

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

## Consultation project in a comprehensive school<sup>1</sup>

(1968)

*A two-year pilot project was initiated by Martha Harris and her husband Roland Harris at the latter's school (Woodberry Down Comprehensive in London) that eventually became the School Counsellors' Course at the Tavistock Centre. They believed that the diagnostic, prophylactic, and therapeutic potential of the school environment was capable of much more useful development, provided the school already had an established basis of good pastoral care. The areas demarcated in the project were: work with the staff, work with pupils, and liaison with the child guidance clinic. Informal as well as formal meetings took place, with both individuals and groups. The focus throughout is on practicality rather than perfection, given the complexity of the forces affecting children's development.*

Two experienced child psychotherapists<sup>2</sup> were appointed for one session a week each to work in a mixed comprehensive school of about thirteen hundred pupils. One of these continued for one session during the second year. The aim of the school was to see in what way it might benefit from their specialised knowledge of child and personality development,

<sup>1</sup> Published in *Collected Papers of Martha Harris and Esther Bick* pp. 283-310.

<sup>2</sup> Martha Harris and Edna O'Shaughnessy.

in dealing with some problems in the school. The aim of the child psychotherapists was to become familiar with the range of problems in a school, and to see in the immediate event what light they might be able to throw on these. They wished also to consider in what way their training and that of members of their allied psychological professions could be utilized and improved to co-operate with those teachers who, through particular interests and responsibilities, are likely to be more concerned with the general social and psychological welfare of the pupils. One of the child psychotherapists (Martha Harris) was responsible for training child psychotherapists at the Tavistock Clinic; the other (Edna O'Shaughnessy) was engaged in teaching and in tutoring experienced teachers in a child development course at the Institute of Education.

#### *Approach to the School*

The project was in the first instance mooted by the deputy head,<sup>3</sup> then discussed between two child psychotherapists and the headmistress. There were then informal meetings between the therapists and senior members of the school staff, in particular the senior house-staff. Not until some positive interest in the project was shown by these staff was there a formal approach to the relevant administrative officers concerned in the Inner London Education Authority. The headmistress then arranged a meeting with the divisional education officer, the divisional inspector, the chief psychologist at County Hall, senior members of her staff, and the child psychotherapists in question. It was then agreed that they should be appointed as temporary part-time members of the school staff, responsible only to the headmistress, for one year initially. The two child psychotherapists then went to see the staff of the local child guidance clinic to inform them about the project, with a view to clarifying roles and finding possible useful connecting links with the clinic. The initial document setting out the aims of this project was distributed to the people involved.

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<sup>3</sup> Roland Harris.

The child psychotherapists were introduced to the staff and children as specialists helping the house-staff. Throughout the rest of the report they will usually be referred to as specialists or consultants.

Work done in the two years in the school fell under the following headings:

*A. Work with the staff of the school*

The headmistress, the house-staff, house-staff and parents, house-staff and children.

Staff of the remedial department.

A weekly group of six to eight teachers.

Various staff members concerned together with a member of the house-staff with particular children.

Incidental work with staff.

*B. Work with the pupils*

A group of five problem children from remedial classes.

Some prefects and members of the sixth form.

Some discussions assisting a member of the house-staff, with small groups of children evincing particular problems.

*C. Liaison with the local child guidance clinic*

Meetings with the headmistress were irregular and took place usually when some appraisal of the work and of relationships with the staff was indicated, and when consultation about some new development was appropriate. For instance, one of the child psychotherapists was asked to give two talks to sixth-formers on the nature of her work, in a series of talks on careers by representatives of various outside professions. Arising from this some of the prefects asked if they could come and talk about their problems as prefects. This was a welcome request, but one which obviously needed to be cleared first with all relevant members of the staff in order to avoid treading on any sensitive toes.

Discussions with the house-staff occupied the greater part of the time throughout the two years. Each consultant was attached as a matter of convenience to two of the four houses of the school (each house having two staff in charge: a man and a woman, a senior or junior in each instance) and was available at a certain time each week for consultation about any child who had emerged as needing special attention. In the second year the remaining consultant [Martha Harris] was available in the too-brief time for all four houses. In many instances she was present while the teacher interviewed a child in the semi-private conditions of the house-room, on matters maybe connected with some particular culminating misdemeanour or difficulty that had arisen during the previous week, or as part of the routine of selecting courses of study or choice of career. These interviews often took place during the lunch-hour, and at times were joined by some other member of staff concerned with the case in question. Pressure of time was very often a great handicap in having a really thorough discussion before and after the interviews, and on numerous occasions fuller discussion had to be postponed till the next week. Sometimes a longer time was set aside, and the parents of the child were interviewed and worked together with the house-staff and the consultant to gain a better insight into the problems involved.

During the first year one of the consultants was more especially connected with the remedial department, and the especial problems of the backward child and the remedial teacher. She was for several weeks present with one of the new teachers with one of his remedial classes. As a result of this the teacher picked out five of the most difficult children to work each week in a separate group for discussion with her.

#### *Teachers' discussion group*

This group had an abortive start in the third term of the first year. It was formed from a heterogeneous collection of teachers interested in discussing aspects of child development and problem children; some very junior staff, and others carrying greater responsibility. The difference in experience and in aims of the various members

made it difficult to establish agreed topics for discussion, and to keep the group working together in a fruitful way.

Another group was formed in the first term of the second year from experienced teachers (who were free at that time) and who were selected by the senior house-staff and deputy head. They were offered the opportunity of attending if they wished. They met regularly for thirty minutes each week before lunch—too brief a time, which often extended into the lunch hour with those who were not involved in duties. Discussions with this group ranged from queries posed by particular children to general problems of child development, the influence of social and environmental factors, the teacher's own part in relationships with groups and with individual children, and the influence of the school structure and hierarchy on the teacher's own capacity to function well.

As the group grew more familiar with the consultant and with each other there was much discussion of the particular emotional stresses and strains in teaching, of ways in which teachers could be trained to cope with them, and to help with younger colleagues, encountering difficult classes for the first time.

### *Work with groups of pupils*

The group from a remedial class has already been mentioned. The children were selected by the teacher with the help of the consultant who had already been for some time an observer in that class. They were chosen as the most difficult and taken for a double period for about half a term. The time was chosen to help them think about themselves, their feelings and their reactions to each other—a novel and difficult task for them. The class teacher and the consultant then discussed these occasions afterwards. As a result the teacher found that the children settled rather better in class and that he himself was aided in his own handling of them.

A group of five persistently defiant adolescent girls was taken by two of the house-staff for about twenty-five to thirty minutes in the lunch hour with the consultant present and taking part, helping to guide the discussion back to the examination of the children's own problems in fitting in with school life and life in

general. One of the children in this group had been referred to a clinic but could not be offered treatment because of the uncooperative attitude of the parents; another girl who could well have benefited from child guidance treatment had not been referred as the outcome would likely have been the same.

Another group of six children—three boys and three girls from the third and fourth years—met at fortnightly intervals for half a term with one of the consultants and their housemaster. These were children presenting no behaviour problems, law-abiding and conforming, but obviously inhibited in work, social relationships or general appreciation of school.

A third group of seven or eight troublesome second- and third-year boys also met with the same teacher and consultant. There was a plan to form another small group of intelligent girls whom teachers had hoped would stay on at school after the age of fifteen or sixteen to train for a profession, but who had elected to leave as soon as possible. One or two of these girls were enthusiastic about the idea of meeting to discuss what they felt about school and why they thought that they had had enough. Pressure commitments and timetable difficulties made it impossible to arrange in the time available.

The discussions with some of these sixth formers were also informal, held in the lunch hour. There were never more than four and never less than two pupils. No teachers were present; the theme and tone were set by two of the senior boys who were having great difficulties at school in their role as prefects, sensitive about their inadequacy, conscientious about their duties.

#### *Liaison with the local child guidance centre*

The therapists from the school went to meet the whole staff of the child guidance clinic during their first term's work at the school and followed this with occasional individual meetings with the child guidance worker connected with a particular child. Contact with the clinic was, however, much less frequent than was perhaps envisaged at the beginning due to pressure of time and the need

for attention of numbers of children in the school who might be unsuitable for clinic referral for various reasons. The main effect on the local clinic as a result of the presence of the consultants in the school was probably a greater readiness of the house-staff to contact the clinic about children referred there; and, related to this, more tolerant and realistic expectations of what the clinic could offer.

*More detailed comments on work done in various areas*

*Work with the house-staff*

The staff varied considerable in their readiness to avail themselves of the consultants. Attitudes varied initially from perfunctory politeness which could cover hostility towards yet another chore, another person to keep happy, or the resentful “Who on earth is this trying to teach me my job?”—to a very warm welcome and interest in trying to see what they could make of it. This was accompanied by pleasure in talking about the children and pride in their own work and that of the school in trying to do the best for the pupils. As one might expect, it seemed to be those who enjoyed the actual work and contact with individual children most who were the least hampered by omniscience and boredom and were prepared to entertain fresh ways of thinking.

Clarification of the consultant’s role, with acknowledgement of unrealistic hopes on the part of the staff and disenchantment when these were disappointed, was an immediate and often an ongoing task. Some of the more enthusiastic teachers half-hoped to be relieved of their most pressing problems or to be given the entrée to mysterious means of solving them. Pressure for spot diagnosis, for advice in partially understood situations, had to be resisted. In discussing different cases the aim was to link together information coming from different sources, of historical and current events in the child’s family and school-life, observations made by different teachers including the house-teacher and often the consultants themselves when present at an interview with a child. The possible

significance of these various data was then explored. Sometimes relevant courses of action were explored together but these always remained the responsibility of the teachers.

There follow some examples of children discussed:<sup>4</sup>

*Mavis and the geography refusers*

Mavis had done very badly in her geography exam the year before she was due to take the subject in GCE. The geography master informed her housemistress that Mavis had driven herself into a quite unwarrantable state of anxiety about this. She had become the centre of a group including three other girls who were all in a panic about the geography exam, and had come to ask him if they could drop the subject and change to another course. It was difficult to do this at such a late stage and unnecessary in his opinion, because they were all capable of passing the exam. The housemistress told me that Mavis was a friendly, intelligent, helpful but over-emotional girl who two years previously had caused some anxiety; she showed me her file in which the matter was well-documented.

At that time Mavis had been devoted to another girl, Judy, who was always getting into trouble with the staff. Finally her form-mistress had decided very perspicaciously that Mavis was the instigator. When Mavis was accordingly tackled, this had solved the problem of Judy, but Mavis then started to stay away from school, became really school-phobic, and it had needed a great deal of work on the part of the house and form teacher with Mavis and with her mother before she could attend school again regularly. They felt that this had been achieved eventually by getting her parents to buy her a little dog. For a month or two the dog had accompanied her to school, until Mavis had finally settled back there once more.

The housemistress was therefore afraid of putting too much pressure on Mavis to continue with geography lest she panicked and started to stay at home again; on the other hand the geography

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<sup>4</sup> The first child listed in the paper (Ronald) is omitted here since the case is discussed at greater length in "Teacher, counsellor, therapist" (Chapter 20).

master was afraid that if Mavis were allowed to drop the subject the other three would want to give it up as well.

Mavis then had an interview with the hometeacher at which I was present. She was an attractive, soft-looking girl, outgoing, voluble and flushed in her effort to explain herself. She seemed puzzled at her own attitude; failing to understand why she should find this subject such a difficult one. Miss A encouraged her to express in detail her views about different aspects of it, to think how her worries about it had developed, and tried to discover if they were related to any particular teacher. Mavis praised her teacher who, she felt, took a great deal of trouble with them all, and had given them a fair exam paper, but said she had known beforehand that she wouldn't be able to do it—even though she had spent hours on revision, totally failing to learn anything.

She kept repeating that revising for the subject ate into the time she should have spent on other subjects, especially biology. As the latter was a subject she could usually do she neglected to revise for it at all, thinking it better to spend the extra time on geography. As a result she had failed in biology too and that had really shaken her. She said that she could understand her teacher in class, and also the book when it was in front of her, but that she forgot it afterwards; and she instanced as an example the way in which islands were formed and suddenly appeared above the water. Maps she could not keep in her head and, when asked by Miss A to draw a map of Africa, she drew it back to front, realizing it was wrong as she looked at it, but unable to say precisely why.

It was finally suggested that she should come back in a week's time to talk about it to Miss A again together with the geography teacher. In the meantime it would be better for her not to get too involved in talking about it to the other three girls, thereby increasing their anxieties, as their difficulties with the subject were likely to be of quite a different sort, and better settled separately with the staff concerned.

Miss A and I then pooled our impressions about Mavis. We both agreed that she was distressed and puzzled by the strength of her reactions. I suggested to Miss A that geography appeared to have become a phobic subject for her just as a couple of years ago

the school had become a phobic place. The confusion about the maps and the formations of islands would on an unconscious level be related to adolescent anxieties about her changing body, sexuality, and babies; guilt about masturbation or masturbatory fantasies that she feared would eat into or invade her preoccupations to the detriment of all rational learning.

Miss A's immediate response was to say that this view of the matter made some sense to her. She recalled that there had been something peculiar in Mavis's attitude to the dog which her parents had bought her. She used constantly to accost Miss A to tell her about its sex life—when it was in heat, its association with other dogs, and the sort of pups it might produce. After a few months she had lost interest in it and the dog was given away. We discussed the dog's use as a more mentionable repository for her sexual impulses and curiosity.

The discussion of her behaviour and its possible interpretation was presented to Miss A as a tentative map of the situation, not as anything one could say to Mavis in a helpful or meaningful way. If there was a possibility of her having treatment she would have an opportunity to understand and work through these unconscious preoccupations in the relationship with her therapist; but I thought that in the present situation it was helpful for her to be able to express her anxieties in so far as she was able to formulate them, to have them taken seriously, and to have the real though irrational nature of them taken into account when planning what to do about her course of studies. The giving-up of geography would not mean that the source of the fears was removed, but could lead to a reduction in their exacerbation at a time when she seemed to find it particularly difficult to cope.

The next week Miss A and I shared with the geography master some of our considerations about Mavis before discussing further with her whether, and at what point, she should give up the subject and change to another option. He could not understand her failure in the exams as she had always been a good pupil in that subject, more so than the other girls who wanted to drop it. Miss A made it clear to him why she believed Mavis's failure in this subject

had to be considered more carefully than that of the other girls: that it was the result of a disturbance in relation to the work which had its roots in unconscious sources difficult to resolve in ordinary discussions. She was able to reassure him that her difficulty was no reflection on his teaching, although we considered it conceivable that her reaction to him as a man might have played some part in it.

When we saw Mavis again together she was much the same as the previous week: earnest, emotional, voluble and much concerned to explain to Mr R that her worry about geography had nothing to do with him. She went on to say she thought it had something to do with her inability to find her way around anywhere new, even if she had full instructions and a map with her. She always needed another companion to accompany her to new places, or she would get in a state and be unable to find her way back home. Her parents thought that she was silly about this at her age, just as she was silly to think she couldn't do geography. Her father argued about it with her and tried to get her to see how easy it was to read maps. This just put her in a state again and made her feel more hopeless than ever. Miss A let her talk, listened to her seriously, prompting with questions. Finally she said she was prepared to consider changing Mavis's course but this would take a little while as it involved timetable discussions with the deputy head. Mavis was immensely relieved and expressed her gratitude.

In discussions afterwards we decided it would be well to keep a watching brief on Mavis. Miss A arranged to see her parents to get a more complete picture of her current activities and frame of mind and to indicate that this course had been taken because of her genuine distress, springing from sources which were not easy to understand or to tackle directly. Referral to the child guidance clinic was to be borne in mind if this seemed feasible. I had little doubt that, were treatment available and were the parents ready to accept the idea and to co-operate, Mavis was the kind of adolescent who was likely to make use of psychoanalytically oriented therapy.

This idea was not acceptable, however. Mavis settled down to her new course. With her own anxieties somewhat allayed by this

opportunity to have them considered seriously, her involvement with the other three girls as the instigator of the geography revolt was reduced. They were helped to decide that extra work would make it possible for them to continue with the subject, and did so without any further fuss.

*Ann, age twelve years*

One of the houseteachers consulted me in some bewilderment about Ann who was in the middle of her second term at the school. Her mother had said that Ann, who had always been very happy at school and who still said she liked it, had begun to weep every morning before coming. She would also begin to cry quietly at different times during the day. Her mother and Mrs X, who had talked to Ann, could get no idea of what was the matter. Mrs X asked me to sit in with her the next time she interviewed Ann to see if I could pick up any clues which might help her to solve this mystery. Ann was never in any trouble about her work or conduct, was generally liked both by teachers and pupils.

When I met her I found a friendly, expansive little girl, eager and pleased to talk again to Mrs X and to include me in her confidence. She had seen Mrs X a week ago, said she still began to cry without warning and without knowing why, and it was worse when she came back to school after the weekend. She had no complaints to make about anybody at school, said it wasn't because she didn't like school, and she wasn't unhappy at home either, except that sometimes she found herself crying after she'd gone upstairs to bed. The only time she could remember being like this before was when she first went to the infants' school, not at the very beginning but during her first year. But, she said, after a while she just forgot about that.

As she talked easily and eagerly about her friends at school and her family, I could find no more specific clues than Mrs X had found as to shy Ann was in this weepy, easily upset state. We talked afterwards of how girls at the onset of puberty often became more emotional and clinging and subject to recurrence of earlier infantile states of dependence and uncertainty. Ann's only sister, she

told us, was six years younger than herself, which would mean that during her first year at primary school her mother was pregnant and the new baby was born. It seemed then that she might be undergoing a repetition of this separation difficulty in her first year at her new school in adolescence. Mrs X was reassured to find that I could find no evidence of any obvious reason for Ann's unhappiness which she had overlooked. As Miss A had with Mavis, she too decided to keep a watching brief. A week later she told me that a few days after this second interview, Ann had come to see her to say she thought she knew why she kept on feeling like crying. It was because her mum had, since the beginning of the term, taken a part-time job in the afternoon and wasn't at home when she returned from school. Half an hour after she came back her dad came home and then about an hour later her mum. Mrs X then said "What shall we do about it then Ann? Shall we tell your mum?"

"Oh no Miss", said Ann, "I wouldn't like my mum to know—she'd give up her job and she enjoys it so much." It was then left that Ann should come back again and talk to Mrs X if she felt too upset.

Here the consultant agreed with Mrs X that she had intuitively responded with the most helpful attitude. In her more mature and adequate self, Ann wanted to consider her mother's interests, to become more independent herself and to allow her mother more freedom. It was her more infantile self with separation problems, re-evoked in the stresses of puberty and also in the problems of adjustment to a much larger school, that threatened to overwhelm her growing independence. With a sympathetic ear from a teacher who had heard these two opposing needs in her, she was given some support for her more infantile anxieties and a better chance of achieving some degree of independence. Had the teacher identified too hastily and completely with the weepy little girl who was missing her mummy, implicitly or explicitly blaming the mother for going out to work, Ann would very likely have felt guilty and ashamed at letting down her more grownup self as well as her mother.

*Staff group discussions*

Topics for discussion in this group were brought up by members from week to week. These ranged from individual children, types of children, group formations and relationships, teacher-pupil relationships in varied situations and stages, to interstaff relationships and the teacher's role in the community.

The group consisting as it did of teachers who were working together daily in positions of varying seniority and responsibilities, inevitably imposed certain strains and inhibitions which were brought into the open in the early weeks by one of the more outspoken members: "We realize that in talking about the children we are often talking about ourselves and giving ourselves away." There seemed to be as much anxiety about betraying inadequacy to certain fellow teachers as to the consultants.

The consultant took the line that these discussions were likely to be of value primarily in stimulating new lines of thought, enlarging fields of interest, sharpening and exchanging perceptions, and only secondarily in conveying theoretical information. Differing opinions about individual children for instance were accepted as equally valid for scrutiny in attempting to get a more complete view of the child's personality. Members were encouraged to examine and to bring out into the open their own reactions, to make use of them in understanding the nature of the children under discussion.

This encouragement and freedom of emotional expression undoubtedly has its dangers, evoking on occasion a prolonged over-emotional outburst from some member of the group for whom some topic touches too keenly upon a particular personal problem. When this was the case the consultant attempted to align herself implicitly with the member who felt that he'd given himself away too much; and to consider in general human terms the way in which this response threw light on the problem under discussion, rather than the light which it might throw upon the individual speaker's psychopathology.

An example follows of a case that illustrates, first, the problems of keeping a child or topic under discussion—one of general

interest and involvement of the whole group without leading to undue self-revelation—and secondly, the kind of tension which can be evoked and which has to be dealt with when a selected group of responsible people in an organization meet to discuss matters of concern to other responsible people who are not present and may, therefore, feel excluded. Again, to facilitate expression, the consultant will refer to herself in the first person, and again this example is disguised.

*Examples of work in the teachers' group*

One of the members, Mr Q, brought as a problem in the course of one meeting a boy, Martin, who had always impressed him as strangely different from the others—intelligent but moody and erratic in his performance and given to outbursts of protest against the government, religion and established conventions. Mr Q had been particularly concerned because the day before, Martin had stayed behind in class after school with two or three other boys to continue a discussion that had started during the lesson. He said bitterly to Mr Q and the others that he could not understand what people got out of living at all; for himself he could see no enjoyment in it and he had nothing to look forward to. Mr Q had felt compelled to stand up for life, but felt that as far as Martin was concerned he made a very lame job of it.

Most of the other members of the group who were also acquainted with Martin had their comments and observations to make. He emerged as a source of unease and puzzlement with a general consensus of agreement about the description of his external appearance and behaviour, but with opinion sharply divided about the interpretation of this and about the best method of handling him. One view was that he was a born trouble-maker with the agitator's gift of the gab, who needed to be kept firmly in his place: that too much attention paid him would merely inflate his sense of self-importance and encourage him to subvert the system. Others said more sympathetically that he was unhappy and very disturbed, probably misunderstood at home and also at school; why should he for instance be asked to have his hair cut? Why

should his unorthodox political opinions be given less serious attention than they deserved?

At the end of the meeting devoted to Martin we were left with two interlocking topics, both of which the group wished to continue to discuss: that of Martin himself, and the more general theme of adolescent rebellions and deviations together with the teacher's involvement in these as influenced by his own adolescent experiences. We decided to continue first with the primary focus on Martin and to consider all relevant observations of him, gathered during the intervening week by all the teachers in the group concerned with him.

As it happened, before continuing the discussion of Martin in the teachers' group the next week, I had to deal with an accumulation of resentment in teachers outside the group that his name had arisen as a topic of discussion at all. Neither his form nor his housteachers happened to be in the group at that time. A member of the group had approached them, saying that we would be talking about him the next week, and asked if they could let her have some information about him. It was known only to the housemaster at that time that Martin had just become involved in difficulties outside school, in which his family was also concerned. The housemaster became very indignant, felt slighted, afraid that decisions were being taken behind his back, anxious lest confidential information would be irresponsibly divulged and discussed.

Helped by the senior housteacher, I was able to sort out with those concerned outside the group that the purpose of our discussion was not to reach conclusions that led to decisions, or indeed to the definitive diagnosis of any child discussed, but rather to enlarge interests and to encourage second thoughts, to broaden the base of understanding from which any teacher concerned would act when appropriate. The reluctance of Martin's housemaster to disclose confidential information was respected.

This led later on in the teacher's group to discussion of the value of detailed and current information about children's backgrounds and out-of-school activities in order to understand them better. The unanimous feeling was, naturally, that the more information known, the better the understanding possible; hence the tensions

arising at times between houseteachers and other staff who had to deal with problem children—not only because of confidential information deliberately withheld, but because of lack of communication, due maybe to pressure of time and numbers—eg, “How could I be expected to know that Norman was so insolent to me in class today because his mother had just died?”

I then suggested that the group consider that, although in general we might all agree that more information confers greater advantage, our heated emotional conviction of unfairness at the withholding of information might have its irrational sources, dating from early childhood days when our parents were still the kings and queens and magicians of the fairy stories, all-knowing and all-powerful and often seeming to us too miserly about that power. We proceeded to consider then that something of that ambivalent idealization of power and of secret knowledge is probably endemic in our attitudes to authority figures of various kinds, or specialists in subjects that very nearly touch upon our welfare, eg. the medical and psychiatric professions—even teachers, if we are outside the profession! It depends on our own personality and on our attitude to the particular authority in question, whether idealized expectation or resentful suspicion is to the fore.

This brought the group back to consider Martin “the born agitator”—against established authority but, some thought, secretly conspiring to establish rival power groups of his own. Although the housemaster had not wished to divulge details of the recent out-of-school crisis, it was generally known among members of the group that Martin’s home life was unhappy, that he was an only child, his father often away, and his mother subject to bouts of severe psychiatric illness; and that he himself had begun to be involved in an ideological anti-government group with which his father was concerned.

We discussed the possible aspects of his involvement in this group: the attempt to find a positive identification with his father; the attempt to find companionship with others knitted together by a common purpose—anti-establishment though it might be; a rebellion intensified by anxiety and disappointment at the failure of his first parental government to provide him with security.

The merits of giving him a hearing in appropriate lessons and discussions was then discussed. Doubts were raised by some about the wisdom of allowing adolescents of this kind too much rope—they didn't appreciate kindness, just thought that you were too soft, and used that to impose on you. Then, with particular reference to Martin and details of the experience which various teachers had in dealing with him, we discussed the ever-recurring problem of how to keep the balance between freedom of expression and discipline; the value of allowing verbal expression of grievances in the hope of modifying them by insight, thereby lessening the likelihood of delinquent action; the kind of talking that, on the contrary, is designed and likely to stir up and foment grievances and justify delinquency. We talked of the problem of curbing this "rabble rousing" for the sake of the adolescent himself, and also in order to protect the rest of the class or group from the need or greed of one member for extra attention.

One teacher made the point that the trouble was not really the children but the parents: "By the time we have them things have gone too far to be altered." While acknowledging the validity of the parents' responsibility to a large extent for the way in which their children grow up, I suggested that the wisdom of also considering the responsibility which the children themselves carry in the total situation, and the responsibility—however small—which (explicitly or implicitly) they might be encouraged to assume to improve it, bearing in mind the demoralizing effect of being regarded merely as a victim of circumstances. I suggested that in some instances information about bad family background could in fact be used not to give additional insight, but to carry all blame and to distort one's opportunities to learn from actual observation of the child. This was linked with the unconscious rivalry with the parents that operates to some extent in all workers with children, which may intensify censoriousness of the parents at the expense of clarity and impartiality of judgement—a factor which also enters into rivalry with colleagues and the wish to triumph over them by managing better with the children than they do.

*Notes on incidental work with staff*

Because the consultant was not a teacher, she could be felt to stand outside the framework of the school. This made it possible for members of staff to voice anxieties and air grievances they might not have been able to do with a fellow teacher.

For example, one young teacher who was in his first term at the school, found out in conversation in the staff-room what the consultant was doing in the school. He began to tell her about himself as a teacher, whether indeed he would ever make a teacher. He said he couldn't keep the discipline in his class and he felt the scores of experienced teachers around him must have so long forgotten what it's like to be new and inexperienced that he hid his difficulties from them. He talked also about his mother who was a teacher too. The consultant said people might really remember their young days more than he thought, and told him that she too was new in the school. They talked about some of the feelings raised by being new to a job. When they parted the teacher said in a sincere way that it had been a real relief to talk to her.

On another and more urgent occasion, a member of staff approached the consultant asking if he might talk to her. He told her he had been feeling the strain of work lately, and that this seemed to be getting worse. He said in fact he was feeling terribly distressed because the day before in class he had lost his temper with a child and struck him. He felt the housemistress who had dealt with the affair had been secretly very reproving of him, and concerned herself only with the boy and the school's good name. His situation was ignored—what was he supposed to do? He poured out some details about things in his personal life which were worrying him too. The consultant listened attentively saying almost nothing. The teacher finally apologized for flooding her with his troubles, but wondered—if she could stand it—if he might seek her out next week when she came, as he felt he really needed to talk to someone at the moment. The consultant said she would be glad to help, and over the following weeks he regularly sought her out in the staffroom. Gradually there was a lessening

of intensity until the personal nature of his communications gave way to general talk about the school.

The consultant felt that because she was available in the school she had been a support to this member of staff at a moment of temporary crisis.

### *Work with groups of children*

#### *With a house-teacher*

The two house-teachers who assembled these groups were surprised at the degree of enthusiasm shown by the majority of the children, who were not in fact missing any lessons, but were giving up part of their lunchtime recreation. Each child was currently (or had been) a source of particular concern to his house-teacher for one reason or another. Grouping was roughly according to age, and very approximately and arbitrarily according to the type of problem that the child presented at school. The majority of the children (but not all of them) were known to have more than usually difficult family backgrounds, ranging from collusive sub-delinquent parents, unhappy or broken marriages, to parents with gross psychiatric illnesses. The children were not asked to talk about their homes and family relationships although some did so, both explicitly and implicitly. There was a deliberate avoidance of anything which might have been perceived by the parents or by the children as an attempt to pry into private family matters. They were encouraged to express their views about schools, their attitudes to their teachers, to lessons, their friends, their recreations. At the first meeting the teacher said to them that as they were all aware things were not always going too smoothly at school for them, and the purpose of these meetings was for them to exchange points of view with him and with each other, to get to know each other a little better, and to see if this would help matters. The consultant was introduced as a specialist who was there to help the house-staff in their work.

When possible after the group had finished each week, the hometeacher and consultant discussed the session, compared

impressions of individual children, tried to assess what had been going on through considering the underlying implications of the discussions, and also considered how to handle it the next week.

In these groups as one might expect, some children spoke up much more rapidly than others; but the more timid and withdrawn, and sometimes even the more sullen, encouraged by the teacher, were also quite pleased to join in and express their points of view. The little group of second and third year boys who were all to some extent prone to truancy from school, evasion of work and responsibility, and some of whom were without particular friends and ties in the school, admitted to spells of boredom which they had no special interests to alleviate. Led by one lively small boy who seemed to suffer from undirected mischievous energy rather than any serious antisocial or emotional maladjustment, and who had outspoken and genuinely appreciative feelings towards the school and his teachers, they took up a suggestion from the housemaster to organize themselves into a little club to visit places of interest within reach of the neighbourhood. The housemaster told them of just such a miniature travel organization which had been run for a year or two by a group of boys by that time in the sixth form, and asked the leading spirit—by then a prefect—to come and talk to them about it and give them some advice on how to set about matters. The sixth former came, was greeted by slightly embarrassed but flattering attention, and sufficient impetus was given to enable the little group to carry the idea into action.

*Group of five remedial children*

This is an account of the group of children already mentioned that was formed from the remedial class the consultant had been visiting for six weeks. After discussion with the class teacher, a small group of five children was chosen—for their own benefit, and also to give the class teacher a little relief from them. The children were told they would be seeing the consultant for two periods each week; they were to go with her to another room, and they need not bring any books with them.

The children came with alacrity, in a mood of "We're getting out of lessons!" The consultant began by confirming they were there, not for lessons, but for something different. It was meant as time for them to think about themselves. One of the children responded to this by saying "You must be joking", a cry which was taken up by the others, and she was told to "come off it". When asked why they thought she wasn't serious, one said "It's not worth it, Miss", and another anxiously suggested that she hear them read instead. She pointed out that they even seemed to like lessons better than her plan that they should think about themselves, and she suggested they talk about why they didn't like her idea. The children were not articulate, nor much able to concentrate, but with persistent and considerable encouragement, their fear of being mocked by the enterprise as well as their anxiety about self-reflection did emerge.

As the meetings went on, these themes were often enacted in the group itself. For example, one child would derisively jeer at another trying to enlist the consultant's support, saying "He's just a dope, Miss. Don't bother about him", and this could be made an opportunity for the group as a whole to talk about the attitude of not "bothering with a dope". The consultant also asked why the one had called the other a dope in such a hostile way. She found the group had an answer to this one: "Because he's an even bigger dope himself." Indeed, the tendency of all these children to disparage others to avoid the pain of self-disparagement emerged clearly and became something they felt they understood and could recognize, though always more easily in others than in themselves.

Looking away from, rather than at, themselves, was a marked general feature of every child in this group. As an example, one child was telling the rest why he couldn't get on with his work and that it was very blotty. The consultant enquired why it was like that and he said, "It's my neighbour, he jogs me." His neighbour, a fellow member of the group, repudiated the blame for bad work that was being thrust on him. An intense exchange took place, during which the neighbour told him he should blame himself first and not find excuses like being jogged. The boys' tempers flared and they began fighting and had to be separated. Slowly,

through incidents of this kind, the children got some glimmering that their chronic feeling of being badly treated came partly from blaming neighbours, teachers, prefects, instead of blaming themselves. They realized, a little, how hard it was to look to yourself; and also that this was the only hopeful way.

There was constant pressure from the group—once the children became less suspicious—to get the consultant to join them in criticizing other teachers or to be on their side against the school. This took various forms: open invitations to run down the school, or blandishments like “It’s nicer being here than having maths with old Mr X.” Of course, their feelings sometimes veered swiftly, and when reluctant to go with the consultant, they would slyly say to Mr X that it would be more use to them to stay and do work with him, wouldn’t it? The consultant at such moments needed goodwill and a sense of common purpose from the class teacher; and she in turn was careful that the children didn’t go away with the idea that she could be used against their teachers.

Another difficulty was the violation of school rules. For example, the children openly chewed gum in her periods—something they knew no teacher would allow. In the beginning she was not certain what to do. After a while she decided to insist that rules be kept. This was to prevent the children viewing her as an indulgent figure they could oppose to the harsh image they had of their teachers, as this would interfere with the possibility of their modifying their sense of grievance against the staff.

The consultant felt it was important not to raise unreasonable hopes in the children, or in the class teacher or herself either. The consultant and class teacher met often to talk about the children in the group and this led to useful discussions of the burden of teaching so many disturbed and backward children. The class teacher confessed that he always had the guilty feeling he should be able to do more for the children. This led to an effort to distinguish appropriate goals from impossible goals, and to discussions of how, in deluded omnipotence, one either blamed oneself, or else became irritable with the children for failing to achieve the impossible.

Sometimes the consultant found it necessary to protect one of the group from making too intimate disclosures. One child

was afraid he would die in the night. Between the children in the group there were not sufficiently strong or affectionate bonds to make such disclosures possible without risk of hurt by ridicule in the group, or leakage to other children in the school. When a child verged on telling too much, the consultant intervened and suggested he keep that to tell her later. As the weeks went by, a pattern of using these double periods took shape. The first period was spent in talking, the second was more for individual work and attention. The children each had a writing and a drawing book in which they did what they wanted while one of them had his private ten minutes or so with the consultant. In the beginning the wish to read or do spelling was mainly a manoeuvre to avoid self-reflection. However, the consultant felt that to persist with “no lessons” would deprive them of the chance to convey to her their most pressing problem at school—their illiteracy. So in the short private time they had with her the children could try to read to her, or spell, or simply talk to her.

It must not be thought that this group went smoothly. Some days one child, or even all of them, would try to obstruct anything being done. Sometimes they could not be drawn from their disconsolation. Sometimes they were bored. Nonetheless the children at the end thought it had been worthwhile, and were sorry when it came to a premature end when the consultant stopped work in the school.

#### *Discussions with sixth formers*

These emerged most explicitly as the need of many of the senior boys and girls to talk to the staff and to have some help in finding their role as budding adults, to have the opportunity to express their opinions and to get a better understanding of the contradictions in their feelings and their attitudes. As one boy said, “All through the school you tend to look at the forms above you and to copy them. When you get to the top there’s only the staff above you and you know you’re not really one of them but it helps sometimes when they talk to you on a level... often it feels as if you’re given a lot of duties of the staff to keep order, but none of their real

authority... you feel a silly fraud when some little squirt asks you who you think you are—Mr B or Mrs G?”

Had the time been available, and the school timetable allowed an ongoing fee discussion group with sixth formers and with fourth years leavers, this would undoubtedly have been one of the most fruitful and necessary areas of work.

*Reflections on the work done and on possible growing points*

This project had to end after the second year as neither consultant had enough time to continue—it was not in any case envisaged as long-term. Both consultants felt that this experience of working within a school as part of its staff was invaluable in giving them a first-hand experience of the difficulties in finding the time and appropriate setting within an organization to deal with individual problems, in underlining the great number of children and families who present these problems—of a critical or more chronic nature—who either would not or could not be dealt with in a clinic setting. On the other hand it brought home to them the exceptional possibilities of the school situation in detecting and modifying some of these problems (which usually have to be carried willy-nilly), and of the school as a potential therapeutic as well as an educational institution, since it has care of children over a number of years, as well as during a large part of the day.

There was no attempt to make a quantitative survey of the population of children requiring attention during the two years' work. Without a good deal of investigation, involving every child in the school, numbers would be meaningless, and the number actually seen or discussed with the consultants was also limited by the amount of time and the time of day when they happened to be there each week.

The establishment of mutual confidence between the consultant and the staff with whom she works must be emphasized as of primary importance. This is possible only when the headteacher is in favour of such a project and has sufficient confidence in both her own teachers and in the consultant to allow them to get together

without forcing matters, and to take a positive attitude in helping to resolve any discords that may occur.

In this school the headmistress had established a well-developed system of pastoral care around the houseteachers, whose functioning largely covered many of the area for which school counsellors are being trained (personal, educational and vocational guidance). The consultants continued to work largely through these houseteachers—in effect to function as consultants to the counsellors—to broaden their perceptions and help them to assess more accurately the significance of the data which they acquired about their children, and thus to increase the sensitivity of the way in which they were responding to it.

As their aim was to establish an easy working-colleague relationship with those members of the staff who wished or who were able to have contact with them, the consultants were available to discuss cases brought forward by the teachers, rather than to be directly involved in selecting children who needed special attention. As one might expect, the children who first emerged were those presenting some obvious problem in school—such as unruliness, truancy or unsatisfactory work. On the other hand it is extremely unlikely that any child who is unhappy, antisocial or developing in an impaired fashion, will fail to show signs of this in the course of his school life—they are there if the teacher is receptive enough to detect them, if she has some acquaintance with what she is looking for. A number of these children were considered.

Whether the houseteachers would have been able to function so efficiently as counsellors had they not first been trained as teachers and were they not still spending quite a proportion of their time in teaching, is a matter for debate. Certainly those who were most deeply concerned about the responsibilities and potential opportunities conferred by their special role—entailing continuity of care and some degree of global concern for the children in their houses—were constantly dogged by pressure of commitments that often curtailed the amount of attention they felt they should have been devoting to particular children and at times also to their parents. It was also stated that so much time had to be taken in dealing

with the crises and matters of immediate urgency that there was not enough left to spend in developing over a period of months and years the relationship of confidence and trust with the bulk of their children, which might sometimes have led to the forestalling of the crisis before it came to a head.

On a number of occasions relief was outspoken about the opportunity to discuss questions and decisions with the consultants: “Even though it turns out that there is nothing more we could have done, at least it’s a relief to know that we’ve done the best we could in the circumstances, and to see the picture a little more clearly.”

Such part-time consultation work is likely to be useful mainly—or only—when there is a basis in the school organization to receive it. It could be considered as a kind of in-service training in certain aspects of counselling, on the dynamics of interpersonal relationships between individuals and groups, children and adults, both parents and teachers, and in personality development. There is little doubt that a school of the kind described could usefully employ as a full-time member of staff a specialist whose initial and primary function would be that of consultant to the houses-taff and others concerned with pastoral care, but who would also become involved in working directly with individuals and groups of both children and parents. Although the consultants in this project were impressed by the freedom with which the children responded to their teacher’s interest in personal matters, there are undoubtedly cases and situations when the role of teacher—concerned with action and discipline as it is—can impose inhibitions on both parties in an intimate personal interchange with a pupil.

At the present time, given the great scarcity of psychological workers trained in therapeutic techniques and in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and child development, and the scarcity of teachers with such training, the writers envisage the possibility of demonstrating their appreciation of those who co-operated so willingly with them in this project, by making some use of their experience in the school to conduct seminars with interested teachers on the lines described in this report.