GROUP WORK IN SCHOOLS

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Prologue to Leading Groups in Schools

Few activities in the work of the professional school counselor provide the level of challenge and satisfaction that comes from leading small groups of students focused on important developmental goals. The evidence of the impact of such groups continues to grow. School counselors who implement systematic interventions in the form of small groups show dramatic, positive effects on a number of critical academic variables (students' test performance, retention, scores on behavioral measures, goal setting, interpersonal skill development, the building of internal resilience, increased decision making, self-efficacy, discussion skills, small-group interaction competencies, empathy, and personal courage). Process-outcome research evidence underscores the importance of developing and maintaining a high level of leadership skills. Group leadership competency requires a commitment to continuous growth in leadership skills.

Human beings live much of their lives in the presence of others, often in small groups. Therefore, it seems fitting that professional helpers, such as professional school counselors, often find themselves faced with opportunities to use their professional skills to facilitate the interaction of those groups. Effective group leaders recognize group roles (both positive and negative), stages of group development, and a number of therapeutic factors that seem to be present in successful groups, and they know how to build group cohesion, typically associated with goal achievement. Also, effective leaders know how to use various types and levels of group leadership techniques and approaches. To take the next step in your own group leadership competency development, we offer several learning exercises at the end of this book as a way to confirm your readiness to lead small groups in schools.

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Introduction

Historical Influences

A comprehensive history of groups in schools has not been recorded to date, particularly if one tries to follow the development of a movement from a single defining moment of origination. Groups, and learning in groups, have undoubtedly been a natural part of life for humans throughout history, but most of what we know about groups in schools comes from the 20th century. Most professionals credit the use of groups in schools to teachers. Some credit is also saved for physicians such as Joseph Pratt and Jacob Moreno, and early psychologists such as Alfred Adler. Pratt was a physician who began treating his tuberculosis patients in a class format to improve their knowledge of the disease, to increase their interaction with and support of one another, and to build their sense of hope for their own physical improvement. Moreno, a Vienna physician, introduced the use of sociodrama and psychodrama in group psychotherapy. His influence on groups in schools largely took the form of helping teachers and counselors use creative techniques in their small-group work. For example, he helped introduce the use of classroom relationships measures (sociograms) to identify "isolates" and "stars," who could then be invited to participate in small groups where they could help one another.

If only one individual could be credited for influencing the introduction and use of small groups in schools, in our opinion it would be Alfred Adler, who undoubtedly deserves the lion's share of credit for his work with groups of teachers, students, and families in early 20th century Vienna, and soon thereafter in America. Adler was a Viennese physician who began to practice a proactive approach to medical practice by helping people improve the health of the *community*, particularly in families and schools. Known as the founder of the child guidance movement, Adler believed deeply in the principle that the child is shaped and influenced by small groups throughout life, beginning with the family of origin. He worked with teachers in their schools and in more than 31 Child Guidance Centers he established in Vienna during the 1920s and early 1930s. Adler and his protégés spent Saturday mornings for several years working with groups of teachers, students, parents, and families. His key principles of education were grounded in the importance of

encouragement and support to help individuals and groups develop "social interest," a feeling of connection with others. He believed that the most fundamental desire of humans was to find a way to belong by making a positive contribution to the larger group. These same principles were brought to America by his students, most notably Rudolf Dreikurs.

Early Psychoeducational Groups

It was one of Dreikurs's students (Donald Dinkmeyer), however, who brought psychoeducational groups to the schools when he developed mid-century one of the earliest curriculum guides. His DUSO (Developing an Understanding of Self and Others) program gave elementary school teachers and counselors an integrated curriculum designed around using small groups to build academic and social skills. His program was used and revised through the 1980s (Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1982). Eventually, such curricular efforts were deepened and sharpened into what constitutes the small curriculum-based group programs in evidence today. Beyond these kinds of developmental guidance groups, or psychological education groups (what we refer to now as psychoeducational), early small-group counseling efforts in schools focused also on those with special needs.

Small groups provide a natural structure for learning, whether the group is a family, a team, a task force/work group, a class, a neighborhood group, a small club, or a church group. Opportunities for formal and informal learning alongside others are ubiquitous. Probably as long as there have been schools, small groups have served as the natural organizational structure for teaching and learning, most likely because participation in small groups can provide uniquely affirming and challenging experiences. Even though teachers do not typically have the luxury of "small" classes, effective teachers have long shown an expertise in using the common group leadership technique of subgrouping (dyads, triads, or foursomes) to help create small groups within a larger group. Students of all ages, particularly young students, seem to find an extra degree of comfort and support in small-group interaction. Also, students benefit from the significant, yet sometimes subtle, cognitive development and intellectual differences represented in most small groups. Of course, the range of developmental trajectories represented in most small groups goes beyond cognitive to affective, physical, social, career, and moral/ethical developmental areas as well. As human development specialists, teachers and other school leaders have learned how to facilitate learning and growth in each of these important areas through the strategic use of small groups.

Purpose of Groups in Schools

Professional school counselors have made especially effective use of small groups in their work, particularly in support of students' academic

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development, career development, and personal/social development. The principal purpose of this book is to provide these professionals, as well as graduate students aspiring to become school counselors, with a practical academic resource directly aimed at their work. Too often, graduate-level training programs and general group counseling texts are directed at the work of clinicians in multiple clinical settings, sometimes focusing solely or mainly on "therapy" groups. This book offers an alternative. The focus is solely on group work as applied in the schools by professional school counselors. It is toward the new graduate students who aspire to become professional school counselors that this book is largely directed, but practicing school counselors may also find it useful as a reference book for exemplary practical ideas and suggestions. The principal emphasis is on the K–12 age group, but some attention will also be paid to exemplary group work with older, college-age students.

More than anything else, this book is about prevention. In the long run, groups in schools afford students opportunities in psychological education—opportunities to build strengths and competencies through the group process to avert potential problems in learning and mental health (Conyne & Clanton Harpine, 2010). Schools are about positive growth and development. Psychoeducational groups are actually de-facto prevention groups in that they offer the medium of group process to build positive mental health, not only to prevent potential problems but also to build the kind of psychological muscle required for a full life. Group prevention uses the power of group process and the interaction between group members to create a cohesive learning environment in which students can learn and grow (Clanton Harpine, Nitza, & Conyne, 2010). There's little doubt that as today's students begin to face a future of incredibly rapid and seemingly constant change, they will need the psychological and academic strengths built in early preventive small groups in school (Kulic, Dagley, & Horne, 2001).

Overview

This book will open with a brief history of school counseling and then introduce the Association for Specialists in Group Work *Best Practice Guidelines* (Thomas & Pender, 2008), which has helped shape the work of modern professional school counselors. A brief narrative will describe the important theoretical constructs that collectively provide a foundation for leading a variety of types of groups in schools. A review of the extant empirical evidence relative to the effectiveness of groups in schools will illustrate the ways prevention and counseling groups may positively influence students' academic and personal growth. Finally, case examples of groups in schools will be outlined and described.

1 The School Counseling Profession

A Brief Historical Perspective

Today's school counseling profession is an important part of an educational system that was greatly influenced by the events and hopes of the late 19th century and early-to-middle 20th century in America. Educational initiatives and related social reform movements combined to serve as a set of forces that inspired schools to become more active agents of democracy. The Progressive Education Movement of John Dewey (1915) emerged to counter the growing effort of some to separate education into "academic" education for the few at the top and narrowly targeted "vocational" training for the growing majority not at the top. Progressives emphasized the importance of fully educating all children in both academic and vocational areas to become effective workers and informed participants in a democracy. This inclusive strategy emphasized the import of educating each child. To accomplish such an ambitious assignment, schools were called to shift their instructional attention to the learner, regardless of ability. A child-centered approach to teaching and learning would require that each child become known personally for the purpose of meeting his or her unique needs. Today's school counselors build their programs on similar basic foundations—appreciation for individual differences, respect for human diversity, and the importance of preparing each young person to achieve learning goals to be equipped to make a meaningful contribution to society.

Frank Parsons, one of the reformers who came along at that time, did more to shape the work of school counselors than perhaps anyone before or since. Often referred to as "The Father of Guidance" (Aubrey, 1977), Parsons was an engineer who had become unemployed during the serious economic depression of the 1870s. He was reemployed as a teacher, then as a professor, and also as the director of the Breadwinners' Institute, which was quite similar to what we would now refer to as a continuing education center. As the director, he renamed the institute to more closely match its function, calling it the Vocational Bureau of the Civil Service House. Parsons became increasingly concerned about the great numbers of immigrants who were

unemployed or severely underemployed, some of whom he was encountering in the Vocational Bureau. He was troubled not only for those he served directly but also for the many others he was unable to serve, and more broadly for the vitality of the country as a whole. He believed deeply that such a misfit of needs and resources would eventually drag down not only the economy but also, and more important, the whole society. He developed and articulated in his 1909 book, *Choosing a Vocation,* a vocational counseling model that helped influence the direction of schools, as well as the focus and work of school counselors. His framework for using the scientific method as a guide for career decision making consisted of three distinct steps:

> In the wise choice of a vocation, there are three broad factors: (1) A clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations and their causes; (2) a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; (3) true reasoning in the relations of these two groups of facts. (p. 5)

Another historical force that emerged around the same time was Jane Addams's Hull House Settlement. Addams spearheaded a social reform movement aimed at helping the same target group as Parsons's Vocational Bureau, the millions of immigrants who had come to America during the heyday of the Industrial Revolution, only to face underemployment, unemployment, poverty, and deplorable living conditions. Far from a melting pot, the country had become, from Addams's perspective, an abusive top-down society that neglected the educational and living needs of the majority in favor of the wealthy (Addams, 1912).

Still other influences on school counseling included the pioneering psychotherapy work around the turn of the 20th century from the Viennese physicians mentioned above—namely, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, and Jacob Moreno. School counselors were also greatly influenced by the nondirective, supportive, and humanistic approach to counseling made popular by Carl Rogers in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. From these pioneers in the field of psychotherapy, school counselors have gained rich and varied theoretical perspectives on human growth and development, psychological health and dysfunction, motivation, and relationships. The collective work of these individuals, and others, provides the theoretical underpinnings of the interventions employed by school counselors to facilitate growth and learning among students.

Assessment

Beyond counseling, several psychologists and researchers developed tools of assessment in the early years of the 20th century that would become exceptionally useful to educators. Binet developed an intelligence test, designed

originally to distinguish mental retardation levels but later modified by Terman (1916), a professor at Stanford, to measure intelligence. The Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales (Roid, 2003) are widely used in schools and communities today, as is the Strong Interest Inventory (Strong, 1927), a widely popular career interest scale that is the longest, continuously implemented vocational interest measurement scale still in use. Student assessment has become a regular part of school operations, administered and used by school counselors, school psychologists, and other educational professionals.

Mental Health

Around the same time as the unfolding of the vocational guidance and progressive education movements, a fledgling mental health movement was energized by Clifford Beers's account of his own experiences in a mental institution in his book *A Mind That Found Itself* (1921). A trend of lessening the stigma associated with mental illness gained momentum, as did efforts to reduce the "institutionalization" of those struggling with mental illness. Instead, efforts turned toward increasing the possibility of working with previously institutionalized individuals at home, in their communities, and in their schools as much as possible.

Governmental Legislation

Finally, governmental support in many forms throughout the decades of the 20th century greatly influenced the work of school counselors. Several national efforts to improve vocational education were among the most enduring acts of financial support that influenced schools and the school counseling profession. The country continued throughout the century to focus on the importance of educating youth in such a way that they could participate fully in the labor market. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 was undoubtedly the legislative force that most directly shaped the training and work of school counselors. Developed in an effort to meet more effectively the country's need for supporting the educational and career guidance of the gifted and scientifically talented, the act provided funds to underwrite new professional training standards and increased the number of faculty members in key areas at the graduate degree levels of higher education, including counselor education faculty. As a direct result of the National Defense of Education Act—and some parts of its follow-up extension, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—school counselors earned a significantly higher proportion of graduate degrees and met increasingly higher standards of performance. Various forms of extensions of these two acts have continued to reshape education, first by improving service to impoverished students and presently by sharpening attention to students' (and their schools') academic performance (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

The evolution of the role of today's school counselor is a product of all these social changes and subsequent educational reforms over time. At first, focused largely on the vocational planning and preparation needs of students, the school counselor's work consisted of testing, placement, and coordination of what was often referred to as vocational guidance or personnel services. Counseling services tended to be somewhat directive and solution focused as a preferred method for helping students with problem solving, curricular planning, and career decision making. Prominent throughout the historical development was a commitment to vocational guidance. Today the work of a school counselor is much more comprehensive, multifaceted, and integral to the functioning of schools. Vocational guidance, or career counseling, is but one facet.

The American School Counselor Association National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs

Professional school counselors have become comprehensive and programmatic contributors to the entire educational system. Several decades of theoretical articulation, practical applications, and empirical investigations have collectively served as the foundation for the development and refinement of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, which builds on a comprehensive map of important roots, as well as theoretical principals and research data (ASCA, 2005). The model reflects a much deeper and more extended commitment to leadership, management, and program delivery systems than did the open-ended and somewhat amorphous contributions early guidance counselors made to schools. Indeed, the profession has been "transformed" (Erford, 2007). The National Model consists of four basic elements: a foundation of content standards, a comprehensive delivery system, a management system, and an accountability system for auditing performance. The first two are presented here to frame our descriptions of groups in schools.

Content Standards: Domain Areas

Student competencies in the academic, career, and personal/social domains form the substance of the ASCA model of a comprehensive school counseling program. ASCA has developed a model of competencies and indicators for each of the three domains.

Academic

"Today, in a world enriched by diversity and technology, school counselors' chief mission is still supporting the academic achievement of all

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