

New legal status of school psychologists in the Slovak Republic

Part I

A brief review from the 40-years of school psychology and the school psychologist profession development in Slovakia (1965 – 2005)

1965 – 1975

1965 – The Department of Educational Psychology was established at the Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University in Bratislava. The mission of this Department was to develop educational psychology and to prepare psychologists for the educational process in schools and school institutions. The first students who wanted to become school psychologists began to study educational psychology at the Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University in Bratislava in the academic year 1967/68.

- 1967 – The Cabinet of school psychology was created at the Department of pedagogical psychology at the Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University in Bratislava. Its objective was to coordinate the work of school psychologists both methodically and professionally.
- 1970 – the concept of school psychologists' work in schools was defined for the first time ever. This concept was being verified experimentally through the work of psychologists in elementary and secondary schools in Košice and Bratislava.
- 1974 – Through the work of school psychologists and their cooperation with teachers and parents, the verification process acknowledged that psychological services in schools are effective and necessary. In cooperation with the Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University, the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic prepared to introduce school psychology into schools.

1975 – 1990

In the 70. years of 20. century, after Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Soviet army, which was followed by the normalization period, began the „dark ages“ for school

psychology. It lasted for 15 years, until November 1989, when the Gentle revolution took place in Czechoslovakia, resulting into the overthrow of the Communist government. During those „dark ages“, no more places for school psychologists in schools and school institutions were created. Before, this task was carried out by Slovak psychologists under the leadership of prof. Hvozdík, and educational psychologists of my generation were taught to it during their university studies.

1990 - 2005

The development of school psychology and the strengthening of its position in the educational process begins no sooner than in the year 1990, after the Gentle revolution in November 1989 was over and the social structure and political situation in Czechoslovakia changed. Here are listed some of the events that took place:

year 1990 – the establishment of School psychology Association

1991 – school psychology becomes a separate subject in the pre-graduate studies program for psychologists. Later it is approved as a subject for final state examination and a study program for PHD. study.

1992 – for the first time, psychologists meet at the ISPA colloquium in Turkey

1993 - for the first time, school psychology is introduced into the legislation. It is the year when the meeting of ISPA took place in Slovakia (800 of psychologists participated). Anton Furman, a school psychologist from Slovakia, later became the president of ISPA.

1993 -1996 Legislation, *legal status of school psychologists in the Slovak Republic*

1993

The Law of the Slovak National Council No. 279/1993 Collection of Laws on School institutions

The Law of the Slovak National Council emphasizes that “the school psychologist is actively involved in the work performed by the school or the institution for special education and provides professional psychological advice to children, their legal guardians and pedagogical employees during the solving of education problems.“ Resulting from this law, Slovak schools and school institutions can employ school psychologists for full time, or they

can cooperate with school psychologists who work in pedagogic-psychological counselling centers.

1996

**The Regulation of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 43/1996
Collection of laws on educational counselling and counselling institutions**

The Regulation of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic provides that school psychologist plays an important role in the educational counselling system. Other parts of this system are pedagogic-psychological counselling centers, special educational counselling centers, children integration centers, but there is also counsellor and special teacher. The primary objective of the work performed by a school psychologist is to provide psychological and educational services to the pupils, parents, teachers and other pedagogical employees to promote their personal development and mental health using modern forms and methods of identification and diagnostic, consulting and counselling, correctional and preventive work.

School psychologists are required to provide primary prevention and prevention activities in schools and school institutions, with an aim to ensure appropriate social and educational conditions that would prevent or eliminate such negative phenomena as violence, aggression, bullying, intolerance, playing truant, delinquency, drug addition of pupils, but also stress, exhaustion, loss of motivation and interest in learning, or tensions and conflicts among pupils, among teachers and pupils, or teachers and parents and promote personal development and mental health of pupils and teachers.

From 1996, **Pedagogical – organization rules for schools of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic** are issued at the beginning of every school year. The headmasters are advised that school psychologists are to be employed in compliance with the Law No. 279/1993 Collection of laws and the Regulation No. 43/1996 Collection of laws, issued by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, with the aim to humanize schools, optimalization of pupils' mental development and to help teachers to cope with the requirements resulting from the education process.

Part II

The current development

of school psychology and the position of school psychologist in Slovakia

2005 – 2010

- The School psychology Association of Slovak and Czech Republic joins ISPA
- The representative of Slovak school psychologists in Network of European psychologists in the educational system (NEPES)
- The study program of psychology, valid for Slovak universities contain the subject of school psychology, which is an obligatory subject for both bachelor and master studies. During their master study, the students of the Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University, who are specialized at school psychology and the work of school psychologist, can choose from these obligatory-optional subjects: Psychodiagnostic methods of school psychologist, Program PROFTEENS, Program for the Development of pupils' emotional intelligence, Social - psychological training in school psychology. The subject of school psychology is also included among subjects of final state examination and doctoral study.
- From 1996, the Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University in Bratislava is the only one university to offer a 2-year specialized studies on school psychology (4 block teaching, a total of 240 lessons). The purpose of these studies is to acquire additional knowledge from psychology regarding preventive, diagnostic and intervention work of a school psychologist in the education process (to these days, the number of participants is 200).
- An international cooperation on a regular basis and lecturers from foreign countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, USA, Great Britain).
- An international cooperation, contacts, researches, counseling (ISPA, NEPES, EFPA, NASP) regarding preventive programs – a program designed to prevent violence in schools SECOND STEP (cooperation with the Committee for Children USA and school psychologists from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Lithuania, Germany and Japan), and there are also lecture activities (under the project called An Excellent University, school psychologist Prof. P. Farrell from the University of Manchester came to Bratislava and he spoke about the position and preparation of school psychologists within the EU.) The meeting of the members of NEPES committee (the Network of European

Psychologists in the Educational System) near EFPA in Bratislava and their participation on the conference of school psychologists from Bratislava under the auspices of mayor of the Ministry of Education of Bratislava – Ružinov city district (November 2008).

- Educational psychology books –
- monographs, university textbooks, articles and collections of scientific contributions (Hvozdič, J.: Základy školskej psychológie. / The Essentials of educational psychology. Bratislava: SPN, 1996; Gajdošová, E.: Školský psychológ a jeho vstup do humanizácie našich škôl. / School psychologist starting to bring the humanist approach to our schools. Bratislava: Príroda, 1998; Gajdošová, E. – Herényiová, G.: Rozvíjenj emojní inteligence žákú. / The development of pupils' emotional intelligence. Praha: Portál, 2006; Jimerson, S.R., Oakland, T., Farrell, P.: The Handbook of International School Psychology, Sage Publications Thousand Oaks, California, USA - London, UK , 2007, where one chapter was written by Gajdošová, E. – Herényiová, G.: School Psychology in Slovak Republic; Valihorová, M.- Gajdošová, E.: Vybrané otázky ŠP / Some selected issues from school psychology)
- The Journal of the School psychology Association (SPA) of Slovak and Czech Republic, „The School psychologist“, founded by the SPA of SR, issued by the Institute of pedagogical - psychological consulting (Institút pedagogicko-psychologického poradenství), Ministry of Education of Czech Republic, Praha, Czech Republic. Our colleagues from Slovak and Czech Republic form the editorial staff.
- Active participation in international colloquia (the last time it was held in 2007 in Tampere, Finland and in 2008 in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 2009 on Malta).

Part III:

New legal status of school psychologists in the Slovak Republic

(2007-2009)

The concept of pedagogical – psychological consulting system approved by the government of the Slovak Republic on the 21th of March, 2007

The government of the Slovak Republic passed a resolution which provides that school psychologists are a part of the educational and psychological consulting system. The concept

of their work is specified in the Annexe No. 3 „School psychologist.“ The concept says that school psychologist forms a part of the educational and psychological consulting system, he works in schools and school institutions where he provides his psychological advice to children, legal guardians and pedagogical employees during the solving of education problems.

(1) The concept of school psychologist's work is divided into the following parts: kindergartens, elementary schools, universities. For example, the part of the concept regarding elementary schools says that a school psychologist:

- works with pupils who are creative and talented. Together with their teachers, he prepares some special and differentiated teaching methods to be applied for their instruction and education.
- works with pupils who have bad school marks and who do not make enough effort in studying, he proposes direct and indirect interventions into the education and instruction process and special programs for pupils' education and development and helps putting them into practice
- works with pupils who have behaviour disorders. In cooperation with the class teachers, school psychologist takes part in creating of intervention programs designed to change undesirable conduct of pupils and he helps putting these programs into practice
- he helps pupils and teachers to overcome stress and to cope with psychical load situations in school environment. He tries to ensure unstressful conditions for learning, teaching and working in school and suggests ways for overcoming feelings of overburdening and exhaustion
- using diagnostic methods, school psychologist helps pupils and students of secondary schools to decide on their future profession and to choose an appropriate secondary school or university. He offers consulting and counselling services to students and their parents.
 - for students, he prepares self-study training programs, programs for development of emotional intelligence and social competencies, antistress programs, premarital and marital education programs, anti-drug prevention programs and other programs that help students to prepare for their professional, family and partnership and private life
 - he works with children who come from low social and cultural background and he prepares special development programs for them

National program for children and youth care in Slovak Republic in the years 2008 – 2015 (21.3.2008) Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic

The government of the Slovak Republic approved the National program for children and youth care, valid from 2008 to 2015 (hereafter referred to as „National program“) that is based on the European strategy for health improvement and healthy development of children and youth. There are 7 priorities. The part „Psychosocial development“ is important from the point of view of mental health in schools.

As far as this part is concerned, the general goal of the program is to „ensure appropriate conditions for the instruction and education of children and youth, and to ensure them good social background and material conditions, and mainly supporting healthy personal development and mental health of pupils.“ It also emphasizes the fact that the work performed by a school psychologist is important for psychological development and mental health of children. The National program gives the school psychologist the task to “help pupils to decide on their future profession, provide psychological care for gifted and talented pupils, work with pupils who have learning difficulties and behaviour disorders and work with pupils who are integrated into the school, having a physical or mental handicap and to ensure appropriate conditions for their education. School psychologist has to offer his psychological services also to the teachers. He has to support mainly their mental health, personal development, personal relationships, help them solve interpersonal conflicts, give them advice how to avoid psychical load situations, stress and the burn-out syndrome. School psychologist’s duties include the supporting of teachers’ professional development in psychology, education process and optimalizing of education process. He has to offer consulting and counselling services to the parents of pupils with the objective to improve their methods of education and child care, if their children have learning problems and behaviour disorders. He also ensures a good cooperation between school and families.“

The Law of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on education and instruction, adopted on the 22nd of May, 2008

(school law)

Part 3. „School institutions for educational counselling and prevention“, paragraph 130

It says: Other parts of the educational counselling and prevention system include the school psychologist (section 3), who „cooperates mostly with families, schools, school institutions, employers, public administration bodies and civil associations.“ (section 4), school psychologist works in schools or school institutions (section 5).

The Law of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on pedagogical and vocational employees, adopted on the 24th of June, 2009

This Law determines

- a) the rights and duties of pedagogical and vocational employees,
- b) prerequisites needed for performing of vocational activities,
- c) professional development, career ranks, career positions, attestations,
- d) vocational employee’s qualification eligibilities,

- e) vocational activities of vocational employee,
- f) the scope, specialization, organization and termination of different forms of vocational employee's continuing education,
- g) accreditation of the continuing education programs, the activities and status of the Accreditation council for continuing education of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic,
- h) the obtaining of credits for having successfully passed different forms of continuing education,
- i) vocational employee assessment,
- j) vocational employee care and protection.

This Law distinguishes the following categories of vocational employees:

- a) psychologist
- b) school psychologist
- c) school logopedist
- d) special teacher, school special teacher, special teacher who performs his activities outside of the school or school institution,
- e) remedial pedagogue,
- f) social pedagogue.

School psychologist performs vocational activities regarding psychological diagnostics, individual, group or large groups psychological counselling, psychotherapy, prevention and intervention care of children and pupils, with strong focus on the process of education and instruction in schools and school institutions. He also offers psychological counselling services regarding family, partnership and other social relationships. School psychologist offers psychological counselling and consultations to legal guardians of children and to pedagogical employees working in schools or school institutions. He prepares basis materials for vocational employees of counselling centres.

The fifth part named PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT puts emphasis on the process of deepening and increasing of qualification and professional competencies of vocational employees. School psychologists' professional development is realized in the so-called career system. In the career system, the school psychologist is classified into career ranks and he has a given career position. These are the career ranks for the school psychologist:

- a) novice vocational employee,
- b) vocational employee working independently,
- c) vocational employee with first attestation,
- d) vocational employee with second attestation.

The sixth part of the Law treats continuing education, credit system and attestations.

The purpose of the continuing education is to deepen and increase the professional competencies of the vocational employee.

The law determines that continuing education can be provided by:

- a) school or school institution
- b) university
- c) organization established by a ministry

- d) educational organization of other central authority
- e) the Church or Religious Society or other legal entity which has „education“ as its business activity.

This Law distinguishes the following forms of continuing education:

- a) adaptive education
- b) updating education
- c) innovative education
- d) speciality education
- e) functional education
- h) vocational education.

Credits are given for

- successful passing the accredited programs of continuing education
- professional competencies acquired by performing of pedagogical activities, vocational activities or self-study
- creative activities, e.g. authorship or co-authorship of approved or recommended teaching materials including computer programs, textbooks, study materials, methodical materials and workbooks

The competencies of vocational employees, acquired through continuing education, self-education and performing of vocational activities, are verified by means of an attestation.

The Regulation of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 437/2009 Collection of Laws, issued on the 20th of October, 2009 provides the qualification eligibilities and specific qualification requirements for different categories of vocational employees according to the type of school or school institution.

School psychologist who works in school or counselling centre has to be a psychology graduate, a psychology and pedagogy graduate or a school psychology graduate.