

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPPORT GROUPS FOR THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

Nowadays there have been many psychological problems within the elementary school children in relation to the aspects of academic, personal, social, and morale development. Of course, these problems raise a great concern in the world of education especially for the professionals, the schools, the counselors, and the parents. Therefore, there is a demand to implement psychological aid programs for the children, in this case the students, through the service of guidance and counseling with support group approach. The implementation of support group for the elementary school children aims to solve the children's psychological problems in the scope of group. The children characteristic as a unique individual and the individual differences within the children become the counselor's main attention in the service of support group. Some results of the research explain that the support group is effective to solve the children's problems such as having learning difficulties, cutting classes, having familial problems, being unable to adjust themselves to their classmates or to their schools, having problems with their peers, smoking, having aggressive and destructive behavior, watching blue films, playing online game, trying to commit suicides, and even drug abuses.

Keywords: support group, elementary school children

1. Introduction

Each of the children has problems whenever he or she enters the growth and developmental period. This is a form of challenge for the children in order to learn about how to deal with the problems with their confidence and endurance toward the problems. When the parents see their children come home with many complaints, the parents will afford to help their children to change the children's paradigm that the parents consider to be harmful and to encourage them to try several things so that the children make the situation becomes better. This is what has been called as the ability to deal with the problems of life (*coping*).

In the reality, children are not certain in making plans and in training themselves to face difficult, heavy, complicated, severe, and complex hardship. The problems occurred in the children have been found in various forms starting from the lowest one until the heaviest one. The elementary school children in general experience the following problems: having learning difficulties, cutting classes, having familial problems, being unable to adjust themselves to their classmates or to their schools, having problems with their peers, smoking, having aggressive and destructive behavior, watching blue films, playing online game, trying to commit suicides, and even drug abuses. The children become less confident and have less spirit in learning, psychological problems, and even any

other health problems. These children need supports from the other persons concerning their parents, their friends, the counselors, and the surrounding neighborhoods.

The counselor usually provides recommendations for conducting counseling or case conference with the related party. The objectives of counseling that should be achieved is to provide a convenient place for the children, so that the children will be able to describe and to identify their feelings; then, the children will be able to practice new methods that relate to their feeling, their thinking, and their behavior in order to promote a more healthy adjustment and to expand their choice of life. Within the counseling, a counselor helps the counselee to realize their own power, to help finding ways of prevention (preventive efforts) by using their own power, and to clarify their self-desire according to their self-expectation.

Generally, children who attend the counseling process will experience the following phase: strengthening the relationship with adults, increasing the problem-solving, decreasing excessive focus on specific worrying matters by developing a more realistic understanding and agreement on one's self, developing self-acceptance, understanding various choices along with the consequences, strengthening healthy mechanism, and weakening one's self from matters that cause problems (Jackson, 2007).

In several forms of children's problems, there is need for the existence of counseling service by means of certain techniques, methods, and approaches. Support group is one of the group counseling approaches within the service of guidance and counseling for the elementary school children. From these statements, counselors might formulate problems in relation to the need of implementing support group for the elementary school children. Based on the problem formulation, there should be an in-depth discussion about the implementation of support group for the elementary school children in order to solve peculiar problems within the scope of group.

2. Discussion

2.1. Support Group for Children

Recently there have been so many problems in the scope of elementary school students that relate to drug abuse (narcotics and illegal drugs). These problems are, of course, concerned the people of education world a lot especially for the professionals, the schools, and the counselors. Therefore, there should be an effort to implement aid programs for the students. The researches that have been conducted shows that from several types and several forms of different groups, it has been found support group is the most effective one.

In the practice, the number of counselors assigned to the elementary school is very limited so that the lack of counselors causes the limited service of guidance and counseling for the elementary school children. In order to overcome such incident, the programs of counseling services are focused on the group of students that has immediate importance to be served by the counseling service (concerned persons group) and on the preventive group, such as: anger management and changes in one's family due to divorce. In addition to those tasks, the school counselors are responsible to coordinate and to implement the service of support group in the level of elementary school.

A support group usually consists of 4 to 12 members with weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly meeting. In this type of group, the members share thoughts and feelings about themselves. Mutual sharing and mutual listening creates the various points of view in order to test the problems and to develop feelings toward the members. Thereby, the support group allows its members to learn that other people are working hard to cope with similar problems and similar emotions and also having similar thoughts. The examples of groups of children who are involved in the service of support group includes: (a) the child convicts who gather together and share their attention about the lost of freedom, the release, the upcoming abolition, or the loneliness; (b) the children of divorced parents who

would like to talk about their experiences and adjustments; (c) the child victims of natural disasters such as flood or tornado, earthquake, tsunami, volcano, who share their feelings about losing the people they love, their wealth, and their hopelessness; (d) the children who are in rehabilitation centers, the support group in this case provide supports one to another in order to cope with alienation and loneliness; (e) the children who are struggling with the death due to having cancer, these individuals will find convenience when they hear that there are also other people who suffer from the same sadness and the same despair and they are also struggling to continue their life; (f) the children with disabilities who would like to share their feelings and their fears about their disabilities; and (g) the children who live with their stepparents, and so on.

The role of support group leaders formed by the counselor is to encourage mutual-sharing interactions among the participants. Ideally, these interactions are personal and the members talk directly one to another. In this case, it does not mean that the leaders are not talking. The leaders may be active and may wish to share their own experience. The group objectives could not be achieved if the leaders or each of the members dominate(s) the discussion.

The group leaders function well if they facilitate their groups and provide meaningful experiences for the members in order to provide opportunity to learn from and to share with the other members. A leader defines that the group objective is to produce inter-members interaction with an expectation to provide clarity for the members (Jacobs, Harvill, & Masson, 1994). The objectives of support group may refer to the objectives of counseling in the Alder approach, namely:

- a. To form and to maintain emphatic relationship between the counselors and the counsees based on mutual respect and mutual trust where the counsees feel accepted and comprehended by the counselors.
- b. To provide a therapeutic climate where the counsees are able to understand their basic feelings and confidences about themselves and the causes of the fact that their confidences are wrong.
- c. To help the counsees to develop insights about their incorrect objectives and their behaviors that tend to harm themselves, by means of confrontation and interpretation process.
- d. To help the counsees to find choices and to encourage them to make choices.

The implementation of the service of support group for the children serves to promote the children's preparedness and ability in learning, in achieving new or special skills, in learning life skills and correcting the unhealthy conditions, in

developing the children's potential or resources, in developing awareness toward values, priorities, and neighborhoods, in exploring and coping with the social and emotional challenges and in acquiring experiences of managing feelings, assistances toward the behavioral problems, healthy life, and optimal growth and development.

Each of the children or of the students in the elementary school has different needs in relation to the service of support group. Therefore, the group is developed with various relevant themes or topics. Several specific forms in the support group are namely: concerned persons, insight, break-free, and recovery group. Rainey, Hensley, & Crutchfield (1997) explain that concerned-persons group is designed for the students who live in a family that abuses alcohol and a family that experiences problems with illegal drugs. The insight group is available for the students who are involved in the alcohol or other drugs abuse and who need support from the other people. Break-free group is intended for the students who have been smoking and who want to quit smoking. Recovery group is designed for the students who have got treatment from drug dependence and who are in recovery process.

2.2. The Results of Researches about Support Group

Some results of researches show that the support group can be implemented effectively in order to solve problems for the child subjects in the elementary schools. Some of those researches are explained as follows. The research conducted by Rainey, Hensley, & Crutchfield (1997) in terms of the implementation of support group for elementary school children involved a number of participants from 22 schools. The support group in the school was scheduled to have 45 minutes in each session for a week. The support group lasted for six to eight session. The counselor discussed the right time arrangement for conducting group meetings both with the teachers and with the students. The result of this qualitative-descriptive result shows that the children were assisted a lot in anticipating problems because the support group was informative, interesting, and effective.

The next research is an experiment conducted by McVey et al. (2003) that serves to evaluate the effectiveness of peer support group in order to prevent eating disorder in the female children, covering increasing body esteem and self esteem and decreasing the negative attitudes and behaviors toward eating behavior. The subjects of the research were 214 female children including 115 female children as the control group. Before and after the intervention, the subjects completed questionnaire of self-report for three months. The findings show that participation in groups for 10

sessions was able to increase the weight, the self-esteem, and the increase of diet.

Howe (2006) conducted an experiment research that involved 9-12 years old students and he found positive contribution of the working group within the child community in increasing the academic comprehension in the field of science. The research has been supported by the results of recent survey of 11 schools in England (Baines, Blatchford, & Kutnick, 2003, in Howe, 2006) that showed that 28% of the learning in knowledge or science more involved the interaction of peers compared that of 5% in mathematics and that of 12% in English.

Another research was conducted by Steen & Kaffenberger (2007) about group dynamics in developing aspects as well as personal and social attitude in relation to the problems of family, friendship, and anger management (emotion control). The goal of academic results for the group is strategies in facilitating the personal and social development. The research involved 725 students of elementary school in Virginia. The goal of academic results and of specific personal-social characters gives many variations because the research was based on the students' special needs. One of the examples is how to have a relationship under a situation that triggers anger, how to communicate our feelings, how to use strategies in order to free our anger, and how to implement the abilities of anger management outside the group.

In this research, the researchers ran several procedures namely a group that was arranged in 8-10 counseling sessions depending on the progress of the members through the group (Gladding, 2003). The session took place once in a week during lunchtime and break-time. The school counselor employed several activities included bibliotherapy, communication strategy, art design, role play, modeling, and games. The counselors provided feedback and employed strategies to ease the discussion within the group. The collaboration or communication with the teachers and the parents should be conducted in order to obtain accurate information of the students and support of cooperation so that the counseling process would attain an optimal success (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007).

The counseling conducted in group for the child community basically is a dynamic interpersonal process and is focused on the conscious behavior and involves therapeutic functions such as permissive characteristics, orientation toward reality, catharsis, mutual trust, harmonious mutual treatment, mutual understanding, mutual acceptance and mutual support. The statement is in line with the opinion of Gartner & Reissman (1977, in Adelman & Taylor, 2003) that says that support group is based on the potentials of having mutual understanding,

having empathic attitude, building trust, having interpersonal competence, having openness, having mutual ownership, having mutual emotional support, and so forth in order to increase the efforts to solve and to cope with the problems by means of self-empowerment in optimum.

Based on the review of the results, there is an important thing that should be considered in the implementation of support group service namely the existence of collaboration with the professionals in relation to the problems being raised in the groups so that the students shall acquire the demanded facilities. For example, counselors might seek: health experts (doctors) for serving the children in dealing with the problems of smoking behavior, of drug abuse, of alcohol abuse, and so on related to their physical condition; psychologists or psychiatrics for helping the children who suffer from stress or post-traumatic depression due to the natural disasters; schools (teachers and principals) as facilitators for the children in the implementation of support group; family counselors for the children who suffer from a deep loss and an extreme hatred when both of their parents have been divorced; and the other professionals.

3. Conclusion

Children are a special population who has unique characteristics and individual differences. Therefore, the approach of support group toward each of the problems should be adjusted to the kinds, the characteristics, the symptoms, and the impacts of the encountered problems. It means that children who experience similar problems will raise different impacts according to their own response and reaction. Thus, the counseling technique and approach for each of the children shall be different.

The implementation of support group for the children in the elementary school is a part of the application of guidance and counseling service for certain population namely children. The children will obtain effective results because the participants feel assisted a lot in dealing with the problems that they encounter. This is due to the fact that within the support group there has been interesting and informative content in terms of its implementation and application and there has been ability in terms of providing guidance and counseling service (psychological aspect of the students) as well as social service. The limited numbers of counselors found in the elementary school within the implementation of support group can be outsmart by providing counselor-visiting time in each of the schools. In addition, the limiter numbers of counselors can also be outsmart by providing comprehensive training by means of short courses to the teachers who are directly involved in the learning process with intensive guidance from the counselors.

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