

A SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE PERTAINING TO GROUP
COUNSELING WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN
IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The spread of group counseling reflects the growing interest in new and more effective counseling methods. The social values promulgated in group counseling are in line with man's search for equality and cooperation. It teaches each member to deal with each other member as an equal. Group counseling implies more than assistance to individuals; it becomes a social force in a culture which is in a transitional stage from an authoritarian to a democratic society. Thus, it is more than counseling, more than education. It promotes a new social concept and fortifies definite cultural trends. Group counseling is a product of the democratic evolution and a tool to meet its needs. If these benefits accrue from adolescent and adult groups, perhaps the same advantages can be gained by working with groups in the elementary school. The notion that like benefits will be gained when group counseling is applied to children provided the reason for this study.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was (1) to gather and examine current information about group counseling with intermediate grade children in the elementary school, and

(2) to establish guidelines for effective group counseling with intermediate grade children.

The Scope of the Study

The scope of this study was limited to literature pertaining to group counseling with children between the ages of eight and twelve, enrolled in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The study considered group counseling within the school, and was not concerned with group counseling as employed by counselors, ministers, or agencies outside the school setting.

The Method of the Study

This report was primarily a library research project, using the facilities of Farrell Library at Kansas State University. It depended heavily on educational periodicals due to the newness of the area and the desire to include as many current ideas, practices, and evaluations as possible.

Definition and Differentiation of Terms

Group counseling. Combs, Cohn, Gibian, and Sniffen defined group counseling as:

. . . 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 they are better able to deal with developmental problems.¹

¹Charles F. Combes and others, "Group Counseling: An Orientation," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 42:355-356, April, 1963.

Dinkmeyer clarified this definition by stating "group counseling involves two or more people working by means of their interpersonal relationships to discover alternative solutions to problems. The relationship of the individuals within the group is the important factor."²

Group counseling differentiated from group guidance.

Group counseling and group guidance may be differentiated in terms of content and process.³ Group counseling tends to be directed toward improved personal adjustment which is more therapeutic in nature while group guidance deals with school-related topics and topics of general concern. While group counseling involves small groups of four to six in number, group guidance involves larger groups of fifteen or more. Group counseling is usually led by the counselor while group guidance more often is the function of the classroom teacher. Group counseling involves more flexible and less observable planning than group guidance.

The general objectives of group guidance are preventive, insofar as it provides students with assistance for normal everyday problems before they develop into crisis situations; and developmental, insofar as it helps children share and solve many of their common developmental

²Don C. Dinkmeyer (ed.), Guidance and Counseling in the Elementary School (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), p. 271.

³Ibid., p. 307.

problems. Group guidance focuses on those needs and interests which evolve when members of the group share in the planning of activities.

Carter V. Good defined group guidance as:

(1) those aspects of a guidance program that are carried on with groups rather than the individuals, for example, occupational information classes or group discussions; (2) the procedure of conferring with a group rather than an individual, used when the problems involved have elements common to the counselees present, so that discussion is helpful either in arriving at decisions or in preparing the way for later individual counseling; (3) sometimes used to refer to instruction of a group in matters relevant to personal or group problems that evolve from the guidance program.⁵

Group counseling differentiated from group therapy.

Hill and Luckey stated that group counseling may be differentiated from group therapy in the following ways:

1. Group therapy is deliberately aimed at changing the personal make-up of the participants. Group counseling is also concerned with change but it is what Tyler has called "minimum change" in personality. The group counseling process is concerned with helping the child make decisions and effect workable adjustments to the demands of their existence more than with helping them to effect basic changes in personal characteristics.
2. Group therapy is provided for children whose personal and emotional problems are deep-seated. Group counseling seeks to help children who have problems which are less intense and usually not of long standing. This, of course, is a relative distinction.
3. Group therapy, like individual therapeutic counseling, usually requires considerable time. Treatment of

⁴Ibid., p. 308.

⁵Carter V. Good, Dictionary of Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1959), p. 194.

disturbed children is almost always a lengthy affair. It is a matter of months and sometimes years before the process of emotional reeducation can be completed.

4. Group therapy always is provided because of essentially personal problems, disturbances of the emotions that may or may not have any direct connection with the school in which the child is enrolled. Group counseling is usually a school-initiated service, designed for the alleviation of children's problems which have a direct relation to the work of the school. This distinction, like the first three, is not a rigid one; but it emphasizes the fact that the school cannot, and should not, seek to provide treatment for all of the children's difficulties. The school's primary responsibility is to help the child find more effective means for coping with educational problems.⁶

Scheidlinger defined group therapy as: "a specific psychological process where carefully selected individuals with diagnosed personality disturbances are treated through the medium of a small group."⁷

Group counseling and group therapy differ little, if any in their common aim to assist the child to affect a better understanding of himself and of the common concerns he shares with other children. Whether the process be called counseling or therapy, this dual purpose is uppermost. It is a purpose which can be achieved irrespective of the maturity of the children involved if the approaches used are appropriate to their maturity, and respect the child as he is.

⁶George E. Hill and Eleanore B. Luckey, Guidance for Children in Elementary Schools (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), p. 262.

⁷Saul Scheidlinger, "Should Teachers Be Group Therapists?," Progressive Education, 32:72, May, 1955.

Multiple counseling. Multiple counseling uses a small group discussion activity conjunctive with individual counseling by the group leader.⁸ A group project can be called "multiple counseling" only if individual counseling accompanies group activity.

⁸Helen I. Driver, Multiple Counseling . . . A Small-Group Discussion Method for Personal Growth (Madison, Wisconsin: Monona Publications, 1954), p. 19.

CHAPTER II

PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL GROUP COUNSELING

Rationale of Group Counseling

The fact that human beings are social beings is basic to the rationale for group counseling.⁹ Each man's personal characteristics express his social movement and interaction with others. Children, as social beings, live and grow in groups. The family is the first group in which the child seeks to find his place. Later, he struggles to find his place in his peer group. Each child develops his own unique approach to integration within the group. The method he chooses is in keeping with his concept of himself and his interpretation of life. On this basis, he assumes a unique role within each of the groups to which he belongs.

The impact of the group on each child is readily observed whenever he participates within it. The use of the group to influence the child not only constitutes an effective way to teach but also an effective means of exerting corrective influences. Group techniques are more imperative in a democratic society where the authority of the adult has been replaced by the authority of the group. The group is

⁹Rudolph Dreikurs and Manford Sonstegard, "Rationale of Group Counseling," Guidance and Counseling in the Elementary School, ed. Don C. Dinkmeyer (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), p. 278.

the reality in which the child operates.

Group counseling's major therapeutic effect stems from the recognition that most problems are primarily social or interpersonal.¹⁰ The child must learn to interact effectively within the group. Group counseling satisfies this condition by providing direct experience in social interaction.

Group counseling provides the child an opportunity to reveal personal convictions and develop self-understanding. The child benefits from the corrective influences and encouragement of the group and is afforded the opportunities to try out new modes of behavior in an accepting environment. Members of the group come to understand their own behavior by observation of and identification with the behavior of others. The process also gives them the opportunity to consider alternative behavior and test reality.

Group counseling helps the child develop social interests. In the group situation he can show his concern for others and participate in the give and take of life. In his position as a member of the group, the child has the opportunity to see that other children may have problems similar to his own. In this way, he can lose the feeling of being different. Within the safety of this socially accepting group, the child can approach his problems at his own speed.

¹⁰Dinkmeyer, op. cit., p. 272.

Group counseling considerably enhances the corrective process. The child experiences feedback from his group peers regarding his behavior and is thus given an opportunity to develop new behavioral approaches to social problems.

Dreikus and Sonstegard¹¹ pointed out that the group provides a social situation with real meaning. Some children have never had an opportunity to test themselves in a real social situation. They may never have felt belonging in the family group and have never been assured of their place in the school group. In group counseling each member soon feels that he has a place, despite his shortcomings and deficiencies. Under the guidance of the counselor he learns how to contend with conflicts of ideas and interests which he encounters in the group and develops coping devices which he can use when he returns to the family and the classroom group. The problems of each child reveal themselves in a group, at home, or in school; therefore, they must be solved in a group. It is in group counseling that the youngster finds he is equal with others. In the counseling group, deficiencies lose their stigma. Paradoxically, deficiencies may be necessary qualifications for membership in a counseling group. Thus, in the group, deficiency does not lessen social status, but serves as a basis of equality for all.

¹¹Dreikus and Sonstegard, op. cit., p. 283.

Objectives of Group Counseling

The objectives of individual and group counseling are usually quite similar. Of course, individuals differ, and counseling aims thus differ. Yet, the general aims of counseling, be it group or individual, are very much the same. These aims are:

1. To help each child attain and maintain an awareness of self so that he can be responsible for himself.
2. To help each child confront threats to his being, and thus to open further the way for each child to increase his concern for others' well-being.
3. To help each child bring into full operation his unique potential in compatibility with his own life style and within the ethical limits of society.¹²

¹²Robert H. Byrne, The School Counselor (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), pp. 19-20.

CHAPTER III

GUIDELINES FOR GROUP FORMATION

Selection of Members

Authorities in the field suggested several ways of selecting group members. Hyman and Feder¹³ stated that a group could be selected by a team made up of teachers, administrators, and specialists who work in the school. They also suggested sending out or posting an announcement inviting children to join in "workshops in self understanding." For the elementary school a rewording of the invitation to a phrase closer to the children's vernacular, or an oral invitation and explanation by the counselor would be in order.

Combs, Cohn, Gibian, and Sniffen¹⁴ pointed out the importance of including the classroom teachers when attempting to identify pupils who might profit from group counseling. The opinions and reactions of the teachers are extremely valuable to the counselor in identifying the disruptive students, the gross underachievers, and those pupils who in their opinion would benefit from counseling. Likely

¹³Irwin Hyman and Bud Feder, "Instituting Group Counseling in the Public School," School Psychology, 46:401, April, 1968.

¹⁴Charles Combs and others, "Group Counseling: Applying the Technique," The School Counselor, 2:12, October, 1963.

candidates for group counseling may also be identified by studying school records. For instance, if the basic presenting problem were underachievement, candidates could be identified in terms of differences between measured capacity and achievement, or the teacher's recorded comments of classroom difficulty.

Ohlsen¹⁵ stated that the children who seemed to profit most from group counseling included shy children, children who had difficulty participating in class discussions, children who wanted to make friends, and children who had better ability than their performance indicated. Usually the last type needed help in accepting their ability before they could improve their performance.

When pupils ask to join a counseling group or are referred, individual interviews should be scheduled. The purposes of the individual interview are to answer any question a pupil might have about group counseling; to help the counselor get to know the child better in order to determine how he can best be helped and with whom he would best fit in a counseling group; to give the child a chance to discuss the problems with which he hopes to obtain assistance in the

¹⁵Merle Ohlsen, "Counseling Children in Groups," (Report from the Department of Guidance Services, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Illinois) available through Educational Resources Information Center, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Washington, D. C., Document # ED 010 890, 1966, p. 73.

group; and to assess his readiness for group counseling.¹⁶ The counselor often supplements the information obtained in the individual interview with a teacher or parent conference and by carefully examining the child's cumulative record.

If the counselor decides that a child can be helped by three sessions or less, he usually does not assign such a child to a counseling group because a group meets over a longer period of time. There will also possibly be occasions when the counselor elects to work with a child on an individual basis, and later decides that the child can best be helped in a group. The counselor must be flexible enough to utilize the method best suited for the child.

The principles prescribed by the above authorities are not upheld by William Glasser.¹⁷ In his book, Schools Without Failure, Glasser advocated including the entire class in a counseling group. He referred to the group sessions as class meetings. Glasser stated that the whole class should be included in nonjudgmental discussion about problems which are relevant to them.

¹⁶Merle Ohlsen, "Counseling Children in Groups," Guidance and Counseling in the Elementary School, ed. Don Dinkmeyer (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), p. 289.

¹⁷William Glasser, Schools Without Failure (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 122.

Composition of Group

Combs, Cohn, Gibian, and Sniffen stated that members of a group should have a common presenting problem, but they should also have different levels or degrees of the problem. They warned,

The counselor who tries to establish a group composed only of the most severe and recalcitrant persons who present a particular problem is almost assuredly foredoomed to disappointment. Members of the projected group should present mild as well as severe evidence of a particular problem.¹⁸

In a study of gifted underachievers, Ohlsen¹⁹ agreed in his findings that gifted underachievers could best be helped if they were placed in groups along with other children who could accept their own ability and were concerned about why they were not doing better. The gross underachievers seemed to need a role model to emulate.

The composition of a group will also be determined by the maturity of its members, and depend upon the identification of the members with each other and the counselor. Even after a group is organized, the counselor should feel free to take an unproductive member from the group or reassign anyone who does not seem to fit in the group. Ohlsen pointed out, "both Fiedler (1949) and Broedel, Ohlsen, Proff, and Southard (1960) found that even a single blocking client can

¹⁸Combs and others, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁹Ohlsen, loc. cit.

sometimes take such an anti-therapeutic stance that its members never establish a therapeutic climate."²⁰ For this reason, Ohlsen strongly suggested that the counselor consider not only a given child's readiness for counseling, but also his impact upon the other members of the group.

Ohlsen²¹ also reported that best results were obtained when, after describing group counseling to the children, more children volunteered than could be included in the next group to be begun. Under these circumstances, prospective group members tried hard to convince the counselor in the intake interview that they were ready for counseling and that they really had something to talk about in the group. As they tried to convince the counselor that they should be included in the next group, they increased their own readiness for counseling.

Size of Group

The size of the group depends upon several major factors: the age of the children, the maturity of the children, the level of adjustment they present, and the topic to be discussed.

Combs, Cohn, Gibian, and Sniffen²² suggested that elementary school children seem less capable of deferring

²⁰Ibid., p. 290.

²¹Ibid., p. 289.

²²Combs and others, loc. cit.

their actions and reactions than are older children. The elementary age child seemed to be neither as verbal nor as group oriented as the junior-high or secondary-school student. Therefore, a small group of four to six seemed to afford these younger children a better opportunity to interact with their peers and to gain social experience than they would find in a larger group. Dinkmeyer²³ agreed that optimum group size for effective elementary school counseling should not exceed five or six children.

As the group size increases, the number of its interactions seems to increase geometrically.²⁴ Beyond six members, the number of interactions definitely would hamper the progress of the group. In counseling with aggressive students, even a group of five or six would be too large. Two, three, or maybe four would be a more practical size.

Again, it should be noted that Glasser²⁵ advocated including an entire class, no matter what its size, in the class meeting.

Physical Setting

Group counseling in regular school buildings must, of necessity, use existing facilities. Group counseling does

²³Dinkmeyer, op. cit., p. 273.

²⁴Combs and others, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

²⁵Glasser, loc. cit.

not require a glorified setting and can easily be adapted to what is available. Combs, Cohn, Gibian, and Sniffen²⁶ successfully conducted group counseling sessions in regular classrooms, locker rooms, storerooms, cafeterias, stages of auditoriums, conference rooms, and small offices.

Ideally, the room where the group meets should be as plain as possible. The optimum room size for a group of about six students seems to be about 15' x 15', with a round or square table having a seating capacity of approximately ten people.²⁷

There should be enough room between members of the group so that, while they can readily communicate with all of their neighbors, they are not so close to others that they are tempted into diversionary activity. It is also highly desirable to have a soundproof or isolated room, so that any noise of the group will not disturb the rest of the school and vice versa.

Especially with pupils having academic difficulties it is important that there be as little distraction as possible. The room should be small enough that the individual cannot readily back away from the group or walk about the room in a manner that would be distracting. While groups are meeting, the central office should be requested to cut

²⁶Combs and others, op. cit., p. 14.

²⁷Ibid.

off the public address system and telephone calls to the room.

Glasser advocated the use of a closed circle within the classroom for group meetings. He stated: "Meetings should always be conducted with the teacher and all the students seated in a tight circle. This seating arrangement is necessary if good meetings are to occur."²⁸

Length of Session

In the elementary school, group counseling sessions seem most effective when they are of 35 to 45 minutes duration. Sessions lasting less than 30 to 35 minutes do not seem to allow a group to approach and develop topics. On the other hand, sessions that last longer than 45 minutes may result in boredom.²⁹

Ohlsen³⁰ stated that though intermediate grade children do have some ability to empathize with peers, they have difficulty maintaining a sustained interest in another's problem, and therefore should meet for a period of between 40 to 45 minutes instead of an hour. Glasser³¹ stated that the length of the meeting is less important than its regular occurrence and the pertinence of the problems discussed, but he suggested approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

²⁸Glasser, op. cit., p. 132.

²⁹Combs and others, loc. cit.

³⁰Ohlsen, op. cit., p. 291.

³¹Glasser, loc. cit.

CHAPTER IV

DYNAMICS OF GROUP PROCESS

Role of Leader

Since an understanding of personality dynamics and characteristics of the helping relationship are fundamental to group work, it is important that the leader of a group be experienced in individual counseling. In addition, group counseling requires certain unique skills of the counselor. In group counseling, while the counselor concentrates on understanding the speaker's feelings and assisting him to communicate, he must also observe how the comments of each member affect other members of the group. He must give members of the group the opportunity to test tentative solutions and to provide each other with feedback.³²

Hill and Luckey³³ stated that a perceptive counselor can become effective in group counseling if he observes a few basic demands upon him that are imposed by the fact that he is involved in group counseling:

1. The group leader needs to study the members of his group carefully, both as to their individual characteristics and as to their relations with each other. Counseling

³²Dinkmeyer, op. cit., p. 274.

³³Hill and Luckey, op. cit., p. 259.

sessions with individuals, conferences with teachers and parents, examination of permanent records, and observation in class and on the playground provide many insights useful to the counselor as the counseling group is getting under way.

2. In the group the counselor must establish, from the very beginning, a friendly and accepting climate. It is essential that members of the group feel free to express themselves, through actions or words, in ways which they feel are necessary to them. This may result in behaviors and expressions that are a bit shattering; but the leader should recognize these as, in part, methods used by children to test the counselor's sincerity and acceptance. Most counseling groups, if composed of children who have experienced real problems of school adjustment, will involve some such behaviors during the early sessions.

3. The leader must permit the group to follow its own plans through free exchange of ideas.

4. The counselor-leader must encourage and expedite anything that seems to be leading toward a group effort which may bind the group more firmly in a sense of common purpose.

5. The leader should feel free to share in group discussions. He is not a sideliners, a disinterested observer. At the same time, the leader will be careful not to dominate discussion. This is a tightrope that group counseling leaders find difficult to walk successfully.

6. The leader, in like fashion, must be involved in the process of arriving at decisions as to courses of action.

7. The counselor-leader must help the group evaluate the plans they make and the results of carrying out these plans. For example, a group concerned with lack of freedom of expression in their classrooms, may ask the principal to hold a teachers' meeting on this subject. The principal may be agreeable, but asks the pupils what responsibility they wish to carry in the conduct of this meeting. The children may well have not anticipated this reaction and go back to their group a bit worried about how they would handle a direct confrontation with the teaching staff. Here the leader is responsible for helping the pupils think through carefully several possible approaches, considering the alternatives which promise best to achieve their purposes.

8. The leader must help the group carry out the action involved in their decisions.

9. The leader must be patient and not expect results to come rapidly or in any spectacular fashion. Group counseling takes time. It cannot be rushed.

10. Often the impact of such group experiences upon children does not show up quickly. The counselor will sometimes fail to achieve much with a group. The counselor must, therefore, be adaptable, willing to analyze his failures and change his approaches with future groups.

Hill and Luckey³⁴ clarified the use of the term "leader" by stating that in group counseling it is necessary for the counselor to view leadership in terms of his own group membership, not in terms of his position as an authoritative adult. The counselor must, if the group is to be productive, submerge himself into the role of a coequal with the children. This is not easy for many counselors to achieve. Dinkmeyer³⁵ stated that group counseling requires a greater emotional stability on the part of the counselor than most other counseling work.

Ohlsen³⁶ pointed out that intermediate grade children need more structure and more carefully defined limits in the group counseling situation. Even when the children were carefully selected for a group, they had difficulty defining limits and enforcing them. They had to understand what was expected in group counseling and how this differed from what was expected in their classrooms.

Associated with the need for more structure, Ohlsen and Gazda³⁷ concluded that there seemed to be a need for more active participation on the counselor's part than would have been required in an adolescent or adult group. Younger

³⁴Ibid., p. 261.

³⁵Dinkmeyer, loc. cit.

³⁶Ohlsen, op. cit., p. 290.

³⁷Merle M. Ohlsen and George M. Gazda, "Counseling Underachieving Bright Pupils," Education, 86:81, October, 1961.

children did not seem to be able to detect and reach beyond mere talk to respond to significant statements by their fellow group members.

Ohlsen³⁸ sighted a study made by Ackerman (1955) in which Ackerman found that when a counselor failed to participate enough, especially in the early sessions, the members of the group became restless, were easily distracted, and often competed for the counselor's attention. Ackerman suggested more structuring by the counselor, more responses by the counselor to significant statements made by members of the group, and the use of role playing.

Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the group counseling situation should be a permissive one. There must be an openness to all of those experiences that can and should be explored within the framework of the educational setting. The students must experience the counselor as an accepting and facilitating adult. However, the counselor must also remember that he is operating within a school framework and that there are certain limits and restrictions by which the group must abide.

The limits observed must be those which are really necessary to the functioning of the group. Children find that the security of limits is very important. They are in

³⁸Ohlsen, op. cit., p. 291.

formative social periods and find security in the periodic restructuring of the group and its aims. This often enables them to abandon courses of action which they may have already begun to experience as largely unrewarding.

There are certain techniques which may help the group get off to a smooth start. A sample of an initial structuring might go as follows:

"While we are here in this group we are going to talk about anything that is of concern to us. We can say anything we want in any way that we want. Obviously, there are going to be some limits. We don't want to disrupt the rest of the school, and of course we can't destroy any of the equipment in this room, or hurt each other physically. But other than these limits, I want you to feel free to express yourselves in any way you like.

"What we say in this group is our business. Nothing we say here is to be told to anyone outside of the group by you or by me. No one else is going to know what goes on in our discussions; that is our business. I am here to work with you and perhaps help you to work through the problems, but together we may be able to work something out which will help us all. We must all work together and help each other; we must all try to understand each other.

"Okay, who would like to begin?"

It is important for the counselor to be openly warm and accepting, especially during the initial sessions. For

many children this will be their first experience of freedom and it may scare them. The counselor can encourage free expression nonverbally by looking and acting accepting. Intermediate grade children pick up attitudes and feelings very quickly. What might appear to be an objective attitude to an adult might be interpreted as rejection by a child.

Group Interaction

Dreikurs and Sonstegard³⁹ stated that group counseling must have structure. Without structure, the group interaction becomes confused and chaotic. They stated that the group counseling process consists of: (1) the establishment and maintenance of proper relationships; (2) an examination and understanding of the purpose of each group member's action or behavior; (3) revealing to each student the goals he is pursuing, called psychological disclosure; and (4) a reorientation and direction.

1. Developing an effective counseling relationship requires more than mere good relationships. With intermediate grade children the counselor has to take a great deal of initiative in providing direction for the group, especially in early sessions. An effective group counseling relationship is based on mutual acceptance and respect. Firmness and kindness are necessary in all group counseling.

2. The goals which the child is pursuing underlie his

³⁹Dreikurs and Sonstegard, op. cit., p. 284-285.

behavior. The method of discovering these goals can be applied in individual counseling as well as in a group counseling situation. However, the child's goals and movements become more obvious in the interaction within a group than between him and the counselor in individual sessions. Secondly, the counselor no longer depends exclusively on the student's verbal reports of his outside interactions with others. He sees him in action during the sessions. Often the child acts differently in a group than when alone with the counselor. Much of the veneer which the child uses as a cover-up may be stripped away in the group, and his true personality is openly revealed. Some children gain the courage to talk in the group situation and thus provide the counselor with a better understanding of what they are experiencing.

3. The group helps more effectively than individual counseling to gain insight and to redirect each child's antisocial goals. The group facilitates the process of insight. Many would not be able to learn about themselves but for the interaction taking place in the group. The child comes to see himself in others. Thus, the psychological disclosures and the interpretations during the group sessions are not only valuable for the child to whom they are directed, but to other members of the group who learn from these disclosures. In some instances, the child may say something like, "I remember when I used to think that way," or "I used to do that!"

The counselor can help the child examine his feelings. The counselor, together with the child, may describe a feeling which the child, until this time, had not been aware of. Members of the group along with the counselor can help clarify experiences together for a child at a moment of insight.

4. Reorientation provides an opportunity for the child to test new perceptions and attitudes. The group permits the child to be himself without fear of losing status. It breaks down some of the feelings of social isolation and encourages participation.

The statements and opinions of group members often carry more weight than anything the counselor tells a student. Group members accept each other more in redirec-tive efforts because they sense the equality that exists among them.

The insight that a counselor helps to develop in the group sessions is not always a matter for the individual alone. Very few, if any, human beings understand their own behavior. Yet the child can and will likely learn about human behavior in general. So children in groups learn something about themselves, but more about people. With the understanding of human nature, they begin to understand themselves. Group counseling is in reality a learning process. Dreikus and Sonstegard⁴⁰ pointed out that the

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 287.

research indicates that the group enhances learning and that counseling, as a learning process, is enhanced by the group.

The group leader uses a variety of tools and techniques, depending upon the situation. In some instances disclosure and confrontation can be used, such as "Is it possible . . . ?" This procedure may accelerate the individual's or the group's understanding of the dynamics of a given behavior.⁴¹

Within the group, members may often need to act out as well as talk out their problems. Role playing is effective whenever a child has difficulty describing a situation or conveying to others how he feels about it; or when he wants to obtain others' reactions to his way of meeting a situation; or when he feels he needs practice in meeting a situation.⁴² Puppets may also be used, especially when the group develops the skits to be portrayed by the puppets. Other play materials such as family dolls, finger paints, and sketching paper may be used with the younger children, but care must be taken so that the children do not get the idea that use of these materials is "kids stuff."

The control of the topics explored should be in the hands of the students. It should be their decision to change the subject of discussion and, if necessary, to

⁴¹Dinkmeyer, op. cit., p. 276.

⁴²Ohlsen, loc. cit.

reorganize the group. Combs, Cohn, Gibian, and Sniffen⁴³ found that members of the group seemed to have a built-in control for the depth of problems they were willing to explore. A topic was handled only when the group felt it could actually deal with and solve the problem. When the group or particular members felt beyond their depth or not yet prepared to deal with a subject, progress was effectively blocked by their lack of participation or by their changing of the subject. Restlessness, resistiveness, aggression, or hostility often appeared at that point.

The counselor should be aware that the members of the group will often test the sincerity of the counselor (who is, after all, a representative of the adult society) and the other members of the group.

As members of the group become able to express their pent-up feelings and needs within the safety of the group, they test and reorganize their perceptions of themselves and the world around them. Essentially, they are groping toward greater self-adequacy and greater self-acceptability. As they work through group problems, they will be able to see new relationships and will thus become more effective individuals.⁴⁴

Group counseling provides a unique opportunity for

⁴³Combs and others, op. cit., p. 16.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 17.

social learning. For the retiring child, it may work to dissolve the wall of social isolation which he has experienced. It may enable the aggressive child to experience the benefit of group interaction. The process is not easy and it is not without hard times and hurt feelings, but hopefully the group will also lend its support when the going gets rough. It may take a verbal slap-in-the-face to awaken a child to his unacceptable behavior.

Glasser advocated the development of social responsibility within the group.⁴⁵ He contended that responsibility is necessary to solve behavioral and educational problems. Glasser stated that the group discussion should always be directed toward solving the problem. The purpose of the discussion is to help those who have problems to find better ways to behave. It is very important that the solution should never include punishment or fault finding. Glasser stated that the orientation of the class meetings should always be conducted in a positive way toward solutions. When meetings are conducted in this way, the children learn to think in terms of a solution instead of the typical adult way of fault finding and punishment. Glasser contends that once an atmosphere of thinking, discussing, and problem solving is established, situations that ordinarily would cause serious disturbances in class can be handled effectively

⁴⁵Glasser, op. cit., p. 122.

in class. Children learn that their peers care about them. They learn to solve the problems in their world. Then it is easy to accept the teacher who says, "We have a problem; these two boys are fighting. At our next class-meeting time we are going to discuss the fight, but now would you boys stop fighting and wait for the meeting?" When they believe that even if they stop fighting they will be punished or expelled from the class, they often continue to fight because the alternatives offered aren't any better than fighting. Classroom meetings can serve to siphon off steam in the class by providing a better alternative. Often the problem is dissipated before the meeting, and the children agree it would be a waste of time to discuss it. The availability of the meeting allowed the children to use the normal ways children have to solve problems.⁴⁶

By treating the whole class as a unit, the same spirit of cooperation can arise as arises on athletic teams. By eliminating failure, by accepting each child's thinking, and by utilizing his mistakes as a basis for future problem solving situations, we have a way of approaching the child that supports him. The present system of accentuating his mistakes tears the child down and makes him unable or unwilling to think.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 131.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 143-144.

Another advantage of the class meetings is the confidence that a child gains when he states his opinion before a group. In life there are many opportunities to speak for oneself. The more we teach children to speak clearly and thoughtfully, the better we prepare them for life. When a child can speak satisfactorily for himself, he gains a confidence that is hard to shake.

It should be understood that many problems arise that are not readily solvable. At times the progress toward the solution of a certain problem seems to stop and the same problem is discussed over and over with little seeming to happen. Many times progress is unseen until a later time. Consistent thinking, discussing, and problem solving are the important thing.⁴⁸

People interested in behavior modification are also interested in using the group approach. G. Roy Mayer, Terrence M. Rohen, and A. Dan Whitley⁴⁹ are concerned with the applicability of a cognitive-behavioral approach to group counseling with elementary school children. They stated that group counseling appears to offer an excellent environment for the creation of dissonance through the aid of segments of social learning theory. In a group counseling

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 130.

⁴⁹G. Roy Mayer, Terrence M. Rohen, and A. Dan Whitley, "Group Counseling with Children: A Cognitive-Behavioral Approach," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 16:147, March, 1969.

setting more than one model is provided for each child to listen to, observe, and interact with. As a result of this interaction among members, contradictory items of information are likely to be introduced in the group. Furthermore, group counseling provides several potential sources of reinforcement that could be used to aid students in behavioral change. The above authors stated that group counseling could be a powerful instrument for assisting students in their developmental process. Mayer, Rohen, and Whitley⁵⁰ would probably follow similar guidelines for group formation, but be far more directive with group dynamics than would the aforementioned authors, with the possible exception of Glasser.

Duration

Combs, Cohn, Gibian, and Sniffen⁵¹ stated that it is very important to establish at the beginning of the series of counseling sessions a definite duration for the group counseling experience. This seemed to give structure to all members of the group so that they can more readily judge the available time remaining.

The timing of the start of a series of group counseling sessions is important. Members of the group seemed to be more able to tolerate interruptions in counseling after

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Combs and others, loc. cit.

the group had been well established rather than in the formative period, when consistency seemed to be very essential. Members often felt rejected if they experienced a break in the group pattern in the early periods. It is important that group sessions not be started shortly before Christmas or Easter vacations or semester breaks, for if the formation of the group is thus broken the members may return rather coldly to the group.

Combs, Cohn, Gibian, and Sniffen⁵² stated that group counseling seemed to be most effective on a one-period-a-week basis. Ohlsen and Gadza⁵³ recommended three meetings a week. Hyman and Fedder⁵⁴ stated that groups were usually scheduled once a week, but that the schedules were flexible and more frequent sessions were added when necessary. This writer would favor two or three meetings a week with intermediate grade children. They seem to need more than one meeting a week to maintain continuity. Glasser stated that the class should meet regularly and as long as the class is in existence, and meetings should be held at least once each day at a regular time.

The greatest gains from group counseling take time. The counselor should not be too concerned if there is a lack

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ohlsen, "Counseling Children in Groups," ERIC #ED 010 890.

⁵⁴Hyman and Feder, op. cit., p. 402.

of observable difference in behavior or attitude early in the counseling process. Counseling often seems more effective if the groups terminate after the designated period and reopen at a future date.⁵⁵ It may be that the group will decide to close prior to the originally decided length of time. The counselor should be aware of becoming so personally involved with the group that he feels that an expressed desire for closure is a rejection of himself. If the counselor is not threatened by the request for closure, the problem of closure will be a rather simple one.

If the counselor is informed by the group that the members feel they have discussed all they want to at this time, he should begin structuring for closure. He might say, for instance, "Okay, some of you seem to feel like stopping. Let's take a vote to decide. If as a group we decide to quit at this time, let's begin to taper off over the next few sessions. We'll review what we've discussed and what conclusions we've come to. If in the future we as a group or as individuals want to come back, we can resume this group or start a new one."

Combs, Cohn, Gibian, and Sniffen⁵⁵ found that it was often in the discussion of closing that many problems not previously discussed came up. This gave additional material

⁵⁵Combs and others, loc. cit.

⁵⁶Ibid.

for the tapering-off sessions. Two to five sessions were recommended for closing. However, they stressed that control of closing should be in the students' hands. If the group decides on four sessions for tapering off, and then later decides to stop after two sessions instead, this is their prerogative.

During the tapering-off sessions, the counselor should assist members of the group to summarize, clarify, and restate the problems that have been covered. He should help them discuss the various solutions they have previously explored. It is very important that all members of the group have the opportunity to express themselves on the various problems and their own unique solutions.

The tapering-off sessions are exceedingly important since some students may be deeply threatened by the idea of the closure of the group. They may find it quite difficult to give up the relations formed in the group.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Group counseling is a process involving two or more people working by means of their interpersonal relationships to discover alternative solutions to problems.

The fact that human beings are social beings is basic to the rationale for group counseling. Children live and grow in groups. The use of the group to influence the child is an effective means of exerting corrective influences. In his position as a group member, the child has the opportunity to see that other children may have problems similar to his own. In the counseling group, deficiencies lose their stigma and serve as a basis of equality for all.

Teachers, administrators, and school records should be consulted when selecting members for group counseling. Individual interviews should be scheduled with each child considered. Children who seemed to profit most from group counseling included shy children, children who had difficulty participating in class discussions, children who had better ability than their performance indicated, and children who wanted to make friends.

Members of a group should present mild as well as severe evidence of a particular problem. The composition of a group is determined by the maturity of its members, and

depends upon the identification of the members with each other and the counselor. Group size should be limited to five or six. Group counseling sessions seem most effective when they are 35 to 45 minutes long.

The counselor needs to take an active role in interpreting feelings and actions while still remaining in a group membership position.

The atmosphere of the group counseling situation should be a permissive one, with free expression encouraged. The dynamics of group interaction include: the establishment of proper relationships, the examination and understanding of the purpose of each group member's behavior, the revealing of goals to each student, and the process of reorientation.

As members of the group become able to express their feelings and needs within the safety of the group, they begin to test and reorganize their perceptions of themselves and the world around them.

William Glasser proposed the use of the class, led by the teacher, as a counseling group which daily spends time developing the social responsibility necessary to solve behavioral and educational problems within the class.

The establishment of duration at the beginning of the series of counseling sessions gives structure to the group so that the members can more readily judge the available time remaining. Intermediate grade children need more than one session a week.

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A SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE PERTAINING TO GROUP
COUNSELING WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN
IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES

by

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Group counseling is a process involving two or more people working by means of their interpersonal relationships to discover alternative solutions to problems.

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