

GROUP COUNSELING AND A PLAN FOR  
EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

by 632

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In a recent estimate by the American Personnel and Guidance Association, it was indicated that the schools presently need twice as many counselors as they now have.<sup>1</sup> This fact is a result of the post World War II "baby-boom" and the present "population explosion." To cope with this problem of increased counselor-counselee ratio, educational leaders have had several alternatives. They could have (1) tried to educate and mass-produce counselors, (2) had other, less qualified personnel do counseling work, or (3) used some other method whereby the present number of counselors could be used to satisfy the increased client load. Number one was out of the question since people are free to pick their own careers. Again supply wouldn't meet the demand. It was felt that number two would not provide the quality of experience needed to help the counselee. Therefore, point number three was chosen. Since group work with mental patients had met with a good deal of success, it was felt that group counseling with students would be the answer. It has been tried and tested in many school systems and is now widely accepted and used.

The major concern of the first sections of this paper was with the development and uses of group counseling. In this manner an understanding and feeling for the whole field of group counseling could be gleaned. The final section of the report dealt with

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<sup>1</sup>Merle M. Ohlsen, *Guidance Services in the Modern School* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964), p. 148.

a proposed plan for change of attitudes toward the guidance and educational program of a school system. It has been stated, "A guidance program is successful only when its attitudes permeate the entire school; its program encompasses the school; its purposes, scope and limitations are understood by all the school."<sup>2</sup> It was the purpose of the last section of this report to present a plan which would bring about this desired ideal.

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<sup>2</sup>B.B. Paulson, "Counselors are Catalysts," The American School Board Journal, 152: 38-9, February, 1966.

## II. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF GROUP COUNSELING

Group counseling had an erratic and shaky development. The first systematic use of the group concept in therapy may be traced to the organization of several patients into a group for the treatment of consumption.<sup>3</sup> Moreno<sup>4</sup> established a children's theater in Vienna in 1911 where he created "spontaneity plays" for children to "play out" problems. The first group therapy, using a lecture method for mental disorders, was described in the work of Lazell.<sup>5</sup> The actual medical use of group methods was sporadic until after World War II.<sup>6</sup> A complete bibliography presented by Kotov<sup>7</sup> in 1950, helped establish a summary of group counseling to that date.

The early non-medical applications of group therapy and counseling were recognized in special situations, especially in helping young delinquents. Rathbun<sup>8</sup> listed many school applications of group counseling and Froelich<sup>9</sup> began to isolate specific

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<sup>3</sup>J.H. Pratt, "The Home Sanitarium Treatment of Consumption," Johns Hopkins Hspt. Bull., 17, 140-144.

<sup>4</sup>J.L. Moreno, Psychodrama (New York: Beacon House, 1946).

<sup>5</sup>E.W. Lazell, "The Group Treatment of Dementia Praecox," Psychoanalytic Review, 8, 168-179.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Schilder, Psychotherapy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1938).

<sup>7</sup>B.A. Kotov, "A Bibliography for the Student of Therapy," Journal of Clinical Psy., 6: 77-91.

<sup>8</sup>Jesse E. Rathbun, "The Functions of Group Counseling," California Journal of Secondary Education, 17: 341-3, August, 1963.

<sup>9</sup>Clifford P. Froelich, "Must Counseling be Individual?" Educational and Psy. Measurement, 18: 681-689, February, 1965.

applications of group counseling with students and adults. The descriptions and research data concerning groups in counseling and therapy have multiplied by nearly geometric proportions from these early beginnings.

The first group work in the guidance program of schools, termed "Group guidance," usually meant large classes led by counselors or teachers unfamiliar with group dynamics or methods. The results were appalling. Both teachers and students rebelled and counselors dropped group work altogether. However, educational theory, the economic and social pressures of the years following World War II, and the pressures of increased enrollments of the 1960's forced guidance workers to review their positions.

Forces creating a new climate for groups included the writings of James Conant on the American high school<sup>10</sup> stressing the guidance needs; the National Defense Education Act of 1958, establishing guidance training institutes throughout the country; and increasing enrollments. Because of these factors, group counseling began to grow in importance in the public schools.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>James B. Conant, The American High School Today (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1959).

<sup>11</sup>Edward C. Glanz, Groups in Guidance (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1962), pp. 267-268.

### III. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

#### Group Centered

In this process emphasis is placed on the release of the group's potential capacities and the development of the members' independence and self-responsibility. For success these goals generally require: (1) an increase in participation, (2) a decrease in barriers to free communication within and among group members, (3) and a non-threatening climate and genuine acceptance.

Usually group-centered groups achieve five objectives reasonably well. These are: (1) skill in critical thinking, (2) ability in cooperation, (3) a degree of sensitivity to the feelings and needs of others, (4) self-reliance and responsibility to oneself and others, (5) understanding of self and of the group-centered process.<sup>12</sup>

The group leader is of prime importance in helping the group achieve these goals and objectives. The leader initiates the members into a permissive, accepting situation in which they take the lead in formulating goals and process. He conveys the confidence he has in the group members and in their ability and willingness to be responsible for themselves. The leader's acceptance of what is said, his reflection of the meaning of content, and his clarification of feeling are the most beneficial

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<sup>12</sup>C. Gratton Kemp, *Foundations of Group Counseling*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1970), pp. 92-99.

kinds of responses. This leader behavior assures the members that he is genuine, lowers the threat, and gives release to those members who are trying to understand themselves.

The theoretical basis of the group-centered approach is self theory. The basic assumption is that the self has a single goal, that of realizing itself in accordance with its make up. It expresses itself through a creative biological urge which motivates a continuous striving against great odds. The rationality of the organism is considered dependable and directed toward constructive development. This development takes place through differentiation and expansion, with the person becoming progressively capable in decision making and more autonomous thinking.<sup>13</sup>

### Authoritarian

Authoritarian technique has the longest tradition and is the most common type used in teaching, counseling and therapy. In this type of group setting the leader is the dominant and controlling figure. He outlines the purposes for the group and the methods to be used to obtain them. Through the use of evaluative comments, interpretations, and suggestions he directs the group. By using a system of rewards and punishments, he hopes to accomplish the group goals and further establish his leadership role. He operates on the assumption that his knowledge and decisions are superior to the group's and thus expects a high degree of conformity. A

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.



good authoritarian leader is forceful, energetic, a good organizer and planner, firm, kind, and successful in securing the cooperation of members.<sup>14</sup>

The authoritarian type group has its theoretical base in association theory in which attention is focused upon the relation between persons and things. In taking an external objective approach to behavior, this viewpoint sees the action of a group member as a function of the externally controlled stimulus. Change in behavior is the result of learning the interrelationships which exist in conditions outside the group member. These are learned from authority figures, such as a group leader. Evaluation rests in this authority figure, and group members try to conform to his expectations.<sup>15</sup>

### Democratic

In this type of group setting, the leader has the responsibility of helping establish a friendly, permissive atmosphere in which all may feel at ease and have the desire and self-confidence to participate as democratic members of the group. In the beginning the leader may find it desirable to present an overview of possibilities for the particular group and stimulate group discussions about them. The pooling of suggestions by group members as to personal problems, worries, and interests will usually also provide enough information for a good starting

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-87.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

point on common problems.<sup>16</sup> The leader and members handle their experiences cooperatively and decide on a working plan of action for the group. Generally, the leader and group try to formulate a plan which will assist each member in attaining better understanding of himself, other members, and the process in which he is involved. It is also hoped that more maturity and responsibility will be attained in the fostering of growth of the total person of the group member.<sup>17</sup>

The theoretical base of the democratic group is the field theory of learning. The total field is composed of persons and objects, so there are three possible relationships: (1) objects to objects, (2) persons to objects, (3) persons to persons. Although there are these three possibilities in the democratic group, the main emphasis is placed upon relations between persons. Since each group member is the center of his own field, he may understand others better through open interaction and communication. The unit of learning, then, is mainly the member facing his own situation, growing out of his needs as he sees them. The process of interaction, thus, is the most important single factor in the determination of the member's possibilities of becoming. As a result of these interactions, each group member is continually evaluating himself. Thus, his field is fluid and always in the process of emerging or becoming.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Margaret E. Bennett, *Guidance and Counseling in Groups*, (New York, : second edition; McGraw-Hill Inc., 1963). pp. 101-103.

<sup>17</sup>Kemp. op. cit. pp. 87-92.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

#### IV. USES OF GROUP COUNSELING IN AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING

The main plan used in this section of the report is to relate a few studies concerned with the topic area and in this manner show the utility of the group counseling process as used in the subject area being considered.

##### Underachievers

Mezzano<sup>19</sup> in a study with low-motivated high school students was concerned with two types of counseling, individual counseling and group counseling used in conjunction and group counseling alone, on self-concept, study habits, attitudes, and academic achievement. It was found that the groups that had been group counseled had a significantly higher grade point ten weeks after the study than did the control. Also, no significant difference was found between the two types of group counseling.

In a study by Dickenson and Truax<sup>20</sup> with college under-achievers, it was found that underachievers receiving group counseling showed greater positive academic change than a control group. Counseled students receiving high conditions of warmth, empathy, and therapist genuineness showed greater improvement academically than a control group or group receiving moderate

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<sup>19</sup>J. Mezzano, "Group Counseling with Low-Motivated High School Students; Comparative Effects of Two Uses of Counselor Time," Journal of Educational Research, 61: 222-4, January, 1968.

<sup>20</sup>W.A. Dickenson and C.B. Truax, "Group Counseling with College Underachievers," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 45: 243-7, November, 1966.

levels of empathy, warmth, and therapist genuineness.

In a third study conducted by Roth<sup>21</sup> with underachieving college students, group counseling was used with the experimental group while the control received no counseling whatsoever. The counseled group worked on the problem of poor study habits and related concerns. It was found that the group counseled experimental group increased their grade points significantly and that these changes held over time. The grade points of the control group didn't increase significantly. The difference was attributed to the group counseling experience.

Similar studies concerning underachieving junior high, senior high, and college students have been conducted by Gilbreath<sup>22</sup>, Brown<sup>23</sup>, and Tucker<sup>24</sup> to mention a few, which have shown similar results. From these findings it can be concluded with reasonable certainty that group counseling is frequently a successful method of helping the underachieving student deal with his academic problems.

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<sup>21</sup>R.M. Roth, "Non-Achievement Syndrome, Group Therapy, and Achievement Change," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 46: 393-8, December, 1967.

<sup>22</sup>S.H. Gilbreath, "Group Counseling, Dependence, and College Male Underachievement," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 14: 449-53, September, 1967.

<sup>23</sup>R.D. Brown, "Effects of Structured and Unstructured Group Counseling with High and Low Anxious College Underachievers," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 16: 209-14, May, 1969.

<sup>24</sup>B.J. Tucker, "Modifying Exasperating Attitudes Through Small Group Counseling," National Association of Women's Deans and Counselors Journal, 30: 187-9, Summer, 1967.

### Behavior Problems

As early as 1957 Caplan<sup>25</sup> did a study in which he compared the outcomes of group counseling for experimental and control groups of junior high school boys referred to as unruly, antisocial, unteachable, and incorrigible. Group counseling was conducted weekly for a semester. The Q Sort-Technique was used to measure self and ideal-self concepts at the beginning and end of the period. The data collected indicated increases in congruence of self and ideal-self sorts for the experimental but not for the control group. Positive changes in citizenship marks from teachers were also recorded for the experimental but not for the control group.

In a study by Finney and Dolsem<sup>26</sup> academically gifted but underachieving and behavior problem sophomore high school students were given four semesters of weekly group counseling and then compared with a control. As rated by their teachers, the counseled students were less resistive, less rebellious, and more cooperative in the classroom, and absent from school less. On the California Psychological Inventory, the counseled students showed a behavior highly identified with adults and adult values.

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<sup>25</sup> Stanley W. Caplan, "The Effect of Group Counseling on Junior High Boys' Concepts of Themselves in School," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 4: 124-8, Summer, 1957.

<sup>26</sup> B.C. Finney and E. Van Dalsem, "Group Counseling for Gifted Underachieving High School Students," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 16: 87-94, January, 1969.

It was concluded that group counseling had a behavioral changing effect in this study.

At this point it should be mentioned that not all studies have shown behavioral changes due to group counseling. A case in point concerns a study by R.M. Laxer<sup>27</sup> concerning junior high school problem students involved in an eight week group counseling program. Several personality and academic measures were observed before and after counseling for the counseled and control groups. No significant differences for any of the variables were found. However, Laxer felt that since several important variables such as counselor experience, techniques used, and length of the counseling experience weren't controlled to a great degree, his results may not have been valid. Therefore, as supported by these studies, group counseling seems to be effective to a large degree in the changing of attitudes and behavior of the problem student.

### Dropouts

Littlefield<sup>28</sup> in his work with dropouts, began an experimental vocational guidance project in Buffalo, New York. The project which operated for 27 months, included work with sixteen to eighteen year olds who were school failures and jobless. The program consisted of individual and group counseling of nearly 250

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<sup>27</sup>R.M. Laxer, "Counseling Small Groups of Behavior Problem Students in Junior High Schools," Journal of Counseling Psychology, 14: 454-7, Summer, 1967.

<sup>28</sup>P.G. Littlefield, "School Dropout Demonstration Project," Vocational Guidance Quarterly, 14: 183-6, Spring, 1966.

youths, mainly boys, with eight to twelve in a group. The aim of the groups was to provide a climate which would encourage the youths to feel free to express their problems and feelings. A guideline of topics was developed by the project founders to guide sessions, such as employer-employee relations, job seeking techniques, and employment application and interview techniques. Group techniques included the use of films, role-playing, tours, and guest speakers. Generally, the group sessions centered on the problems and concerns common to most adolescents.

This type of program provided the dropout with a constructive outlet with which to give vent to his pent up feelings and a therapeutic climate in which he could try out new roles and more mature behavior. With a renewed self-confidence and an enlightened interest in life, goals which were once thought to be out of reach came again into view. Expression of thoughts of returning to school, enlistment in the Armed Services, preparation for the Equivalency High School Diploma Examination obtainment of a job, or utilization of training opportunities began to occur as a result of this group counseling vocational project.

### Vocations

In a study by Sprague and Strong,<sup>29</sup> group counseling was used with high school students to assist them in choosing appropriate occupations. The specific goal of each group member

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<sup>29</sup>D.G. Sprague and D.J. Strong, "Vocational Choice Group Counseling," Journal of College Personnel, 11: 35-6, January, 1970.

focused on having the student improve his problem solving ability by working on his own and other member's cases and by having each student develop a case study on himself. The project used the case conference and small group approach. Students were given various interest inventories and from these developed their own cases, which they presented to the group. The group leader was a regular counselor and functioned as a facilitator for interpersonal interaction, as an expert in problem solving, and as a resource person on psychological testing as well as for problems related to vocational indecision.

The results showed that overall the students enjoyed the group experience and gave positive reactions. The personal case presentation method was viewed as definitely valuable. Over half of the group of students taking part made a definite vocational choice, while most of the rest were making progress in acquiring firm alternatives.

### Parent Counseling

The main goal or idea behind group counseling with parents is that the counselor doesn't have the time and can't do as good a job counseling with each and every student as other significant adults in the boy's or girl's environment, namely the parents and teachers.<sup>30</sup> By directly helping the parents in group counseling to become better adjusted adults, the children are indirectly

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<sup>30</sup>M.C. Shaw, "Role of Pupil Services with Significant Adults," National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 52: 76-87, January, 1968.



helped, since the parents provide guidance for the child's growth, development, and behavior. Also the child learns the nature of human relations from his parents.<sup>31</sup>

Several studies have been conducted which support these ideas and goals. Shaw<sup>32</sup> held group sessions with parents and teachers of elementary and high school students. The main concern of the elementary and junior high parent groups was their children's educational development, whereas the high school parents discussed the parental role in educational and vocational decision making. As measured by teacher and administrator ratings, the children of the participating parents overall showed positive changes in grades earned, absences, and administrative and guidance referrals.

In a second study by Gazda and Ohlsen<sup>33</sup> with parent groups, their basic approach was the repeated underscoring of the positive wherever it was identifiable in the parents. Another concept that was used was the concept of limitations; the idea that although people have shortcomings, this fact doesn't make their total being worthless. The basic premise behind this study was that by helping the parents to change, the children would hopefully be also through interaction with their parents. The results seemed to bear out this contention. As reported by the

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<sup>31</sup>J. Carlson, "Case Analysis: Parent Group Consultation," Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 4: 136-41, December 1969.

<sup>32</sup>Shaw, loc. cit.

<sup>33</sup>G.M. Gazda and M.M. Ohlsen, "Group Counseling: A Means of Parent Education," Adult Leadership, 14: 231-2, January, 1966.

counselees, a significant improvement developed in family relations. As rated by personality inventories, the children experienced increased congruency between their self and ideal-self perceptions, and showed improvement in behavior as evaluated by parents and teachers.

## V. A DESCRIPTION OF GROUP COUNSELING

The primary goal of group counseling is the creation of an interpersonal helping climate which allows each individual to develop insight into himself and to achieve a healthier personal adjustment.<sup>34</sup> This goal is felt to be desirable by most. However, there are those who feel that the only meaningful goals are those set by the group themselves.<sup>35</sup> This group feels that the way to establish goals is by having the members state the problems bothering them. This can be accomplished by having members write a brief resume of their problems and signing it with a pen name. This is then read to the group by a different member. It should be remembered that at the onset of a group situation, a feeling of trust has not yet been established, which is the reason for the written problem and pen name. Then, after the group reacts to the problem initially, the person with the problem may feel the atmosphere and climate to be a helping one in which he can explain his problem to a greater degree and have the group work with it more fully. In this manner either a unified group goal can be set or separate goals for each group member can be developed.

The group counselor usually tries to help develop within the group a psychological climate of safety in which freedom of

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<sup>34</sup>W.C. Bonney, "Pressures toward Conformity in Group Counseling," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 43: 970-3, June, 1965.

<sup>35</sup>W. Vordenberg, "Technique for Goal Setting in Group Work," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 48: 479-80, February, 1970.

expression and reduction of defenses gradually occur. In such a climate, many of the feelings of each member toward others and himself are expressed. A climate of mutual trust develops both positive and negative. Each member moves toward greater acceptance of his total being. With individuals less inhibited by defensive rigidity, the possibility of change in the desired directions becomes less threatening. Also, with this reduction in defensive rigidity, individuals can hear and learn from each other to a greater extent. A resultant development in feedback from one person to another occurs so that each individual learns how he appears to others and what impact he has in interpersonal relations. These learnings in the group tend to carry over into relations with peers, other students, and superiors. Thus, the experience in the group affects the counselee's total life experience, hopefully in a positive manner.<sup>36</sup>

Eventually, the group members will have talked about all the problems that they care to discuss. Should the group decide to break up before all members feel they can go on alone, it is up to those who need more help to decide what to do. They may seek help through individual counseling, join another group, or add members to their present group. In any case, the group terminates counseling whenever a majority of its members decide that the group has fulfilled their needs. However, members also are encouraged to consider the needs of those not ready to

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<sup>36</sup>C.R. Rogers, "Plan for Self-Directed Change in an Educational System," Educational Leadership, 24: 717-31, May, 1967.

terminate.<sup>37</sup>

### Role-Playing

Role-playing is a device for developing skills and insights in the realm of human relations by "acting out" situations which parallel real-life problems. It usually takes the form of psychodrama or sociodrama in a school setting. The basic difference between the two forms is that educational psychodrama concerns itself with the individual involvement of a person with other people, such as adolescent rebelliousness toward parental authority. Sociodrama deals with problems in a societal setting, such as undemocratic attitudes toward members of a minority group. These two group techniques of psychodrama and sociodrama can be applied at any age level in group counseling. The important considerations are that situations which are chosen for acting out bear a relationship to recognizable problems for the age group involved and that individuals are not subjected to traumatic experiences through situations that are beyond their depth and that cannot be utilized by the leader for wholesome learning within the group.<sup>38</sup>

Role-playing can be used effectively in group counseling when the counselee: (1) is having difficulty describing a situation or his feelings about it to others, (2) wants to know how others

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<sup>37</sup>Ohlsen, op. cit., pp. 178-9.

<sup>38</sup>Bennett, op. cit., pp. 110-11.

perceive him and his situation, (3) wants to know how others react to his proposed actions, (4) feels that he needs practice with social skills or that he needs practice in dealing with a difficult situation in order to develop the confidence to act.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ohlsen, op. cit., pp. 174-8.