement of the school progress. All the interventions are studied and planned in advance.

The school psychologists are part of the groups who plan the interventions. Most of the time, they give their contribution, cooperating with other actors and only in rare cases they design the plan individually. The planning processes tend to perform certain interventions. The psychologist's contribution in planning is clearly expressed and doesn't face any limitations. It is implemented through his participation in the workshops, through his suggestions on the interventions, while reporting the findings of the evaluations, through his specific role in the planning process, through recording the documentation of his activities etc. Other examples of this contribution are the participation in planning the trainings, suggestions for curricular improvements, awareness campaigns, recreational activities etc.

Planning of the psychological service in school is usually a process that starts after identifying and evaluating the students' needs. The evaluation of students' needs enables the identification of the main concerning issues. By doing so, the actors involved in planning, design the schedules of the intervention whether at school level, or at district/regional level. They enable a good combination of data taken by the evaluation with the creativity and the fantasy. The purpose is to make an effective use of data and to adopt them according to identified needs and the psychology of groups benefiting this service. (Teachers, parents, students). The planned interventions fit into the category of students' academic performance, their psychological welfare and their behavior.

The domain of “*Planning*” is divided into two subfields:

- a) knowledge acquisition in this field, and ability to plan.
- b) planning practices

Field number 3: Consultation and Collaboration

The school psychologist does not operate isolated by other actors involved in the school life and community. He frequently gets involved in consultation activities and sessions and cooperates effectively with the other actors in all the process phases comprising evaluation, planning therapy at individual, group or system level.

Consultation is understood in various ways. Generally speaking, it is seen as an exchange of thoughts, but there are cases when it is considered as a way to suggest interpretations and certain actions. In fact, consulting involves these activities and goes beyond them, it engages also on the problem solving situations. Consequently processes like thought exchanging, suggestions, support, encouragement, and inhibition and information transmission happen.

Consultation covers issues associated with the academic, behavioral, and psychological progress. It allows us to complete a full analysis of needs (the analysis of the needs is achieved by the evaluation procedure, while consultation can be used to realize this analysis) in order to find out the problems the schools are facing. In front of this reality these problems should be brought and taken into consideration to be solved in specific projects.

The school psychologists are keen not only to collaborate with other stakeholders, but they are interested in their contribution too. They provide the consultation in a collaborative atmosphere with the stakeholders. Hence they plan their job; they put priorities, take responsibilities, negotiate and take decisions at individual, group or system level.

Collaboration constitutes an important area of psychologist activity and intends not allowing isolated actions inside a complex system concerning the actors involved, their relationship, activities and features.

The new role of the psychologist is based on a deep collaboration between him and the actors. As every teacher has to deal with his own subject, in the core of the psychologist's duty remains the collaboration with other stakeholders and actors. In this process, interpersonal skills like: the ability to build and maintain relationships, the ability to listen to the others and respect them, the ability to appraise the contributions and a successful collaboration, remain crucial.

The field of “Consultation and collaboration” is divided into four subfields.

- a) Knowledge on the consulting process,
- b) Consulting procedure
- c) Knowledge on the collaboration process
- d) Collaboration procedure

Field number 4: Counseling

The counseling (<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/PsychSocial/GuidelinesSchoolPsychology.pdf>) represents a process in which the school psychologist helps the students to maximally benefit from the educational investment in general and the opportunities it offers.

Counseling is the kind of service that provides help for people who face difficulties in their life. These experiences sometimes impede them to fulfill their potential.

Counseling is scheduled individually and in group with all the actors involved: the students, parents, teachers, the supporting staff and the community groups. Counseling (National Inspectorate for Pre-university Education “Inspection and Internal-evaluation of School” Tirana, 2011) tends to open all available opportunities to individuals, to encourage the efforts for optimistic changes, to overcome obstacles, to support change, to encourage and motivate success in the academic performance, to improve social relations and personal achievement.

In the position of a counselor the psychologist operates individually or applies group therapy. The individual counseling is provided during confidential individual

meetings. He mainly covers issues related to psychological welfare of students, their academic performance. On the other hand he recommends teachers who deal with students with special needs, and parents about the ways they should treat their children during the phase of adolescence. The process of providing counseling for different target groups is provided through workshops aiming to raise consciousness, inform, train and support. The more frequent form of “group counseling” is developed under the form of training.

The counseling process happens also during critical incidents and intervention in cases of crisis. In these interventions the psychologist job consists in: building teams to afford crisis, giving the first psychological aid, identifying people who need support and attention, coordinating the external aid in order to afford the school’s crisis and informing about the existence of extra resources. Some of the essential proficiencies, while performing the role of a counselor, a school psychologist should have are: building and maintaining relationships, challenging, effective communication, empathy, sensitization and support.

The component subfields of “Counseling” are:

- a) Knowledge on the field of counseling
- b) Counseling practice

Field number 5: The Professional Development of The School Psychologist

The school psychologists are frequently engaged in their professional development, in order to be updated with the latest professional developments. This process means a deep knowledge of the scientific researches in the field of school psychologist activity. As a result the schools psychologists stay in touch with the results of the scientific researches, they study the periodicals and the publications in the field of psychology, attend scientific conferences and trainings in order to advance the knowledge and support the professional development of the psychologist.

The school psychologists (National Inspectorate for Pre-university Education “Inspection and Internal-evaluation of RED/EO” Tirana, 2011.) make progress by reflecting on their own personal experiences. Usually they pay attention to their best personal practices, but they also focus on the poor performances and activities in order to improve them. During this process the school psychologist study the cases they treat in many aspects; like evaluation, planning, consultation, advice; they analyze their personal experiences and they choose the best experiences that fit in offering an effective service to the school bodies and school community. In this context they dedicate time to personal achievement.

The schools psychologists work systematically by exchanging the appropriate professional experiences with each other. In this context, they periodically gather together and hold discussions, they arrange meetings, seminars, symposiums, and take an active part in forums and professional organizations. They support each other in their efforts to cultivate the profession and find solution to practical issues.

In their efforts to advance professionally, the schools psychologists become members of associations, act under organized ways, defend their interests and

community interests, document and publish their activities and researches, get trained as well as ask and provide supervision.

The component subfields of “Professional development of the school psychologist” are:

- a) The official qualification and training of the school psychologist
- b) Periodical updating with the professional development
- c) Reflection on individual experience
- d) Experiences' exchange with colleagues
- e) Professional communion membership

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