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COUNSELOR USE OF GROUP TECHNIQUES IN SCHOOL SITUATIONS

INTRODUCTION

There is little question that group counseling is one of the "in" topics to be discussed at professional conferences of many disciplines. The literature on group counseling appears to be expanding in some type of geometric ratio. This writer would concur with the prevalent mood that group processes have opened up exciting new vistas, yet to be explored by many professional counselors. At the same time, there still exists a need for direction in this area. Today it is proposed that this paper will reflect the writer's thinking on the basic question, "How can group techniques be profitably employed by counselors in school settings?" Present indications are that group procedures have been successfully implemented in many different situations within an educational framework. A recent review of the literature by Shaw and Wursten (1965) confirms this conclusion.

> On the basis of present information, even allowing for bias of different kinds, group procedures appear to offer the school guidance worker at least a partial solution to increasing both his effectiveness and the size of the population he reaches . . . . (p. 32)

In the same article the authors noted a need for "more rigorous attempts to study such procedures (p. 32)." In this vein a note of caution is introduced. Not all groups are necessarily therapeutic, beneficial, problem-solving, or even useful. Our society also includes pressure groups, egocentric political clusters, criminal or delinquency motivated gangs. Surely goals, directions, competence of workers, need for definition and relationship to the broader educational spectrum are as essential for group counseling as individual counseling. Thus, the need for a statement of goals or biases in counseling before elaboration of group procedures in schools.

COUNSELING VALUES

One value of an early statement of biases is to enable those in the audience who violently disagree to "tune out" whatever else concerns a speaker. In spite of this obvious danger, the next few statements are value judgments about us and about education, within which counseling in general and group counseling in particular can operate.

The major purpose of all schools is to provide educational opportunity for pupils, or, more simply, instruction. Counseling services, then, are always auxiliary, and are designed to meet needs of students, parents, and teachers in a particular school. In my opinion, if teachers and pupils remained, education could continue even if all counselors, librarians, school social workers, principals, superintendents, and all other auxiliary and administrative personnel were fired tomorrow. This perspective, however unpopular, is needed to frame our services to educational needs of children. Group counseling in schools should be unique and different from group work in other social

agencies, even though many of the same skills and training are required by professional personnel. Counselor use of group procedures should meet a particular need within a particular school.

Counseling services, although auxiliary, are extremely important. Goals of counselors need not be unlike goals of all educators, and can be phrased generally in the following manner: "to maximize the educational potential of each child." It is the firm belief of the writer that counseling services should be available to all school children, at all grade levels, in all schools. Shakespeare some four hundred years ago indicated, "good counselors lack no clients," and this maxim holds true today. Success of counseling services can be gauged by how the service is utilized by pupils, teachers, administrators, and the community at large. In schools, group procedures should be used by counselors to meet common problems of children. There is no magic in "groupness"; these techniques will be appropriate in some situations, inappropriate in others. It must be recognized at the outset that group counseling is not a panacea which will assist all children who need specialized help.

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

One problem facing counselors attempting to study group counseling has been lack of uniformity in definition. Writers in this area have come forward from a variety of disciplines, and terms such as dynamics, processes, and sensitivity have seemed to have as many definitions as there have been writers in the area. This writer has become alarmed at the apparent trend toward more and more technical language with few ground rules as to the need for accurate communication. Some educators, at least in western Canada, have dismissed group counseling because of an inability to understand what we are trying to communicate. There is a need for counselors to avoid "intellectualizing" about group dynamics and to begin explaining how groups can help achieve important purposes in the lives of young people.

The purpose of this paper has not been to define terms used in group work. However, because of confusion regarding terminology in this area, the writer will attempt to clarify at least the broad headings under which we operate in this field.

The terms "group guidance," "group counseling," "multiple counseling," "group therapy," and "group psychotherapy" are often used interchangeably. They designate methods that can be differentiated, however, on the basis of such factors as objectives, general procedure, and worker's competency. While the artificial limiting of terms through confusing and too-fine distinctions should always be avoided, some differentiation of terms is desirable. When the group is large and the role of the worker is somewhat that of a teacher, group guidance may be a more appropriate term than group counseling. Because in the group counseling situation the participants have a therapeutic effect upon one another, some writers prefer the term multiple counseling to group counseling. To some others, however, it seems well to distinguish these two terms in education and psychology in much the same way that the terms multiple therapy and group therapy have long been differentiated in medicine and psychotherapy. When two or more practitioners or therapists are involved, the work is described as multiple therapy. When two or more clients or patients are involved, it is described as group therapy.

The terms "counseling" and "therapy" and "psychotherapy" are more

difficult to differentiate. In my opinion, group therapy rather than group counseling is needed when the clients are seriously disturbed or maladjusted and when the worker should be competent to function as a counseling or clinical psychologist, social group worker, or psychiatrist. When the counselees are "normal" individuals who seek help with their emotional problems, group counseling rather than group therapy is needed. It is generally agreed that group counseling is a more appropriate term than group therapy for describing the work as it is ordinarily provided in schools and colleges.

Group "structure" and "dynamics" have been most difficult for this writer to define. Perhaps this is because the terms are not nearly as complicated as the connotations which have become associated with them. Structure in groups refers to external surroundings or arrangements such as time, place, length of session, and the placing of chairs. Group dynamics refers to the "pattern of change within a group," or more simply, everything that happens which has not been covered by the definition of structure. It is hoped that what these definitions lack in sophistication is made up in clarity. It should also be stated that the writer's experience with group process or sensitivity training institutes has been limited, so it is difficult to comment on the value of this type of training for school counselors. A personal opinion would be that such an institute would not replace the necessity for theoretical orientation resulting in techniques appropriate to the group with which one is working. This type of training can probably best be handled by university practicums, although certainly the role of in-service training has not yet been fully explored in this area.

GROUP COUNSELING IN SCHOOLS

For many years social group workers have classified all groups into two major types, "growth-oriented" and "task-oriented." This concept may have particular meaning for the school counselor. Task- and growth-oriented groups are similar in many respects; they differ in terms of goals and purposes. The goal of the task-oriented group is to accomplish some task, and in an educational setting this might include career planning, remediation in a subject area, or family living information. Knowledge about individuals and group processes will be utilized by the skilled counselor, but within the framework set by the goals for the group. Without stretching the analogy, it is the opinion of the writer that counselors have been operating in these kinds of groups for many years. Educators have called this task-oriented group "group guidance."

The growth-oriented group is different in purpose, yet often similar in terms of what might happen in a particular session. The concern of the counselor in a growth-oriented group is for the growth and development of each participant. This is the purpose. Group projects will occur but evaluation must be based on the change in self-concept of each group member. Group counseling in schools can be compared with such a group in terms of purposes. Both group guidance and group counseling are valuable and necessary in schools; counselors should be aware of differences as well as similarities.

If a counselor is to function in either type of group, he must be knowledgeable in three major areas:

1. about children,
2. about the educational process,
3. about group dynamics.

In the school the counselor is the logical person to be knowledgeable in all three areas. Group procedures are also important in the classroom, but focus on the learning process is outside the scope of this paper. Often educational problems and solutions make groups in schools different from all others.

No one has yet found a single best way to approach group work. Each group develops differently, depending on the reason for its existence. The basis for formation of most school groups is a common problem faced by group members. The word "problem" itself is from the Greek, meaning "something thrown forward." For purposes of this paper such a broad definition is helpful. A common problem can mean "anticipated adjustments faced by all of us at certain stages of living." The counseling task can be either to prepare for an anticipated adjustment (group guidance), or to overcome maladjustment (group counseling) where problems have not been solved. Group procedures, like curriculum, must be geared to interests of a child or his parents at a particular level of development. Groups, to be real, must be focused on "real problems" or meaningful learnings at a stage in the life history of an individual. Questions involving makeup of the group in such terms as age or sex cannot be answered theoretically; they must be fielded in terms of needs of particular children at a particular stage of development. School counselors must be knowledgeable about developmental psychology and be skilled in relating concepts of maturation to practical situations.

Teachers, too, work with groups, and classroom climate can be laissez-faire, group-centred, democratic, authoritarian, or some combination of the above. In 1939 Lewin, Lippitt, and White found relationships between group atmosphere and leadership styles. The democratic atmosphere proved most satisfactory. Both teachers and counselors need practicum experience to know themselves, their techniques, and their defenses, thus better to utilize strengths. The primary rule for all counselors is to *be genuine*. This can be learned best through humanness, not technique. Many practitioners in this area feel the strength of human warmth is best typified in a "client-centered" approach to group counseling. Bennett (1963) made the following statement in her book on this subject:

> Client-centered or nondirective techniques are probably used more extensively in group counseling in educational institutions than any other techniques . . . . (Pp. 143-144)

POSITIVE GROUPS

In group counseling the basic objective is, as in individual counseling, to help the counselees gain release from feelings of frustration, anxiety, and guilt so that they may come to understand and accept their feelings and basic motivations. While the goals and methods in group counseling are similar to those in individual counseling, the two techniques are not the same. The group counselor must establish rapport and communication with more than one counselee and must help the counselees establish and maintain rapport with one another. The chief reason why the group counseling experience differs greatly from that of individual counseling is that the group members have a therapeutic effect upon one another. Also, the group situation discloses to a member the inadequacies in his interpersonal patterns and at the same time helps him develop new, more satisfying patterns by providing him a protected situation in which to try out new ways of interacting with others. (Much of the information in this section has been adapted from Warters, 1960.)

The counseling group should be relatively small (desirably from six to fifteen members) and should be a balanced group if this is at all feasible. By balanced it is implied that all of the members would not necessarily be either passive or aggressive. It is also desirable that the members should not differ greatly with respect to intelligence and education.

Group counseling helps the participants to socialize their attitudes and to become increasingly appreciative of satisfying human relations. Some members lose feelings of isolation as they feel accepted and understood in the group. The group's acceptance, understanding, and support help the members to move from such negative feelings toward others as dislike, competition, and envy to such feelings defined broadly as acceptance, identification, helpfulness, and cooperation, and at the same time help members to achieve a balance between dependency and independence.

Some individuals can be reached through group counseling who do not respond to individual counseling. However, not all persons can be helped through group counseling. Individual counseling should often accompany group counseling, while at times it should precede or replace it.

A chief function of the group counselor is to help the group establish a friendly atmosphere in which the members can explore problems and relationships. Through his calmness and consistency, impartial interest and objectivity, permissiveness and acceptance, confidence and respect, the leader helps the members to feel comfortable with one another and thereby helps to strengthen member-member relationships. He shows confidence in the group's capacity to direct itself by relinquishing to it such leadership responsibilities as information giving, clarifying, summarizing, analyzing, and interpreting.

The counselor does not dominate the group, but neither is he a passive onlooker. He participates actively by listening attentively, conveying understanding and acceptance, at times offering clarification or synthesis of the feelings expressed, by helping a member to understand his feelings, and by asking questions to help the group understand what a member is trying to express.

Group counseling methods, like those of individual counseling, may be grouped along a continuum between the extremes of directive or leader-centered counseling and non-directive or group-centered counseling. Most of the counseling offered in schools probably falls within the middle area. In directive counseling the emphasis is upon rational solution of problems. The counselor assumes major responsibility for appraising the problem situation, recommending solutions, and planning application of his suggestions. He plays a highly active role, directing the group's thinking by asking questions, giving information, diagnosing, interpreting, explaining, and advising.

Group-centered counseling is focused upon personality integration and growth rather than solution of particular problems. The emphasis is upon the emotional rather than the intellectual aspects of understanding. A chief function of the counselor is to help the group establish a relationship marked by acceptance, respect, freedom, and lack of pressure. The counselor encourages free expression by recognizing and accepting all expressions without displaying approval or disapproval. He does not attempt to force insight or to promote it directly. He avoids offering diagnoses, interpretations, and recommendations. He seeks to facilitate rather than to direct growth through the group experience.

The bias of the writer in this area is reflected by avoidance of the term "group leader" in this paper. It is my feeling that group methods in guidance must always be differentiated from teaching, both in contents and in processes by which the contents are handled. Goldman (1962) has summarized this point of view, and his thoughts on the matter are reproduced here.

> Too often guidance groups seem to differ from subject-matter classes only in their contents. This may be one of the major reasons for the failure of so many homeroom and other group guidance enterprises. It seems clear that group guidance, group counseling, and group therapy, as these terms are used here, require special training, including supervised practice. Even with such training, it seems doubtful that many classroom teachers will be able to make the transition from the processes which are appropriate to teaching to those which are more appropriate to guidance. Instead it would appear to be necessary that group guidance and group counseling be done only by those who do not concurrently have normal classroom teaching responsibilities. (p. 522)

PHASES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

A great deal of work has been done by various writers to attempt to isolate specific phases through which all groups move. The value of such an analysis becomes readily apparent if one utilizes the concept of differing subject matter, differing techniques, differing focus, dependent upon the phase of development the group is experiencing at any given point in time. The phases of group development outlined and defined below are those developed by Dr. Henry Maier at the University of Washington.

Phase of locating commonness. Group members' primary efforts are directed towards identifying each other in regard to commonness. That is, common locale of residence, common friends, incidence of common experiences, common ideas, interests, or objectives. Group members remain solitary individuals, while their joint activities essentially involve parallel activities related to common factors. Each group member is primarily concerned in meeting his own immediate interests.

Phase of creating exchange. Group members' primary efforts are centered around doing things together. That is, they will discuss together topics of common concern, play jointly or work next to each other on a single or on several projects. Their social togetherness is marked by doing, learning, and progressing through an exchange of ideas, support, and activities with the others. There is a give and take, but each group member exchanges the content of the discussion, work, or play, primarily in his own interest and for his own personal conception.

Phase of developing mutual identification. Group members' primary efforts are focused upon concerns of others and their own in discussion, work, or play. That is, group members will reflect together on topics or activities of common interest as they relate to each one differentially. They will discuss, work, and play in relationship to each member's capacity to contribute and to receive in each particular situation.

Phase of developing group identification. Group members' primary efforts are directed toward strengthening the overall purpose of the group as a whole. The members' interpersonal relationships to each other are directly influenced by the impact of such personal involvement upon the total group and vice versa. That is, group members will discuss, work, or play in a way that their activity justifies and furthers their being together within *their* group.

The implications of phases of group development for the counselor in a school group counseling situation are staggering. If the group is in the beginning phase then surely the major emphases of the group should be to assist the group members to get to know each other, i.e., foster cohesion; to establish a purpose for being together; and to facilitate a method of working together. As the group moves into other phases, the group's role is perceived differently by each of the members. Individuals no longer allude to problems but name them. The counselor may assist group members to focus and talk now about specific factors rather than vague areas. Testing situations which we all recognize from individual counseling are now not so prevalent as members do not have to "fight or flight" and the group can now get at problems or reasons for its existence. Everything that happens in the group can now become a work item as the counselor continually asks himself why a member would bring up a specific problem at a specific time. (This of course is based on the assumption that whatever a person does has a deeper and more important meaning.) As the group moves to the terminal phase of its development, the aims and goals again take on a different meaning and the counselor works toward separation. Old feelings of testing involved with the trauma of separation are again brought up for discussion and technique becomes important. Surely the idea of termination must be broached at least several times before the group abruptly comes to a halt. The group now moves to an equal status rather than a client-counselor relationship, the same as in individual counseling. Topics related to separation certainly would include the discussion of replacement activities, a summary of problems studied, and a motivational aspect to assist members to proceed in different directions.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The unique characteristics of a multiple counseling group as expressed by Froehlich and by Bennett have been briefly summarized by Wright (1959) in *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*. These follow:

a) All members of the group have a common problem.
b) All of the members identify with this common element which has real meaning for them.
c) The counselor functions as the leader of the group but does so from within the group.
d) A permissive atmosphere favors free expression.
e) Interactions and mutual help among members is essential, and members have the opportunity to evaluate pressures created by the group situation.
f) If group counseling is effective, *the participants* are stimulated by group standards to accomplish the goals of counseling suggested earlier, i.e., evaluation of self and opportunities, making wise choices, accepting responsibility, and initiating courses of action. (Pp. 552-553)

2. The exact techniques used by a counselor will depend upon the situation, his theoretical orientation, and the goals and purposes of the counseling group. In addition, it has been suggested that different techniques might be employed, depending on the phase of group development. Techniques such as *how to select group members* again must follow from the theoretical orien-

tation of the worker. Some factors are apparent, i.e., all group members must have a common problem. The question of open versus closed groups is one which has received a great deal of attention in the literature, and there are many research studies which deal with this question. Certainly the group counselor must be aware of the dangers of changing the group formation or adding or subtracting members, and when there is a request for more or fewer members from within the group, serious consideration must be given to how this would affect each individual. Knowledge of group processes does not relieve the counselor of the responsibiliity of attempting to understand and communicate with each individual within the group. Diagnosis is no less important in group work than it is in individual counseling relationships. The effect of simple structure such as size of table and place of meeting, are of vital importance in group settings, perhaps more so than in individual counseling. Basic considerations such as the worth and dignity of the individual, the confidentiality of information discussed in group gatherings, are no less important in group work than in individual counseling.

3. There are many ways in which growth of an individual through a group setting can be measured. One method of evaluation is by diagnosing the difficulties of the client before the group setting and attempting to measure growth at successive intervals in the group process. Tape recordings are a favorite method of going over group records to understand individual clients and to evaluate growth. The social work concept of process recording where the worker records the group session immediately as it is finished is also very valuable in assessing developments from group sessions to group session. In the schools an excellent evaluative technique would be to have a control group operating either with individual counseling or with no help from the counseling department. Finally, all evaluation should be within the frame of reference for group counseling within a school.

4. Through group counseling the individual can be assisted to know himself as well as gain in knowledge. Students in our schools do not operate within a vacuum, and your client's personality will in the final analysis be determined by how he functions with others. Human culture is group culture. Group experience or group process analysis is not, in my opinion, necessarily therapeutic. Therefore, a group counselor should be both a trained counselor and a person trained and knowledgeable in group processes. In group counseling the counselor makes the assumption, as does the self-theorist, that our clients are capable of positive and progressive behavior. In summary, a positive group, in my opinion, contains:

a) common purposes,

b) a democratic atmosphere to the extent of a permissive emotional climate,

c) small size in terms of membership,

d) responsibility on the part of each member,

e) no permanent group leaders but participants with answers,

f) a maximum emphasis on dynamics and a minimum emphasis on structure, and

g) a willingness on the part of the group members and group counselor to understand themselves as well as others.

Like all aspects of our profession, rewards for successful groups are meaningful. The following letter received by the writer is included, not because it is uncritical, but because it is genuine.

> Dear Sir:
>
> This is a short letter. I found the "class" very helpful, at first it did not have any affect on me but after them and a warning at the office I have given up truency. My only complaints are the letters that were sent to my parents and to my home room teacher. My home room teacher is not qualified nor capable of judging my character. The classes showed me that I could find help or answers to any problems that I might have at the councellors office. Before them I did not trust any school official. I can truethfully say that if I did not take part in the class I would not be in school now.
>
> (Signature)

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SERVICE D'ORIENTATION EN GROUPES

JOHN G. PATERSON

M. Paterson suggère que tous les étudiants peuvent réaliser leur potentiel intellectuel avec l'aide du groupe. Dans ce discours il décrit comment les techniques du travail en groupes aident l'étudiant.

Pour qu'un groupe puisse exercer une influence positive sur ses membres, il faut les conditions suivantes:

a) un but commun,

b) un climat démocratique, où l'enfant ose s'exprimer sans réserve,

c) un groupe pas nombreux,

d) un sens de responsabilité de la part de chaque membre,

e) pas de chef,

f) beaucoup d'insistance sur la dynamique et peu d'insistance sur la structure,

g) la bonne volonté des membres du groupe et du conseiller pour comprendre les idées de chaque personne.