

ORGANIZING DISTRIBUTION OF KNOWLEDGE

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In discussing the dissemination of Individual Psychology's teachings, we touch a controversial point. It is the popularizing not merely of Individual Psychology, but scientific knowledge in general which evokes controversy.

The body of knowledge available to human beings is greater than what is taught in schools, colleges and universities. Artists, writers, preachers, and philosophers make substantial contribution to human knowledge outside of academic research. However, the tendency is to bring any available source of information into the schools. We must stimulate this direction to gain academic recognition for all knowledge and thought beneficial to the human race. We all agree that Individual Psychology should finally find its place in psychological research, that its teaching and application should become a part of the curriculum in colleges and universities. But, until that is accomplished, what are we to do about spreading the knowledge of Individual Psychology?

The whole question of distribution seems to be one of the most difficult, most disputed, and at the same time, most vital problems of our times--in industry as well as science. Our present culture apparently lacks the ability to make all goods, be they material or spiritual, available to all of mankind. What we have and what we know are still too much the privilege of a few. As soon as the question of distribution arises, opinions divide, concepts clash, and points of view interfere.

It is now almost forty years since Adler showed the importance of courage for influencing and helping others. How few recognize this factor today, while they try to teach and educate,

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to help and cure. We have definite techniques of un-

derstanding human beings. It is not a question of whether Individual Psychology is accepted or rejected, but how few know it at all or are aware of what could be done with it. It is pathetic to see how teachers and parents ask what to do, when the answer to so many educational problems could be easily found in books and papers. Physicians treat without realizing how many tools are waiting to be used. Mankind suffers from mutual distrust, from uncurbed hostility and antagonism, and few work deliberately for the promotion of community feeling and social interest, so familiar to the teaching of Individual Psychology. Inferiority feelings of individuals and groups are intensified by political and economic insecurity, by increased competition and mutual fear; we witness, shivering, the terrible compensations sought by individuals and groups. Individual Psychology can help teachers and physicians, parents and social workers. It seems essential for all human beings struggling for success and happiness, and for a better way of living together to overcome inferiority feelings.

All of us familiar with the teachings of Adler, face a tremendous responsibility. It is up to us how much of Adler's findings are available to others. We must contribute our share to the knowledge of mankind. Unfortunately, in the present situation, it takes a great deal of personal courage and social interest to promote ideas which are opposed by influential and well-established groups. It is not our duty to fight back. On the contrary, our knowledge of human cooperation makes us realize that fighting never wins acceptance. But neither does cowardly retreat. We must have the courage to say frankly and openly what we know and see, without being intimidated. We

must participate in the promotion of knowledge--otherwise we neglect our duty as human beings, and even more, as scientists.

Any attempt to bring knowledge to larger groups, outside of the formal educational institutions, meets with certain objections. Many scientists look with great scorn and contempt on any attempt to offer their fellow human beings knowledge vital to the conduct of life. It is the right of any one to call that "profanation of science," but it is also the right of others to consider science not as a god, but as the servant of mankind. Another objection is directed against the promulgation of any knowledge which is not generally accepted by science. But which scientific opinion, especially in the field of psychology, can boast of being universally accepted? In the previous issue of this bulletin, we discussed why psychology, more than any other science, produces controversial findings.

The very existence of different schools of thought makes it necessary to give each group a chance to demonstrate its techniques and divulge its findings. Even if we exclude Individual Psychology from public discussion, that would not lessen the general confusion, as many other schools of thought are typically sectarian and biased. The present predicament of psychology as science exists whether or not we participate in the struggle for truth. As we Adlerians recognize more than many others the relativity of truth and the individual limitations of transgressing personal interest, we can promote mutual understanding between human beings, and the knowledge and techniques in dealing with each other cooperatively. Our practical suggestions for education and for the courageous solution of life problems without violating the rights of our fellowmen, introduce into the scientific discussions a point of view which is of special importance at a time when mankind strives so hard to establish and maintain democracy.

The strongest objection to spreading

psychological knowledge emphasizes the harm which can be done by half-knowledge, by undigested truth. It must be taken into consideration, however, that the damage is done less by shortage of knowledge than by the way knowledge is used. Psychology--in our case, Individual Psychology--can be used for good or bad; like any other human tool, it can be extremely helpful in the hands of someone who is willing to assist others, and it can be most devastating if it is used by a person to fight, humiliate, or abuse others. The main criterion for the right use of any psychology is the courage derived from it. Discouragement is always harmful, no matter under which good pretense it is produced. Half-knowledge in psychology is bad, certainly. But unfortunately, it is the normal condition. Psychology is nothing more than the knowledge of human nature. Everyone possesses this knowledge to some degree. Each person has his own psychology, obtained less from his academic training than from his parents and from his own experiences. No one living today has full knowledge of human nature, whether he is a scientist or not. The question for us is only whether we should increase the half-knowledge prevailing today. Who doubts that any bit we can add is helpful and not harmful?

Teachers and physicians, social workers, parents and married couples, individuals and groups, in their desire to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, are eagerly awaiting practical knowledge. They learn too much theoretically, but find little which they can actually apply. We Individual Psychologists are proud of the practicality of our suggestions, which do not violate common sense. That is a great advantage which we have over other schools of thought, and it facilitates the acceptance and digestion of our principal points of view. But we must make them available to those who need them.

The best way to distribute the necessary knowledge and to promote Individual Psychology is by organizing classes and study groups. Everyone profes-

sionally trained in Individual Psychology, must help even at the risk of being called sectarian. He must organize around him those who are eager to learn. Classes serve the purpose of getting acquainted with our methods. From these classes and our professional contacts, each one of us may gather a group of people interested in a more profound study of Individual Psychology. Each one of us, either alone or together with local co-workers, should organize a group which convenes regularly once a week, or at least once a month. If lecturers and instructors are not available in sufficient numbers, the group can read books and papers by Adler and other Individual Psychologists. Reading books together and discussing them is of distinct value. It is often amazing how little we get out of a book if we read it alone. But an idea conveyed to us orally, especially in a discussion, makes a more profound impression. It forces our minds to follow the idea of others, and does not permit us to exclude what is new, strange, or inconvenient. Such a study and discussion group will train persons to lecture and to lead discussions.

As Individual Psychology arose from medical, psychiatric treatment, physicians and psychiatrists should be the first ones to be contacted and invited to discussions and lectures. But the groups most ready and most vitally interested in our work are teachers and educators. (Parents belong in this group more by their function than by their preparation.) Since our ideas lend themselves to easy translation

into educational practice, this group responds immediately when confronted with Individual Psychology. Social workers and all those dealing with human beings, professionally, are also interested in our methods, which offer psychological insight through correct interpretation of human actions. Laymen have a definite place in general study groups, as the pursuit of happiness requires adequate psychological knowledge.

These suggestions do not demand more than every one of us feels he should do. The work which we put in will reflect upon ourselves. We all need stimulation and encouragement to go on with our work. It is difficult to work alone. We must organize to give every one of our workers practical and moral support, without which he would be unable to pursue his own ideas and understanding. Reports about such group activities can be extremely helpful to all of us. All the details of how the group started, the obstacles it found, and the progress it makes are stimulating and encouraging.

The type of adult education which Individual Psychology can provide is of extreme value not only to the individuals who come within the reach of its influence, but to our whole mode of living. Understanding one another, uniting antagonistic interests into mutual cooperation, developing courage and social interest--all are essential for the solution of the problem which we all, as individuals, as a nation, and as mankind, face today.

Personal Activities

Several members of the Chicago group gave classes outside of the Association.

Dr. Nita Arnold held a seminar at the Chicago State Hospital for the staff, discussing case histories in the light of Adlerian psychology.

Eleanor Redwin conducted in various sections of Chicago six discussion groups for mothers interested in child guidance. Three of these groups met once a week and three every second week throughout the year, each consisting of from ten to twelve members.