

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP COUNSELING IN STIMULATING
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG UNDERACHIEVERS
IN JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Issues to be Investigated	3
Definition of Terms	3
Academic Achievement	3
Group Counseling	3
Underachiever	3
Research Procedures	4
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	5
Characteristics of the Underachiever.	5
Causes of Underachievement.	6
Group Counseling as a Technique and Process	15
Effects of Group Counseling with the Underachiever.	20
3. DISCUSSION	32
Conclusions	32
Recommendations	34
Summary	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	40

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to several educators, there are three broad groups of underachievers: (1) chronic, (2) hidden, and (3) situational.

The chronic underachiever is defined as one who has been performing below the level of his ability. However, the hidden underachiever is difficult to diagnose since test scores are consistent and, whether low or high, fall below the level of the student's true ability. Generally, this type of below-par academic performance is detected by the highly observant and intuitive teacher whose judgment is often supported by a marked improvement after remedial procedures are implemented. The situational underachiever is one whose underachieving is of a temporary nature.

According to Fine (1967), the lowered academic performance is sometimes caused by a serious illness or the upset caused by the death of a parent. Still other reasons for lowered academic performance are: (1) the physical and psychological problems accompanying growth into adolescence, (2) the personal problems that develop when a child ~~attempts~~ to wean himself from over protective parents, and (3) many other similar kinds of situations, all may be productive of academic underachievement which may be relatively short in its duration. But the hurried teacher, or the principal

who does not take time to probe, or the counselor who fails to use all the tools at his disposal, can change academic underachievement from a short term to a life-long pattern.

In a recent study made by the Pennsylvania Advancement School (1971) on Group Counseling for Urban Schools, it was found that group counseling has been used extensively with adults for sometime. It has been proven an effective method in increasing sensitivity and opening up communication in a wide range of groups from executives to drug addicts.

Until recently little thought had been given to the use of group counseling with children. Group counseling can provide more resources for self-exploration and student learning than the traditional one-to-one counseling. As a result of group counseling, a student can share his perceptions, feelings, and problems with all members of the group, his peers as well as adults.

Group counseling provides the counselor with an additional skill in providing the best services for children. Therefore the counselor, by observing how his group functions, can provide valuable feedback to teachers on how to work with the students in his group.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of group counseling in stimulating academic

achievement among underachievers in junior and senior high school.

Issues to be Investigated

It was the purpose of this paper to investigate the following:

1. Characteristics of the underachiever
2. Causes of underachievement
3. Group counseling as a technique and process
4. Effects of group counseling with the under-achiever

Definition of Terms

Academic Achievement - Academic achievement is the performance of individuals in school subjects, usually measured by class grades or a general achievement test, as used in this paper.

Group Counseling - Group counseling is the process whereby a trained counselor, using the principles of group dynamics in group discussion, assists selected applicants to understand their problems better and to make choices through awareness (Hopke, 1968).

Underachiever - An underachiever is a pupil whose academic performance falls below his level of ability.

Research Procedures

After the problem was formulated, relevant literature was researched using as guides the Educational Index, Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Eric, Reader's Guide, card catalogue and Master's Reports. This literature was abstracted and organized to provide answers to the research problem.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Characteristics of the Underachiever

According to Bricklin and Bricklin (1967), an underachiever is a child whose day-to-day efficiency in school (and elsewhere) is much poorer than would be expected on the basis of his intelligence. However, many of these children are underachievers because of conflicting emotional attitudes. The underachieving child is found under various labels such as: disinterested, lazy, unmotivated, or uncooperative.

The underachiever, like anyone else, feels angry on many occasions. The child has a hard time relating his emotional states to his school work. Most children fail to see the connection between their deep-seated feelings and the quality of their school work. They cannot see how their feeling toward their parents, for instance, can have anything to do with the quality of work they do in school. However, most underachieving children are pleasant to be with in spite of their passive-aggressive personality.

Torrance (1962), in his study of the underachiever, found that traditional concepts of underachievement and overachievement were based on a comparison of achievement with an intelligence quotient score or with a score on a test of scholastic aptitude.

In Torrance's comparison of the two groups of students, the first group of students ranked in the upper twenty percent of their classes on the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test, but not in the upper twenty percent on the Minnesota Test of Creative Thinking. The other groups ranked in the upper twenty on the creative thinking tests, but averaged about twenty six IQ points lower than the first group. However, no differences were found in the measured achievement of these two groups of pupils as assessed by the Iowa Basic Skills Battery and the Gates Reading Test. According to traditional concepts, the first group would be labeled underachievers because of their high IQ scores, or the second would be labeled overachievers because of their lower IQ scores.

In other schools, even a child with reasonably good grades may be an underachiever. Consider the child who receives mostly C's and an occasional D on his report card. If this same child has superior potential intelligence, then the child would be an underachiever according to that particular system. A child who is not doing work commensurate with his potential capacity may be called an underachiever. On the other hand, consider the child who is receiving mainly D's. If this child has superior potential intellectual ability should be able to earn the A's and B's with maybe an occasional C or D. However, the label "underachiever" is only used when the underachievement has been chronic (at least a full term's

duration).

Shaw and Grubb (1958), Gowan (1955), and Kirk (1952) found underachievers to be hostile. Gowan (1955) also described them as indifferent to their responsibilities, unsociable, self-sufficient, and hard to reach; and Shaw and Grubb (1958) reported that others' demands on them for better quality of work tended to produce negative results.

Bricklin and Bricklin (1967:167-168) cited the following characteristics of achievers and underachievers:

1. Both the underachiever and achiever are overly concerned with achievement.
2. Both the achiever and underachiever are very much concerned with parental approval.
3. The parents of achievers as well as those of underachievers seem deeply involved and intensely concerned with achievement.
4. Both achievers and underachievers have parents who stress accomplishment.
 - (a) A critical difference seems to rest on the ability of the child to make a relatively conflict-free identification with his achievement-oriented parent(s). The underachiever fears a positive identification would be equivalent to the annihilation of his personality and identifies with the negative traits of his parents. For the underachiever, parental identification seems to hold more conflict and fear than for the achiever.
 - (b) The underachiever feels more compelled and commanded to achieve; the achiever works under less stress. The underachiever fears failure to a much greater extent than the achiever.

- (c) The underachiever seems to have a greater need for individual uniqueness than the achiever.
- 5. Both the achiever and the underachiever have a strict super-ego.
- 6. Both the achiever and underachiever are overly interested in pleasing their parents. Again the identification hold less threat to the achievers.
- 7. The achiever and underachiever both defensively overvalue intelligence.
- 8. The members of both groups often have an overly close relation with the parents.

B. Causes of Underachievement

According to Bricklin and Bricklin (1967:8), the causes of underachievement falls into four categories:

(1) there are physical causes, such as poor vision or hearing; (2) there are pedagogic or "teaching method" causes, such as when a child fails to learn because he is being taught poorly; (3) there are sociological causes, such as when a child turns from school work because his peers and neighbors devalue education; (4) there are emotional causes, where the child does poorly because of emotional conflicted attitudes.

Darley's (1971) survey on teachers concerning reasons for underachievers showed that teachers agreed that a student does not work hard enough; he is inclined to be lazy. Therefore his grades falls below average. Another student of better-than-average ability may appear to be underachieving simply because classroom work is his least inspiring activity.

A student may be emotionally confused or upset. He may withdraw from unpleasant realities by daydreaming,

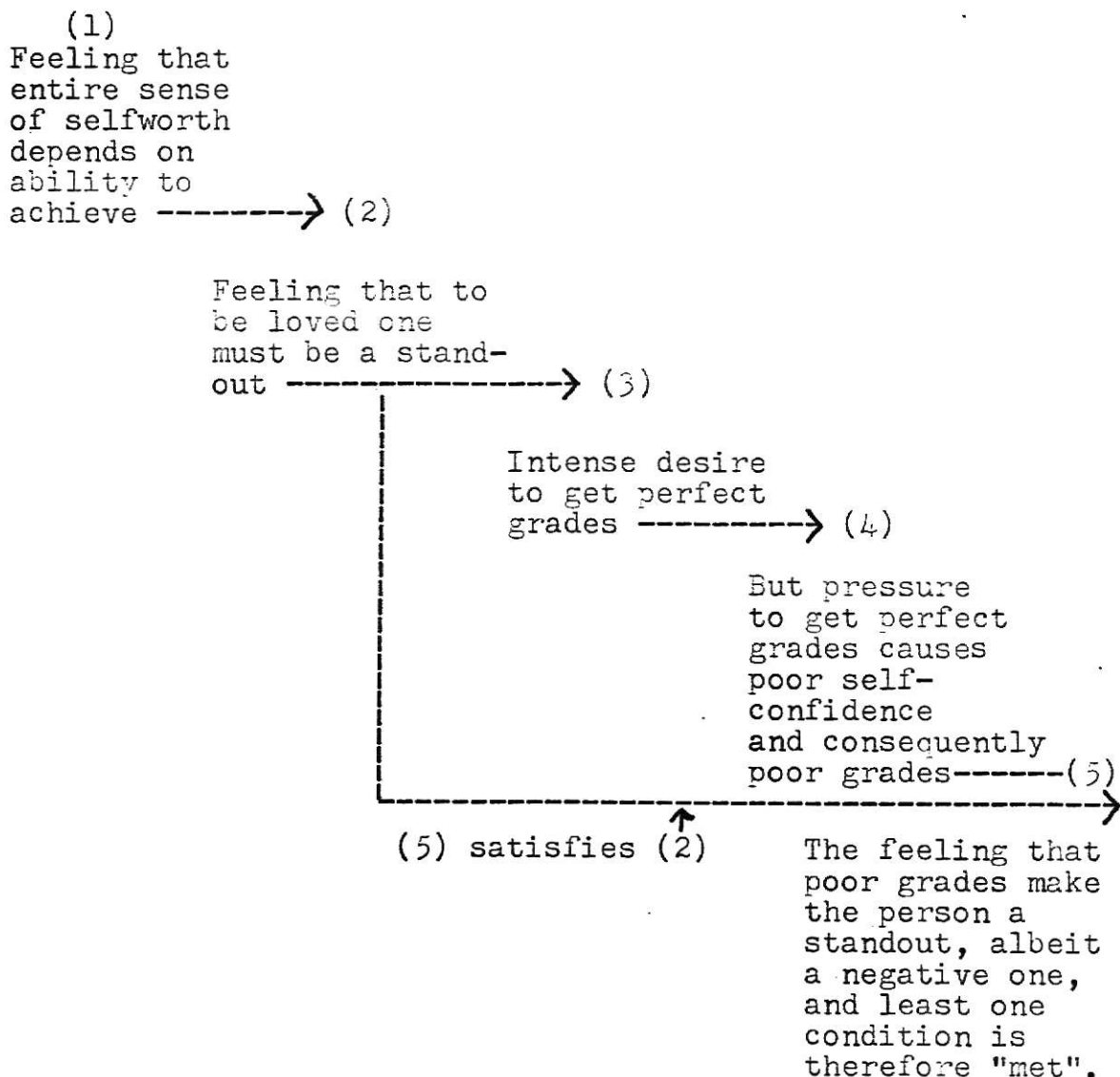
or he may seek attention by making trouble or bullying smaller children. He may come to school each morning directly from an exhausting emotional scene between maladjusted parents.

Cole (1963) confirmed that adolescents showed this same tendency to "slow down" a high grade marker by open or silent disapproval of his behavior. Most adolescents would rather get graded below their ability level than to be pointed out as "teacher's pet." This type of underachievement can only be combatted by making school work intrinsically more interesting and more fun.

One psychological cause of underachievement is the fear of being ordinary. Bricklin and Bricklin (1967:44) stated: "Some underachievers so fear to be ordinary they that come to like the fact that they do poor work in school. At least they are ordinary."

The following diagram shows that the underachiever starts out with fear of failure caused in large part by an irrational belief, namely, that his entire sense of self worth depends on his ability to achieve and accomplish perfectly. From the fear of being ordinary, he comes to feel he must be a standout. Naturally his first inclination is to be a standout by virtue of perfect grades. The very intensity of the need for perfect grades works against its own fulfillment. He is too tense and conflicted to get excellent grades. He is faced with the problem of being a standout by virtue of poor grades. That

part of his personality which strongly desires to be a standout will at least be satisfied. Getting poor grades at least makes him dissimilar from the majority of his friends. Fear in underachievers is summarized in the diagram below (Bricklin and Bricklin, 1967:44):



Lanning and others (1968), in summarizing the contributing factors, reported that underachievement of the gifted can be (1) the child's way of getting back at his parents for some perceived fault such as rejection, over-severe demands, or favoritism for a brother or sister; (2) the result of a low level of aspiration on the part of the parents for the child; and, (3) the result of poor self-concept originating in poor family relations.

Another factor may be that the underachiever does not feel accepted by his peer groups, if he makes good grades. The need to belong and be accepted by peers can be a very strong motivation. If a child's peers express strong disapproval of academic achievement, it may be difficult for him to resist the pressure even though adults are disapproving of academic failure. There is a strong possibility that the school itself is guilty of causing underachievement. According to Lanning and others (1968), there are three basic questions to be answered to make sure the school is not basically at fault:

1. Does the school curriculum make sense to the child? Does it challenge them?

Recent reports on teaching the disadvantaged child suggested that many children see no meaning or purpose in the academically oriented curriculum of the schools, which caters to the socio-economic middle class. It has also been found that the traditional "lockstep" curriculum often fails to challenge gifted underachievers.

2. Does the curriculum provide opportunities to individualize the content and method of teaching?

It has long been proclaimed that each child in the school is unique, and that we must consider his uniqueness in our teaching. New techniques in programming, self-instruction, grouping, problem solving, and discovery now make it possible for teachers to be more effective in their attempt to individualize instruction for all children, including underachievers.

3. Does the school provide diagnostic testing to see that each child's learning skills are adequate?

Diagnostic testing is important to determine if the underachievers are suffering from inadequacies in learning skills. Poor skills development can definitely contribute to underachievement.

Unless the teacher can with good conscience answer yes to these questions, he must consider it a strong possibility that the school itself is contributing to the problem of underachievement.

According to Driver (1958), in order to help the student whose achievement is below his general scholastic aptitude, the counselor has the special responsibility of trying to find causes of the underachievement. The cause may be lack of effort or persistence or it may be lack of interest or ambition. However, the counselor may help the student through a conference in which he is informed of his standing in achievement, as indicated by school

marks and standardized tests. Occasionally such a conference in itself is sufficient to bring about changes in the student's attitudes and efforts. Most often, the counselor will also have to encourage the development of better relations between the student and his teacher or arrange for a revision in the student's program of studies.

Humphreys and others (1967), reported that the counselor should not assume in all cases, or even in most cases where a student's achievement is notably below his scholastic aptitude, that his difficulty has only one cause such as lack of application or effort. Rather, the counselor should recognize that a student's underachievement is usually the result of a number of causes that are probably interrelated.

According to Broedel and others (1960), one of the significant factors in underachievement might well be the influence of significant others, such as parents, peers, and teachers, in the underachiever's environment. Failure of an investigator to describe and analyze the contemporary behavior of the subjects in interaction with their environment might lead to an incomplete picture of the variables influencing underachievement. Change in the direction of increased self and other acceptance as a result of learning experience of multiple counseling may have little or no effect upon their academic performance, because the attitudes and

expectations of parents and teachers alike may not allow for any changes in observable behavior. This problem was illustrated by Trow and others (1950), where they pointed out that students cannot modify behavior because of "inhibition blindness." The student was afraid to behave in unaccustomed way. This feeling can be relieved by use of a "cultural island." It is a group method whereby the instructor places the student in a situation where he will be influenced by his peers who are being affected by the same causes determining his inhibitions. Just as a "cultural island" is necessary for modification of one's attitudes, so must one be placed in a new behavior field where he can experiment with using these new attitudes. Assuming that by modifying the individual's attitudes, one can modify his behavior seems to imply that changes in one's self-concept necessarily make it possible for him to respond differently to his environment. However, by definition, interpersonal interaction involves action and reaction by both elements in a dyad. Therefore, it would seem that one could not be certain that significant change in underachievement behavior would be brought about by changes in self-concept without any changes in the nature of expectations directed toward underachievers by parents, peers, and teachers.

According to Barwick and Arbuckle (1962), and Morrow and Wilson (1961), underachievement has been ascribed to home environment, parental attitudes, and parent-child

relationship. It was also examined by Humel and Sprint-hall (1965), as a problem in "adaptive ego functioning." In another study conducted by Sears (1940), underachievement was related to failure and levels of aspiration. Pine and Boy (1965:368-371) described underachievement as "a way of displacing hostility, as a way of hitting back parents or others who have hurt or rejected." The many studies and range of findings make one definite point: as individuals as different, so are the causes for their lack of achievement.

Frankel (1960), and Barrett (1957), stated that whatever the causes, the underachiever is a person who needs help. His problem is generally not alleviated by the mere passing of time. It is not a phase through which one passes on the road to maturity, but a condition that becomes ever more pronounced. Shaw and others (1960), and Hummel and others (1965) advocated that a person who have a negative sense of worth and whose aspirations are blunted by a fatalistic outlook can hardly be described as a happy, full functioning member of society. In a period when concern for mental health is a major issue and maximization of intellectual resources is a prime educational objective, the underachiever is a looming spectre.

C. Group Counseling As A Technique and Process

In group counseling one counselor is involved in a relationship with a number of counselees at the same time.

Most authorities cited six as the optimum number, with a range from four to eight. Group counseling is usually concerned with developmental problems and situational concerns of members. Focus is upon the attitudes and emotions, the choices and values involved in interpersonal relationships. Bonney (1965:970) stated that the primary goal is:

The creation of an interpersonal helping climate (counseling atmosphere) which will allow each individual to develop insight into himself and to achieve healthier adjustment. The vehicle for accomplishing this goal is the discussion of personal concern at an effective level.

Group counseling is essentially preventive in nature, hoping to prevent problems from growing to the point where the individual needs special help to cope with them.

Cohn and others (1963:355-356) cited the following definitions:

Group counseling as we see it is a dynamic, interpersonal process through which individuals within the normal range of adjustment work within a peer group and with a professionally trained counselor, exploring problems and feelings in an attempt to modify their attitudes so that they are better able to deal with developmental problems.

These authors emphasized that group counseling is problem centered and feeling oriented. Reflection and clarification of feelings and modifications of attitudes are focal points. The major concern is with helping members deal with their problems and experiences, and emphasis is upon growth and adjustment rather than upon cure of deficit behavior.

Characteristic problems among adolescent groups include conflicts or emotional upheavals such as sibling rivalry, and independence - dependence. Educational - vocational concerns would be dealt with on a feeling level rather than on information - giving or instructional level.

Some have used the term "Multiple Counseling" rather than "Group Counseling", referring apparently to the fact that participants have a therapeutic effect upon one another. However, "Multiple Counseling" is increasingly being used to mean the presence of two or more counselors with counselees.

According to Deighton (1971), group counseling is a powerful approach to aiding disadvantaged adolescent and to cope with problems of everyday living. However, a trained, effective group counselor can provide an opportunity for youngsters to interact and explore new behaviors in a safe setting. In a group, members learn from one another, support one another, develop social skills, and provide the counselor with invaluable behavioral information about themselves which enables him to become more realistic and effective in his individual counseling sessions. In addition, the group itself has been demonstrated to be an important force in modifying the behavior of its members. In a group, disadvantaged youth can be helped to discuss their aspirations, fears, plans, self-perceptions, perceptions of others, developmental problems, and hopes in an atmosphere conducive to growth in self-understanding.

Ohlsen (1964:148) suggested that an adolescent benefits particularly from group counseling in that he learns:

(1) that his peers have problems too; (2) that, despite his faults, which his peers want to help him correct, they accept him; (3) that at least one adult, the counselor, can understand and accept him; (4) that the adolescent is capable of understanding, accepting, and helping his peers; (5) that he can trust others, and (6) that expressing his own real feelings about himself and others as well as about what he believes helps him to understand and accept himself.

Gersh (1967) revealed that the experienced counselor has recognized that study skills and habits have an important bearing on achievement. Students who know how to study and have good study habits are likely to succeed in their academic work and in other school adjustments. On the other hand, those who are deficient in study skills and habits make up a large proportion of school failures, particularly in college, where students are expected to be relatively mature and independent in study situations. Group guidance procedures can often be effective in teaching students how to study. The counselor can help each student to analyze his shortcomings and to plan and carry out a program to improve these abilities.

Before initiating group or individual study programs, Mahler and others (1961) suggested that the counselor or teacher should determine which students need specific help. All students should fill out a self-

inventory of study. The counselor can use a student's responses to the inventory items as a basis for an individualized program to improve study methods.

Comb and others (1963:470) cited five advantages of group counseling:

1. In dealing with several students simultaneously, it (group counseling) spreads the effect of the counselor and at the same time preserves his effectiveness.
2. It seems to be more readily accepted by students in that, since it occurs within a peer group, it is as "different" or as threatening to them as individual counseling.
3. It makes effective use of the social setting and peer identification.
4. The adult experienced by the students in group counseling is unique in that he is accepting for them and facilitates their experiences, rather than imposing an external judgment. He is a resource, a catalyst, and perhaps a new kind of adult.
5. Often, the establishment of counseling groups within the school may facilitate individual counseling and other new opportunities to meet the needs of the students.

Driver (1958:290) presented the following recommendations for group counseling:

1. With respect to underachievement, a school faculty should develop an organizational structure that uncovers those pupils whose arrested progress is primarily due to, or affected by social relationship problems.
2. These pupils should never be placed in remedial groups with pupils whose progress is being affected by some organic or physical short-coming, mental deficiency, or serious neurotic or psychotic difficulty.
3. Pupils whose progress is being affected by social relationship problems can be "restored"

to adequate classroom performance with relatively short periods of time if the right counseling is given at the right time.

4. The identification and diagnosis of those pupils whose progress is being affected primarily by social relationship problems must be done by skillful and competent personnel.
5. The small-group counselor should be a person who is trained in school counseling and guidance work.
6. The remedial teachers (for reading and mathematics) must be very skillful at locating and defining a child's academic difficulties; be able to prescribe instructional activities in accordance with his analysis.
7. The small-group counselor and the remedial teacher must be in close communication and working relationship.

Smith (1955) suggested that counselors must assume responsibility (1) to identify underlying problems contributing to the student's underachievement, (2) to provide opportunities for both student and parent to examine their basic attitudes toward learning, and (3) to help the student acquire more positive attitudes toward learning in light of newly discovered insights.

D. Effects of Group Counseling with the Underachiever

Academic failure is one of the major problems confronting counselors in schools. Not all failures are a result of lack of academic ability or aptitude. The discrepancy between potential and achievement identifies a group of students who are known as underachievers. Underachievement is both a problem to the individual, who may suffer from the sense of failure, and to society which

loses the full potential contributions of unestimated numbers of its members.

Krugman and Impellizzeri (1960) counseled seventy-five experimental underachievers and forty-two in a control population, coming from thirty-nine junior high schools. At the end of the counseling sessions students suggested that the close contact with an interested adult, an informal atmosphere, was helpful to many students. In several cases, the group counseling sessions provided possibilities for developing satisfactory adult youth relationships.

Baymur and Patterson (1960) tried to evaluate three methods of helping underachieving high school students. One group of underachievers consisted of children who were individually counseled; a second group received group counseling; and a third group was given a one-session motivational talk. The underachievers were told, in one session talk, that they had high ability and that they should try to work up their expectations. The fourth group was a control group that received no counseling at all. There seemed to be some tendency for the counseled student to have a higher grade point average than the non-counseled students, but there were only limited changes in the self-concept stemming from the short term counseling.

One of the most noticeable results was that the inspirational talk, or "get-in-there-and fight-fellows"

approach, seemed to be a complete failure. Baymur and Patterson (1960:38) pointed out that this is the same technique used by parents and teachers when they try to help the underachiever. They commented that "it may be better to leave underachievers alone, rather than pouring out their failure to them."

McDaniel and Johnson (1962) counseled gifted underachievers for twelve weeks. At the end of twelve weeks the students were asked to evaluate the sessions in terms of the project's personal worth to them. Both groups felt that the greatest value to them was realizing that they, as individuals, were not the only ones experiencing many problems involved with parent's understanding, friends, sibling, value systems, school work, and the meaning of life. All of the students reported less friction at home and fewer difficulties with siblings and greater ease at studying, and most of them felt that grades and citizenship marks were improving as a result of the counseling process.

Shaw (1961) initiated a family counseling technique for underachievers and their parents. The basis for this program was the hypotheses that basic problems of the underachiever are few. The basic problem of the underachiever was a breakdown of communications between himself and his parents, causing him to feel unworthy.

In the family counseling technique, the parents and the children are seen together by a counselor. For one half of the period, the child listened to the parents' side of the problem; then, for the other half of the session, the parent listened to the child expression of his difficulties.

In order to express feelings in the presence of his parents, the first two of the four sessions were arranged so that the student was with other students' parents and not with his own. Shaw (1961) used twelve groups of twelve parents each; eight of the group came from a tenth grade population and four from a seventh grade population. They underwent four therapeutic sessions of an hour and a half each, with both a mother and a father present during the sessions. It was found that students were able to talk freely in front of adults and with practice can do so with parents. Shaw (1961:276) concluded: "Lecturing at either parents or students failed to help, but setting a climate where both can learn from listening to each other makes the likelihood of learning greater."

Gowan (1955:248) has stated the following suggestions for counselors in working with gifted underachievers:

1. Make a survey of the percentage of underachievers in your school. If it runs much higher than fifteen percent there may be problems of morals, anti-social trends, or other factors in the school which school administrators should give special attention.
2. Since gifted underachievers are usually boys by a ratio of two to one, make an effort to assign counselors who are most capable of reaching them. A male counselor may often be more effective than a woman with such boys.

3. Give attention to building up the gifted underachiever in the area where he has a real chance of understanding success, whether this is athletic, music, a hobby, or an academic course. The real and enduring interest of some strong adult model figure with whom the young person can easily relate should be secured.
4. Give attention to the anxieties which plague boys at this period. These stresses may include economic dependency on a hostile home figure, ignorance about sex, worry about the draft, concern with how a mediocre record can be brought to college standards, anxiety over the rejecting attitudes of a fussy stick to the rules type of teacher, and many others.
5. Try to find membership roles for the gifted underachiever in clubs, activities, and students organizations, and student leadership. He should engage in responsibilities which will enlarge his social ability as much as possible.
6. Because this type of person may feel insecure and lack a real peer group, attempt group therapy with a number of gifted underachievers was made possible. This led to confidence and possible friendships among these people, leading ultimately to improved social adjustment. It also helped to establish stronger worthwhile personal attitudes.

According to Driver (1958), the underachieving individual accomplishment may be below the accepted standard for a class or other groups whose objectives are similar to his, or it may be below his general scholastic aptitude. The solution may require one or more of the following: treatment of the student's handicaps in tool subjects such as reading or arithmetic, adjustment in the curriculum to put the work within the range of the student's ability, assignment of the student to a special class or to a programmed instruction suited to his ability and level of maturity.

Although the treatment of the student's handicaps is mainly instructional, the counselor has important functions to perform for the underachievers. For example, the counselor should provide objective information about scholastic abilities of the student and the teacher involved, as well as the administrative officers, to understand the nature of student's difficulties and to decide on the best methods of solving them.

Broedel and others (1960) used multiple (group) counseling as a treatment method with underachieving adolescents. Their study illustrated well the difficulty that can ensue in treating academic underachievers. They applied an accepted therapeutic method to students with underachievement problems. The investigators apparently operated on the assumption that successful remediation would involve the modification of the antecedents of current behavior. They found significant changes in acceptance of self as well as increased acceptance of others by the gifted underachievers but they failed to provide evident " . . . that group counseling improved underachievers' academic performance in school."

Culbertson (1960), in summarizing a series of studies dealing with drop outs, discussed the major areas of neglect by most investigators studying drop-outs. Culbertson's conclusions were: (1) multiple factors are associated with drop-outs; (2) these factors were complex and interrelated; (3) research has not validly defined the

dynamics of these interrelationships. He later listed agreement by investigators as to two major reasons for drop-outs: (1) inadequate curriculum, and (2) unsatisfactory student-teacher relationships. Both of these reasons would be discovered and remediated by dealing with the dynamic of the contemporary behavior of the underachiever.

Sears and others (1957) gave substantial theoretical and experimental evidence to indicate that significant parental attitudes are transmitted to children through the identification process provided a reasonably healthy parent-child relationship exists.

Brookover and Patterson (1962), in a study designed to predict academic achievement used self-concepts of ability as an additional independent variable to IQ in a regression equation, found that they could approximately double the variance accounted for multiple R. However, an additional finding of their study was that substantial correlations existed between the student's self-concept of his general ability and the images that perceived each of four significant persons hold of his ability. It would appear that a fruitful effort towards remediation of underachievement in students centered around inadequate self-concepts of achievement might well be made in the direction of raising the expectations of parents.

Creange (1971), in his study reported that one of the most difficult challenges facing educators today, as in the past, is that posed by the underachiever. At all

levels of ability, in every type of program, the underachiever inevitably makes his presence known. Rare indeed was the classroom teacher who had not experienced the bright child "just going through the motions", the average student hovering around the failure level, and the slow learner who was not learning at all. To parents, teachers, administrators, and counselors, for different reasons the underachiever presents a perplexing situation. Regardless of the reasons, however, the problem remains the same, a child of measured ability who was not working to his capacity.

In a report by Kowitz and others (1951) and NEA (1958), it was stated that the underachiever is hardly unique. According to various studies done in this area, the percentage within a given population which might fall into this category varies from approximately ten to fifteen percent.

Calhoun (1956) reported that underachievers can be helped through extensive individual counseling since the responsibilities of the typical high school counselor, however preclude a program that allows for individual counseling on a long-term basis.

Berman (1954) suggested that group counseling was particularly appropriate for adolescents. So often they are made to feel that they are culprits, and that whatever the difficulty is they are the ones who should be expected to change their behavior. Most adolescents also believe that

few adults will listen to them. On the other hand, they believe that their peers can and want to understand them. They often use peers as models because they want to win peers' acceptance. Adolescents appreciate the opportunity to exchange ideas with peers in a permissive and accepting group. Inasmuch as they are struggling for independence from adults, they also prefer peers' assistance in solving their problems. Moreover, they are genuinely reassured when they discover that their peers have problems similar to their own. Ackerman (1955) reported that while members of a counseling group, adolescents not only come to feel better understood by others, but that they also learned to empathize with others and to increase their tolerance for others' idiosyncrasies.

Broedel and others (1960) treated four groups of underachieving ninth graders in small groups. All of the sessions were electrically recorded for the four groups; kinescopes were made of all sixteen sessions for each of the two groups. Growth of clients were evaluated in term of grades earned, scores on an achievement test battery, responses to a Picture Story Test, and observations made by clients, their parents, and the members of observer teams. They concluded that three of the four groups achieved significant growth. Positive changes in clients were noted in improved scores on the achievement test, increased acceptance of self- and others, and improved ability to relate to peers, siblings, and parents.

A general accepted principle is that successful counseling depends upon the counselee's motivation: he must recognize his need for counseling and be willing to invest himself in the process. Mezzano (1967) questioned whether a group member's investment in group counseling was related to change in his academic achievement.

"Investment" was defined as participation in group discussion and actions and attitudes that indicated a willingness to explore and communicate feelings. The investigator asked school counselors to identify the two most and two least "invested" students in their groups. He reported a significant relationship between degree of investment in group counseling and change in academic achievement. He suggested that counselees in groups who were spectators be removed from the group and be given individual counseling.

Although, group counseling is often applied as remediation for school underachievement, presumably, the attempt was made to resolve problems that interfered with educational performance. However, Broedel's (1959) comparison of the effects of group counseling with those of no counseling for underachieving gifted adolescents showed a significant difference between the two groups only with respect to "increase in self-acceptance."

Baymur and Patterson (1960) reported that under-achieving high school students who had a series of individual or group counseling sessions or a single

motivational counseling session showed an increase in Q-sort adjustment score and grade average significantly greater than that of controls.

Jensen (1958) held small group counseling sessions for primary school underachievers with the result that participants improved in achievement and ability to do independent school-work. He also reported a significant relationship between degree of investment in group counseling and change in academic achievement. He suggested that counselees in groups who are spectators be removed from the group and be given individual counseling.

Benson and Blocher (1967) sought to determine whether group counseling would help tenth graders cope more effectively with their role as students. Statistically significant changes in academic grades occurred; while not statistically significant, fewer disciplinary referrals were made; significant changes occurred in feelings of adequacy in coping with problems; and more counselees compared to controls remained in school.

Broedel (1959) sought to investigate methods by which the outcomes of group counseling could be evaluated and to ascertain the extent to which group counseling could improve the mental health and academic performance of gifted adolescent underachievers.

The evaluation of group counseling was made on the basis of data obtained from five sources: (1) School grades; (2) The California Achievement Test Battery; (3)

The Picture Story Test, a projective instrument assembled for the present study; (4) The Behavior Inventory, and instrument designed for the study which was used by a clinical observer and teacher-counselor who observed all group sessions by means of closed circuit television, the counselor of the groups, and parents to describe the behavior of experimental subjects; and (5) The Mooney Problem Check-List. The evaluative instruments were administered the week prior to the first counseling session and read-ministered one and sixteen weeks subsequent to the close of counseling.

Statistical analysis indicated that group counseling per se did not result in improved academic performance as measured by school grades. In fact, group counseling initially may have negatively influenced school grades. Although very little change in the mean performance of experimental subjects on the California Achievement Battery was observed between pre- and posttesting, significant gains were made by the group between the posttesting period and the follow-up testing.

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION

Conclusions

The investigator feels that group counseling may be an effective medium for improving the academic performance of underachievers. It provides a setting that frees underachievers from many of the normal restraints of the school and enable them to identify with and relate to other members of the group.

Many counselors have reported that individuals respond better in groups of peers than in individual counseling relationships. However, group counseling appears to develop members' insight in their problems and feelings and help them to arrive at some understanding of the causes of their concerns.

It appears that counseling for the underachiever varies primarily with respect to (1) early identification of the underachiever; (2) motivation and goals commensurate with their abilities; (3) effective group counseling; (4) provision for opportunities for the child to participate in a wide variety of activities where he has a real chance of understanding success, whether this is athletic, music, a hobby, or an academic course; and (5) assistance given to students in self-appraisal, self-conceptualization, and

self-confidence, as well as helping them cope with unusual pressures from parents, teachers, peers, and others.

It seems that underachieving junior and senior high school students have the same basic personal needs as achievers and have, in addition too, other intensified needs. Thus, group counseling sessions can provide a student with the opportunity of sharing his perceptions, feelings, problems, with all members of the group, his peers, as well as an adult.

Some causes of underachievement have been ascribed to home environment, parental attitudes, and parent-child relationship, and the influence of significant others, such as parents, peers, siblings, and teachers in the underachievers' environment. Researchers have found that the causes of underachievement fall into four categories: (1) physical causes, such as poor vision or hearing; (2) pedagogic or "teacher method" causes, such as when a child fails to learn because he is being taught poorly; (3) sociological causes, such as when a child turns from school work because his peers and neighbors devalue education; and (4) emotional causes, where the child does poorly because of emotional conflicted attitudes. Thus parents should provide an intellectual and accepting atmosphere in the home, concerning the child's abilities, needs, and interests. However, the child should like and admire these parents enough to identify with them and thereby imitate them.

Research reveals that effective group counseling

can provide (1) improved academic achievement; (2) increased acceptance of self and others; (3) improved citizenship marks; and (4) improved ability to relate to peers, siblings, and parents. It was also concluded that counseled underachieving junior and senior high school students, both group and individual counseling, have higher grade point averages than non-counseled students.

It is concluded that any attempt to reduce the problem of underachievement must be based upon an acceptance of the broad implications of individual differences. School personnel must recognize that there are readiness levels for all types of learning with a variety of differences demonstrated in each individual as well as between individuals.

Recommendations

On the basis of the review of literature and the results of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The counselor should identify underachieving students at an early age in order to assist them in clarifying their needs, especially in the areas of self-assessment, vocational information, human relations, and personal philosophy.

2. More counselors are needed in order to meet the needs of underachieving junior and senior high school students, in exploring life goals and values in terms of their own needs and interests. Perhaps too much of the

counselor's time is spent in program making and clerical chores that should be done in part by others.

3. There should be an increase in group counseling sessions with parents of underachieving junior and senior high school students since underachievement has been ascribed to home environment, parental attitudes, and parent-child relationship.

4. Since underachievers are usually boys by a ratio of two to one, a male counselor may often be more effective than a woman with such boys.

5. The counselor should give attention to building up the underachiever in the area where he has a real chance of understanding success, whether this is athletic, music, a hobby, or an academic course.

It appears that the most favorable development of the underachiever will depend upon (1) early identification; (2) motivation and goal commensurate with their abilities; (3) effective group counseling; and (4) opportunities to participate in a wide variety of activities.

Any attempt to reduce the problem of underachievement must be based upon an acceptance of the broad implications of individual differences. School personnel must recognize that there are readiness levels for all types of learning, with wide differences demonstrated in each individual as well as between individuals.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of group counseling in stimulating academic achievement among underachievers in junior and senior high school. Other issues investigated were: (1) characteristics of underachiever, (2) causes of underachievement, and (3) uses of group counseling as a technique and process.

The underachiever, like anyone else, indeed feels anger on many occasions. Most underachieving children are pleasant to be with in spite of their passive-aggressive personality. The child has a hard time relating his emotional states to his school work. Most children failed to see the connection between their deep-seated feelings and the quality of their school work. They cannot see how their feelings toward their parents, for instance, can have anything to do with the quality of the work they do in school. Because this type of person feels insecure with a lack of self-confidence and a lack of peer group, group counseling has been used for (1) securing self-confidence, (2) friendships, (3) improving self-confidence and social adjustment, and (4) academic achievement. It also helps to establish strong worthwhile personal attitudes.

Causes of underachievement fall into four categories: (1) physical causes, such as poor vision or hearing; (2) pedagogic or "teaching method" causes, such as when a child fails to learn because he is being taught poorly; (3)

sociological causes, such as when a child turns from school work because his peers and neighbors devalue education; and (4) emotional causes, where the child does poorly because of emotional conflicted attitudes.

Group counseling of underachievers does not differ greatly from counseling of other students. Thus, under-achievers share some important similarities with the best achievers.

Many counselors have reported that individuals respond better in a group of peers than in an individual counseling relationships. Thus group counseling appears to develop members' insight into their problems and feelings and help them to arrive at some understanding of the causes of their concern.

The responsibilities of the counselor are: (1) to convey feelings of acceptance, warmth, and understanding; (2) to be aware of his own needs and limitations and try not to let them interfere with the counseling situations; (3) to give full attention to the members and their interactions, allowing each member to express himself as he wishes; (4) to seek to communicate confidence in each member's ability to solve his problems; and (5) to help to define the working relationship, display consistency, and set an example in accepting and helping others.

Favorable home conditions, good educational opportunities, good health and stimulating environment were factors that favored the development of a child's full

potentialities. However, the parents must provide an intellectual and accepting atmosphere in the home, concerning the child's needs, abilities and interests. However, the child must like and admire these parents enough to identify with them and thereby imitate them.

Studies have indicated that one of the significant factors in underachievement appears to be the influence of significant others, such as parents, peers, and teachers in the underachievers' environment. It was also revealed that underachievement has been ascribed to home environment parental attitudes, and parent-child relationship, and conflicting emotional attitudes.

Other studies revealed that underachieving junior and senior high school students showed improved academic achievement as a result of group counseling. However, multiple counseling may have had little or no effect upon their academic performance, because the attitudes and expectations of parents and teachers prohibited change in observable behavior.

It was reported that underachievers, who received counseling, group or individual, had a tendency to have a higher grade point average than the non-counseled students. It was also revealed that grades and citizenship marks of underachievers were improved as a result of group counseling.

Another study revealed that group counseling sessions enabled underachieving students to show improved scores on achievement tests; to increase acceptance of self- and

others; and to improve their ability to relate to peers, siblings, and parents.

Several studies have indicated that underachievers have benefited from group counseling sessions. Underachievers felt that the greatest value to them was realizing that they as individuals, were not the only ones experiencing many problems involved with parents' understanding, peers, siblings, value system, school work and the meaning of life.

It appears that the most favorable development of the underachiever will depend upon (1) early identification; (2) motivation and goal commensurated with their abilities; (3) effective group counseling; and (4) opportunities to participate in a wide variety of activities.

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP COUNSELING IN STIMULATING
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG UNDERACHIEVERS
IN JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of group counseling in stimulating academic achievement among underachievers in junior and senior high school. Other issues investigated were: (1) characteristics of the underachiever, (2) causes of underachievement, and (3) uses of group counseling as a technique and process.

After the problem was formulated, relevant literature was researched using as guides the Educational Index, Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Eric, Reader's Guide, Card Catalogue, and Master's Reports. This literature was abstracted and organized to provide answers to the research problem.

Researchers have found that the causes of underachievement fall into four categories: (1) physical causes, such as poor vision or hearing; (2) pedagogic or "teaching method" causes, such as when a child fails to learn because he is being taught poorly; (3) sociological causes, such as when a child turns from school work because his peers and neighbors devalue education; and (4) emotional

causes, where the child does poorly because of emotional conflicted attitudes. Some studies have indicated that one of the significant factors in underachievement appears to be the influence of significant others, such as parents, peers, siblings, and teachers in the underachievers' environment.

One group of studies revealed that underachievers showed improved academic achievement as a result of group counseling. It was also reported that counseled under-achievers, group or individual, showed a tendency to have a higher grade point average than the non-counseled students. However, multiple counseling may have little or no effect upon underachievers' academic achievement, because the attitudes and expectations of parents and teachers prohibited change in observable behavior.

Several studies reported that underachieving junior and senior high school students showed improved scores on achievement tests; increased acceptance of self- and others; improved citizenship marks; and improved ability to relate to peers, siblings, and parents.

Other studies also revealed that underachieving junior and senior high school students showed academic achievement as a result of group counseling sessions. It was also reported that underachievers felt that the greatest value to them was realizing that they, as individuals, were not the only ones experiencing many problems involved with parents understanding, peers, siblings, value system, school

work, and the meaning of life.

It is concluded that the most favorable development of the underachiever will depend upon (1) early identification; (2) motivation and goal commensurated with their abilities; (3) effective group counseling; and (4) opportunities to participate in a wide variety of activities.