

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN THE FAMILY (3/3)

Developing the Human Rights Family How Adlerian Principles and Methods Contribute to Human Rights in the Family

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ADLERIAN METHODS AND MODELS

Having given a brief sketch of how Adler's Individual Psychology promotes well-being in the family, I will now refer to more specific ways of developing Human Rights in the family, using the Adlerian model.

One important tool in the hands of parents who want to adopt Adlerian principles at home and create a happy and creative family is to initiate the **Family Council** or the **Family Meeting**, as it is sometimes called. The idea of Family Council was developed by Rudolph Dreikurs as an exercise in cooperation and an efficacious means for "promoting democratic leadership, family harmony, individual responsibility and mutual respect in solving problems (*in the family*)." (17) In addition, the Family Council permits children to develop a sense of belonging and enhances their self-esteem in an atmosphere where their potentials can mature.

The Family Council is organised on the following propositions that not only promote human rights but constantly maintain respect for the individual and strengthen human relationships.

1. All family members, including very small children who can understand the spoken word, are encouraged to participate in family meetings where problems are discussed in a relaxed, uninhibiting and nonaggressive atmosphere, free from criticism and fear of punishment. Naturally, the family also discusses plans, projects, house chores, special purchases, celebrations, holidays, etc. that serve to make family life enjoyable and fun. To ensure a spirit of friendship it is often suggested that at the beginning of each meeting some time is spent in affirming each other by some sign of appreciation for a task that was performed, for an idea that has been of benefit for the family, etc.

2. Meetings are held regularly, on a specified day and at an appointed time, most convenient to all. The family decides how long each meeting will last. Meetings start on time irrespective of whether all are present or not. Each person is free to leave the meeting at any time. However, it may not be in the interest of any family member to be late or to leave early from the meeting, because decisions that are taken during a meeting are binding on all the household.

3. All decisions taken at a meeting are made by consensus and not by majority vote, and so parents, and everybody else, for that matter, are never in a minority situation. When consensus is not reached, changes are not made until such time when all are in agreement of what is good for the family as a whole.

4. Family members establish the rules that all are bound to honour. The council itself will decide on how to deal with

members who do not keep to agreed rules and other arrangements. Parents resist the temptation that they themselves enforce regulations made during a meeting.

5. Chairmanship is taken in turn, giving all the opportunity to lead discussion and decision taking.

Clearly, the above propositions are a direct and most efficacious means of training children in human rights and inviting them to practise the same rights in the family.

Again, one must stress that the Family Council will be effective and feasible in as much as parents are skillful in introducing the idea of the Family Council to their children and able to adopt a style of equality during the meetings. Research that has been carried out regarding the appropriateness and benefits of the Family Council indicates that this Adlerian model of teaching and practising human rights in the family, works and that often it is responsible for the changing climate in the family – from one based on competition to one based on cooperation, from one that favours autocracy to one that functions on democratic lines. Finally, the Family Council offers children training in human relations that prepares them to participate actively in their community and society. Truly, it is an expression of equality and a lesson in democracy.

The concept of **Family Counselling Demonstration** is another Adlerian instrument that is helpful to parents in their task of bringing up their children. Alfred Adler first demonstrated his theory and approach by counselling the family in the **Open Counselling Centres** in Vienna. The concept of family counselling was later perfected by Rudolph Dreikurs and extended by Ray Lowe and Oscar Christensen. The idea is to conduct a counselling session where both parents and children are interviewed in the presence of an audience of other parents.

Naturally, the focus of attention is the family being counselled. The problem that is presented is of the sort that is common to many of the parents in the audience. In such a case, it is not only the Counsellor who helps the family but the audience too, by their moral support and by their words of encouragement at the end of the session. This method of counselling is essentially educational and not therapeutic as it would normally be. As Christensen says:

"A much more optimistic concept of counselling could be one based not on illness but on health, not on abnormality but on normality. The model alluded to here is essentially an educational one, which makes the assumption that the lack of knowledge, information or experience, rather than illness, is the basis of maladaptive behaviour." (18)

Once again this educational model provides the family with an effective means of coping with interpersonal relationships at home and encourages its members to unite for the purpose of learning from each other in the ultimate interest of all siblings. Even if indirectly, this Adlerian method is aimed at upholding the unity of the family and safeguarding the rights both of the child (to be heard) and of the parents (to be assisted with the rearing of their children). However, the only way of appreciating fully the process and techniques involved in the Adlerian Family Counselling is to participate in one of these demonstration sessions.

I should like to refer to yet another model that has been developed by Dr. Raymond Corsini, a distinguished clinical psychologist and educator with a clear understanding of Individual Psychology. Dr. Corsini's concept is expounded in what is known as the **Corsini Four-R School**. Though parents are not directly involved in this type of school, they support it and endorse its philosophy and send their children to be educated there. Pratt and Mastroianni describe the ethos of the 4-R school as follows:

"Adlerian educators see the child as an active chooser and decider who wants to belong, but whose 'social interest' needs intelligent nurturing. Rejecting both authoritarian and permissive styles of socialisation – the wise adult neither tries to 'make' children do things nor protects them from the consequences of their choices – 4-R practitioners use a democratic approach, based on social reality and carried out

consistently. They see people as equal in social worth no matter how different they are in developed abilities or in age and experience. So, 4-R schools insist that both staff and students behave respectfully toward one another." (19)

There is no point in describing here every feature of the 4-R school. It will suffice, to remark briefly on the meaning of the four Rs to show how Corsini's concept fosters human rights. The four Rs stand for the four goals that are considered as essential for the development of the student.

These are:

1. **Responsibility**, which is moulded in children by involving them in decisions regarding their own education, always under adequate supervision and guidance.
2. **Respect**, which is nurtured in children by respecting them but also by expecting respect from them.
3. **Resourcefulness**, which is encouraged by opportunities offered to children in preparation for engaging in the three main life tasks which are occupation and leisure, family life and membership in society.
4. **Responsiveness**, which is encouraged by providing a school environment where both students and teachers demonstrate trust and practise love and care.

The above outlines the nature of Corsini's "ideal school" which in the last twenty five years has been a unique model in a few countries responding to today's call for training children for the "well-being of Individuals and Societies". Again, similar to other Adlerian principle that have been described above, the 4-R School has to be seen in practice in order to be appreciated. Certain prejudices and lack of confidence and trust in any new system or style of education work against the same idea being implemented. Unfortunately Education Departments and other government agencies have not yet fully realised the ineffectiveness and futility of the present system of education that is generally prevalent in the West. This system, which may have been valid in its day, seems to be producing frustrated individuals bent on criticising and fault-finding. Education innovation ought to be doing something to promote alternatives to what is now obsolete. I believe that the Corsini 4-R School is a most valid alternative that goes a long way to teach, provide practice and generally promote human rights among students. In turn this will build better bridges of cooperation and understanding between school and home and between children and their parents.

Finally, another instrument that has gained popularity in North America and in a number of European countries, including Israel, Germany and Switzerland is the **Parents Study Group**.

According to Joyce and Gary McKay, the Parent Study Group is basically a series of regular meetings of parents with a leader, who together study Adlerian principles as these apply to parents in their everyday relations with their children at home. These groups, too, are not therapeutic but rather educational in nature. They can be described as courses in the 'art of parenthood'. Participants usually meet once a week to discuss specific Adlerian material from such books as "*Children the Challenge*" by Dreikurs and Soltz, "*Raising a Responsible Child*" and "*Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP)*" both by Dinkmeyer and McKay. Between meetings parents are expected to practise at home the Adlerian principle that they would have discussed and learned.

Again, the idea is to help parents understand their families better and teach them how to establish a democratic style of family building. The value of the group experience permits parents to exchange ideas and share experiences and provides support and encouragement.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, I am engaged in school, conducting a programme which I have called **Adolescent Awareness Programme**. A similar programme in schools in Malta is referred to as *Life Skills or Personal and Social Education*. This programme is organised in courses for groups of 15 pupils, each group meeting

once a week for a period of one hour. The philosophy behind the AAP which is based on Adlerian principles seeks to develop a democratic style of life that is mindful of the needs of each individual person. Two questions that the teacher tries to answer are:

1. What are the needs of the pupils in my class, this year?
2. How can I meet these needs so that these adolescents will be able to develop in a balanced and healthy manner?

The answer to these two questions is then translated into practical exercises that help the adolescent to come to a clear understanding of what is going on **inside** him (Life Style) and **around** him (Life Tasks).

The topics that become the subject for discussion in a particular year and group are chosen by the pupils themselves so that each person in the group feels that he is important while at the same time committed to the interest of the common good.

Concurrently with group teaching, individual counselling is available for those who need to go deeper into some personal matter and want to discuss it in private.

The **Parents Orientation Programme** is organised for groups of not more than 12 couples. Teaching takes place in the form of a Workshop of about six, three-hour sessions. The aim is to help parents learn a new style of parenting that is appropriate to the needs of the family today. Backed by real life experiences, parents come together with their difficulties and concerns and with the help of the teacher and also of one another, they discover effective ways of solving problems and of maintaining a happy family atmosphere. In the same way, parents who wish to seek assistance or discuss some particular problem are invited to come to counselling, either on their own or accompanied by the children.

These two programmes have a common objective - that of bridging the gap between parents and siblings. My task is to discern the concerns of adolescents and submit them to the attention of parents, and vice versa, I define the problems and difficulties of parents and present them to students for their study and reaction.

Outside the school situation I have been involved in the foundation and organisation of the Alfred Adler Cooperation Group. Just a few days ago the Group has officially become the Malta Adlerian Psychology Association (MAPA for short). The aim of the association, as it appears in the Statutes, is, "to help its members to learn for themselves and to teach to others the Psychology of Alfred Adler as it applies to the Family, School and Place of Work." - and, "By learning the principles of Individual Psychology the members shall be able to apply the acquired practical skills with children and adolescents at home and in school and with fellow workers at the place of work so that both young and adults will be able to develop and mature further in a holistic manner." (20)

The Group was founded on December 4, 1991. It had a very modest beginning, but since then the Group has grown to reach the 160-membership mark. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the Diocesan Secretariat for Christian Education, the University of Malta and the Malta Union of Teachers, we were able to hold the first Alfred Adler Education Week during March this year. With the help and expertise of three distinguished Professors of Psychology from the United States of America, we were able to introduce the Individual Psychology to the Maltese Islands.

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(17) **Griffith, Jane and Powers, Robert L.**, *An Adlerian Lexicon*. p. 58

(18) **Christensen, Oscar C. and Marchant, William C.**, in *Adlerian Family Counselling*, p. 29

(19) **Pratt, Ann B. and Mastroianni, Michael**, *How Corsini Four-R Schools Work*, Introduction

(20) Malta Adlerian Psychology Association, Statute 2.1 and 2.2, *Aims and Objectives*.