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## GROUP-GUIDANCE CLASSES — AN ANACHRONISM?

**ABSTRACT:** This paper attempts to answer the question raised in the title. It does so by briefly examining definitions, commentaries on group guidance, and observations concerning research in the area. Passing mention is made of ongoing research on group-guidance classes by the author.

The definition of what constitutes a group guidance class presents the first difficulty in arriving at a definitive answer as to the anachronism of group-guidance classes. The definition of group guidance can be as succinct and narrow as Mahler's where, "Group guidance is primarily a class or education experience, mainly involved with giving out information (1971)." On the other hand, the definition can be as broad as Bennett's. She defined the term thus,

Group guidance refers to any phase of a guidance or personnel program carried on with groups of individuals rather than between counselor and counselee or clinician and client in the face-to-face interview. It may include instruction in the classroom where the content is related to problems of self-appraisal, educational or vocational guidance, personal adjustment and interpersonal relationships. It may embody a great variety of activities in the extracurriculum that relate to these areas (1963, p. 5).

Canadians who write about group guidance tend to be positive in their position on this aspect of guidance. Auld and Stein held that, "The most effective means of meeting a student's guidance needs is through the provision of a definite portion of school time, throughout the grades, for group guidance (1965, p. 57)." Guest, recorded in this journal, said in an address,

Guidance is like a suit of clothes. Group guidance could be considered one leg of the trousers, and individual counseling the other leg. Neither is complete in itself; it takes both branches to provide adequate coverage. . . . The real point is that the two functions supplement each other and are inadequate one without the other (1967, pp. 57-58).

Also in this journal, Neufeld, aware of "the challenge and responsibilities of group guidance" as well as some of the negative aspects, said,

Classroom guidance has suffered a great deal of abuse and neglect, but we are confident that to those of us truly concerned about guidance for all, for this and the next generation, the key to many of the problems of prevention and assistance to our youth in their early and most important years, lies in classroom guidance (1968, p. 122).

Again in this journal, writing on the counselor use of group techniques in the schools, and after discussing the differences between group guidance and group counseling, Paterson concluded, "Both group guidance and group counseling are valuable and necessary in schools . . . (1968, p. 90)."

Can a vehicle that reaches all and is preventative be an anachronism? It would seem, however, that it is not these aspects of group guidance that are anachronistic. Objection to group guidance is voiced by Johnson, Busacker, and Bowman. They found the scheduling of group-guidance classes objectionable because of the implication that guidance is taught and "because of the lack of subtlety with respect to the intention to guide (1961, p. 68)."

Glanz and Hayes noted that in the 1930's hardly a junior high school in the United States was without a group-guidance program which had units on character, vocation, and citizenship. Although group-guidance classes still exist, Glanz and Hayes add, "most systems have eliminated such classes and the term 'group guidance' has a sour taste for many educational administrators (1967, p. 3)."

Shertzer and Stone (1968), in viewing the contemporary scene, observed that the guidance class is rapidly being replaced by counseling groups and that the instructional nature as well as the size of the guidance class obviated meaningful counseling activity. They described counseling groups as "more personally relevant to the participant in their scope, purpose and accomplishments."

Despite the positive view of Canadians in the literature, the experience of those actually involved in group guidance tends to be negative. "Two Canadian High School Students" in outlining their guidelines for a high-school guidance department stated,

Many students when they enter grade nine find themselves confronted with group guidance classes that in actual fact are nothing but outdated sermons. Counsellors feel it is their duty to tell students they should not smoke, drink or use drugs. No one listens to the message of these lectures (including the counsellor who then goes off and has a smoke to relieve the tension he has built up standing in front of a lot of yawning students) (1974, p. 10).

Professionals also note the lack of success of group guidance classes and try to account for their failure. Auld and Stein (1965), noted above for their positive position on group guidance, stated that there was lack of clarity of objectives in early attempts at group work and that untrained personnel lacked skills and knowledge to make the program a success, and that this then resulted in many well conceived programs falling into disrepute with the teaching profession, the parents, and the students.

The Toronto Board of Education (1973) stated in a report that,

"many students found the sessions dull, and the teacher-counselors found them frustrating (p. 76)." They listed timing problems such as having only forty minutes in a period and then having to wait a week for followup, as well as the difficulty of maintaining continuity, as factors leading to the negative response to the group-guidance class experience. A resource booklet from the Ontario Secondary Education Commission of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, written by counselors, lists the reasons just noted to account for the virtual disappearance of group-guidance classes. In addition they note that the material was relevant for only a few and that "counselors were not trained to handle large group dynamics, and felt more comfortable in a one-to-one relationship (1972, p. 32)." Goldman (1962) examined the content and process of group guidance and noted that often the group guidance class differs from subject-matter classes only in course content. He feels that this might be one of the major reasons for the failure of so many group guidance enterprises. Kirby's (1971) assertion of the need for research in group guidance echoes that of Froehlich (1954) made some twenty years earlier in a paper examining group-guidance approaches in educational institutions. When one examines the research done in the area of group guidance, Froehlich's statement is most contemporary. He said,

It is unfortunate that studies of the relative effectiveness of one group technique in comparison with others are not reported more frequently. Opinions about or descriptions of technics are of interest to novices in the field, but such articles make little contribution to objectively based evaluations of procedure (1954, p. 148).

Shaw and Wursten (1965), in their review of research on group procedures in the schools, noted that, when the research on group procedures is analyzed both in terms of outcome and measures used, the outcomes of group procedures form the greater part of the research in this area.

Research in the area of group guidance classes is relatively scarce. It is also complex, as the researcher must consider grade, sex, age, developmental and socio-economic levels, as well as contemporary concerns. Preliminary results of research on group-guidance classes by this writer indicate the complexity involved in reducing the negative response to group-guidance classes in terms of content and process just within one grade.

Are group-guidance classes an anachronism? Some results and the commentaries, particularly, indicate that the concept of group-guidance classes is not an anachronism. But most results seem to cry out for a reincarnation of content and process. Therein lies the challenge!

**RESUME:** On s'efforce de répondre à la question soulevée par le titre de l'article. On examine brièvement les définitions, les commentaires sur les groupes d'orientation et les observations concernant la recherche. On mentionne en passant la recherche qui se poursuit actuellement sur les groupes d'orientation dans les classes.

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