

# Elementary School Counseling: An Adlerian-Based Model

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Elementary school guidance and counseling is one of the most rapidly developing professions on the American counseling scene. The nature of the clientele to be served by the Adlerian counselor makes the elementary school an unusually good opportunity for the application of Adlerian psychology.

The services of the elementary school counselor-consultant can emphasize developmental services to both children and adults. This approach does not focus primarily on individual counseling with children. While individual counseling is conducted, a greater emphasis is placed on working with the total milieu and life space that surrounds the child and with all the factors that motivate development and inhibit growth (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1973).

The child is not as free to independently choose and decide as the adolescent is. The significant adults in the child's life—parents, administrators, and teachers—establish restrictions and limits and foster dependency. Thus, if the program is to have a real impact, parents, administrators, and teachers are essential clients. The rationale is based on the recognition of certain fundamentals.

1. Teachers are responsible for developing an atmosphere which creates involvement in the learning process. They must be competent in leading group discussions and understanding group dynamics. Despite the necessity of these skills for all teachers, teacher education usually has not equipped teachers to meet these demands. The counselor has some in-service responsibilities in training teachers in group procedures (Dinkmeyer & Muro, 1971). The Adlerian program trains teachers to lead group discussions and class meetings (Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1971). The child becomes involved in understanding the purpose of behavior and misbehavior and becomes responsible for his or her actions. As teachers use logical consequences in the classroom, the child is helped to mature socially (Dreikurs & Grey, 1968).

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Adlerian guidance programs emphasize educating the child's feelings and helping the child understand how his or her goals and faulty beliefs interfere with his or her happiness (Dinkmeyer, 1970d, 1973).

2. Teachers need to develop an understanding of themselves as well as of the child. They must become more aware of the meaning of the interactions between themselves and the students. This awareness is best developed in a "C group" where consideration is given to both the external unit (the child) and the internal unit (the feelings, attitudes, and values of the teacher). The C group is a holistic approach that involves the feelings and attitudes of the teachers, thereby seeking to change the teachers' as well as the child's behaviors (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1973). The C group is both didactic and experiential. It involves the whole teacher and his or her beliefs, feelings, and intentions, and helps each teacher recognize that, as he or she changes, the child will change, too. The name *C group* originated because the essential elements of the process all begin with a "c": consult, collaborate, change, cohesion, commitment, congruence, concern, caring, clarify, confront, communicate, congruent, confidential (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1975).

3. Administrators have leadership responsibilities and need access to the consultant, a specialist who understands feelings, group dynamics, and the forces in the school culture. There is a place in education for a specialist with specific skills in human relations. The counselor consults on how these forces in the specific school setting effect learning. The counselor would work with school administrators in groups to increase their understandings and skills (Watson, 1969).

4. Parents meet increasing challenges in their relationships with their children. The parents have considerable effect on the child's attitudes, values, and behavior. The counselor should be available to provide leadership for parent study groups, which are concerned with helping parents relate more effectively with their children (Corsini & Painter, 1975; Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1973, 1976; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964).

5. Everyone involved must realize that we cannot change others; we can only change ourselves. This approach recognizes that, if we begin with the significant adults and change the child's life space, we will make greater long-term gains. The teacher who teaches for 15 years may have a significant effect on 800 to 1,000 students. Each teacher in the self-contained classroom has 1,000 hours a year with the individual and his group. Thus, the emphasis is on giving parents, teachers, and administrators an understanding of how Adlerian skills can be applied to their concerns.

### **Psychological Rationale**

The counselor's work is based on the following psychological premises, which are listed briefly.

1. Human personality is best understood in terms of its pattern. The counselor must be a specialist educated to understand the lifestyle and the unique patterns of behavior. His diagnostic skills enable him to understand the meaning of the student's uniqueness for the educational process. The counselor is not only skilled in taking and interpreting a lifestyle, but he can understand and interpret the purpose of psychological movement.

2. Behavior is purposive. Understanding the purpose of the behavior is a diagnostic skill the counselor possesses, but it should also be transmitted to teachers and parents, a task which is best accomplished in group settings. Both teachers and parents are educated in regard to the goals of misbehavior (Dreikurs & Cassel, 1972; Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1971), and the goals of positive behavior (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976).

3. The individual is best understood in terms of how he or she seeks to be significant in the group. Through the development of group procedures, both diagnostic and therapeutic opportunities are provided.

4. All behavior has social meaning. Belonging is a basic human need. The school needs a specialist who understands the social context of all behavior and works with that behavior through group approaches. These group approaches include child, teacher, parent, and administrator groups.

Those readers interested in greater details regarding this developmental approach to understanding behavior can find more information in Dinkmeyer and Caldwell's *Developmental Counseling and Guidance: A Comprehensive School Approach* (1970). An understanding of Adlerian theory as applied to education can be found through first studying Dreikurs' *Fundamentals of Adlerian Psychology* (1950) or Ansbacher and Ansbacher's *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler* (1956). Raymond Corsini has made a seminal creative contribution through the conceptualization of Individual Education in the November 1977 issue of the *Journal of Individual Psychology*.

### **A Hierarchy of Function**

One of the problems related to the effectiveness of the counseling-consultant service is that the counselor often behaves as if he were reacting to crisis situations or demands made by students and faculty. The counselor must do more than react. He must become a force for change. He is conceptualized as a catalyst in the school environment. He serves as a force to stimulate new ideas, humanize the curriculum, and encourage therapeutic approaches to the educational process (Dinkmeyer, 1970a, 1970b).

The basic premise is that the counselor is concerned with improving the educational experience for all children. He recognizes that he can often serve

more children through teacher, parent, and administrator contacts than through direct work with a child. Thus, he establishes some priority related to direct and indirect services. The hierarchy of services will certainly differ with the skills of the counselor and the particular setting in which he works. However, at this time it is suggested that some of the following priorities might be established.

**1. Consultation to administration.** The counselor should develop a cooperative and collaborative relationship with those responsible for administering the school, so that feedback can be exchanged to improve the learning situation for students and teachers.

**2. Collaboration and consulting with groups of teachers.** Note that the word *collaboration* underlines the concept of working together and not in a superior-inferior relationship (Dinkmeyer, 1967, 1968; Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1973). Consultation may focus on a specific child or a group of children. Teacher groups are C groups in which each teacher focuses on his or her situation. These groups involve the teachers' affective and cognitive domains to change their behavior. The groups are both didactic and experiential.

**3. Consultation with parents in groups.** This type of consultation may originally focus on parent education, child study groups, and family/parent/teacher education centers. The attempt here is to reach a large number of parents and help them understand more effective ways of relating with and motivating their children. The groups I have led and have trained counselors to lead feature *Raising a Responsible Child* (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1973) and *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP)* (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976) as the basic materials. Dreikurs and Soltz' *Children: The Challenge* (1964) and Corsini and Painter's *The Practical Parent* (1975) are equally well received by parents.

**4. Counseling with groups of children.** This type of counseling (Dinkmeyer, 1970c; Dinkmeyer & Muro, 1971) may either be developmental or crisis oriented. However, the program has a definite intent of attempting to work with as many children who are interested in the group process. The counselor is accessible to the child through regular visits in the classroom and may arrange with the teacher to demonstrate the purposes and procedures of both group guidance and group counseling.

**5. Demonstrating and establishing classroom guidance programs.** The counselor visits the classroom to demonstrate and promote affective education programs such as DUSO, *Developing Understanding of Self and Others* (Dinkmeyer, 1970d, 1973). Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper (1971) propose many ideas for the application of Adlerian psychology in the classroom. John Platt and the Elk Grove Schools, Elk Grove, California, have

developed an exemplary Adlerian school system (Asselin, Nelson, & Platt, 1975).

**6. Counseling with individuals.** Counseling is either developmental and self-referred or crisis oriented (Blocher, 1968; Dinkmeyer & Caldwell, 1970; Muro & Dinkmeyer, 1977; Dinkmeyer, Pew, & Dinkmeyer, in press). The counselor makes himself accessible to the children as a resource so they might learn about themselves and interpersonal relations. He helps with crisis situations, but he is careful not to be identified by staff and students as only crisis and maladjustment centered. The counselor makes himself visible for contacts regarding normal development problems. Children perceive him as a listening and understanding person who helps them understand themselves and others.

The Adlerian counselor's primary focus is on all children, the learning atmosphere, and the significant adults who provide indirect service to the children. The end goal is assisting each child to attain a purposeful and socially meaningful approach to the educational experience and the tasks of life.

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