

**THE EFFECT OF SMALL GROUP COUNSELING ON
CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL**

BY

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THE EFFECT OF SMALL GROUP COUNSELING
ON CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL

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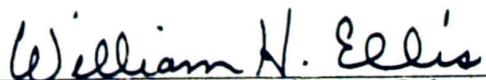
by
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Dotty Jane Arnold entitled "The Effect of Small Group Counseling on Children's Attitudes Toward School." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts, with a major in Psychology


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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The use of group methods with children, including group guidance activities and group counseling, has grown in recent years with the increased placement of counselors in the elementary schools. These group activities have involved counselors, teachers, parents, and other school personnel, and have focused on developmental as well as remedial counseling (Howard & Zempfer, 1972).

Dinkmeyer (1968) and Dreikurs and Sonstegard (1968) have provided theoretical support for the value of group counseling with elementary school children. Dinkmeyer and Caldwell (1970) state that group counseling provides the opportunity for each student to engage in an interpersonal process through which that student can work within a peer group to explore feelings, attitudes, values, and concerns. He cites the positive relationship between social and self development and intellectual development, and concludes that affective variables are related to academic success. Dreikurs (1968) believes that counseling provides the student with the unique opportunity to be free to decide and take on the consequences and responsibilities that go with one's choices. Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper (1976) feel that "In a discussion group, children form

attitudes and set values which may influence them for their whole life and may affect their behavior inside and outside of school" (p. 101).

William Glasser, in his book Schools Without Failure (1969), criticizes the schools for promoting failure, feelings of worthlessness and loneliness. Glasser advocates the use of classroom or group discussions as a means of overcoming these feelings of loneliness, promoting responsibility and decision-making, and helping children to find relevance in their learning. Through group discussions, he suggests that we can help to fulfill the critical needs of individuals, the need for love and respect, and promote success in school and life.

Other researchers have found that group counseling approaches have affected such adjustment variables as attitudes toward school, learning, peers, teachers, and self-esteem (Crow, 1971; Lodato, Sokoloff & Schwartz, 1964; Mann, 1968). Howard and Zempfer (1972) state that "Most educators agree on the importance of affective elements in the learning process" (p. 164). They support this contention by citing studies of Coopersmith (1959) which showed a positive correlation between self-concept and achievement, and a study by Glick (1969) which reported a correlation between achievement and high peer acceptance. Much of the research investigating the effect of group procedures on achievement also reported

significant positive changes in social and personal adjustment (Crider, 1966; Kagan & Moss, 1962; Ohlsen & Gazda, 1965).

The state of Florida conducted a survey to determine if the addition of counselors in the schools had an impact on the student's self-concepts and attitudes. The results of a three year study showed that students who were seen five times or more made average grades and had a positive increase in their self-concept and attitudes toward school as measured by the Self-Observation Scales and School Sentiment Index (Peck & Jackson, 1976).

Broedel, Ohlsen, Proff and Southard (1960) studied the effect of group counseling with ninth grade underachievers. Subjects for their study were ranked in the top ten percent of the class as determined by the California Test of Mental Maturity, but fell into the ninth decile or below in terms of grade point average. The subjects were divided into four groups: two experimental groups who received counseling and two control groups which received no counseling. The California Test Battery was used as a measure of academic achievement; the Picture Story Test was employed to measure acceptance of self; and the Behavior Inventory was used as an assessment of student's behavior. After eight weeks of counseling, the researchers found that both of the experimental (counseling) groups increased in acceptance of self and others, improved in their ability

to relate to peers, siblings, and parents, and showed significant growth in achievement test scores over the control groups.

Millaway (1975) conducted a study at the North Texas State University using group counseling as an intervention technique for first and second grade failures. The study had two purposes: the first purpose was to determine if those students who fail have different self-concepts and attitudes toward school than those who have not failed; the second purpose was to determine if group counseling could enhance the self-concept and attitudes of these students. Through the use of the Primary Self-Concept Inventory, the School Attitude Test, and the Behavior Rating Form, it was found that students who had failed had lower self-concepts and poorer attitudes toward school than those who did not fail. The failure students were then divided into two groups: students who had experienced failure and received group counseling, and students who had experienced failure and received no counseling. Students who were not experiencing failure served as a control group. After eight weeks, the results of the study revealed that the non-counseled failures showed an even more negative attitude toward school, while those failures who were in the counseling groups exhibited a more positive attitude toward school. No differences were noted in the non-counseled, non-failure group.

Play therapy has also been shown to be effective when used in group counseling to improve the sociometric status of second grade children. Thombs and Muro (1973) had students rate those peers with whom they would most like to play. Subjects for the study were then chosen from among the social isolates and divided into five experimental groups. Two groups received verbal counseling, two groups received play counseling, and one group served as the control. The researchers found that the children who received group counseling made greater gains in sociometric status in comparison to the control group. Those subjects engaged in play therapy showed a greater positive change in social position than those who received verbal counseling.

Thompson (1973) studied the effectiveness of two different approaches of counseling with sixth grade pupils. Students serving as subjects for the study were divided into four experimental groups. Subjects in the first group were given a form of developmental group counseling and allowed to explore their feelings; the second group was counseled with a human developmental program in which the counselor provided cues for counseling; the third was designated as a placebo group and discussed career development; and the fourth group served as a control group. Using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, Thompson found that the two counseling treatments did not make a

difference in self-concept or interpersonal relations, but that those taking part in both counseling groups showed greater positive gains in self-concepts, interpersonal relationships, and school adjustment than those who received either the placebo treatment or served as a control.

Gibbons and Lee (1972) found that group counseling improved the behavior and feelings about self with disruptive students from lower-middle to middle class schools. After several weeks of group counseling, both clients and teachers of fifth grade boys noticed that disciplinary incidents decreased and the boys' feelings of powerlessness and helplessness decreased. There was also a marked increase in leadership skills.

Using the Walker Problem Behavior Identification Checklist, Marchant (1972) attempted to prove that group counseling or consultation with teachers was more productive than no treatment at all. Subjects were fourth and fifth grade students with problems ranging from withdrawal to acting out behavior. The researcher randomly assigned the children to four experimental groups. In one group, the children and the teacher received counseling and consultation, respectively; in a second group, the teacher received consultative services only; in the third group, the children received counseling only; the fourth group received neither child counseling nor teacher consultation.

During the five weeks of treatment, it was found that in all three groups in which either counseling or consulting was implemented, the students produced a positive behavior change. Those who received no help at all experienced no change whatsoever.

Roche (1974) conducted a study to determine if disenchanted junior high school students trained to be group co-counselors would improve in self-concept, interpersonal relationships, attitudes toward school and school performance. The study included urban junior high school students who were considered disruptive, disliked school, and were often truant. Roche's subjects for the study included students who had volunteered to help and were selected as counselors, students who volunteered to help and were not selected as counselors, and students who did not volunteer to help and were selected for counseling. The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, the California Test of Personality, and the Class Attitude Questionnaire were used to analyze the data from the study. The findings indicated that training for co-counseling did not improve the self-concept of the disenchanted students who were selected for counselors when compared to those who volunteered and were not selected. However, it was noted that the attitudes toward school of those students who volunteered

and were selected for training as co-counselors were more positive than those of the volunteered but not selected group.

Using possible school dropouts, Roberts (1972) sought to investigate whether a student-to-student counseling situation in the elementary schools with potential dropouts would result in change of self-concept and attitudes toward school. Using the Pirs-Harris Self-Concept Scale and the Student Opinion Poll to measure differences in attitudes in both potential and non-potential dropouts, the results indicated that there was a relationship between self-concept and the students' achievement, but no relationship between attitude towards school and achievement was found. Gains in positive attitudes toward school among potential dropouts who met in groups with student counselors were significant.

Studies with the mentally retarded have also shown that group counseling effects a noticeable difference in the students' behavior. Lee (1977) conducted a study of residents of the Alberta School Hospital in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada, to investigate this hypothesis. Through the use of the Peabody Picture Test and the Adaptive Behavior Scale to rate behavioral improvement, the results showed that those students who received some type of counseling scored higher in five areas of social and personal development than did the control group.

Not all research on the effects on group counseling with children has indicated positive results, however. Bergin (1974) conducted a study at the College of William and Mary to investigate the effects of group counseling on the self-regard of elementary school children. The hypothesis of the study was that group counseling with experimental games paired with positive reinforcement would affect the students' self-esteem and their self-concept. After six weeks of counseling, the researchers found that there were no differences in the self-concepts of the students who had participated in group counseling and in those who had not participated. The findings also indicated a decrease in the students' self-esteem the longer the games in the counseling session progressed.

The University of Oklahoma studied disadvantaged students to determine if small group counseling would improve their self-concepts as measured by the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. The results showed that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control group scores of these disadvantaged students. It was also noted that there was no significant difference between pre-test and post-test findings of either group (Caruthers, 1975).

At the University of Texas at Austin, a study was conducted by Harris (1974) with socially anxious students to determine if group counseling could be an effective

tool in lessening children's anxiety. After six weeks of counseling, utilizing the techniques of role-playing and modeling, it was found that each subject obtained a significantly lower social anxiety score than had previously been reported. Although the children's anxiety levels decreased, Harris did not find an improvement in their social behavior when rated by fellow students and teachers.

In summary the literature does provide evidence of a positive relationship between affective variables and school achievement and support for the efficacy of group procedures as a means of enhancing both the learning process and the affective elements in learning. Therefore, it is the purpose of the present study to further investigate the effectiveness of group counseling on one of these personal-social variables, the attitudes of elementary age children toward school.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects for the present study were 12 fourth grade students enrolled in Central Elementary School, Cunningham, Tennessee, during the academic year 1977-1978. Subjects' ages were 10 and 11 years. Both the experimental group and the control group consisted of four boys and two girls. Subjects for each group were selected on the basis of teachers' evaluations of the students as having a poor attitude toward school.

Procedure

In September 1977, the 12 fourth grade students included in the present study were given the Attitude Toward School: Tennessee Student Survey. The survey was administered during two consecutive periods because of its length. In order to control for possible reading disabilities, each student was given a copy of the survey and asked to read the question silently as the researcher read it aloud. After each question was read, students were allowed time to record their answers. The following week group counseling was initiated with the experimental group and continued for a period of 10 weeks. Each counseling session was approximately 30 minutes in length.

Counseling was directed toward the improvement of school attitudes using the techniques of Reality Therapy and integrating role playing. The control group received no treatment. In December of 1977, the Attitude Toward School: Tennessee Student Survey was administered as a post-test, using the same procedure as had been followed during the pre-testing session. The data were then analyzed to determine the effect of group counseling on the children's attitudes toward school.

Instrumentation

The Attitude Toward School: Tennessee Student Survey was used as a pre-test and post-test measure of the students' attitudes toward school. This survey was developed by Dr. Coy Hollis of the Bureau of Educational Research and Services at Memphis State University, Memphis, Tennessee under contract from the State Department of Education.

The survey is designed as a general attitude measure with items questioning attitudes toward teachers, the school experience and the value of education. The survey consists of 50 items to which students respond on a scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and undecided.

The author cautions that the survey is not intended to give attitude scores for individual students, but is designed primarily for the purpose of giving feedback to

school personnel concerning the feelings of the students as a group. Because the survey is suggested only as an indication of students' feelings, and because the survey is still in an experimental form, no validity and reliability information was available.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Non-parametric statistics were used to analyze the data obtained from the present study. The Mann-Whitney U was used to compare the gain scores from pre-test and post-test ratings. This statistical test was indicated because of the small sample size and because the data to be analyzed were considered ordinal data. According to Siegel (1956), the Mann-Whitney U is one of the most powerful non-parametric tests for two independent groups.

Individual gain scores derived from pre-test and post-test ratings from the Attitude Toward School: Tennessee Student Survey and the sum of these gain scores for each group are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Pre-Test, Post-Test Gain Scores Derived From The
Attitudes Toward School: Tennessee Student Survey

Subject	Sum of Pre-Test Ratings	Sum of Post-Test Ratings	Gain
<u>Experimental Group</u>			
A	134	117	-17
B	110	94	-16
C	146	158	12
D	147	140	- 7
E	136	158	22
F	134	96	-38
Sum of Gain Scores for Experimental Group			-44
<u>Control Group</u>			
G	109	107	- 2
H	138	149	11
I	143	106	-37
J	125	94	-31
K	106	84	-22
L	126	133	7
Sum of Gain Scores for Control Group			-74

The results of the analysis of these gain scores is
shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

The Mann-Whitney U Test Employing Gain Scores
 Derived From The Attitudes Toward School:
 Tennessee Student Survey

Experimental Group		Control Group	
Gain Score	Rank	Gain Score	Rank
-17	5	- 2	8
-16	6	11	10
12	11	-37	2
- 7	7	-31	3
22	12	-22	4
-38	1	7	9
$N_1 = 6$	$\Sigma R_1 = 42$	$N_2 = 6$	$\Sigma R_2 = 36$

Note: $U = 15$; $U' = 21$

A critical value of 5 was necessary for a significant U at the .05 level of significance, using a two-tail test. This result of the analysis indicates that group counseling did not make a significant difference in the attitudes toward school for this sample.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

In light of the literature which contains contradictory evidence on the effect of group counseling in changing attitudes toward school, the present study was undertaken to further investigate this area. The results showed that there was no significant difference between the experimental subjects who received group counseling and the control group who received no group counseling.

Several studies reviewed have indicated that group counseling has improved the social and interpersonal relations of students (Broedel, Ohlsen, Proff, & Southard, 1960; Thombs & Muro, 1973). Other studies have noted that group counseling made a significant difference in the attitudes and self-concepts of the school child (Peck & Jackson, 1976; Roche, 1974). In view of the statistical results that were obtained from the present study, a comparison with the positive studies cannot be made. The findings seem to substantiate those of Caruthers (1975) and Harris (1974), who also noted negative correlations between group counseling and school attitudes and self-concepts.

However, more subjective reports might also be considered in determining if group counseling made a

difference in the school attitudes and social interactions of the students included in this study. The classroom teachers who worked with the students participating in the counseling group noticed differences in classroom work and behavior. These teachers noted that the experimental subjects were taking a more active part in classroom discussion, were more attentive in class, displayed less unruly or disruptive behavior in the room toward either the teacher or their peers, and appeared more concerned about their schoolwork. The peers of the students participating in the counseling group observed that these students were easier to work with in groups on school projects; they were not as verbally abusive concerning other students, teachers, or the principal as they once had been; and they were working more in school on their schoolwork. Even the counseled subjects themselves felt that they were able to see differences in their thoughts, actions, and feelings concerning school, their schoolwork, and their teachers. They all cited instances in which they found themselves trying to keep peace with their teacher, working a little harder to make better grades, and trying to take an interest in school subjects and projects introduced in the classroom. The counseled subjects stated that they no longer fell asleep in school and were punished less often for minor offenses.

The statistical results of the present study indicate that group counseling did not have a significant effect on the students' attitudes toward school. Subjective reports from teachers, peers and the experimental subjects were more positive; however, these more positive attitudes and feelings could possibly be attributed to the extra attention the counseled students received during the group sessions or to students' and/or teachers' expectations for change.

Inasmuch as only a small sample of subjects was used in the present study, it would seem worthwhile to investigate the effect of group counseling on students' attitudes toward school with a larger population. Another aspect of the study that should be considered was the use of selected subjects rather than randomly chosen subjects. The selection of subjects by teacher recommendation could have resulted in a biased population. Additionally, it might prove more effective if the classroom teacher acted as the group leader rather than an outside counselor. Positive feelings created in the group counseling situation could generalize more easily to the learning situation. A last limitation of the present study is the lack of research investigating the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument, Attitude Toward School: Tennessee Student Survey. This survey

is still in an experimental form and cannot be considered a highly valid and reliable instrument for measuring attitudes toward school.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

A review of the literature reveals that there is some evidence of a positive relationship between affective variables and school achievement. The literature also provides some support for the efficacy of group procedures as a means of enhancing both the learning process and the affective elements in learning. Therefore, it was the purpose of the present study to further investigate the effectiveness of group counseling on one personal-social variable, the attitudes of elementary age children toward school.

The subjects were 12 fourth grade students enrolled at Central Elementary School, Cunningham, Tennessee, during the academic year 1977-1978. The subjects were selected for the study by teacher recommendation. Six of these students were randomly assigned to the experimental group which received group counseling directed toward the improvement of school attitudes, and six of these students were assigned to the control group and received no counseling.

The results of the present study did not indicate that group counseling effected a significant change in the students' attitudes toward school as measured by the

Attitude Toward School: Tennessee Student Survey. However, subjective reports from other sources tended to view the group counseling positively. Favorable reports were received from all the classroom teachers who worked with the subjects, the subjects' peers who interacted with them daily, and the subjects themselves felt that they had indeed experienced an attitude change.

There are several limitations to the present study, and it would seem that further investigation of the effects of group counseling in changing attitudes toward school should be conducted before generalizations concerning these effects are made.

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