

Interview at Frederikshavn Gymnasium

Participants in the interview
Ida, teacher and Erasmus coordinator
Anja, teacher and student guidance counselor
Henrijette, youth worker / social pedagogue and licensed in addiction treatment

What is your role in the life of the school?

A: Our role is focused on students completing their education

H: Student wellbeing mentor, I am the (ventil) so that students can vent with me and then go back to their academic studies – I often deal with our students with diagnoses or who are in the process of getting a diagnosis.

How many young people come to you? How often?

A: I am in charge of a handful of classes and out of each class at least 1/3 come for individual counseling with me. It is also different between different types of classes, and whether their social dynamics in the classroom. The demand is increasing very much, sometimes I don't feel like I have enough time to deal fully with each student. Sometimes there is a waiting list of 2-3 weeks in the student counseling team for students to see us.

H: I have 10 students that come to me regularly, and my employment is for 13 hours per week.

What type of problems do you meet the most?

A: Anxiety or tendencies to depression, which often relates back to relational struggles. Fx, we see a lot of grief or reactions to parents divorcing. Also being pressured academically, especially in the exam period.

H: My students most often have ADHD or autism, and they often come to me with relational issues (girlfriend/boyfriend at home or a chaotic home environment). A few also have eating disorders.

Is there a specific type of student that you see more?

H: 9 out of 10 of my students are female.

A: The question does not make sense on a larger scale, we cannot generalize about a specific type of student. We do often see that natural sciences classes are more functional than a music/humanities class. But sometimes they surprise us, and a mathematics/social studies class shows up a lot. We do see a pattern with our M-classes, which are typically language majors.

Why do you think there is so much more need of counseling now?

A: We didn't ask the same questions, back in the day people only used student counselors for choosing electives and further education, so very technical academic support.

H: I think our view on mental health as a society has changed – we are now very focused on the individual.

A: I do think that their problems and struggles are real, I do not think that they are being sensitive – the world is more complex in terms of what we expect from students (competitive, higher expectations, social media) – they never get to calm down.

H: Yes, they are always online, they are always within reach, they can never actually detach.

A: People in general used to spend more time reading and being in nature and building resiliency, which we need. Our primary schools are also more focused on emotions and emotional interpretation.

H: It has also become more acceptable to say out loud that you have a diagnosis or that you have suffered from sexual abuse or have parents that are alcoholics etc. Professionals are also more educated within the field.

What does a conversation or session with you look like?

H: I usually have an agenda in my head with reflections about our last conversation. We always start with a “weather status” where we start with how they are doing. It depends on my relation with each student, some are very closed off and other share very willingly. It is about being curious about them and being humble to them wanting to talk to me. I am very keen to listen to their needs, and not push my agenda.

A: They very often cry in student counseling – with us they often ask for the meeting, and we typically start by talking about their day-to-day and how school is going, and then we move into the harder topics, which is where we often see them “crack”. We have to be mindful that we are fixing their issues, but that we are there to listen and support, and sometimes help them navigate with parents.

H: I often experience that they never talk to their parents, they seem to hide their struggles because they do not want to upset their parents.

A: I try to tell them the parents’ perspective. We often get inquiries from parents, and so for about 20% of conversations with students parents actually participate, especially if it is about social wellbeing.

When do you ask someone else for help (for a case)?

A: I asked our administration on how to deal with parents in a specific case, because I wanted to know what options I had

H: I sometimes confer with an old colleague to get a new perspective

A: If it is very important for the student that I keep it a secret I usually make sure to do that, fx in the case of an abortion, but if I am worried about a student being in danger of self-harm or the like, I contact our administration.

H: It is also important for us to air our cases with colleagues, so that I don’t bring all of these conversations home and internalize them. It is also important to celebrate when we have successes in these mentorships, where we have had a great conversation with a student or where we manage a relationship well – we have started having lunch meeting to talk with either other (the psychologist, the mentor and the student counselors), which is great.