

Beyond the Watershed: And Where Now?

Carl R. Rogers

The pioneer of client-oriented therapy examines the present state of humanistic innovative education, the issues it raises, the research that supports it, and the changes needed to sustain it.

I firmly believe that innovative, humanistic, experiential learning, whether taking place in or out of the classroom, is here to stay and has a future. So we are not simply going to complain about what *is* in education. We are going to look forward. We are beyond the watershed. Let me explain what I mean.

When the early pioneers struck out for the West, they followed the rivers and watercourses. For a long time they were traveling upstream, always going against the current, which became increasingly swift as they climbed through the foothills and into the mountains. Then came the moment when they passed the divide. The going was still very rough, the streams no more than trickles. But now they were moving *with* the current, which was flowing into stronger, larger rivers. There were now important forces working *for* them, not always against them.

I believe that is where we are today in education. We have passed the watershed. Now, instead of a few lonely pioneers, we find an increasing flow of movement into an education more fit for humans. Every city has its alternative schools, free schools, and open classrooms. At the college level, I get letters from teachers of astronomy, mathematics, mechanical engineering, French, chemistry, biology, psychology, English—all telling of the tentative steps they have taken toward providing for their students a freedom to learn, and the exciting rewards of such steps.

Academic credit is even being granted for learnings outside of school. There are other signs. I am part of a program in which 900 medical educators have attended workshops on the humanizing of medical education, and now are calling in consultants to help them achieve that aim in their separate medical schools. Universities without walls, programs of independent study, graduate schools that grant students more autonomy—all are burgeoning. We are a current to be reckoned with in American education.

The fact that it is no longer necessary simply to be fighting *against*, brings with it new personal issues for the educator. It raises new problems of interpersonal politics in education. It also means that now we are called upon to define more clearly what we mean by this new education. Do we have any evidence that it is effective in promoting learning? And where will it go in the future? I want to comment on each of these topics, hopefully in ways that will provoke thought and promote discussion and dialogue.

Personal Issues

The educator who is moving in the direction of innovative humanistic education is asking himself or herself a number of tough questions.

- To what extent do I, in my deepest feelings, trust students, in a facilitative climate, to be self-directing? What do I do with the ambivalence I often feel in this respect?

- Where do I find my rewards? Do I need a great deal of direct satisfaction for my hungry ego? Or can I find equally great ego rewards in being facilitative of the development of others?

- How do I prevent myself from becoming a rigid, dogmatic “true believer” in humanistic education? The intolerant “true believer” is a menace to any field, yet I suspect each one of us finds traces of that person in ourselves. Do I believe I have the final best way in education? If so, how can I move beyond that?

- How can I maintain my integrity and yet hold a position in a system that is philosophically opposed to what I am doing? This is a terribly difficult problem often faced, I suspect, by many of you.

I was fascinated by the way in which one man facing this problem dealt with the college requirement that he write “behavioral objectives” for his students, a task that he found philosophically abhorrent. Instead of complying, he wrote “A Set of Behavioral Objectives By and For Dave Morris” (in other words, for himself). Very briefly, they were (He spelled them out much more fully.):

1. “I have to give the learners access to me as a *person*. . . .
2. “I have to be as ready as I can to suggest (all kinds of) experiences that they might not otherwise have thought of, thereby increasing the options open to them. . . .
3. “I have to respect each learner’s autonomy and freedom. . . .
4. “I have to (try to) . . . have the courage to give each learner honest feedback as straight as possible.”

Dave Morris still has his position, even though he did not write out behavioral objectives for his students. However, I’m not sure that proves anything because Dave Morris has tenure. Others will have to face challenges to their integrity without that much security.

I’m sure there are many other personal issues facing innovative educators, but these are some that I recognize because I have felt them in myself or have seen them in others.

Political Issues

I wonder if we have any conception of the threat that innovative education poses for the conventional instructor or administrator. We may be repeating the lack of awareness that I know was present in me when I first advanced the principles of client-centered therapy. Why did I meet such resistance? Every counselor or therapist was surely interested in being more effective. I was saying that here was a way I had found more effective. Why was I being denounced? I realize now that the reason was not the newness of my ideas—whether valid or not. It was that if a therapist believed any part of what I was saying, his/her *power* was threatened. I was saying that it was not the therapist who was the final

authority, but the client. I was saying that the best insights were not those given by the therapist who had superior knowledge, but were those discovered by the client during the experience of therapy. I was saying that it was not the therapist who could discern the wise choices and steps to be taken, but the client. I was saying that the significant power lay in the client, and that the therapist's task was to elicit this strength. So I was threatening the whole traditional role of the therapist as the knowing, wise and powerful figure. No wonder I was resisted!

The situation is similar in this field. I think that it is in its interpersonal politics that a humanistic, person-centered, process-oriented, experiential education is most threatening to the education world. I question whether we have a sufficient realization of this.

Let me contrast for a moment the politics of conventional education and humanistic education. In traditional schools, the power structure is clear. The administrator has power over and controls the teachers. The teacher has power over and controls the students. The student obeys or suffers the consequences. The teacher knows what should be learned, and the student is to learn it. Authoritarian rule is the accepted policy. Trust in the students is at a minimum. Students are governed by fear of ridicule, by constant fear of low grades, and by fear of failure with its dread consequences. In college and graduate school, the fear is deeper. The traditional medical school used to tell its incoming students, "Look at the individual to the left and to the right of you. One of you three will fail, will not receive an M.D." In Ph.D. programs, the fear is often worse; the candidate may be in danger of being failed by a faculty sponsor because he or she is not willing to conform to every wish of that sponsor.

To be sure, lip service is given to democratic principles throughout the conventional system, but any practice of democratic choice and power is strictly prohibited. It is authoritarian through and through.

Consider now what happens if a teacher utilizes a person-centered approach in the classroom, permitting student choice, sharing responsibility, power, and control with the students, and entering in, himself or herself, as one more learner. This facilitative individual is stating, not

in words, but in behavior, that the learner is the one to make the final choices, that it is the learner who is exercising self-discipline rather than being subjected to external discipline, and that power lies with the learner. It is the task of the facilitator to help provide the psychological climate in which the learner can begin to take responsible control of his/her own education. It is the growing,

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learning person who is the politically powerful force in such education.

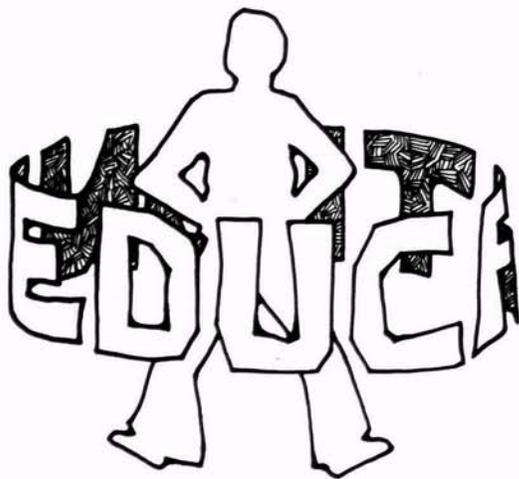
I cannot imagine a stance more threatening to the conventional educator. This process of learning, and its politics, represents a revolutionary about-face from the politics of traditional education. I am not sure that we have adequately realized what a threat we are.

I know a teacher, a fine facilitator of learning, who was selected by the students as one of the two or three best teachers in the college. She was finally dropped because she repeatedly and resolutely refused to agree that she would grade on a curve; in other words, she refused to promise in advance that she would fail a certain percentage of her students no matter what the quality of their work. This was taken as evidence that she did not believe in standards, since in the circuitous logic of the conventional school "standards" means, in practice, failing students. She was also saying in effect, "I refuse to use grades as an instrument of punishment." So she was not only undermining "standards," but she

was undermining the punitive power of the faculty. It was such an uncomfortable threat that they *had* to get rid of her, though they were embarrassed to do so. This is far from being an isolated incident. It shows how even one individual can threaten a whole faculty.

Humanistic education, then, is a threat to conventional institutions, and to the conventional practices of the educational profession. So I believe we should be facing such issues as:

- How can we minimize the threat we constitute?
- How can we make sure that there is always a place for both students and faculty who desire a traditional education? We don't want to coerce people into freedom.
- How can we reach the persons who are centers of power in today's educational systems?
- Can we learn the strategies of a quiet, nonviolent revolution? Because that, I believe, is what we are about.



Person-Centered Education: A Definition

I realize that I have talked about this newer approach to education without ever saying what I perceive it to be. Since I have a strong dislike for vagueness, I would like to state, as clearly and as briefly as I can, the way in which I see the picture of education as it might be, and toward which it seems to be moving. I would stress that this is my

definition, and others may have quite a different perception.

Let me think in terms, not just of a classroom, but of a larger unit, such as a school or college. For person-centered learning to develop in such a setting, there is one precondition that is followed by a number of characteristic and predictable features. The precondition is this:

A leader or a person who is perceived as an authority figure in the situation is sufficiently secure within and secure in relationship to others that he or she experiences an essential trust in the capacity of others to think for themselves, to learn for themselves.

If this precondition exists, then the following aspects become highly probable:

1. *This facilitative person shares with the others—teachers, students, and possibly parents or community members—the responsibility for the learning process.* Curricular planning, mode of administration and operation, funding, and policymaking are all the responsibility of the particular group involved. Thus a class may be responsible for its own curriculum, but the total group may be responsible for overall policy.
2. *The facilitator provides learning resources—from personal experience, from books or other materials, or from community experiences.* The facilitator encourages the learners to add resources of which they have knowledge or in which they have experience. Doors are opened to resources outside the experience of the group.
3. *Each student develops a program of learning, alone or in cooperation with others.* Exploring his or her own interests, facing the wealth of resources, the student makes choices as to a learning direction and carries the responsibility for the consequences of those choices.
4. *A facilitative learning climate is provided.* In meetings of the class or of the school as a whole, an atmosphere of realness, of caring, and of understanding listening is evident. This climate may spring initially from the person who is the perceived leader. As the learning process continues, the climate is more and more often provided by the learners for each other. Learning from each other becomes as important as learning from books or community experiences, or from the facilitator.

5. It can be seen that *the focus is primarily on fostering the continuing process of learning.* The content of the learning, while significant, falls into a secondary place. Thus a course is successfully ended not when the students have "learned all they need to know," but when they have made significant progress in learning *how to learn* what they want to know.

6. *The discipline necessary to reach the student's goals is a self-discipline,* and is recognized and accepted by the learner as being his/her own responsibility.

7. *The evaluation of the extent and significance of the student's learning is made primarily by the learner,* though this self-evaluation may be influenced and enriched by caring feedback from other members of the group and from the facilitator.

8. *In this growth-promoting climate, the learning tends to be deeper, proceeds at a more rapid rate, and is more pervasive in the life and behavior of the student than learning acquired in the traditional classroom.* This comes about because the direction is self-chosen, the learning is self-initiated, and the whole person, with feelings and passions as well as intellect, is invested in the process.

That is my picture of what a person-centered approach to education would mean.

Is There Any Evidence?

The statement I have just made about the superiority of a person-centered education may seem like a bold and unfounded statement. But it can be backed up by a very solid body of evidence. The research studies of David Aspy and his colleagues in the National Consortium for Humanizing Education are only beginning to be known, but I regard them as highly important. For a number of years, Aspy has been the leader in a series of research studies aimed at finding out whether human, person-centered characteristics in a classroom have any measurable effects, and if so what these effects are. Recently, he and one of his major colleagues, Flora Roebuck, have written a general report of their findings (1974a), along with a series of technical reports of their studies (1974b).

As a starting point, Aspy took the basic hypothesis that we had formulated in client-centered therapy and redefined the terms slightly to make them more appropriate to the school setting. Empathy (E) was redefined as a teacher's attempt to understand the meaning that the student's school experience has for the student. Positive regard (PR) was defined as the various ways in which the teacher shows respect for the student as a person. Congruence (C) needed no redefinition; it was the extent to which the teacher was genuine in relationship to the students.

The method, very briefly, was first to obtain tape-recorded hours of classroom instruction. Rating scales were developed to assess various degrees of these three primary attitudes and behaviors, ranging from low to high. Using these three scales, unbiased raters measured the "facilitative conditions" as exhibited by each teacher. These ratings were then correlated with achievement test scores, with problem-solving ability, with number of absences from class—the range of variables was very great.

Having established a methodology, the researchers applied it on a previously unheard of scale. Their final report indicates that they recorded and assessed nearly 3,700 hours of classroom instruction, from 550 elementary and secondary school teachers! These studies were done in various parts of this country and in several other countries. They involved black, white, and Mexican American teachers and students. No study of comparable magnitude has ever been made.

Here is my summary of the findings of Aspy and his colleagues:

1. There was a clear correlation between the facilitative conditions provided by the teacher and the academic achievement of students. This finding has been repeatedly confirmed. Students of "high-level" teachers (those high in the facilitative conditions) tended to show the greatest gains in learning. A sobering finding was that students of "low-level" teachers may actually be retarded in their learning by this deficiency.

2. The situation most conducive to learning was when teachers who exhibited high levels of the conditions were backed up and supervised by principals with similarly high levels. Under these conditions, students not only showed greater

gains in school subjects but other positive gains as well.

They became more adept at using their higher cognitive processes such as problem-solving. (This was especially noteworthy where the teacher showed a high degree of positive regard and respect. Creative problem-solving evidently requires a nurturant climate.)

They had a more positive self-concept than was found in the other groups.

They initiated more behavior in the classroom.

They exhibited fewer discipline problems.

They had a lower rate of absence from school.

In one exciting study, they even showed an increase in I.Q. In this study, 25 black first graders with "high level" teachers and 25 with "low level" teachers were given individual intelligence tests nine months apart. The first group showed an average I.Q. increase from 85 to 94. The figures for the second group were 84 and 84—no change whatsoever.

3. Teachers can improve in the level of facilitative conditions with as little as 15 hours of carefully planned intensive training, involving both cognitive and experiential learning. Considering the demonstrated influence of these attitudinal conditions, it is highly important to know that they can be increased.

4. Of significance for all of education is the finding that teachers improve in these attitudes only when their trainers exhibit a high level of these facilitative conditions. In ordinary terms, this means that such attitudes are "caught," experientially, from another. They are not simply intellectual learnings.

5. Teachers exhibiting high levels of facilitative conditions tend to have other characteristics.

They have a more positive self-concept than low level teachers.

They are more self-disclosing to their students.

They respond more to student's feelings.

They give more praise.

They are more responsive to student ideas.

They lecture less often.

6. Neither geographical location of the classes, racial composition, nor race of the teacher altered these findings. Whether we are speaking

of black, white, or Chicano teachers; black, white, or Chicano students; or classes in the North, the South, the Virgin Islands, England, Canada, or Israel, the findings are essentially the same.

Aspy and Roebuck conclude as follows after analyzing their mountains of data:

"The results are by and large supporting our original findings though we have been able to sharpen them greatly. *That is, the measures of the conditions (E, C, PR) continue to relate positively and significantly to positive student growth. Additionally, they relate negatively and significantly to student deterioration such as discipline problems and negative attitudes about school.*"

For me these studies are adequate evidence that the more the psychological climate of the classroom is person-centered, the more are vital and creative learnings fostered. This statement holds for both elementary and secondary classes. It has yet to be investigated at the college level, but there is no reason to suppose the findings would be sharply different. So I trust it is clear from what I have said that I believe person-centered education can be defined, and that it is effective.

A Possible Emphasis in Research

I am not so bold as to try to predict the future of this new mode of promoting learning, except to say that its future is likely to be multifaceted, exciting, controversial, and revolutionary in its implications. I would, however, like to express two hopes in regard to that future.

The first has to do with the research that is necessary to learn more about its meaning. I believe that it will be a great mistake if the primary emphasis is on the assessment of the outcomes of a self-directed experiential learning. Here I would like to draw upon my own experience in research in psychotherapy.

We were under pressure—just as innovative educators are today—to prove that our approach to therapy was effective. We gradually carried on more and more sophisticated studies to assess the outcomes. But where this was the sole purpose of the research, the results, even though the evidence of effectiveness was positive, were always disappointing. We found, as could have been predicted, that some clients were more successful

than others, some therapists more effective than others. But assessment studies are not heuristic, do not lead forward. They offer almost no clues to the elements we need to know to improve therapy, or to understand its process. It was only when we developed hypotheses of the if-then variety that we could begin to discern that if certain elements were present in the relationship, then certain constructive changes occurred. If other elements were present, the changes might lead to a deterioration or a disintegration in behavior.

This is one reason I described Aspy's research at such length. I personally hope it is in this general direction that research will go. Starting from a well developed "if-then" theory, he investigated relationships between antecedent attitudinal elements and a wide variety of outcome variables. So, in his findings, he was able to point to those elements that had a positive effect on learning and those that had a negative influence. Consequently, the end result was not only an assessment of the learning, but a pinpointing of specifics that should be stressed in the training of teachers. Then he went ahead to show that teachers could, with training, improve in these specifics.

So I hope that research in innovative education will place secondary emphasis on assessment and primary stress on theory-based hypotheses that may give us deeper understanding of the antecedent conditions associated with effectiveness or ineffectiveness in such education.

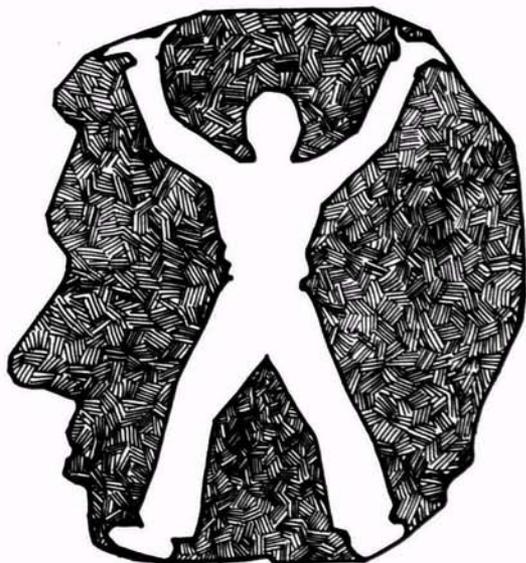
The Exploration of Inner Space?

Up to this point I have, whether right or wrong, felt quite secure in what I have been saying. Now it is with some trepidation that I wish to express a second hope, not very clearly formulated in my mind and indefinite in its outline.

I believe that the next great frontier of learning, the area in which we will be exploring exciting new possibilities, is a region scarcely mentioned by hard-headed researchers. It is the area of the intuitive, the psychic, the vast inner space that looms before us. I hope that innovative education moves forward the learnings in this primarily noncognitive realm, the area that currently seems illogical and irrational.

There is a growing body of evidence, which is hard to ignore, that shows capacities and potentials within the psyche that seem almost limitless, and that fall almost entirely outside the field of science as we have known it. It would seem obvious, for example, that an individual floating weightless in a tank of warm water, with almost zero input of stimulation from sight, sound, touch, taste, or smell, would be experiencing nothing. But what is the fact? Such an individual is bombarded by rich visual imagery, hallucinations, imagined sounds, all kinds of bizarre and often frightening experiences coming from unknown sources of inner stimulation. What is the meaning of this? It appears that our inner world is continually up to something we know nothing about, unless we shut off the outer stimuli.

Or another question, another possible aspect for exploration: Is it possible for the whole body, the whole organism, to learn something the mind does not know, or only learns later? What about the well-substantiated reports of telepathic communication between members of the Masai tribe in Africa, as well as other "primitive" tribes. Could it be that our Western culture has forgotten something they know? Can we know, as they seem to have known, when we are in tune with the pulse-beat of the world? A compelling fictional but true-to-life account of such abilities is contained in Waters' classic book, "The Man



Who Killed the Deer" (1942). We need, I believe, to learn more of our intuitive abilities, our capacity for sensing with our whole organism.

Can we, at times, know of distant happenings? I think of Jean, the woman who told me that her identical twin sister was driving back to her home at night by a familiar route when Jean woke in a panic of certainty. She phoned the highway police and told them, "There's been an accident on such-and-such a highway. It's a white car with this license, and a lone woman driver." There was a pause, and then the officer said in a puzzled and slightly suspicious voice, "But how did you know about that, lady? We only got the report of the accident two minutes ago." Do we wish to learn about experiences like that—of which there are many—or is it too threatening to us?

I also read the story of Robert Monroe (1971), a hard-headed businessman and engineer, who after some puzzling experiences found himself one night floating up to the ceiling of his room, looking down on his own body and that of his wife. His account of his fright and of his increasing willingness to take journeys out of his body are startling indeed—and often very convincing. One cannot help but ponder the question, "What can be learned about such experiences, so foreign to our ordinary way of thinking and being?"

I will not press my point further. I would only say that this whole intuitive and psychic world is being opened to thoughtful, serious investigation. Two examples are the scholarly review of intuition by Frances Clark (1973) and the careful research of Dr. Grof (1975) on the puzzling and challenging inner experiences of individuals under LSD. There is ample reason to think that the inner experiences of individuals constitute as vast and mysterious an area for exploration as the incredible galaxies and "black holes" of outer space. I am simply expressing the hope that innovative educators and learners may have the courage, the creativity, and the skill to enter and learn this world of inner space.

Conclusion

I have endeavored to make a quick survey of the new issues that are being and will be faced by a human, innovative education as it increas-

ingly comes into its own as a major educational force. I have defined this new person-centered approach to learning as I perceive it. And, I have sketched some of the ways in which the person of the educator is and will be challenged as innovative education grows.

The political threat to institutions posed by these new developments is not often discussed. Here I have emphasized the enormous threat we pose to establishment power.

From the field of research, I have presented some recent findings that are all too little known, and have also expressed the hope that continuing research will not limit itself to assessment, but will diligently search for relationships of an "if-then" nature.

Finally, I have speculated that the next great frontier of learning may have to do with some of the least appreciated capabilities in our culture—our intuitive and psychic powers. \square

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Carl R. Rogers is Resident Fellow, Center for Studies of the Person, La Jolla, California.

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