

GOOD-BYE MR. FRITZ – WE’LL MISS YOU

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Fritz Redl, the renowned teacher, psychologist, and advocate for children and child care workers, died in March of 1988 in North Adams, Massachusetts. At age eighty-three, he had been suffering from the results of a stroke.

He was born in Vienna and came to the U.S. during the rise of the Nazi era in Germany. He began his professional work in Vienna as a teacher and later studied psychoanalysis with Anna Freud, daughter of “The Father of Psychoanalysis” Sigmund Freud, and with noted youth specialist, August Aichorn.

This writer once had the opportunity to interview Dr. Redl at his home and ask him why had he chosen to devote his life’s work to children. To the writer’s surprise, it was apparent from his expression that the question had tapped into a well of deep emotion. His response resulted in an amazing, poignant story.

It took him back to an incident early in his childhood when he was five or six years old.

One night while he slept in his room he was awakened by the cry of an infant relative, who had been asleep in a crib in the room. The house had inadvertently caught fire and the room was ablaze. The young Redl was carried out of the house by relatives; however, they were unable to save the crying infant from the smoke and flames.

Fritz realized that, had it not been for the cry of the infant, he too would have probably perished. According to Redl, the impact of that event created within him a deep sense of empathy and compassion for young people that continued throughout his life.

He married his wife Helen at a relatively late age. She is an outstanding and well-known educator in her own right.

Her early life also was filled with some remarkable events. Every member of her family died in a Nazi concentration camp. One hour before Helen was scheduled for execution, the death camp was liberated by the Allied Army Forces. Throughout her life she too has been an outspoken advocate for children.

The contribution made by Fritz Redl and his work to the care and treatment of emotionally troubled children has been invaluable. There are few serious studies or publications that focus on work with troubled children that do not include references to the classic writings of Redl

and his colleague, David Wineman. One can think of few other individuals whose ideas and theories have had a more dramatic influence on the field of children and youth over the past thirty years.

The books *Children Who Hate*, *Controls From Within*, and *When We Deal With Children* are now considered classics and “must” reading for those who want to be well grounded in the knowledge base of the profession of caring. To the dismay and chagrin of many who held to the traditional approaches of the psychiatric establishment, Redl was among the first to articulate and emphasize the crucial role played by the direct care line worker in the treatment of children and youth. He was a vocal advocate for providing direct care workers with viable strategies that would enable them to work therapeutically with troubled youngsters.

He took highly conceptual clinical theories and translated them into approaches and strategies understandable to line practitioners that could be applied in their “nonabstract” daily work with children. His seventeen specific techniques for managing “surface behavior,” the Life Space Interview, and his ideas about the content and design of a therapeutic milieu, remain as eternal “gifts” of great significance that he left to the ever expanding child and youth care body of knowledge.

In this field, we devote so much energy and commitment to caring for others that often we neglect to recognize and to celebrate the meaningful life-long contributions that individuals such as Fritz Redl have made to our work.

Redl, as did Al Trieschman, has made a powerful impact on the lives of many in the children’s field that has been both professional and personal. There is certainly much sorrow that Fritz is no longer with us in body, but much consolation in the reality that his example and spirit as manifested in his writings and work will be with us forever.

About the Author:

Norman W. Powell, Associate Director, Masters Program for Child and Youth Care, Administration Center for the Advancement of Education, Nova University. Norman Powell began as a line child care worker 21 years ago and has continued to work in various field-related positions as program director, administrator, trainer, and program developer. He has been active in the development of the profession including a founding officer of NOCCWA, the Maryland, D.C. and Florida Associations of Child and Youth Care Workers.

Instructions To Authors

Articles submitted to the *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work* should be completely typewritten, double-spaced on standard letter-sized paper, with ample margins, and no handwritten corrections. Four copies of each article must be submitted. All articles should have implications for child care practice or child care education.

In general, articles should conform to the specifications in the **PUBLICATION MANUAL OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION**. In the case of research articles, exact conformance to APA standards is expected. In addition, articles must include an abstract of 100-200 words. NOCCWA policy prohibits an author from submitting the same manuscript to more than one publication at a time.

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