


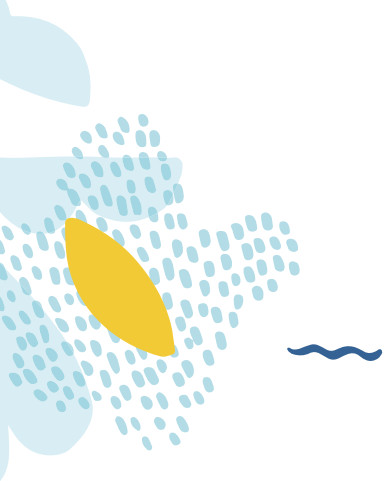
Ped Counsellors: Leaders of the Pack Working in the Shadows

Claire Moreau





"But what does a ped counsellor do?" "If you become a ped counsellor, is it because you don't want to teach anymore or don't know how?" These are a few questions that pedagogical counsellors (PCs) hear regularly. In reality, the profession is largely misunderstood, often little known and even less recognized. Regardless, there is a competency framework (Houle & Pratte, 2007) in which PCs are positioned as experts in pedagogical fields, in teacher professional development, in curriculum development and in ad hoc or planned interventions on various issues with institutional managers and teaching staff. However, the expert status of PCs must be reviewed in light of the challenges facing the profession today.



Currently facing an unprecedented labour shortage, colleges are struggling to fill positions and provide backup to support increasingly overworked in-service PCs. Once hired, PCs try to learn on the job. In the midst of familiarizing themselves with a new work environment, building professional relationships, and developing their professional identity, they must also (too often) learn a new profession for which there is no initial training. Colleges then rely on the more experienced PCs, if they have not already left, to support the novices. The great difficulty in finding replacements and the high turnover rate leave a gaping hole that prevents hard-won experiential knowledge from being adequately transmitted. In addition, given the number and diversity of files to be

appropriated and dealt with as soon as possible, PCs see their continuing education hours, whether credited or not, being reduced to a minimum.

Training takes time in a context where there is a lack of succession. It is therefore important to adjudicate (and not to negotiate) because there are many issues at stake: professional isolation, work overload, recruitment difficulties, difficulty in keeping up to date, and changes in management teams. A vicious circle is taking hold in the workplace. We need to break it. Now.

Two training spaces can and should be occupied: learning communities to respond to isolation and to offer *in situ* training and credited training to formalize the "why do it this way" and to

further clarify the role of college-level PCs. However, even 15 credits of training specifically designed for college PCs, to equip and support them and to lead them to formal certification, cannot, on its own, solve all the challenges if the community does not take into account the specificity of the PCs' role and does not sufficiently understand their importance in the dynamics of the college system to give them this precious training time.

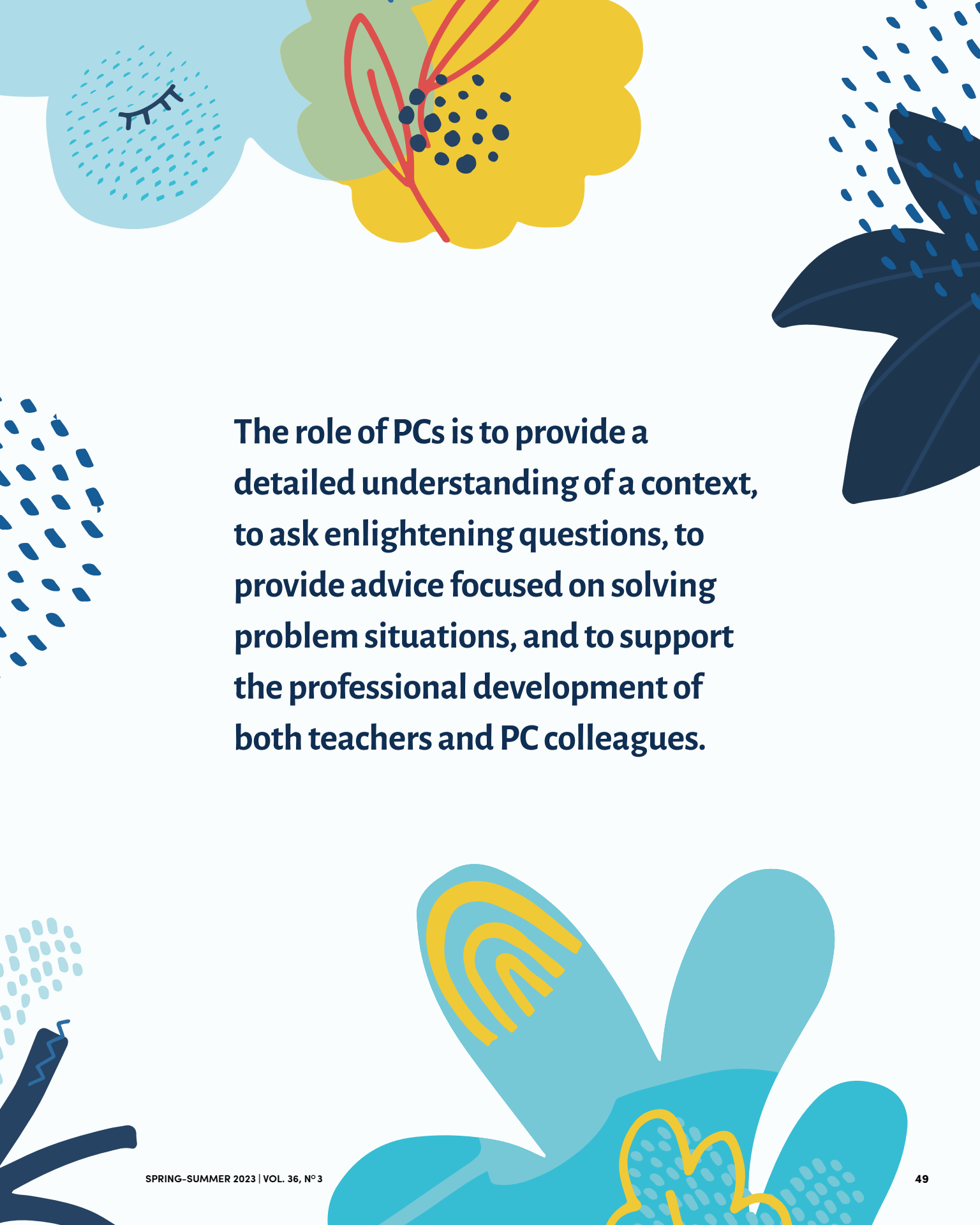
The role of PCs is to provide a detailed understanding of a context, to ask enlightening questions, to provide advice focused on the resolution of problem situations, and to support the professional development of teachers and PC colleagues. During the social and public health chaos of the last few years, PCs were on the front lines. Almost two years of producing materials, providing support and guidance, training and participating in more-than-strategic decision-making to keep institutions running. PCs responded to technopedagogical calls for help, even when it was neither their expertise nor their file; some did not count their overtime so that colleges could continue their educational and social mission. In light of these crucial actions repeated day after day, all PCs thought that their beneficial value would be recognized. Unfortunately, their support and guidance, their advisory role, their training, and their innovation in action quickly become invisible once the objective is reached.

With and for others

If we look at the situation differently: could it be that pedagogical counselling is the work of taking care of others? *Care* is about attention, solici-

tude, welcoming and helping people in vulnerable situations (Benelli & Modak, 2010). Of course, nurses, early childhood educators, and home service first come to mind. But could it be that PCs are also sometimes involved in care, which is a professional help relationship (Benelli & Modak, 2010)? Care work, which is routine and not very valued, seems to be taken for granted: it is not questioned, it is only noticed when it is not well done. Unfortunately, it is ill-recognized, if at all, and it is especially fragile in times of budget cuts (Benelli & Modak, 2010). Is this consistent with a certain perception of PC work? The vast majority of care work is also based on this (false) idea that it is "natural." We could discuss this idea of naturalness for a long time, but for now, let's just say that if "nature does it right," then why value something that is intrinsic to a profession, to a person who is naturally gifted to do it, and which, ultimately, does not require that much training? Moreover, nurses, who were important and recognized during the pandemic, had to stand up and say that they were not angels fallen from the sky, but recognized professionals, having undergone specific training and having a professional identity.





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The few studies that have examined the professional identity of PCs point to tensions between expectations and realities, and between the perceptions of the function by PCs, by the institution and by other stakeholders (Denouël, 2021; Daele, 2021). Always stuck between a rock and a hard place, they are sometimes the target of disproportionate expectations (Lachaine & Duchesne, 2019). For teachers, PCs embody change from above, whether policy or political decisions are concerned; for managers, PCs embody the special connection to the field, the community, and the people within it (Lachaine & Duchesne, 2019). For each PC, there are challenges to be met: appearing credible or always on the cutting edge of educational developments, popularizing information

when necessary, being an agent of pedagogical influence for their institution or a liaison between two worlds, training and running the complaints office or spreading the good news (Daele, 2021).

"What is a PC again?" A PC is a person at the service of the professional development of others, the curriculum development of institutions, and the ministry's Action Plan for Success in Higher Education; they are always keen to have a fine comprehension of institutional issues. What about time (and space) for their own professional development? It is urgent that the community stop to think about this issue and to take care of this essential profession in the college community. —



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