

Harold Altmann

Show Them Love – Attempt to Understand – Reduce the Statistics – Mr. Elementary Counsellor

In the past two decades, counselling programs in North America have developed from high schools downward with almost no consideration shown for this service in elementary schools. Rapid changes in educational, vocational and personal domains of living prompted the surge of interest for counselling at the secondary level. More recently the Government of Alberta,¹ textbook writers, and counsellor educators have displayed an interest and have described new learning programs and experiences for elementary children which would strongly suggest a need for a counsellor at that level.

An investigation by Van Hoose and Vafakos² revealed a total of 3,837 elementary counsellors (K - 6) in the United States. A follow-up study by Van Hoose and Kurtz³ indicated a total of 6,041 elementary counsellors, representing a substantial increase. These statistics strongly suggest that elementary counselling has gained endorsement in the United States, but the status of this field in Canada is an uncertainty. In a provincial survey of Alberta, Altmann and Herman⁴ found that 62 people were employed in an elementary guidance capacity during the 1968-69 school term. Only ten of these people were employed as full time counsellors. The number of "helping" specialists in this field is far from being impressive when one considers the fact that 205,671 elementary school children were involved in the survey. Why the hesitation, deliberation and lack of support of elementary counselling in Canada? Are the needs of our children different than those of children in the United States whereby people feel this individual is not needed in our schools? Do teachers feel they can handle all the psychological, sociological and learning concerns of their students by them-

selves? Are parents saying they communicate with, understand fully and require no additional assistance from the school in order to improve these conditions? If indeed these assumptions are valid, then there is no need for further consideration of elementary counselling. However, statistical research is available which would deny these assumptions as being true.

The Canadian Mental Health Association reported:

Mental illness disables more people than all other diseases combined. 30% of the population of any community has suffered from definite illness with at least temporary disability.

5.4 million Canadians have "disabling disorders" at present and 600,000 suffer from "incapacitating illness."

There are 100,000 acutely ill children, but treatment facilities for only 400.

Suicides number 1,700 a year in Canada (suicide attempts total over 15,000).

There are at least 230,000 alcoholics in Canada.

In terms of absenteeism, accidents, alcoholism, inefficiency, and physical illness with emotional effects, mental illness costs Canadian business and industry close to \$1 billion a year.

On research, the Federal Government spends 5¢ per head or \$1 million per year; in comparison, we spend 30 times as much on agricultural research, 60 times as much on Defence research, even 6 times as much on military bands.⁵

Similar information derived from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics indicates that:

Of the estimated number of 19,554,000 persons (9,789,200 males, 9,764,800 females) living in Canada in 1965, 2,394,804 (1,256,925 males, 1,137,879 females) would be expected to be admitted to a psychiatric institution on at least one occasion during the remaining years of their lives (12.7% of the males, 11.7% of the females). The remaining 17,249,196 persons would not be expected to be admitted because (a) they will remain mentally healthy, (b) they do not utilize the reporting inpatient, facilities even though in need of treatment or (c) death will "rescue" them from admission to a psychiatric institution by intervening before they develop a mental disorder requiring admission.⁶

Although these startling statistics include adults as well as children, at one time they too were children. Perhaps some of you are saying, "Oh yes, but I'm 35 years of age now and I only started heavy drinking or feeling very depressed four years ago." So what if they had an elementary counsellor or somebody like that, what could he have done for me? Perhaps nothing, but research indicates that many serious concerns are

in evidence at a very early age, so perhaps something could have been done. Smith⁷ indicates that when professional and understanding help is not available in early school years, unheeded problems lead to our school dropouts, underachievers, slow learners, our physically and intellectually handicapped and emotionally and socially disturbed children. Glueck and Glueck⁸ have found that potentially maladjusted or potentially delinquent children can be identified at an early age.

Would it seem plausible then to assume that many of the individuals cited as statistics in this paper displayed evidence of difficulty at an early age; however, due to the lack of or type of attention gained from significant others, frustration, depression, and a feeling of worthlessness resulted? Are you concerned that perhaps even one of your own children may and perhaps already is one of the statistics mentioned? As teachers, principals and other school personnel, how many of your former students have become one of the cited statistics? Do you experience uneasiness or a bit of guilt, feeling at times that "perhaps I could have shown more concern," more " " ?

A substantial amount of research by Piaget,¹⁰ Nitzschke and Hill,¹¹ and Woodroof,¹² to mention only a few, indicate a vast array of needs, stresses, and developmental stages of children which require a great deal of individual attention and clarification by qualified personnel. Do our best teachers have these qualifications, and if they do, indeed do they have the time for these many concerns? With rapid social changes, do parents have additional time to spend with their children?

With the overwhelming changes taking place all around us, we would be extremely neglectful if we attempted to meet the many demands of children via new curriculum and teaching devices. Students seem to be perceiving adults more and more these days as being unapproachable, insensitive and unconcerned. But perhaps we all have available within us a formula or a device much more effective than giant computers, new curricula and teaching devices? Perhaps we fail to recall the impact of human concern and sensitivity to the needs of one's fellow man. Maslow¹³ feels the first prerequisite for psychosocial development is the basic need for relationships centered on love and affirmation. Hayakawa¹⁴ supports this claim by stating that hundreds of mistakes can be made in the handling of children and they will survive if we can provide the child with basic security, love and attempted understanding. Fromm¹⁵ feels for most children before the age of ten the

problem is almost exclusively that of being loved — of being loved for what one is. He speculates that certain types of neuroses, like obsessional neuroses, develop more on the basis of a one-sided father attachment, while others, like hysteria, alcoholism, inability to assert oneself and to cope with life realistically, and depressions, result from mother centeredness. Have any of Fromm's titles of maladjustment been mentioned earlier in this paper? Is love and understanding essential only in the early years of a child's life or is it of vital importance throughout all our lives?

When family life is seriously disrupted via separation, desertion, divorce and death, do we turn our backs to those involved in these types of psychological disruptions? These happenings many times make children less secure, less certain of themselves, their values and goals, and greatly affect the learning process. These experiences are all causes of anxiety which could generalize to many other situations with eventual more serious neurotic or psychotic symptoms or forms of maladjustment. Why are these statistics and theories of our children so important? My response is a selfish one — I am concerned about my own children and yours too. I think we as parents, teachers, counsellors and administrators can improve our interpersonal relationship skills and be of greater assistance to our children and our students. I do not mean to imply that it is necessary to physically love every student in our class. I am suggesting that we attempt to be more facilitative by taking time, showing concern and attempting to grasp the meaning of words and behavior.

Truax¹⁶ cites three characteristics of an effective helper as being able to demonstrate high levels of empathic understanding, non-possessive warmth and genuineness or authenticity with people. His extensive on-going research continuously supports his beliefs — that people who offer high levels of these conditions produce statistical and practical changes in people, while helpers who offer low levels of these "facilitative conditions" produce deterioration or no change in their clients.

Truax and Tatum¹⁷ in a study of socialization in preschool children found significant positive relationships between the level of teacher-offered accurate empathy and non-possessive warmth and the degree of improvement in preschool socialization. Aspy and Hadlock¹⁸ found that pupils receiving relatively high levels of these conditions showed 2.5 year gains in reading achievement compared to 0.7 year gains for pupils re-

ceiving low levels of facilitative conditions. A recent study by Altmann and Firnesz,¹⁹ involving self-esteem of elementary children suggests that high levels of facilitative conditions of the counsellor had just as much influence on improving self-esteem as compared to structured counselling techniques. The implications of these research findings strongly suggest a need to have people in "helping" areas who can display a genuine concern and love for our children. Teachers need assistance from parents, but even more than that they need assistance from a person who is continuously available and who can demonstrate many of the desirable characteristics of good helpers — an elementary counsellor. In the interim we must attempt to be more facilitative with people as we continue to deliberate and await the next report by the Canadian Mental Health Association to determine the need for elementary counselling.

The research cited in this paper indicates that problems of children can be detected at a very early age. The research indicates that certain "helper" facilitative conditions can have an effect on certain difficulties at a very early age. Statistics indicate there is a need for elementary counsellors for your children and mine. But in the meantime, show them love — attempt to understand — reduce the statistics!

references

1. *Statement on the purposes of elementary education*, Curriculum Branch, Department of Education, Province of Alberta, May, 1970.
2. W. H. Van Hoose and C. M. Vafakos, "Status of Guidance and Counseling in the Elementary School," *The Guidance Worker*, April, 1968.
3. W. H. Van Hoose and M. Kurtz, "Status of Guidance and Counselling in the Elementary School," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1970.
4. H. A. Altmann and A. Herman, "Status of Elementary Counselling in the Province of Alberta," (in press).
5. Canadian Mental Health Association, British Columbia Division, *Campaign Materials*, 1968.
6. *Dominion Bureau of Statistics Report*, 1968, p. 8.
7. H. M. Smith, "Preventing Difficulties Through Elementary School Guidance," *Elementary School Guidance and Counselling*, I (1), 1967.

8. S. Glueck and E. T. Glueck, *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency*, New York: Commonwealth Fund, 1950.
9. S. Glueck and E. Glueck, *Predicting Delinquency in Crime*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.
10. J. Piaget, *Origins of Intelligence in Children*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1963.
11. D. F. Nitzschke and G. E. Hill, *The Elementary School Counselor: Preparation and Functions*, Athens, Ohio: Center of Education Research and Service, College of Education, Ohio University, 1964.
12. J. Woodroof, "An Approach to Guidance and Counselling in the Junior Elementary School," *The School Guidance Worker*, April, 1970.
13. A. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Toronto: Van Nostrand, 1962.
14. S. I. Hayakawa, "Communicating with One's Children," *Psychology Today*, I (2), 1967.
15. E. Fromm, "Love Between Parent and Child," *Psychology Today*, I (9), 1968.
16. C. B. Truax, "Effective Ingredients in Psychotherapy: An Approach to Unraveling the Patient-Therapist Interaction," In L. W. West, A. B. Herman, R. C. Conklin, and H. A. Altmann (eds.), *Readings in Human Relationships*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970.
17. C. B. Truax and C. R. Tatum, "An Extension from the Effective Psychotherapeutic Model to Constructive Personality Change in Preschool Children," *Childhood Education*, 1966.
18. D. N. Aspy and W. Hadlock, "The Effects of High and Low Functioning Teachers upon Student Performance," Unpublished paper, University of Florida, 1966.
19. H. A. Altmann and K. M. Firnesz, "An Approach to Influencing Self-Esteem." (In preparation.)