# SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL ASSISTANCE AT SCHOOL: PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This article analyzes the peculiarities of the social pedagogical assistance at school. The purpose of social pedagogical assistance is defined in the education governing documents. These documents indicate that it is necessary to help the child to implement his right to education and to guarantee his safety at school. Thus, effective social pedagogical assistance helps to solve the problems at school: the abuse of psychotropic substances, juvenile delinquency growth, increase of emotional and physical violence, dropping out of school. Effective aid can be achieved through teamwork principles, which require different areas of information, knowledge and skills. The article presents a review of scientific literature and research data which can be applied for improving of social pedagogical assistance at school in order to help students and families by involving various specialists. The study revealed essential factors that affect the social pedagogical assistance organization and real assistance to the student at school.

*Keywords*: help the student, social pedagogical support, teamwork.

### Introduction

European Union countries recognize that the school environment is the most important determinant of a children's well-being, children's health, physical, mental, social security. Ministry of Education in its order defined that parents (guardians) while dealing with the child's educational issues must cooperate with the school counselor or another education provider, teachers, health professionals who provide special psychological, social, educational or other assistance, health care. Teachers must not only ensure learners 'safety and good quality of education, to develop the students' strong moral, civic, ethnic and patriotic features and guarantee their personal growth, but also to regularly inform the parents (guardians) of their children's educational needs and achievements. Thus, the law stipulates that parents and teachers cooperate to provide and receive information, and are responsible for the child's education quality. The goal of education is to develop the spiritual, intellectual and physical person's abilities, to develop an active, creative, responsible citizen who will acquire competencies necessary for successful social integration and

lifelong learning (primary and basic education Framework Programmes). Thus, the school as the main child socialization authority must respond to the changing needs of society, in order to allow each child to gain an education and to provide social pedagogical assistance in cooperation with appropriate institutions, the student's parents and teachers. Therefore, in order to ensure school social pedagogical assistance it is essential to provide the forms, methods and techniques of organization of comprehensive assistance at school. The concept of social pedagogical assistance and its importance were examined by (Kučinskas&Kučinskienė, 2000; Kvieskienė, 2005). Galkienė (2005) analyses the special pedagogical assistance at school, teachers approach to children with special educational needs (Ališauskas, 2004; Ambrukaitis, 2004; Miltenienė, 2004). Influence of preventive programs for school was examined by (Auškelis et al., 2010; Čižienė, 2015).

Purpose of the article is an overview of the social pedagogical assistance specific features at school as well as to analyze the key factors that affect the organization of social pedagogical assistance and a real assistance to pupils of the school.

### Peculiarities of social pedagogical assistance at school

Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030" sets out the fundamental Lithuania's ambition to become a smart country: a modern, expansive, open to world, safeguarding the national identity. The expected role of education is the development of an intelligent society, to help the society to become a productive, loyal and learning continously. Envisaged goals for schools are as following: to shift from traditional education towards thinking, creativitystimulating education, leadership development, raising role of community selfgoverning, continuous learning promoting systems. However, various studies show students' deteriorating physical and mental health, increased alcohol consumption, drug abuse, smoking, juvenile delinquency, bullying in schools. In 2013, the United Nations Foundation, UNICEF issued the data of study about child welfare in rich countries. The study evaluated five aspects of children's lives: material well-being, health and security, behavior and risk, housing and the environment. It was found that in Romania, Latvia, Lithuania, the United States and Greece the child's well-being is at the bottom of the list of countries (Lithuania is 27 out of 29 countries). According to the children's behavior and the risk field indicators Lithuania is at bottom of the list (29 out of 29 countries). According to Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) 2013/2014 data, number of Lithuania's 11-15 year old pupils, often suffering bullying, amounted to 29 percent and was the highest among the surveyed countries. According to European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) 2011 data, only 3 per cent of 15-16 years old Lithuanian pupils said never smoke, drink alcohol, use inhalants, tranquilizers and sleeping pills or illegal drugs. The average of countries included in study was 11 per cent, while in Iceland number of such pupils amounted even up to 40 per cent, in Norway -26 percent, in Sweden - 20 percent. The area of concern is the high number of teens, constantly consuming psychoactive substances. In 2011, about 29 percent of 15-16 year-old students said they smoked cigarettes 40 or more times, 25 percent used alcohol, 2 percent used illegal drugs. In particular, there is an increased share of at least once illegal drugs taking pupils (from 3 to 21 percent.). According to alarming data of Lithuanian Department of Statistics, the number of school-age children not attending school in 2014 amounted to 3 778 and in more than half of non-attendance cases of these pupils the reasons were of social, psychological, and similar nature. A juvenile delinquency is a complex social problem. In 2014, the number of minors (14-17 years), suspected of (charged with) criminal offenses, amounted to 3.9 percent. Children and youth suicides is a major problem in Lithuania with suicide rates among the highest in Europe. In 2012, the suicide rate (per 100 000 inhabitants) of youth of 15-19 years age group was 15.4 and it was the highest among the European Union countries (according to Eurostat). In summary, it can be said that the social risk factors are sufficiently important and they need to be dealt effectively by development of a safe school, which would ensure for the student complex support of all school community members to help students seek to be better and feel safe. After analysis of the social risk factors in schools, it can be seen that school children have the following social problems: inappropriate behavior during lessons and breaks, homework not performed, coming too late to the lessons, violence, criminal behavior, school absenteeism, alcohol consumption, smoking and so on.

According to (Valeckienė, 2007) study, school professionals list the following problems: children's mental health and personal development; inadequate self-esteem; problems in the family; inadequate and deviant behavior; children and adolescents adaptation problems; conflicts and psychological climate in the school. (Atutienė, 1997) refers to the social problems, some of which are associated with antisocial behavior, the others with the psychological-social problems. Antisocial behavior problems are as following: destructive behavior, negative reaction to the control, absenteism in lessons, running away from school, deliberate self-harm, verbal aggression, physical aggression, sexual disharmony, spiritual downfall, a positive approach to antisocial behavior. (Giedrienė, 1999) indicates that parents and educators are routinely exposed to a variety of child and adolescent behavior, communication disorder expressions. The most common complaints are: non-adaptive, situation inadequate communication with parents, teachers and peers, aggressive and

delinquent behavior, emotional disorders (anxiety, oppressive mood, fear, etc.), impaired learning motivation (unwillingness and inability to learn, for reasons not related to intelligence or specific cognitive disorders), common behavior norms ignored, relaxation tendencies seeking pleasure and new impressions in alcohol, drugs, orgies and so on. (Bulotaite, 1994) refers to these students' psychological problems: tensioned relationship with parents, communication problems with teachers, classmates, friends, self-doubt, sleep disorders, mood swings for no reason, tension. For many students it is uncomfortable school environment, they are worried about grades, have difficulties to overcome curriculum, feel the fear and tension. Reluctance to learn is a social phenomenon which causes the student's negative attitude towards science. The reluctance to learn at schools could be because of deficiencies of a lesson as a form of education, assessment by grades system problems, poor school or class microclimate, teachers and students relationship problems, lack of family and school cooperation (Civinskas et al., 2006). A review of the above-mentioned authors' research data suggests that children's social, psychological and educational problems are very much inter-related and they concern the family, the children themselves ill-treatment and communication features. Therefore, on the basis of indentified groups of social educational problems it can be distinguished following social pedagogical assistance activity fields: social pedagogical assistance organization; work in pupil groups; creating a safe environment; cooperation with the educators and institutions affecting education. From the analysis of social assistance for children it can be concluded that the main component of this assistance is an educational assistance in connection with the child's education and training and based on child's development and successful socialization. (Kvieskiene, 2005), by providing the social pedagogical assistance concept, emphasizes the purposefulness of social pedagogical activities, orientation towards certain groups and importance of professionals who provide social pedagogical assistance and seek to operate in practice in the field of child welfare. Valeckienė (2007) argues that the destination of social pedagogical assistance for children includes pedagogical, psychological and special pedagogical assistance. Pedagogical assistance is related to the child's education and training and based on its development and successful socialization. Psychological assistance is the assessment of student's personality and developmental problems and solving of them by psychological assistance providers in collaboration with the student's parents or guardians and teachers, advising them. Žemaitytė (2004), by reviewing social pedagogical assistance, indicates those areas where you can help: students' self-esteem building, improvement of academic achievement, social skills training and performance improvement. Merfeldaite (2005) describes the social pedagogical assistance concept as a purposeful, organized, time-limited prevention activities SOCIETY. INTEGRATION. EDUCATION Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference. Volume III, May 27<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016. 271-281

for children for solving specific social pedagogical problems. In conclusion, the assistance at school includes the following areas: security of children at school; social and legal analysis of the situation; children, teachers and parents' education; prevention of violence, crime, smoking, alcohol use and drug abuse; cooperation and institutions. In education governing documents assistance is defined as activity carried out by professionals, school staff and related to the students' social and educational needs, allowing to increase the child's educational abilities. The goal of social pedagogical assistance is to help to implement all students right to education by ensuring the efficient development of students and their learning. Social pedagogical assistance is provided according to the Law of Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter - LR) amending education law (2011), LR law amending child minimum and medium supervision law (2011), Government acts, the Minister of Education orders, other legislation and social pedagogical assistance arrangements (2011). In Social pedagogical assistance order (2011) and Law on Education (2011), social pedagogical assistance is defined as the activity of social pedagogues, class educators, teachers, administration and other staff related to meeting of children and students social educational needs, ensuring child's compulsory education, quality of education, increasing the effectiveness of education. In summary, it can be said that the social pedagogical assistance is purposefully organized activity intended to effectively address the problems of student according to student's needs, opportunities and abilities, and reduce the prevalence of those problems or completely prevent from their occurring. Social pedagogical assistance combines different professionals with various abilities, skills and knowledge, learners, their parents (guardians), peers, other persons involved in training (SI), and socialization process. An effective social pedagogical assistance organization is ensured by common work of different specialists, which requires a variety of information, knowledge and skills. One of the most important social pedagogical assistance provision conditions is a teamwork because this is the only way to coordinate the work of specialists, to optimize the set of social pedagogical assistance needs. Therefore, the goal of each school is to find means and ways to mobilize members of the organization energy and talents in order to achieve the main goal, which is to provide comprehensive child welfare training and socialization process. According to the Lithuanian Minister of Education Order of 11/04/2011 on approval of school children's welfare commission and its work organization procedure, in each educational institution assistance for students is organized and provided by the child welfare commission. School Child Welfare Commission is the connecting link between school staff, parents, local communities and wards to mobilize professionals for educational assistance, work with children for which the minimum and medium care measures are prescribed, and other statutory activities related to child

welfare. This commission has the task to create and maintain a safe and healthy school environment, fostering respectful relationships, namely to eliminate bullying and harmful habits, to prevent smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, apply prevention programs and to develop a healthy lifestyle skills. Each school has to choose its most urgent, priority activities. Child welfare commission is formed in each pre-school, school of general education and vocational training institution providing initial vocational training. Members of the Commission may be school managers, social pedagogues, psychologists, special pedagogues, health care professionals, class educators and teachers. The composition of the commission may include parents, the local community, ward representatives. The purpose of School Child Welfare Commission is to organize and coordinate preventive work, educational assistance, and create a safe and supportive environment for the child's education, adapted education programs for students with special educational needs and others. Commission competence is to examine the failure of the learning, reluctance or fear of pupils of going to school and taking concrete steps to help solve these problems, to analyze the infringements of rules of behavior, cases of violence, bullying, addiction, law violation cases and to assist teachers. Commission members help to solve a variety of teacher-child relationship problems, advise parents. In case of a dangerous situation in the school, members of the commission must organize crisis management activities and provide information to the school community and the relevant authorities.

### **Research methodology**

The research problem is the following: for providing social pedagogical assistance it is important to clarify the reasons sufficiently precisely by involving professionals and to offer appropriate assistance to the student and his family. An object of research is the social pedagogical assistance at school. Aim of research is to reveal the opportunities of providing of social pedagogic assistance and challenges in schools. Empirical research objectives: 1) to carry out an expert opinion survey to help to identify the social pedagogical assistance provision problems; 2) to suggest ways and means for further improvement of social pedagogical assistance in schools and how to make it appropriate and effective for students and their parents. For empirical investigation it was chosen a qualitative research method, namely, an expert opinion survey using structured questionnaire (interview). In scientific methodological literature a qualitative research is often described as naturalistic. They include long-term object (person, group, organization) study, which aims to understand a person's behavior and feelings, and physical, social and psychological environment of person (Bitinas et al., 2008). The study was carried out as a formal interview, i.

e. interview according to pre-formulated questions that all respondents were asked using the same procedure. This interview was chosen in order to find out the opinion of experts on the current situation and by comparing the answers to reveal the experts' views about the place of social pedagogical assistance in the activities of the school. The predefined profile consists of a group of interrelated questions to which experts need to answer. Problematic issues were the following: What are the most frequently encountered problems of the school? How do you assess the effectiveness of the work of professionals working? What can distinguish strengths and weaknesses of assistance provided for the student? What do you think what are the perspectives of social pedagogical assistance activities in modern school? Reply to the expert survey requires special expertise and experience which have the professionals of field to be investigated. During the study there were interviewed 7 experts from Lithuanian educational institutions.

## The research data analysis

The experts were asked to express their observations about the school community's specific characteristics and the role of social pedagogic assistance at school. Respondents stressed that for the school it is not typical to distinguish any exceptional students features that require special attention to students 'assistance: "school does not have a large number of students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or children's home", "our school has not recorded any suicide case", "not notice the students dropping out of the education system trends". Respondents note that after setting up the posts of specialists for assisting students and assistance organized in accordance with the general provisions of social pedagogical assistance at school: "the process of identifying of students' practical needs has become much more efficient", "we were able to quickly solve the problems arising", "microclimate at school became more favorable" "students' employment has improved". To sum up, the assistance at school gave a lot of positive things, especially teamwork, which encouraged the school's staff training in areas that are associated not only with the how training programs are set up, but also with the development of personality and of different skills. Administration representatives observe: "that for school the post of social pedagogue is very important", "with increasing workload and students continuing to confront the more complex problems, there is a need for various services provided by a psychologist", "after launched integration into mainstream schools of children with special needs, the established posts of a special pedagogue and speech therapist become important".

For organizing of social pedagogic assistance it is important: "meet the needs of the students ", "to solve all social pedagogical problems", "to create a

safe learning environment that will enhance the effectiveness of education". The aim was to find out the problems commonly faced by the students and what kind of assistance is provided: "conflicts with other students", "students' reluctance to learn", "other behavioral problems during the lessons", "running away from school is our problem", "astounding indifference of parents to pupils problems". However, as quite important respondents named also other problems: "increasing emotional abuse ,,, "still fighting bullying stemming from students", "noticing other pupils fatigue due severe learning to workloads", "physical abuse caused by other students", "conflicts with teachers ,smoking, alcohol consumption and exposure to toxic substances", "boring leisure", "noticing teacher indifference to the problems of the students".

Respondents were asked to assess the functions carried out by school's specialists: "functions performed by the members are not duplicated, although the same problem is not solved by one specialist", "every problem has different aspects, so for one employee would be too difficult to see things", "when there is a team work it is easier to fit to provide assistance quickly and effectively". Administration representatives especially highlighted several functions performed by social pedagogue: "representation of rights of the child ", "parents' representation", "relations with various state institutions, NGO support ". Respondents indicated that the methods of individual work with the child at school most actively are applied by a psychologist and a speech therapist. Other methods specialists choose themselves depending on the situation.

During the interview with representatives of the administration it has been shown that the school community expectations are justified by all team members: "special pedagogue helps to integrate students with special needs in the educational process", "helps teachers to prepare modified and adapted programs, use a variety of teaching methods that help to absorb content of the curriculum and encourage students to learn", "psychologist helps to effectively address the problems of students". The study found that the majority of respondents are satisfied with the provision of assistance to pupils by specialists: "last school year, none of the student left the educational system", "decreased significantly a number uncertified students", "not learning going to decline", "it remains, however, the ongoing problems as school non-attendance, nonattending lessons", "try to change behavior in the classroom", "ongoing constantly addiction prevention".

The informants noted that solving of these problems requires that the student himself would like to change, makes changes in their environment and that their close environment would like to support problem solving process. Interviews show that professionals have adequate opportunities to exercise effective assistance to students: all professionals "not missing essential working

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tools", "have private rooms", "are given the opportunity to improve their professional knowledge in various trainings", "encourage participation in seminars", "organize their work in accordance with the essence of the situation". Respondents were asked to indicate what kind of help the school community is missing: "the main problems are financial or related to them", "lack of time or heavy workload". There were listed the following difficulties: "a large paper work", "a significant number of problematic children", " the classes have more and more children with modified edcuation process", "many students have psychological and speech disorders problems", "teachers working in various jobs unrelated to direct his work", "psychological assistance is needed not only for students but also for teachers". Almost all the experts pointed out the cooperation with the students' parents problems: "students and their parents do not really want to go and seek help together, parents are not worried about their children", "lack of feedback from parents", "often parents do not want to change anything", "it is difficult to persuade parents come the school". For improving the assistance at school respondents suggest: "to organize more workshops for teachers on social pedagogical assistance issues", "lack of assistance from governmental organizations", " we are satisfied with the way the school is organized help for the student", "noticeable specialists initiative to change approach to students' problems they encounter", "obvious division of responsibility for different stages of the provision of assistance to learners", "school teachers collect information about their pupils, monitor changes in behavior in everyday school activities", "in case of a problem it can be referred to a school professionals who carry out an analysis of each case and provide appropriate assistance ".

While assistance is provided at schools, but respondents agree: "that does not always succeed in everything according to plan", "try to all help to solve their problems, which are themselves turning to us", "sometimes the most students, especially adolescents do not want to cooperate", "whole team is trying to cooperate with the student, and he even did not come to the meetings provided", "all of the aid is a mutual process".

#### Conclusions

Social pedagogical assistance at schools is based on the principles of cooperation, understanding of the student's situation and his problems, involving parents (guardians), teachers and other professionals to the process. Child welfare commission is the team of assistance professionals at school who have a duty to organize and coordinate preventive work, educational assistance, and create a safe and child-friendly education environment, adapt educational programs for pupils with special educational needs, examine the problems of

students and in case of a dangerous situation members must organize and coordinate crisis management measures and actions to ensure a safe environment for the student. The study revealed that an effectiveness of social pedagogical assistance organization is influenced by the students 'and parents' reluctance to deal with the problems together and to cooperate with the institutions in providing assistance to the child, increasing number of students having social adaptation problems. Properly organized social pedagogical assistance is effective, thereby decreasing number of uncertified pupils, number of students not going out from education system and number of students who not attend the lessons without reason, ensuring that integration of students with special needs is ongoing and safe environment for the student is being created.

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