HUGH M. LEARD,
Department of Counsellor Education,
McGill University.

THE ELEMENTARY COUNSELLOR AND DISCIPLINE

ABSTRACT: Elementary-school counselling is in need of a new image. It is not enough to acknowledge advances in the behavioral sciences and their implications for education. The elementary-school counsellor should have a thorough understanding of the many problem areas in which he will be involved. He should be trained to handle specific problems in a competent, effective manner. Most teachers encounter discipline problems in their classrooms. Many aspects of school functioning, teacher behavior as it pertains to classroom management, and individual psychology are related to the entire question of discipline. These are discussed and with them a number of techniques are suggested which may be used in dealing with students who display problem behavior.

In the 1970's, an important challenge to school counsellors will be the obtaining of favorable notice from individuals and institutions which they serve. Failure to do this could well mean that counsellor stature will be branded "another pedagogical fad of the 1950's and '60's." A growing concern rests in the premise that counselling will become a myth if counsellors fail to meet the perceived needs of those who present themselves for assistance. A counsellor should, therefore, possess those skills which will enable him to help the child, the teacher, and the administrator deal with many real problems encountered within the school setting. This means that a counsellor should have some specific and practical training in methods related to working with problem children in the classroom.

While one may question the types of problems with which a counsellor should be concerned, experience indicates that few, if any, teachers escape responsibilities associated with a rather wide variety of discipline problems. This is, consequently, an area which demands the elementary counsellor's attention. In this discussion, certain aspects of school functioning will be considered with particular reference to their relationship to discipline. Also to be examined will be a number of techniques which elementary counsellors have used in dealing with several discipline problems in our schools.

THE COUNSELLOR AS CONSULTANT

There are many roles which the elementary-school counsellor may assume in his efforts to deal with children who present discipline problems. Counselling, per se, is, of course, his most significant function. Referrals to counsellors often result from specific disciplinary

situations which have been experienced within the classroom. Group or individual counselling usually follows, and, when handled effectively, perceptual and behavioral change is facilitated. This specific function is adequately described in many counselling texts.

Either individual or group counselling fulfills the most traditional role of counselling. However, the elementary-school counsellor must create a unique identity in the educational matrix of the primary grades. The effects of counselling children who are discipline problems have been described and researched for many years. This does not prevail in the area of consultation. As a consultant, the counsellor is a facilitator rather than a therapist (Faust, 1968). The teacher, not the child, becomes the focus of his attention. The counsellor's objective is to assist the teacher in a manner which will make her more effective on future occasions. The counsellor may meet with teachers individually or in groups to consider ways of dealing with children who present discipline problems. He visits classrooms and spends much of his time away from his office. Administrators and teachers perceive the counsellor-consultant as a co-worker who performs a variety of functions. He has a deep understanding of human behavior and utilizes this in assisting teachers to understand child behavior and the effects of environmental circumstances. The counsellor-consultant also focuses on planning for specific experience which can lead to behavioral change in the classroom.

IMPACT OF THE TEACHER

Understandably, the classroom teacher has a significant and very direct effect upon the child. It is she who determines what type of social and emotional relationships will be developed in her classroom. Her likes, prejudices, fears, and enthusiasms will shape her reaction to her pupils and to classroom events which she perceives as problems (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). One teacher may contribute immeasurably to the intellectual and emotional growth of a child. Another teacher may have an adverse effect upon the same child and regard him as a constant discipline problem.

A counsellor should anticipate that some teacher-child relationships will contribute to the enhancement of mutual problems. Consider, for example, a teacher who controls her classroom autocratically and who handles breaches of the "rules" punitively. In such a situation, fear will force some children to conform to the rules. Others, however, will react in a hostile manner towards the teacher and will be considered a discipline problem.

"Love" and guilt-producing techniques are sometimes used by teachers to control their classes. Upon examination, the counsellor may discover that problem students in the classes of such teachers are those who simply do not feel guilt after breaking teacher-made rules. Such methods of controlling classroom behavior may also lower the self-esteem of certain children so drastically that an intense, adverse reaction to the teacher will ensue.

Ideally, all schools should be staffed by well-adjusted teachers whose

problems are such that they do not interfere with effective teaching. Teachers, like other humans, are more-or-less well-adjusted. When a teacher is excessively or inappropriately upset by a pupil's mannerisms or behavior, she may have conflicts which center on the mannerisms or behavior in question. In such a situation, the teacher will find it difficult to control her impulses and, in a logical and effective manner, bring discipline to the situation.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

Those who teach are actually involved in those processes which lead to the enhancing and changing of behavior. Teachers usually have explicit ideas as to how this may best be accomplished. Unfortunately, some of these ideas suffer when measured in terms of validity and effectiveness. On the basis of some inarticulated criteria, however, they have become firmly implanted in the behavioral repertoires of those who hold them. This is exemplified by the assumption that children will behave differently if they are told what they ought to do and are given logical reasons for changing their behavior. It is somewhat unfair, then, to consider that a child is a discipline problem simply because one's logic and reasoning does not result in a change in his behavior.

Of all the methods available for the control of behavior, punishment is probably the one which is most frequently used. Because punishment usually stops the undesirable behavior at the time it is used, it is perceived as an enduring and desirable influence in a child's behavior. The use of punishment as a disciplinary tool, however, is too often abused. Punishment is most effective when its use is a planned strategy. Used by an adult in the heat of anger or frustration, its effectiveness is doubtful. It should only be used when the relationship between the adult and the child is a positive one and only when the child feels that it is an understandable consequence of his actions. If the child does not have a sense of wrong-doing, punishment will seldom increase his desire to control his behavior. It may act as a reward by bestowing a form of status on a child who dares to rebel against a teacher who is generally disliked by the group.

Ideally, a teacher should have an intimate knowledge of child psychology. She should be a model of self-control. It has been found repeatedly that teachers who know the most about children and who are sensitive to their needs and interests are most successful. This type of teacher has more influence on her students, forms more effective relationships with them, and has fewer discipline problems than the teacher who has little understanding of children and their problems. When a child feels that he is understood and accepted by a teacher, he will identify with her and will desire to subscribe to her goals. A reasonable degree of self-control will enable a teacher to maintain predictable relationships with her students. Few things are more upsetting to children than inconsistent treatment. A teacher who is able to control her emotions in the classroom can look for meaning in a child's behavior without administering impulsive, severe discipline. Some teachers lack sound psychological backgrounds or reasonable

degrees of impulse control. In such cases, the counsellor-consultant's task is to work with the teachers, attempting to help them acquire genuine understandings of children and their problems. If the teacher is overly anxious or overly hostile or impulsive, she will have difficulty establishing acceptable classroom routines. Her students will have difficulty developing safe, secure relationships with her. An important, albeit difficult, goal for the counsellor-consultant is that of helping the teacher understand the effect of her frustration and conflict upon the total learning situation. In such a situation, the teacher might be encouraged to seek therapeutic assistance in the hope that this will assist her in developing frustration tolerance and self-control. Because students respond to changes in the behavioral attitudes of their teachers, a small positive change in a teacher is often reflected in significant improvement in classroom functioning. The teacher receives positive reinforcement for her changes. In turn, this encourages her and may make the growth process self-sustaining.

The first task that a teacher faces at the commencement of a new school year is that of coming to grips with the control and management problems which are posed by a class of thirty or more children. She can avoid many problems if she does some planning before meeting the class at the beginning of the school year. At the time of such planning, the counsellor may play a significant role. He may alert interested teachers to the needs for this type of planning and provide them with background information which might otherwise be unavailable. Many teachers are unaware of the fact that there will usually be two or three children in each class whose behavior deviates to a significant degree from the norm. There will also be several children whose problems are less noticeable but who, nevertheless, need special help and the attention of a skilled teacher. Assistance and information relative to the "problem" pupils in her classroom will enable the teacher to plan the special approaches she will use in working with them. As the teacher surveys her class, she becomes sensitive to the individual needs of her students. This assists her in obtaining a favorable response from all children in the class at the earliest possible time in the school year.

The counsellor-consultant may play another important role prior to the beginning of the fall term. A surprising number of teachers appreciate a short "pep" talk which helps in preparing them for the first weeks and months of the school year. Such a talk might include a reminder that the classroom tone for the year is set during the first week of a new school term. Decisions will be made by the teacher and the students concerning acceptable ground rules, the handling of routines, and the operational mechanics of the classroom. It is important to remind some teachers that their new students will expect them to have made decisions about classroom functioning. It is necessary for the teacher to communicate these decisions clearly as she structures classroom routines. Significantly, nothing upsets a child more than not knowing what is expected of him by his new teacher and what he, in turn, can expect of his teacher (Olson & Wattenberg, 1955). It is difficult for some teachers to modify the

kinds of relationships they have enjoyed with children during the summer vacation months in such a way as to make them most effective in the classroom. A review of common classroom difficulties and frustrations sensitizes teachers to the unique problems which face the profession and this may serve to prevent their occurrence. In general, teachers can expect to experience problems in their classroom early in each school term. Effective teachers who work through these problems early in the school year find that the remainder of the year can be used to much greater advantage. Few classroom problems have simple solutions. Some teachers become frustrated when solutions are not easily found. Some become concerned feeling that their pupils will never learn certain defined routines that make possible the smooth functioning of the classroom. When teacher frustration becomes too great, power and authoritative techniques are sometimes used to induce conformity. Anticipating this and other inappropriate reactions to predictable classroom situations, the counsellor-consultant can do much to sensitize teachers to difficulties which may otherwise prompt rigid or inappropriate measures.

A teacher can spare herself a considerable amount of concern if she develops a "counsellor sensitivity" to the tone and mood of the class. The teacher who is alert to symptoms of boredom can save many children from becoming "discipline problems." Children who remain unstimulated or overly frustrated for long periods soon express a restlessness which is contagious. An alert teacher can perceive adverse changes in the mood of her pupils and will take appropriate counter measures before they get out of hand. A change of activity or focus can often result in the avoidance of "high-pressure teacher tactics."

HANDLING SPECIFIC PROBLEMS BEHAVIOR

For the counsellor-consultant's consideration as he works with teachers, this section will present approaches to classroom problems from several theoretical and practical view-points. In general, the role of the counsellor as an active participant in the disciplinary process has not received sufficient attention. It is appropriate, then, to present some simple, elementary considerations. The counsellor-consultant is well advised to remember that a teacher who is emotionally involved in a particular situation may fail to consider even the simplest solutions to her problems. Any suggestions which are made are not to be interpreted as prescriptions. They are presented in an attempt to stimulate additional thinking about the counsellor's role in the disciplinary process. It is also intended to point out that there is a highly relevant and complementary role for the counsellor to play in that process.

Aggressive behavior probably causes greater teacher concern than any other type of behavior. It usually disrupts on-going classroom activities. It often evokes counter-aggression in other class members. It follows that effective teaching is terminated by the lack of a reasonable semblance of order in the classroom concerned. Generally

speaking, there is little to be gained by the use of force per se as a corrective measure. Most aggressive kinds of behavior can be inhibited by engendering a significant amount of fear in a child. The child, however, has still to deal with his hostile feelings. Usually, he exhibits other symptoms which demand attention. A more desirable and therapeutic method of dealing with aggressive behavior in the classroom lies in the encouraging of acceptable kinds of catharsis. If a child is allowed to express his anger, he will relieve some of his inner tensions and will have less need to act in an aggressive manner. Nighswander and Mayer (1969), however, are concerned about the use of this method of reducing aggressive behavior in children of elementary school age.

Several considerations should be examined before attempts are made to deal with a child who displays aggressive behavior. Close counsellor-teacher co-operation facilitates this process. A combination of the teacher's knowledge of the child's behaviors and the counsellor's understanding of personality dynamics may be translated into an approach which will modify aggressive behaviors. Initially, it is necessary to establish whether aggressive symptoms appeared suddenly or whether they are part of a long history of aggressive behavior. Children with long histories of aggressive reactions have probably experienced all the "usual" disciplinary techniques and punishments. These have proven ineffective. In the case of a teacher report that a child has exhibited sudden aggressive behavior, it would be wise to investigate the possibility that the child has reacted to some form of situational crisis. The sudden disruption of a child's life is an upsetting experience for him. It is not unusual to find that the anxiety and confusion which accompany a crisis are expressed in some form of aggressive behavior. Sudden separation from one or both parents caused, say, by unexpected hospitalization, may trigger intense child reaction. A dramatic parental conflict may have the same effect. Knowledge of the crisis assists the teacher and the counsellor in their efforts to focus on the child's needs. Working together, they may be able to give the child the support that he urgently requires. In such cases, a tolerant, supportive relationship with the child is usually indicated. Any extreme measures designed in the hope of making the child conform to more acceptable classroom behavior patterns simply add to his disequilibrium. The teacher should be assured that once the crisis has passed, the child usually regains his emotional balance. If the teacher supports the child emotionally and is tolerant of the child's behavior during the period of stress, she will probably find that her relationship with the pupil is strengthened.

An important consideration rests in the degree to which the child is disturbed. With this knowledge, methods to be used in serving the child may be more readily determined. In the case of a child who is basically stable, the method of dealing with aggressive symptoms differs considerably from that employed when a neurotic or severely disturbed child is involved. If the counsellor-consultant ascertains that the child who is exhibiting aggressive behavior is a

relatively stable child who, perhaps, comes from a home where over-permissiveness prevails, the teacher could be encouraged to place rather firm limits on the child's behavior. Possibly few firm, consistent limits have been placed on his behavior at home. His demands and aggressive behaviors could mean that he has not learned to exercise appropriate inner control. The teacher should be warned that such a child's behavior often worsens before signs of improvement are evident. In the initial stages, as the teacher attempts to apply limits to the child's behavior, she may require considerable support from the counsellor-consultant. The child may be quite resistive to controls but will learn to accept them if the teacher likes the child and, in turn, is liked by the child. Resistance behaviors may include excessive demands, aggressive behavior, crying, hovering about the teacher's desk, and gestures made in order to attract the attention of classmates. The "turning on" of considerable "charm" may be involved. If the teacher can specify her expectations for the child and enforce limits in a non-punitive, accepting and tolerant fashion, changes in the child's behavior may occur rather quickly. Such methods will prove less effective for the more disturbed child.

Age, of course, is a vital concern in the consideration of aggressive behaviors. Many children of elementary-school age are in the process of developing controls over some of their stronger impulses. They should not be unduly penalized for an occasional hostile explosion. Older children who fresuently resort to aggressive forms of behavior should receive different consideration. These children are more likely to have deeply imbedded personality problems, the approach to which would be systematic and specific.

Aggression usually refers to expressively hostile behavior. Such behavior occurs when frustration is experienced in attempts to attain goals that one considers personally significant. Aggressive behavior in the classroom may result from family problems experienced by children. It may be, to a great degree, the product of classroom dynamics. Remedial methodology to be considered is more applicable to the preventing of frustration and to the handling of aggression in classroom situations.

An interesting and highly successful method of dealing with aggressive behavior has been developed by Keirsey (1965). The persons most involved with the aggressive child — parents, teacher, and counsellor-consultant—identify one or two of the child's overt aggressive behaviors. After a careful count is made to determine the frequency of the behavior, a contract with the child regarding the behavior is drawn up. In the contract, a reasonable time period is stated during which the child can be expected to control his behavior. If the child controls his behavior for the stated time period, the contract states that he is to receive one check mark. If he fails, a check mark is taken away. After receipt of a number of check marks, for example, 12, he may choose as a reward a chocolate bar or a small toy. However, if four or more check marks are taken away, he is then required to give up a privilege that he enjoys for a day. This could be a television program. Once a child is able to control his behavior for a stated

period of time, the length of the interval is increased. As soon as the child's behavior begins to improve, the teacher uses praise to further enhance the satisfaction the child experiences from self-control. Often, after a period of time, children indicate that they no longer need check marks. They feel capable of controlling their behavior without them.

The withdrawal of privileges is a well known technique which is frequently employed in depressing undesirable behavior. Keirsey's approach, however, adds an important dimension to this form of discipline. Anger and hostility responses are not aroused. Often, these result from the withdrawal of privileges without first making the pupil aware of such action. Failure to keep the magnitude of the withdrawn privilege commensurate with the misbehavior may also result in anger and hostile responses.

Noteworthy is the fact that there have been many behavioral techniques developed during the last decade which deal with specific discipline problems (Brown, 1971; Carlson, Arnold, Becker, & Madsen, 1968; Hunter, 1967; Ullmann & Krasner, 1965; Ullrich & Mabry, 1966). It is particularly pertinent for counsellor-consultants to examine carefully the criticisms that behaviorists level at traditional methods used in effecting behavior change. Patterson and Gullion (1968), for example, suggest that the effectiveness of smiles and verbal compliments which are used by a great many teachers and counsellors in efforts to shape the behavior of students, is open to considerable questioning. In the opinion of some authorities, many students who are considered to be discipline problems require tangible reinforcers. These may be rewards in the form of toys, candy, or time activity privileges. The counsellor-consultant should be conversant with the nature and application of such techniques even though he may not endorse their theoretical basis. Teachers have effectively used such approaches to modify a variety of disruptive behaviors.

School life sets the scene for many frustrating situations that can provoke outbursts of aggressive behavior. Indeed, the child who presents a discipline problem often has difficulty conforming to the rules of the classroom and the school. Usually, his attention and interest cannot be sustained for reasonably long periods of time. Lengthy assignments which hold little interest for him serve only to aggravate him. Competitive challenges that expose his inadequacies affect him in much the same way. The counsellor-consultant can often assist in creating teacher sensitivity to class activities for which the child has a low frustration tolerance. Aceptable motor outlets and activity changes should be developed to which the child's attention may be directed when his ability to concentrate lessens. The activity may take the form of errand running or an opportunity to work in one of the classroom "activity centers." Discipline-demanding situations may result if the child is presented with an assignment that is too difficult for his level of skill or too great a tax upon his attention span. The thoughtful teacher is quick to sense such situations and, accordingly, restructures classroom activities.

There are times when a child's behavior gets out of control. If a

careful survey of a class suggests that a severe disturbance is likely to occur, the counsellor and teacher would be well advised to work out a planned strategy. This strategy should enable the teacher to maintain control over the situation. By removing the child from the situation where the misbehavior occurred to a place where he can regain his self-control is a technique which is sometimes quite effective. Although his approach to the child's behavior should not be used or regarded as "punishment," it is often employed for this purpose. The teacher should, therefore, avoid angry or threatening responses. The child and his classmates should understand that removal from the classroom did not constitute punishment and simply meant that the involved child required a quiet and less exciting place in which to regain his self-control.

A difficult and perplexing problem faced by most teachers relates to ways and means of keeping children productively engaged in the learning process. There are some children who quite regularly do not complete work assignments. Upon visiting a classroom, the counsellor-consultant may observe an all too frequent occurrence: only the more successful children are engaged in attractive activities, having completed their more formal work. By the time the slower child has finished his work, the period will have ended or the teacher will have been "patiently" waiting to proceed with the next activity or lesson. The counsellor-consultant can frequently help the teacher in her efforts to modify the behavior of the child who refuses to work steadily at his assignments. This is accomplished by giving the child an opportunity to choose an enjoyable activity in which he may engage upon completion of the assigned work. Often, after a short period of time, the child will attempt to complete his work as rapidly as possible in order to participate in something that he enjoys. Such activities should be meaningful to the students. There should be a fair number of activities from which to choose and they should be changed frequently. The class itself may be the source of excellent suggestions for activities. This technique requires the teacher to have a flexible schedule of class activities. Assisting the teacher to develop and sustain flexible attitudes and approaches is one of the most significant contributions made by the counsellor-consultant.

The "gripe session" technique is probably more familiar to counsellors than to teachers. It has worthwhile implications in the handling of irritations and frustrations which might erupt into rather severe disciplinary problems. Working together in the classroom, the counsellor-consultant and the teacher can provide students with an opportunity to discuss freely and without censure their feelings about personal or classroom problems. Such discussions may be initiated by a simple statement from the counsellor or teacher, by a story that epitomizes the problem, or by a film. It is usual for the counsellor-consultant to make careful preparations with the teacher before introducing this technique to students. The teacher may need support in playing an unfamiliar and difficult role. If the counsellor-consultant has any reservations about the teacher's ability to adapt to this new role, a discussion of this type should never be initiated.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper has been to examine the role of the elementary counsellor in working with children whose problems relate to the disciplinary climate of the school. It is important that this "new" specialist should be involved in more than the individual counselling of a few problem children in the school. Any counsellor-consultant who is hired to provide services at the elementary-school level should understand recent advances in the behavioral sciences and be competently trained in their application to disciplinary problems. In addition to a plethora of techniques, we have a substantial body of knowledge about the learning process, the developmental process, the facilitation of growth (Gordon, 1966), and the school as a social system. If a counsellor's training and function in the elementary-school setting do not reflect an understanding of the forces that influence behavior and a methodology that is effective in dealing with problem situations, much of his potential will not be realized.

The writer has attempted to point out that educational outcomes may include problem behaviors as well as positive growth and academic achievement. With this in mind, some aspects of the school's functioning have been examined as they relate to the child who has evidenced problems which became "disciplinary" in their implications. When dealing with specific discipline problems, emphasis was given to those behaviors which the counsellor-consultant and teacher could expect to change through the application of reasonable effort and understanding. An effort has been made to assist the counsellor-consultant to differentiate between such behaviors and those of a more serious nature which are, of course, more resistant to change or are generally considered to have poorer prognoses. It is understood that a child who presents a more severe behavioral disorder requires referral to other professional services.

RESUME: Le counseling au niveau primaire a besoin d'une nouvelle image. Il n'est pas suffisant de reconnaître les progrès des sciences du comportement et leurs implications dans le domaine de l'éducation. Le conseiller au niveau primaire devrait posséder une connaissance profonde de nombreux problèmes dans lesquels il sera impliqué. Il devrait être formé à résoudre des problèmes spécifiques de façon efficace et compétente. La plupart des enseignants rencontrent des problèmes de discipline dans leurs classes. Plusieurs aspects du fonctionnement de l'école, du comportement de l'enseignant dans sa classe et de la psychologie des individus sont reliés au problème de la discipline. On discute de ces aspects et on suggère quelques techniques susceptibles d'être utilisées avec les élèves qui manifestent des difficultés de comportement.

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