Adlerian Counseling in Racially Mixed Groups of Elementary School Children

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Negative intergroup attitude between the negro and white races is a primary source of the "social dynamite" of these times. Our public institutions, particularly the schools, must use all the tools at their disposal to combat the polarization which occurs between the races.

Many misunderstandings toward ethnic groups exist in today's society. Assuming these misconceptions are the end products of distortions learned early in life, we may conclude they represent the confirmation of derogatory information learned in childhood. To this extent these ideas or perceptions are similar to self-fulfilling prophecies since experiences are interpreted only within the context of patterns established early in life. If these patterns, which are best described as life styles, are the result of limited experiences during the early years, then the problem is intrinsic to public education. Our present racial situation suggests that educators should investigate the techniques at their disposal which may (1) create situations in which negro and white children can develop more positive attitudes toward one another and (2) effect positive changes in negative attitudes that have already been established.

The assumption that racial attitudes are learned and can be modified, and furthermore that Adlerian group counseling is a learning situation conducive to mutual respect and understanding suggested the following research study which investigated the use of the Adlerian model of group counseling for improving racial relations among youngsters at the elementary grade level.

Sonstegard and Dreikurs (1967) point out that basic to the Adlerian or teleoanalytic rationale for group counseling is the fact that all humans are social beings. The impact of the group on the child is readily observed and the use of the group to influence the child provides an effective means for correction. Group techniques are imperative in a democratic society. Adlerian psychology provides a formula for democratic living by considering social equality as the basis for cooperation and social harmony. In Adlerian group counseling members learn to deal with each other as equals, thus the social values developed are in keeping with man's search for equality and cooperation. The capacity for cooperation can be developed when one feels that in spite of external dissimilarities they are not fundamentally different from other people.

The rationale for group counseling and especially the Adlerian approach to group counseling appears to be extremely compatible with the change in society that is needed to bring about improvement in social harmony. Thus, in an

attempt to change the behavior of white and negro children in racially mixed elementary school where the general attitude between races was negative, the Adlerian model for group counseling was used. This paper is a discussion of the rationale and method used, and a summary of the findings.

Rationale:

The general concept of **group counseling** is aptly described by Ohlsen (1960) who says that in many ways group counseling is similar to individual counseling. In both, the counselor tries to help the individual identify and clarify the things which disturb him, help him to better understand himself and his situation, to examine and test alternative solutions for his problems. The relationship enables the individual to discuss matters which heretofore he was unable to discuss adequately. He learns to examine reasons for his difficulty in talking about certain topics and to request information whenever he feels the need for it.

On the other hand, there are some real differences between individual and group counseling. In the group the counselor must not only concentrate on trying to capture the speaker's feelings and to help him tell his story, he must also observe how each speaker's comments affect others and help them to participate in the discussion. The counselor's behavior conveys warmth, understanding, and acceptance to members of the group and they in turn learn to understand and accept one another. Group counseling also differs in another respect from individual counseling in that it provides opportunities for a group member to test his ideas and tentative actions on an accepting group of peers before translating his verbalizations into overt behavior. Thus, members learn to assist others while they are obtaining assistance from others.

Dinkmeyer (1968) points out that group members learn they can share experiences with others and remain socially acceptable. Feedback from the group provides the group member with the realization that many of the things he thought unique to himself are often common to others. Group counseling increases the members' receptiveness to new ideas and they sometimes accept ideas that were previously unacceptable. The group also provides opportunity for catharsis, permitting hostile inner feelings to be exposed without punishment.

Depending upon the particular situation, the group leader uses a variety of techniques, including tentative disclosures and confrontations. The counselor can help the group members examine and describe their feelings in order that they might clarify for themselves how they experience the world. Group counseling may use the mirror effect of not only the counselor but also that of the peer group. Economy is not the justification for working in groups but rather that they provide experiences to develop understandings that can only be brought about by the actions and reactions of group members.

The rationale provided by Ohlsen and Dinkmeyer gives a broad framework for group counseling within which a counselor might adapt his particular counseling theory or style. Counselors can and do make some adjustments within their counseling style, but few are likely to succeed in the varied roles

that would be required in truly eclectic counseling. Generally speaking, confusion results in an eclectic approach to counseling that is detrimental to group counseling and is a basic argument in favor of the counselor operating within a singular consistent framework.

A consistent position toward a theory for group counseling has been prevalent in the literature on elementary school counseling in the past decade (Sonstegard, 1967, Stormer, 1967; Dinkmeyer, 1968; and Dreikurs and Sonstegard, 1968). This position finds its roots in the writing of Alfred Adler (1956). The Adlerian point of view is often referred to as the teleoanalytic approach and perceives man as a social being whose every action has a purpose and implies self-determination and man's ability to set his own goals.

The approach to changing children's problem behavior, using the Adlerian model, is based on the concept that behavior is purposive and that the individual by his nature strives for success. It is the counselor's role to identify the purpose of the child's behavior, to disclose this purpose to him, and to help him respond in more constructive and socially beneficial ways. The child's understanding is facilitated through the interactions with the group and recommendations from the group members which will result in more desirable behavior in the immediate future.

Method and Analysis

This research was an exploratory effort focusing on the use of group counseling for improving the racial attitudes among school children in a racially mixed school at the upper elementary level. Prior to the study an informal survey of the school population to be used in the study was conducted to determine if negative intergroup attitudes existed within the school population and the degree of such attitudes. Interviews with parents, teachers, counselors, students and others with knowledge of the situation indicated that racial antagonisms were present. These conjectures were later substantiated, *i.e.,* the scales used in pretesting the children indicated that negative intergroup attitudes were present.

The research hypothesis proposed that negative intergroup attitudes of students who were counseled in racially mixed groups, with a counselor using the Adlerian approach, would change in the postive direction. Furthermore, it was hyporhesized that students counseled in racially mixed groups by both a negro and a white counselor simultaneously would show significantly greater reductions in negative intergroup attitudes when compared with student who were counseled in racially mixed groups led by either a negro or a white counselor and when compared to students in control groups.

The subjects for the study were students enrolled in an elementary school in West Virginia with an enrollment of approximately fifty percent white and fifty percent negro. Most of the students lived in the same racially mixed neighborhood and, with few exceptions, were from the lower socioeconomic levels.

All the students in grades five and six were pretested on a semantic differential (Osgood, 1957), a social acceptance scale (Raths, 1943), and a measure of self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1959). The semantic differential was used to measure differences in attitudes towards negroes and whites. The social acceptance scale provided a measure of the social acceptability of members of both races. The self-esteem scale was employed with the assumption that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and acceptance of others. Ten children from the above population, five white and five negro, were randomly assigned to each of six groups. Three of the groups engaged in group counseling in which the counselors used the teleoanalytic approach while three groups served as control groups. The race of the group leader(s) was also varied with one of the racially mixed groups being led by a white counselor, one led by a negro counselor, and a third by a team of counselors, one negro and one white. The control groups were similarly comprised but met only for contact activities such as light conversation, games, playing records, and reading magazines. Ten weeks from the date of pretesting the subjects were posttested on the same instruments and the gain scores, which represented reductions in negative intergroup attitude, were calculated. The results on each instrument were analyzed separately using a 2x3 factorial design of analysis of variance to accommodate both the effect of counseling versus no counseling and the effect of three variations in the race of the group leaders (See Fig. 1).

Experimental Group (Adlerian Group Counseling)	Subjects: 5 white 5 negro Counselor: 1 white	Subjects: 5 white 5 negro Counselor: 1 negro	Subjects: 5 white 5 negro Counselor: 1 white 1 negro
Control Group (Conversation and Activity Group)	Subjects: 5 white 5 negro Counselor: 1 white	Subjects: 5 white 5 negro Counselor: 1 negro	Subjects: 5 white 5 negro Counselor: 1 white 1 negro

Fig. 1   Composition of Groups for Comparison
(2x3 Factorial Design)

Findings and Conclusions

Since the interest in this research is primarily that of the consumer and not the researcher, the data from which the findings and conclusions are drawn are not reported. However, a complete and statistical resume' of the investigation and findings are located in the author's dissertation (Owen, 1970), and may be easily secured from the West Virginia University library.

Basically, the hypotheses proposed in the study were not statistically supported, *i.e.,* the data failed to substantiate the hypothesis that negative racial attitudes would be improved within counseled groups and no evidence was provided that the race of the group counselor(s) is important when counseling with mixed groups at this grade level.

Although the data suggest that we must postpone any decisions as to the effectiveness of group counseling specifically directed at improving racial relations pending further investigation, it is interesting to note what appears to be taking place within the groups. The mean gains for the three counseled groups on the Self-esteem Inventory, the Semantic Differntial, and the Ohio Social Acceptance Scale were 4.600, 6.167, and .107 respectively. The comparable scores from the control groups were .867, 4.367, and .230. One is not permitted to form conclusions from events that could very well be attributed to chance, however, one could propose that if movement in the hoped for direction is taking place within the counseled groups, it is primarily a positive change in self-esteem. The lack of significant findings on the Semantic Differential and the Ohio Social Acceptance Scale indicate either the group counseling treatment was not effective as measured by these scales, or that changes in attitudes and behaviors toward others follow a sequential pattern. If the latter is the case, with changes in self-esteem preceeding changes in attitudes and behavior, then the lack of positive results on the two scales, which were designed to measure attitudes and social choice, would be consistent with the gains in self-esteem for the counseled students.

Thus, the study lends some support to the notion that group counseling is effective in changing attitudes. However, systematic studies should be conducted to determine the **process** or **sequence** for change, and variations using different compositions of groups (*e.g.* all boys, all girls, etc.) and length of counseling time need to be conducted. One important implication from the study seems to be that the race of the counselor has little or no effect on the responses of the participants in groups specifically designed to change negative attitudes toward other racial groups.

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