

# PSYCHOTHERAPY IN THE SCHOOLS

C. H. Patterson

(From *Journal of School Psychology*, 1966, 4, 15-29)

During the period of the development of counseling in our schools, education has progressed from the essentialist position of concern only with the intellect. There was, first, recognition of the concept of *mens sana in corpore sano*, leading to concern of the school with the physical condition of the child. This was followed by interest in the social conditions of home life as a factor in the child's readiness to learn. Then the importance of psychological or emotional influences in learning received attention. So there is now recognition that the whole child comes to school, and thus the school is interested in the physical, social, and emotional characteristics of the child as well as his intelligence.

But the question has been, how far does, or should, the school go in its concern about the whole child? What services should the school provide to remedy deficiencies in the various areas? In the physical area, the school does not provide medical care or treatment. It is thus concluded that the school should not provide counseling or psychotherapy. Vocational counseling, yes, but therapeutic or personal counseling, no. In a recent workshop on counseling theory and practice conducted by the writer for school counselors, a school administrator, after visiting one of the sessions, remarked, "I hope they don't think they are going to do psychotherapy."

But if, as has been suggested (Patterson, 1963b), there is no essential difference between counseling and psychotherapy, and if, further, vocational counseling is counseling and is concerned with affective and attitudinal factors (Patterson, 1963a), can the schools say they are not concerned with psychotherapy? What is the responsibility of the school for the personal-social-emotional development of the student? To quote Allinsmith (1962, p. 29): "Is it to be the obligation of schools to aid in the development of healthy personalities, and, if so, are teachers or other school personnel such as guidance specialists the ones to have responsibility?"

The function of the school in society is a broad one--the preparation of the young for taking their places in society as informed, responsible adults. The performance of this function has widened considerably, and although there have been some who have objected, the school no longer is restricted to the teaching of the three R's but is concerned with the preparation of the young for making a living and for functioning as responsible citizens in a democracy. For effective, mature, responsible functioning as a citizen, it may be maintained that the individual must be relatively free from the handicap of emotional disturbances, and that the school has some responsibility to this end.

If it is argued that this goes beyond the assignment of the school, it may be pointed out that the school, as the servant of society, may be assigned whatever functions society desires it to perform. There is nothing preordained about the function of the school. The introduction of pupil personnel services in our schools is the result of the expression of the desires of parents and the community as much as the decision of professional educators. The public in many instances has exerted pressure for more counseling and other psychological services in the school. Where they

desire such services, and are willing to pay for them through taxes for the school, they should be entitled to receive them.

There is sometimes opposition by certain groups to the providing of treatment by a public institution, on the basis that it leads to socialized medicine. The schools do not provide medical treatment, and since psychotherapy is considered by some as a form of medical treatment, it is contended that it should not be provided in the schools. But treatment is provided by other institutions of society, such as mental hospitals, schools for the retarded, and by community mental health clinics, all supported in part by taxes. Interestingly enough, the providing of speech therapy by the schools has never been questioned.

Landy and Scanlan (1962) note that the development of guidance services in the school has been focused upon the normal or relatively healthy child, with limitation of the school's role to identification and referral of the abnormal child. Thus, they note, "The idea of therapeutically oriented services might well be viewed as a function that is not appropriate to the school. This position can be understood historically, but this does not mean that the position is justifiable in terms of the individual child who has a need for collaborative treatment service." It should be noted, however, that these authors do not advocate psychotherapy in the school. They suggest that the school provide "relationship counseling," which is "more than supportive and leads to some insight with actual re-educative goals," whereas psychotherapy works towards "reconstructive goals." They recognize the difficulty of drawing a hard and fast line between the two, which is probably the reason for the problems that they find in attempting to integrate the school's counseling with psychotherapy provided by outside sources.

Society may, of course, decide that counseling and psychotherapy should be provided by other agencies or institutions. In France vocational counseling is provided by the central government outside the schools. There are a number of reasons, however, for counseling services being offered in the school.

In the first place, the school has the child for a greater proportion of his daily life, and for a longer period of time, than any other institution. Thus the child is accessible and is well known by the school personnel. It would appear to be convenient and efficient, in terms of time and transportation, to provide counseling services in the school setting.

Second, there are inadequate community counseling services. Not only are there waiting lists, but such agencies must limit their services to those who are more seriously disturbed. There are many children and youth who need more help with personal problems than can be provided by parents or teachers but who do not require the services of a psychiatrist. Not all students with any degree of emotional disturbance can be, or should be, referred for psychiatric help. Even if such services were plentiful and easily available, there is still some stigma attached to seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist, and students and parents are often reluctant to accept such services.

Third, if the school is to offer adequate vocational counseling services it can and should provide personal counseling services. It is not possible to separate vocational problems from personal problems.

Fourth, "the inclusion of mental health services within a school in conjunction with the physical health facilities offers the possible advantage to a student of disguising from others the fact that a consultation is about emotional illness. Having the services at school may make it easier for parents to seek advice, since some may feel less strange in going to a school for help than to a clinic.... Many workers believe that to be effective a clinician whose job it is to aid students must spend his working hours within the social system of the school in order to have the necessary understanding to capitalize both diagnostically and therapeutically upon the situation as it exists uniquely in each institution." (Allinsmith & Goethals, 1962, pp. 127-128).

There are some practical reasons advanced against the school offering such counseling services. The first reduces to the fact that school personnel, including those currently functioning as counselors in the school, are not competent to engage in therapeutic or personal counseling and therefore should not attempt it (Moore, 1961). This may be the case. No one would advocate staff members performing functions for which they are not prepared. But if so-called "counselors" are not prepared for working with students with personal-social-emotional problems, then they are not prepared for working with students with vocational problems. Counselor education programs are currently training counselors who are competent as counselors, rather than simply testers and information givers.

A second objection is the cost; the extension of counseling services to include help with personal-social-emotional problems would require many more counselors and increase the cost of pupil personnel services in schools. This of course is true. But failure to provide such services in our schools, from the earliest grades, will add indirectly to the costs of other functions of the school, as well as to the costs to society, which, if it doesn't provide such services outside the school, will bear the costs later of emotionally disturbed citizens. And of course, the maintenance of community clinics is also paid for by the community.

It would appear in summary that the schools can provide broad counseling services, and that there are good reasons why they should provide such services. There are, of course, some problems involved in doing so. These will be discussed in terms of questions or issues.

## **Some Questions**

### *1. Who does counseling in the school?*

The days when the teacher was seen also as a counselor are past. It appears that in general the schools are accepting counseling as a separate function from teaching, requiring special preparation and training. With the acceptance of counseling as a function of the school, however, the question arises, who should perform this function?

The school counselor is seen by many as the appropriate person. However, there are some who feel that the counselor is inadequately prepared for this function, and has so many other duties that he has no time for counseling.

Dugan (1963) has suggested that there might be two kinds of counselors in the schools, one performing the functions which most counselors do now, including vocational counseling, and the other specializing in personal counseling. The first kind of counselor would be less highly

trained than the second. Although some specialization among the duties of counselors might be possible and desirable, at least in larger schools, the development of two levels of counselors would appear to be fraught with problems and dangers. If vocational counseling is not conceived of as the traditional rational matching process, and if it does involve the therapeutic handling of attitudes and feelings, then this is not something which can be delegated to less well-trained persons. In fact, in terms of the nature and extent of education and training involved, it is possible to train a therapeutic counselor in less time than to train a vocational counselor, since in addition to the preparation for working therapeutically with clients the vocational counselor must be trained and skilled in statistics, tests and measurements, and occupational and educational information. If there is to be a division into levels, then the higher level only should be designated as a counselor, and should include vocational and personal counseling. The less well-trained individual should be designated by some other title, possibly pupil personnel worker, or counselor aide, and could perform many of the noncounseling functions now required of counselors.

Another aspect of the problem of who should do counseling relates to the overlap in functions of the counselor, the psychologist, and the school social worker or visiting teacher. The social worker may feel that personal counseling is casework, and thus a social-work responsibility. The psychologist may see personal counseling as psychotherapy, and thus to be performed by a psychologist. The point of view of the writer on this question is that counseling or psychotherapy is not the monopoly of any single group but may be performed by members of various professions, including psychology, medicine or psychiatry, social work, sociology, and the ministry, providing they have had adequate education and preparation. In the area of human behavior, there will be an inevitable, but not necessarily undesirable, overlap.

Whether school psychologists should do counseling or psychotherapy has been a matter for considerable discussion. Psychologists could not agree upon this question at the Thayer conference on school psychology (Cutts, 1955). There are two reasons why it appears that we cannot look to school psychologists for the provision of adequate counseling services. First, there are not enough of them. The schools are far from the recommended standards for psychological services, which vary from one psychologist for every 1,000 pupils to one for every 3,000 (Cutts, 1955, p. 4). The psychologist is usually assigned to several schools, which he serves on an itinerant basis. Many schools have no psychological services. As Gray (1963, p. 110) notes, "The manpower situation is the most cogent argument against engaging in psychotherapy. There are few school systems blessed with sufficient personnel and other auxiliary services for psychotherapy to be feasible as an activity for its psychologists."

A second reason is that counseling or psychotherapy is not a function which is accepted by the school psychologist as a main duty and, related to this, is not a function for which he is usually adequately trained. "The school psychologist is not in the school for the primary purpose of rendering psychotherapy" (White and Harris, 1961, p. 278). Thus the school psychologist is not prepared to accept counseling as his responsibility.

The situation in regard to the school social worker or visiting teacher is similar. They are in short supply, especially at the secondary school level. And although one of their functions is casework with individual children, this is not a major function, or one for which they have adequate time.

It would appear that the major source of counseling services must be the school counselor. Although they are also in short supply, this situation is being remedied. It is also true that, for various reasons, school counselors have often done little counseling, but it is now being accepted that their major role is counseling and that they have a responsibility for working with students who have personal problems, as well as with students with educational and vocational problems. In line with this acceptance of the function of counseling, the education of counselors is moving toward adequate preparation for personal counseling. It appears that in the future we will be able to look to the qualified school counselor as the source of counseling services.

## *2. What is the role and function of the school counselor?*

If the counselor is to engage in counseling, both educational-vocational and personal counseling, how does this affect the concept of the school counselor? It is apparent that, as suggested above, the concept of the school counselor is changing.

There has been considerable interest and concern about the role and function of the school counselor. The American School Counselor Association has published a tentative statement on the role and function of the school counselor (American School Counselor Association, 1963). The counseling function is emphasized as a major function of the school counselor, both in terms of its importance and the proportion of time devoted to it.

Currently, perhaps in part the reflection of interest in preventing emotional disturbance, and in part the result of inadequate numbers of counselors, there has been some question about the counselor working with students with problems. This is reflected in the Wrenn report (1962), which recommends that counselors not devote their major time "to crisis situations in the lives of the relatively few" (p. 73), but should "place the focus upon the developmental and preventive rather than upon the curative and remedial" (p. 183).

There are a number of aspects of this question which might be pursued, and only brief comments on a few of them can be made here. First of all, there are more than a few students who, at some time or other, have problems which to them are serious or crisis problems and thus are suitable for counseling. Second, there is no sharp line between the preventive and curative or remedial. What is curative or remedial in terms of an existing situation is preventive for the future. Thus counseling for current problems in the elementary school may be preventive of problems at the secondary school level. Third, for the professionally trained counselor to withhold his services from students who have real problems and give his time to the normal students who have no serious problems is, in my opinion, to be criminally negligent and unethical. Prevention is of course desirable, but it will be a long time in the future before prevention of problems will be successful, even if it is possible or desirable to prevent all problems. In the meantime, as Arbuckle (1962b) points out, "We may stress the need to take action so that future accidents will not occur but we cannot in the meantime ignore the victims of the latest accidents." However much preventive action (or research aimed at prevention) is desirable, help to those who currently need it is also justified and an obligation of society. It is unfortunate that we do not--and perhaps will never--have adequate manpower for both research directed toward prevention and attempts to remedy or cure. But even if we concede that the only real solution to emotional disturbance is through prevention, it is not justified, as Albee (1963) proposes, to attempt to force or direct all our efforts toward prevention and neglect treatment. Not only is concern for those

who are suffering necessary, but the rights of those who would prefer to give their time and lives to treatment or attempts to cure must be respected. The solution to the problem is training more manpower, not neglecting an aspect of the problem. The school and the counselor are concerned about all pupils, of course, and some of the counselor's time and efforts are directed toward improving the psychological environment of the school to make it a healthy one for the student and one which will prevent disturbances or problems that develop from an unhealthy environment. Nevertheless, with the problems and needs which exist for counseling services, there must be someone whose major function is the provision of these services.

### 3. *How far does the counselor go?*

One of the concerns of those who question the place of counseling in the school is to what extent the counselor should become involved in intensive or extensive relationships with a student client. With how severely disturbed students does the counselor work? It is not possible to define sharply the limits of counseling in the schools. At one extreme, the counselor cannot spend all his time working with the so-called "normal" student who has no problem. As Arbuckle (1962a, p. 394) points out, "The counselor should be prepared to work with disturbed children, and if he must refer a child who mentions that he feels like killing his mother, or that he's sick of living in the same house with his mother, then he should not be working as a counselor." On the other hand, he does not necessarily work with a child whose behavior is so disturbed that he cannot be tolerated in the school nor even with any child who is acceptable in the school. Referrals will be made at times, although "if the school counseling services are as they should be very few children will ever be referred (to a mental health clinic) since the professional school counselors will be able to work with the vast majority of the more disturbed children" (Arbuckle, 1962a, pp. 393-394).

There will be differences among schools in the kinds and degrees of disturbed behavior with which the counselor will deal. These differences will depend upon a number of factors. One will be the competence and confidence of the counselor. Another will be the time that he has available. Another will be the nature and extent of other resources in the school and the community. The question of when and whom to refer is a difficult one. The more training the counselor has and the more competent he is, the better he will be able to recognize his limitations and the need for referral. An important part of the counselor's training is concerned with his developing an awareness of his limitations. In some situations it may be desirable to refer an obviously seriously disturbed student or one who is on the point of developing a serious disturbance, even though the counselor may feel competent to help the student, because of possible difficulties which might develop. Although he may not be responsible for the behavior of the client, he may be blamed for this behavior. It is desirable that the counselor have psychiatric consultation available, and certainly medical consultation should be available. In terms of the intensity of the counselor's work with a student, it would not seem unreasonable to expect that he could engage in counseling students over a period of a semester or a year or even longer, on a weekly or even twice-weekly basis where this was considered desirable.

## **Some Problems in Counseling in Schools**

There are a number of problems in counseling which are related either to the school setting itself or to the age level of counselees. Space is lacking to consider these in detail. Some of them are dealt with in another place (Patterson, 1962).

1. Students, especially younger children, may be relatively non-verbal. A purely verbal type of counseling may be inadequate with some students. Thus, particularly at the elementary school level, there should be facilities for play therapy. This also means that elementary school counselors especially should have training in play therapy.

2. It is well known that children, and adolescents especially, are reluctant to admit to having problems, or to seek help for them, or to accept help when it is offered. There are a number of reasons for this attitude. Students do not want their peers to know they have problems or are seeing a counselor. They do not always trust adults, who are the only source of help. And in their desire for independence they may resist help and insist on working out their problems alone.

3. On the other hand, there are many students whose dependence constitutes a problem for approaches to counseling which require that the counselee take responsibility for the content of the counseling relationship and which have as goals responsibility and independence in the individual. It is a paradox of our educational system that, while lip service is given to the development of independence as one of its goals, the natural result of much of the practice in education leads to the development of dependence in students. Some have suggested (see Patterson, 1962) that students who are dependent need a counseling relationship in which they can be dependent upon the counselor. A more positive and effective approach, however, is to recognize the desire for dependence but not to allow the student to develop a dependency relationship in counseling. Otherwise, it would seem that we would be abandoning one of the goals of counseling before beginning the relationship. It is recognized that dependent clients do constitute a difficult problem for counselors who want to help them overcome their dependence.

4. The school is often, or may seem to the students, an authoritarian environment controlled by adults. A counselor working in this situation may have a difficult time with students who perceive him as part of the authoritarian atmosphere. Such students may be submissive rather than dependent and not able or willing to accept the non-authoritarian counseling relationship. Perhaps a part of this aspect of the problem of counseling in schools is the lack of trust and confidence students often have, which leads to reluctance to discuss personal problems with counselors. It is well known among students that records are kept on them, that staff meetings are devoted to discussion of them, and that information about them circulates among the staff. It is perhaps no wonder then that they doubt the confidentiality of the counseling relationship. So-called "counselors" have too often been guilty of violating confidentiality.

5. There are a number of studies (Patterson, 1962) which indicate that students do not perceive the counselor as a source of help with problems. Instead they perceive him as a special teacher, administrator, or source of information. There is no doubt that in many instances the perceptions of students are correct, since the counselor is not a counselor in the professional sense but in name only. On the other hand, a counselor will not be perceived as a source of help with problems-- educational, vocational, social, personal, or emotional--unless efforts are made to

inform students of the nature of the counseling services which are available. Experience indicates that when a professionally competent counselor makes clearly known the nature of his services, students do bring their personal problems to him.

6. It is still the case that, even in schools where counseling is accepted and valued, the facilities which the counselor has are inadequate. Private soundproof offices, adequate in size and ventilation, are a necessity for counseling, yet they are generally lacking. Many administrators, though claiming that they support counseling, do not recognize or accept the requirements in terms of physical facilities and equipment for professional counseling. There is still the misconception that the counselor who goes out and throws the ball around with students is a better counselor than the counselor who spends 45-50 minutes with a student behind a closed door. This misconception is fostered by a recent film which was prepared with the aid of a national advisory committee which included several prominent individuals in the counseling field.

### **Summary**

Counseling and psychotherapy are two terms for the same function: there is no essential difference in the nature of the relationship, the process, the methods and techniques, the purposes or goals, or the results. Vocational counseling is not a different kind or level of counseling, requiring less background or preparation. If anything, preparation for vocational counseling requires more time than does preparation for therapeutic or personal counseling--the former includes the latter. Therefore, if counseling has a place in our schools, it cannot be limited to vocational counseling.

It appears that there is a need or place for counseling and counselors in our schools and that recognition and acceptance of this need is growing. The school has the opportunity, and the responsibility, for providing counseling, broadly conceived, to its students.

The staff member who has been designated as a school counselor appears to be the logical person to provide counseling services. It is true that in the past the school counselor has not in fact been a counselor, nor adequately prepared to function as a counselor, but today counseling is accepted as the major function of a counselor, and his preparation is becoming essentially preparation for performing the counseling function. Although there are some who resist this trend, it appears to be well established.

With the acceptance of counseling as appropriate in the school and the recognition of counseling as a professional function and of the counselor as the person performing this function in the school, school counseling has the basis for becoming a profession or, perhaps better, a part of the broader profession of counseling. One of the requirements of a profession is the performance of a unique function. If the counselor teaches, administers tests, advises students, meets with other staff members and parents, and provides information to students, there is no basis for distinguishing him from a teacher and thus no basis for recognizing him as a professional person apart from a teacher. But counseling is the unique function of the counselor, which distinguishes him from the other staff members in a school and thus forms the basis for his professionalization.



When we fully accept and recognize the counselor as a counselor, performing a wide range of counseling services, then we will insist that he be adequately trained for this function, we will provide opportunities for adequate preparation, and we will provide adequate facilities and opportunity for the practice of the profession in our schools. Then we will have the necessary and desired counseling services for the students in our schools who need them and can benefit from them.

## References

- Albee, G. American psychology in the sixties. *Amer. Psychologist*, 1963, 18, 9-95.
- Allinsmith, W., and Goethals, G. W. The role of the school in mental health. *Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health*, Monogr. Ser. No. 7. New York: Basic Books, 1962.
- Arbuckle, D. S. *Pupil personnel services in American schools*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1962. (a)
- Arbuckle, D. S. A semantic excursion. (Letters and Comments). *Personnel Guid. J.* 1962, 41, 6066. (b)
- Cutts, Norma (Ed.). *School psychologist at mid-century*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Assn., 1955.
- Dugan, W. E. Guidance in the 1970's. *School Counselor*, 1963, 10, 96-100.
- Gray, Susan. *The psychologist in the schools*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963.
- Landy, E., and Scanlan, E. Relationship between school guidance and psychotherapy for adolescents. *Amer. J. Orthopsychiat.*, 1962, 32, 682-690.
- Moore, G. A. A negative view toward therapeutic counseling in the public schools. *Counselor Educ. Superv.*, 1961, 1, 60 - 68.
- Patterson, C. H. *Counseling and guidance in schools: a first course*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. (Chapter 13)
- Patterson, C. H. Counseling, self-clarification and the helping relationship. In Borow, H. (Ed.) *Man in a world at work*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963. (a)
- Patterson, C. H. Counseling and/or psychotherapy? *Amer. Psychologist*, 1963, 18 667 - 669. (b)
- White, Mary A., and Harris, M. W. *The school psychologist*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.
- Wrenn, C. G. *The counselor in a changing world*. Washington, D.C.: American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1962.
- Wrenn, C. G. What has happened to vocational counseling in our schools? *School Counselor*, 1963, 10, 101-107.