

Summary of *What's the Story?* meeting, Feb. 6, 2022: The Life Style of Rudolf Dreikurs

We stand with the Ukrainian people [who have demonstrated that change for the social good is desirable and, hopefully, possible – despite their country's autocratic past].

What's the Story? is a book club with a twist in which we read and interpret a person's perceived important memories (the Early Recollections!) as if, "strung together," they compose a short story or literary text.

Check us out!

<https://www.whatsthestory.online/>

Thank you, all, who zoomed into our Sunday, February 6, 2022, What's the Story? meeting – from France and the United States, England and Romania, Lithuania, Canada, and Turkey.

As many (all?) concurred: "It was a great time. The discussion was lively" (A. Daramus, personal communication [text message], February 7, 2022)

To celebrate our third anniversary, we honored the memory of Rudolf Dreikurs by reading and interpreting his Family Constellation (FC) and Early Recollections (ERs).

Yes, Dreikurs' birthday (February 8, 1897 – 125 years ago in Vienna) coincides with "ours"!

At our founding and first meeting (February 10, 2019, face-to-face in Chicago) we celebrated Adler's birthday (February 7) by reading and interpreting his FC and ERs (including comparing two "sets" of his ERs that he had related over a twenty-plus year span).

Then last year, for our second anniversary (February 7, 2020, over zoom), we read and interpreted the ERs of Adler, Freud, and Jung.

It was, thus, only fitting that this year we focus on

The student and colleague of Adler ... (who was) undoubtedly the single person most responsible for the state of the practice of Individual (Adlerian) Psychology" (Corsini, 1967, p. 167).

That assessment of Dreikurs is undoubtedly still true today!

Settling in Chicago because of political upheaval in Europe (think Nazis), Dreikurs spread Adlerian Psychology throughout the world. Among many achievements, he founded the Adler Institute (now Adler University), the North American Society of

Adlerian Psychology (NASAP), and the International Committee for Adlerian Summer Schools and Institutes (ICASSI, popularly known as the Rudolf Dreikurs Summer School [this year's will be held July 24 – August 6, 2022, in The Netherlands]).

But Dreikurs did not just spread Adlerian Psychology, he helped to evolve it by developing tools or techniques for us to use to better understand and practice it:

Consider his easy-to-understand “goals of misbehavior” (purposes of behavior!), that we associate with children’s behavior and family and educational counseling, but can be used to assess, help, and redirect any individual.

Consider his development of a standardized, systematic Life Style questionnaire with which we can collect, compare, and, yes, even measure FC and ER “data” (the basics of what we use here at What’s the Story?).

When Dreikurs first settled in Chicago in the late 1930s, the Freudians “ruled the roost.” Finding work at the city’s Psychosomatic and Psychiatric Institute for Research and Training (P & PI), which was founded and directed by a psychiatrist who had been one of the last individuals to be analyzed – in Vienna! – by Freud (P & PI’s reputation used to rival that of the famous Menninger Clinic), Dreikurs’ Adlerian views (Holism! Goal-direction! Choice and Use! Social Feeling!) did not find a ready, receptive audience with those in authority. Soon, he found himself “demoted” to conducting intake interviews rather than conducting psychotherapy. However, the experience helped him to develop and later teach a method that could help assess or “zero in” – quickly and efficiently – on an individual’s personality, or his style of life that Adlerians refer to as Life Style. In essence, Dreikurs enabled all of us to “be like Alfred.” As Dreikurs related in a 1953 lecture (published, 1954):

When Adler once declared that he, within an hour interview, could understand a patient, his problems and his whole personality, we, his students, stood in awe of his genius. Today we know that everybody can learn to do so, if not as efficiently... by using ... our technique of eliciting pertinent psychological information (that) follows (Adler’s) well established (questions regarding Life Style/FC and ERs]) ... (The) questionnaire (that I evolved) ... facilitates the collection of all pertinent material within a short period of time (p. 103).

At our February sixth meeting we considered Dreikurs’ interview or questionnaire, which essentially asks for:

- (1) the presenting problem (i.e., what brings the client “in”),
- (2) how the client “solves” or attempts to “solve” the “life tasks” or challenges that all of us must confront (i.e., occupation/school, social/friendship, love/sex/intimacy),

(3) The Question (Dreikurs italics: i.e., how that client thinks his/her/its/their – modern pronouns! – life could be different in the absence of his/her/its/their concerns), and

(4) the FC and ER material that, reflecting the choices one has made based on one's social and biological influences, one "uses" to "guide" his/her/its/their perceptions and behavior.

But before we considered Dreikurs contributions to Adlerian Psychology and interpreted his FC and ERs – and learned that one of our participants had had his ERs interpreted by Dreikurs himself! – we heard from a soon-to-be 99-year-old internist who, zooming in from Arizona, shared his recollections of Dreikurs when both taught at the Chicago Medical School in the 1950s. Their bond had been the German language, our guest having graduated from the University of Munich (What's the Story? had considered his FC and ERs in a couple of face-to-face meetings held over the summer of 2019: The Lesson of the Holocaust/ERs of a Holocaust Survivor).

Dreikurs was remembered as the epitome of a "Viennese gentleman," his manners and especially the melodic lilt of his speech cited (as compared to the guttural sound that some associate with the German spoken in Germany). Both taught a course on diagnosing at the same time, the internist on physical diagnosing and Dreikurs on psychological diagnosing (strange that those courses were not "one"!). The internist noted that one time, before his usual coming in to Dreikurs' classroom to say "hello," a student poked his head into Dreikurs' room and laughed, "Hey, doc, in Vienna, the students wait for the professor, but here in the U.S., the professors wait for their students!"

"I could have strangled that student!" the internist said (A. B. White, personal communication [meeting], February 6, 2022).

He could not remember Dreikurs' response, but, surely Dreikurs would have handled the student with more equanimity and, yes, respect. (Quick now: which goal of misbehavior did the student's behavior reflect, even if he was in his twenties? How would Dreikurs have "exposed" and treated it? Perhaps with a disarming joke that all could "enjoy"!)

After a quick review of the major Adlerian concepts, we read aloud Dreikurs' FC and ER material, and set our "Great Books Foundation's ground rules": that is, opinions or interpretations must be supported with evidence in the "text." (Questions such as "Help us 'see' that" or "How or where did you come up with that?" are not meant to discourage but to help us hone our skills and respect others' ideas.)

Ah, the power of the group, and one's ideas inspiring others' ... or, rather, opening up others to interpretations they might not have considered or considered as strongly!

(Dreikurs did champion a form of psychotherapy – multiple psychotherapy – in which a client is exposed to and works with several therapists.)

How many of us on a first or even second “reading” (Dreikurs’ FC and ERs were provided prior to the meeting) did not, for example, entertain (a pun or sorts considering his piano playing):

All the embrace of the new and questioning of the old. (Example of the “new” included his acceptance even delight with individuals from different, lower-class backgrounds, music considered more modern, and new forms of cooperative learning. This new also included the number of his ERs that started with the situation being the first of something [a birth, a school year]. Examples of the old included: well, remember what happened after the funeral, and how he responded to his Latin lessons?)

How he overcompensated for his perceived inferiority to others, both regarding social status and his studies, including his music studies, and even to his cousin six months younger!

The importance of music, which brought him into contact with others and prompted his becoming efficient at sight reading, a skill no doubt that would help him later on with his profession: that is, the ability to discern the future movement of a piece based on what already has been played.

Oh, there was a lot more there! Next time, be there!

(Canadian) Paul Miki, who had summed up our November, 2020, meeting (ERs of U.S. Presidents) by noting the “horse sense” of General Ulysses S. Grant (see Grant’s ERs on our website), wrote an email after our Dreikurs meeting in which he related the experience that many of us had had: “The discussion was very rich and full. I am still taking time to absorb and enjoy (the) ideas and contributions (of the participants)” (personal communication [email], February 7, 2022).

After the meeting, Paul had begun to “riff” on ideas that we had raised. For example, he likened the Adlerian concepts of “Psychology of Use” (how do we use what we “have” biologically and/or environmentally) and the “Courage to be Imperfect” (essentially, to be optimistic and not be hesitant to try new behaviors) to Dreikurs writing that “I played whatever music came into my hands and also began to improvise (on the piano), to ‘play around’” (1967, p. 147) .

Dreikurs writing that he had “begun to study composition and almost became a professional musician” (1967, p. 147) prompted Paul

to carry on the metaphor, (that) a composer (is):

One who brings together a number of different notes, voices, instruments, themes and melodies to create a coherent, cohesive, harmonious whole, that resonate with the goodness and beauty within each person . . .

Dreikurs continued the work of Adler to present an approach to understanding human behavior and to make it accessible to as wide a public as possible: a masterpiece and tribute to his teacher and friend (personal communication [email], February 7, 2022).

Thank you, Paul, for, again, summing up one of our meetings!

NEXT MEETING: We have decided to meet regularly, every three months. So, our next meeting will be ...

... SUNDAY, MAY 8, 2022

(1:00 p.m. Central Standard Time (U.S./Canada/Chicago), 2:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time/New York, 12:00 p.m. Mountain Standard Time/Denver, 11:00 a.m. Pacific/Los Angeles, 7 p.m. Greenwich Mean Time/London, 8 p.m. Central European Time/Paris, Warsaw).

To continue Adler's and Dreikurs' belief that demonstrations "reveal ... to students, professionals, and lay people ... the significance and advantage of the Adlerian approach" (Dreikurs, 1967, p. 155), our next meeting will consist of a live Life Style interview, to be followed by a reading and interpretation of the transcript (our "text"). (What's the Story? is not a therapy group, but a book club with a twist in which we read and interpret a person's – our author's – important perceived memories as if, strung together, they compose a short story or literary text.)

For more information, contact:

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References

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http://www.adlerjournals.com/_private/AJIP/JIP%20v10%20n3-4/Psychological_Interview_in_Medicine--Dreikurs.pdf (Dreikur's LS interview, pp 110-12.)

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