

Encouragement: a sustainable value in education

A fundamental topic in Adlerian psychology is encouragement. Teachers using encouragement have a belief in the strengths of each child and apply encouraging methods in their classrooms. It is a sustainable contribution in developing cooperative behaviour.

Society and schools

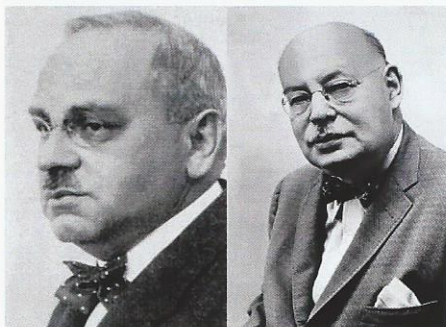
It seems we are very concerned about raising children in our society today. The silver line could be: how do we teach children to behave in a positive, democratic way?

What are the beliefs of a teacher about influencing the relationships in his class? We all have influence on the quality of a relationship: in a positive or a negative way.

We assume teachers prefer to have a positive effect on children's behaviour, because it may lead to persons who know how to behave and to achieve better results in schools.

Do we know what to do to achieve this?

In the first half of the last century, Adler and Dreikurs were of the opinion that different ideas about raising children were necessary. This was based upon their conviction that society was changing from autocracy towards democracy. And democracy is based upon the idea of living together for the benefit of all. That is something we need to develop and educa-



Alfred Adler (1870 - 1937) Rudolf Dreikurs (1897 - 1972)



tion has a task in contributing to sustainable, democratic relations.

Encouragement

In Adlerian theory and practice encouragement is seen as an important power that contributes to a positive and useful cooperation. Children want to have a feeling of belonging; they want to count and contribute on a base of equality. Adler and Dreikurs see activating social feeling as encouragement.

A courageous person:

- looks at situations in relation to possible actions and solutions
- reflects on the consequences of certain actions
- trusts his ability to handle a situation
- considers mistakes not as personal failures.

Courage is a belief in yourself and a belief in your own ability to cope in situations with a focus to serve the whole.

Encouraging teachers have faith in children. A discouraged teacher cannot encourage a student. Encouragement is an attitude and an act: you do something.

Edith Neisser (Dinkmeyer, Dreikurs, Encouraging children to learn, 1963) provides characteristics of an encouraging attitude:

- You are the person who can do it.
- It is all right to try.
- Provide plenty of opportunities for successful achievement.
- Do not set standards so high that children are constantly falling short.
- Be pleased with a reasonably good attempt.
- Show confidence in their ability to become competent
- Accept children as they are.
- Guarantee certain rights and privileges.

Children who feel at home, who have a feeling of belonging develop socially appropriate behavior and responsibility.

Having an encouraging way in treating children includes you avoiding being discouraging.

A feature of discouragement is that the child has no faith in his ability and does not see opportunities. Discouraged children show misbehaviour, because they do not see how to contribute in a positive way. Examples of discouragement are:

- How much better it could have been
- Competition



- Criticism, punishment,
- Emphasizing mistakes
- Rewards and praising
- Using double standards
- Coercion

Also the language we use is of importance and we do speak a lot in education. So it is important to realize what message we will make clear and how we say it. A few suggestions for an encouraging language:

- Say something about what the child has done or does
- Be specific and objective
- Avoid using the word "try" and "but"
- Finish encouraging remarks as a statement
- Do not undermine the encouraging comment
- Do not compare to other children

The use of encouraging language has a big effect in teaching and at home. Therefore we teach encouragement to our children with at least the same effort as we teach them to read.

They will profit from it for the rest of their life.

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