

Robinsons on Parallel Adlerian Psychology: How It All Got Started

ICASSI—the International Adlerian Summer Institute—began the 10 morning lectures with the professor who was introduced as the “beating heart” of ICASSI, Eva Dreikurs Ferguson. Dr. Ferguson teaches Experimental Psychology and Individual Psychology at Southern Illinois University. Since it was the 50th year that this valuable summer institute has been offered, her lecture was aimed at explaining the Development of Adlerian Psychology. ICASSI was established at the request of Rudolf Dreikurs with the idea that “each one teach one.”

OPTIMISM is the key part of Adlerian psychology, the students of which believing the future will be better than the past. During the First World War, neither Adler nor Dreikurs believed in war, but the choice was to fight or be shot. Both Adler and Dreikurs saw the “terrible futility of war” and were convinced there must be peaceful ways for nations to work out their differences. Conflict and killing are useless.

From their experiences as physicians and their observations of war, the cornerstones of Adlerian Psychology were laid:

- *Social interest is crucial.
- *Foster a climate of mutual respect
- *Build cooperation
- *Give consideration to interpersonal relations
- *Discriminate against no one

What is true in the family, in school, is also true among nations. When Adler wrote 100 years ago, women couldn't vote, even in the USA. We often take equality, mutual respect and democratic processes for granted in many western countries today.

Human beings are marvelously resilient. The Greeks had an idea, which seems to play out: When crisis occurs, people tend to go back to autocratic ways. We can be polite when things go smoothly, but when we get into crisis situations, temper tantrums occur, parents hit, spouses call names, teachers get difficult, mayors, governors, presidents get very autocratic. (You know, autocratic, it is often expressed as “my way or the highway” . . . or the gallows, the firing squad, prison, torture, death.)

We live in an era of Entitlement, Dr. Ferguson explained. Teachers feel they deserve special treatment, as do corporate leaders. The President of the US was insulted when corporate leaders flew to explain their economic crises in corporate jets!!

Citizens also want to enjoy special privileges; some go around shooting other people. Government officials ask, “Why?” Bullies—difficult and disrespectful—often are a reflection of the culture of the school. Shoot, when you don't like something or feel insulted. If you want special privileges, you take them.

As students of behavior, Adlerian psychologists know that we can't "cure the individual without curing the social group." The important question to ask is, "What in our community teaches that these are possible ways to act?"

Even B. F. Skinner, the Behaviorist of yesteryear, touted reinforcing the positive and not the negative. As counselors, we ask the question, "What are the underlying ways of thinking in this individual?" If folks are think they are "entitled," they feel it is OK to do things that violate others.

Dreikurs recommended to teachers that they invite their students to share their ideas. The teachers were astonished at what the students thought. Dreikurs was astonished that the teachers didn't know what the students were thinking.

Destructive behaviors hurt the students themselves instead of the school. "You have a choice," was the reminder. Always optimistic, Dreikurs knew people could make a difference. Instead of the idea: "Why vote? Politicians won't change" believe that things can always be different.

Even under Nazis and Soviets, people believed things could be different—"We have the power within us to make things different." Good for us to hear in the USA since we are in election/campaign mode for the presidency.