

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF  
ADLERIAN PARENT AND TEACHER  
STUDY GROUPS IN CHANGING  
CHILD MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR  
IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION

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# Chapter I

## Introduction

Many parents and teachers are frustrated because the old authoritarian methods of child discipline no longer seem effective (Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1971; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964; and Hawkins, 1972). Dreikurs often stated in lectures, "When father lost control of mother, they both lost control of the children." He postulated that the authoritarian methods worked when children had a model of submission; but today, lacking this model, children are the last minority to rebel against authority.

There are many indications that more and more children are demonstrating behavior problems (Hawkins, 1972). The frustration this causes teachers is documented by Brown and Hathaway (1969) in a study where teachers indicated they would refer over forty percent of their children for counseling if services were available. Hanson (1974) and Jones (1973) have verified teachers' increasing concern over classroom discipline problems. According to these authors, the frustration teachers are faced with seems to be generated from a lack of knowledge and skills to effectively work with child misbehavior. The intent of this dissertation is to investigate the effectiveness of Adlerian principles and methods (a democratic model) of working with children to positively redirect maladaptive behavior.

### Statement of the Problem

Teachers and parents have a need to learn effective methods to use with children to reduce maladaptive behavior. They are eager for skills which will help them fulfill their responsibility to guide children toward self-discipline, cooperation, and responsibility (Christensen, 1972; Peterson, 1969; Suaber, 1971; Shane, 1969; and Magery, 1974). These authors have encouraged school counselors to become increasingly involved in meeting these needs through parent and teacher education programs.

This dissertation evaluates and critiques the effectiveness of a Title IV-C, federally funded project entitled, "Adlerian Elementary Counseling As a Problem Solving Model." The writer was project director and counselor during the three years of developmental funding from 1975 to 1978.

Several studies mentioned in Chapter Two have demonstrated the effectiveness of the Adlerian model's emphasis on the education of significant adults as an indirect method of redirecting child maladaptive behavior in a positive direction using a minimal number of subjects. This project was an attempt to demonstrate the effectiveness of these Adlerian methods with a large population of students, and to combine the effects on a child when both parent and teacher are involved in study groups learning the same principles and methods.

### Need For and Purpose of the Study

According to Hayes, Cunningham, and Robinson (1977), and Hudgins and Shoudt (1977), it has been the tradition of elementary school counselors to follow a diagnostic-remedial model. They spend a great deal of time in crises intervention and in trying to help students with behavior problems through small group counseling or individual counseling.

The above authors contend, along with Glidewell (1971), O Dell (1974), and Tavormina (1974), that an alternative approach is to follow a developmental-preventive model.

The Adlerian elementary school counseling approach emphasizes the education of significant adults in Adlerian parent and teacher study groups. This program teaches remedial methods as well as developmental-preventive ones; thus, parents and teachers learn methods which can correct and/or prevent misbehavior.

The implications of productive counseling time use are far-reaching using the Adlerian approach. An elementary school counselor with a student ratio of 500 to 800 students, or more, would find it difficult, if not impossible to work with every student in need. When a counselor trains teachers in effective methods of

working with student maladaptive behavior, the teachers can then reach every child in their classrooms on a continuing basis. This is also true for parents who learn these methods to work with their children in the home.

This rationale is confirmed in the literature. The desirability of the counselor acting as a consultant to train parents and teachers in effective methods of helping children with behavior problems has been established and successful results published by McGehearty (1978), Myrick (1970), Whitley and Sulzer (1970), the American School Counselor Association (1965), Hoyt (1961), Wrenn (1962), Dinkmeyer (1971), and Lauver (1974)

Counselors can further spread their effectiveness by training volunteers and paraprofessionals to lead parent study groups. The only difference between a volunteer and paraprofessional is that the paraprofessional receives a salary. Several trained paraprofessionals and volunteers can reach many more parents than a single counselor. And, of course, using paraprofessionals and volunteers is cost-effective.

Pine (1974), in a review of the literature on paraprofessionals and lay helpers, emphasized his conviction that counselors should teach counseling skills to parents and other significant adults.

Other authors have stated the effectiveness of and need for paraprofessionals. These non-professionals include volunteer workers, parents and teachers. Carkuff (1969, 1972a, 1972b), has shown that trained lay personnel bring about positive change in helpes through counseling services. This rationale is succinctly stated by Delworth and Moore (1974, p. 428):

Helping is what it s all about. But if we recognize that one way to help is to train someone else to do a part of what we can do, we can assist that many more people with our limited resources.

Lindsley (1966) states, "One issue suggesting the need for parent involvement is the number of children in need of services." Guerney (1969) agrees that it is teachers, and particularly parents, who are of sufficient numbers, in comparison to counselors with heavy caseloads, to deal with the problems of children. Hawkins (1972) is emphatic in his cry for mandatory training programs for parents and teachers in our public schools as the only hope to reverse the trend of increasing child discipline problems.

One presumption of the Adlerian approach is that when students leave the classroom or home environment for individual or group counseling, the effects of the counseling are greatly diminished when the child returns to the unchanged home or classroom environment (Dreikurs, 1957). However, when significant adults change their behavior, and thus the home or school environment, children will be motivated to change their behavior accordingly.

Paul (1969), Tharp and Wetzel (1969), Tramontana (1971), Seilberger, Sampen, and Sloane (1968), have all presented evidence that anyone who wishes to effect behavior change must frequently move into the natural environment of the subject. Ross (1972) wrote:

If behavior is to be modified, the modification must take place when and where the behavior manifests itself. This is rarely in the therapist s consulting room, and as a consequence, behavior therapists working with children frequently find themselves working through the adults who are in a position to be present when target behavior takes place and who have control over the contingencies of reinforcement. (p. 919)

In the Adlerian Elementary Counseling As a Problem Solving Model project, paraprofessionals and volunteer parents were trained to lead Adlerian parents study groups. Training consisted of completing at least one parent study group as a participant, and reported success in applying the methods with their own children. The counselor led the teacher study groups and then did follow-up consultation with teachers regarding the application of principles and methods learned to specific behavior problems with children in the classroom.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of working with significant adults in Adlerian parent and teacher study groups as an indirect method of changing child maladaptive behavior in a positive direction.

Four of the fundamental principles taught in Adlerian study groups are: 1) the importance of identifying the goal of the child s maladaptive behavior because different methods are effective for different goals of

maladaptive behavior, 2) the importance of using encouragement rather than praise, 3) the use of natural and logical consequences rather than punishment and reward, and 4) the use of a family or class meeting for involvement of children in the decision making process and shared responsibility.

Following are other principles learned in parent and teacher study groups. They are based on the teachings of Adler and Dreikurs:

BEHAVIOR is purposeful-goal oriented. We are often not consciously aware of our own goals.

MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR is any behavior which interferes with academic or social learning.

PRIMARY GOAL is to belong-to find security and significance.

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR-cooperation, self-discipline, responsibility, and mutual respect.

FOUR MISTAKEN GOALS of children under twelve years of age,, as indicated by their behavior:

1. ATTENTION-the child acts as if, "I count only if I am being noticed or served."
2. POWER-the child acts as if, "I count only if I can boss or defeat others."
3. REVENGE-the child acts as if, "I have been hurt and have the right to hurt back."
4. ASSUMED DISABILITY-the child acts as if, "I can't do anything right so I will give up trying."

NATURAL CONSEQUENCES-the adult does nothing-avoids the temptation to add comments or punishment to the consequence which follows naturally.

LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES-the adult structures the environment so that a "logical" consequence is experienced by the child for misbehavior. Guidelines for logical consequences are:

1. The consequence should be reasonable—not retaliation or punishment.
2. The consequence should be understandable and logical to the child. This does not mean that the child will necessarily like it, but senses the fairness.
3. The adult should be kind and firm at the same time-kind to show respect for the child, and firm to show respect for self and the needs of the situation.

ENCOURAGEMENT is the most important aspect of child rearing. Guidelines for encouragement are:

1. Give the child attention when behavior is positive.
2. Stimulate independence. Don't do anything for a child that the child is able to do.
3. Take time for training so the child knows what is expected and then express confidence in the child's ability.
4. Eliminate criticism. Build on strengths, not weaknesses.

SOCIAL INTEREST-concern for the interests of others and a desire to make a contribution for the common good of humankind under conditions of cooperation and non-competitiveness.

SOCIAL EQUALITY-the right of every individual to dignity and respect.

After learning these basic concepts, parents and teachers learned practical application methods to help misbehaving children redirect their behavior in a positive direction.

## Hypotheses

When both teacher and parent complete Adlerian study groups, child maladaptive behavior, as perceived by these significant adults, will change in a positive direction in the home and in the school.

Teachers and parents will cognitively learn the concepts studied in Adlerian study groups.

## Questions

The following questions were investigated:

1. Does child behavior change in the home when parents and teachers attend Adlerian study groups?
2. Does child behavior change in the school when parents and teachers attend Adlerian study groups?

3. Do teachers cognitively learn the concepts studied in Adlerian teacher study groups?
4. Do parents cognitively learn the concepts studied in Adlerian parent study groups?

### Summary

There is much evidence that parents and teachers are experiencing concern with increasing child discipline problems.

The importance of training parents and teachers in effective methods for working with children's behavior problems has been advocated by many authors. Studies have shown that it is effective to work with significant adults as an indirect method or redirecting child maladaptive behavior in a positive direction.

It has also been established that trained paraprofessionals and volunteers can be very effective in sharing the work load of counselors, thus greatly extending the number who can be helped.

Other authors have presented evidence that child behavior is modified more effectively when the child's environment is changed through significant adult's behavior change.

The Adlerian Elementary School Counseling Program As a Problem Solving Model incorporated all of these findings in a project which trained volunteer parents and paraprofessionals to lead Adlerian parent study groups and a counselor to train teachers in teacher study groups.

The hypotheses are that when parents and teachers complete these Adlerian study groups, child maladaptive behavior will change in a positive direction, and; parents and teachers will cognitively learn the Adlerian concepts studied in parents and teacher study groups.