


Fritz Redl (1902-1988) by Jennifer Wyse

Fritz Redl was a prominent psychologist and educator whose efforts in the field have inspired the nickname “the ‘father’ of modern psychoeducation” (PsychoEd, n/d). His best-known efforts and contributions focused on delinquent youth. Redl served as an advocate for these adolescents, stressing the importance of creating a life space that would nurture and inspire positive relationships. He proposed that this be done by structured, engaging activities and by the use of language (Beker, 2009, p. 5). Parallel to the shift in the perspective of psychology and education that was brought by the early 1900’s, Redl’s new approach helped to substantially further the movement of child advocacy in the United States (Brendtro, 2008, p. 11).

Fritz Redl	
	
Born	1902 Klaus, Austria
Died	Feb 9, 1988 (age 86) North Adams Massachusetts
Fields	Psychoeducation
Known for	<i>Life Space Interview</i> and work in residential care with delinquent youth

Background Information

Fritz Redl was born in Klaus, Austria in 1902 to Gustav and Rosa Redl (Who’s Who, 1976). Trained in both education and psychology, Redl worked as a high school teacher in Germany (Morse, 2001, p. 75). During this time in Europe, education was moving from the “authoritarian model” to a form of education based on experience, where mandatory teacher-student field trips and camps helped to form connections between adults and adolescents (James, 2008, p. 5). According to Morse (2001), taking part in these trips “had a profound impact on Redl and his life’s work” (p.75). Redl, during this time, studied under [Anna Freud](#) and [August Aichhorn](#), both well known founders in child analytic

work (Rausch, 1992, p.1143). It was at the [University of Vienna](#) that Redl earned his doctoral degree (Morse, 2001).

Early Work

Fritz Redl traveled to the United States in 1936 to partake in a two-year study for the Progressive Education Association focusing on adolescence (Morse, 2001, p. 75). Among the other educators participating in this study was [Erik Erikson](#) (Morse, 2001). It was during this time, in 1938, that Hitler occupied Austria and Redl decided to stay in the United States (Raush, 1992, p. 1143). Redl's teaching career in the United States then began at both the [University of Michigan](#) and the [University of Chicago](#) (Morse, 2001, p.75). Redl, who focused on the importance of a healing and safe environment, or *milieu*, for adolescents, worked for a brief time at the University of Michigan Fresh Air Camp, modifying the program into a space focused on "milieu therapy" (James, 2008, p.6). This program was based on the idea that traditional therapy was ineffective for these troubled youth: real change lay in focusing on their natural environmental and social surroundings. This type of therapy, named the Life Space Interview, derived from the idea of *life space* by Kurt Lewin, a colleague of Redl's (James, 2008, p. 6).). As stated by Raush (1992), Fritz Redl was unhappy with the "notions of curing a child's illness while failing to attend to the worlds we created to define the child's reality," (p. 1143). It is undoubtedly this kind of thinking that makes Dr. Redl's intervention so critical.

The [Life Space Interview](#) or LSI is one of Redl's most influential contributions to the field of psychoeducation. He believed that traditional office visits for a troubled youth were limiting, leaving the child without help until his trained therapist was able to see him (Morse, 2001, p. 76). In response to this

dilemma, Redl created the LSI. This offered the youth immediate intervention, at the time of the conflict (Morse, 2001, p. 76). The LSI describes goals, techniques, and strategies that can be used by all of the adults around children during the “ordinary crises of everyday life,” empowering the children and youth with the tools necessary for regulating “healthy emotions” (Raush, 1992, p. 1143; Schneider-Munoz, 2009, p.43). Redl recognized four different problems that could be identified as “triggers” of defiance within the framework of the LSI: “developmental defiance”, “defiance as a wrapping”, “reactive defiance”, and “the defiant ego” (Redl, 2007, p. 35).

A Fresh Start

Fritz Redl later earned tenure at [Wayne State University](#), where he developed a well-known treatment center for children and youth called Pioneer House (Morse, 2001). Fritz Redl’s work began in 1946 with 10 boys at Pioneer House, which was later developed into two of his most famous books, *Children Who Hate* and *Controls from Within* (Morse, 2001; Raush, 1992). These books were later combined into a two-volume book entitled, *The Aggressive Child*. According to Brendtro (2008), Pioneer House served as a home for delinquent boys, where Redl, working alongside colleague David Wineman, enlisted his graduate students to live and work with these young boys (p. 12). Documentations of the boys “natural life space” helped to create useful and effective therapeutic strategies to help not only control behavior, but also to create positive and caring relationships and interventions between the adolescents and adults (Morse, 2008, p. 12). As stated by VanderVen (2009), it is both relationships and activities, and the correlation between the two, which are at the heart of “positive child and youth development,” (p.10).

Later Work

Fritz Redl later accepted a position at the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) (NIMH) as the chief of the Child Research Branch (Rausch, 1992, p. 1143). While working at NIMH, Redl worked with staff in education, clinical, and research in residential work with delinquent children and youth, who have been rejected by their communities and schools (Rausch, 1992, p. 1143). Redl worked in this position for six years, until the program was ended in 1959 (Rausch, 1992, p. 1143).

Redl was elected president of the [American Orthopsychiatric Association](#) in 1962, where he gave his presidential address "[Crisis in the Children's Field](#)" which was later republished in his book, *When We Deal with Children* in 1966 (Rausch, 1992, p. 1143). In 1965, Redl received a White House Citation in honor of his work with children (PsychoEd, n/d).

It was then in 1973 that Dr. Fritz Redl retired (Rausch, 1992, p. 1143). He died in North Adams, Massachusetts on February 9, 1988.