

# APPLICATION OF CARL ROGERS' PSYCHOLOGY TO THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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## **Problem Focus**

Despite protests of students and parents, teaching retains much of its traditional character at all levels of contemporary schooling. Only a small fraction of today's education addresses the significant needs of youth. The fault of the school system is its pervasive devaluing and even ignoring of the individuality of the pupil; the interaction between pupil and teacher; the interaction between learners; and other discoveries into the process of learning.

In the author's opinion, individuals who train teachers bear the primary responsibility for continuing or remedying the presently unsatisfactory condition of our schools. Humanization of contemporary education depends primarily on the quality of teachers' formal educational training programs. Schools will fail to change as long as the contents, forms and methods of work with student teachers remain unchanged.

Over the past several years I have explored various ways to introduce humanistic assumptions into the process of teaching. While working with students, teachers, and teacher trainer specialists, I began by gaining a deeper knowledge of the field of humanistic psychology. True inspiration for accomplishing this aim came from Ruth Cohen's (1979) writings on "active learning, and Carl Rogers' (1961; 1973; 1983) work on the "person-centered approach. In the next few pages, I present

descriptions and examples of the two first meetings with students with whom Carl Rogers' person centered principles were applied.

## Program Theses

1. Teaching is a personal relationship. This aspect decides the axiological measure of the process.
2. The teacher has enough confidence in himself and in those with whom he is interacting to believe that others, just like himself, can think about themselves and learn for themselves.
3. The teacher truly believes in pupils' natural inclinations to develop a potentially positive attitude to the others.
4. The teacher's task is to facilitate, that is, to help in search and deepening of knowledge.
5. The teacher is the student's guide in acquiring some practice and not a source of knowledge.
6. The teacher's ability to listen to those with whom she works; and to recognize and meet students' expectations is very important.
7. A proper educational process comprises elements of cooperation and mutual help, and not rivalry and competition.
8. The student is internally motivated; so any external rewards or punishments are not necessary. Self-discipline replaces external discipline.
9. In any group teaching, the important factors are the subject, the individual, and the group wherein the process of learning takes place. In this process:
  - the teacher as a member of the group suggests the topic of the activities, but the aim can be achieved only when it becomes the pupils' suggestion.
  - the teacher has to expect the possibility of changing his suggested topic; and always takes into account others' proposals.
  - the common task among group members creates quite a new quality; not simply an additive result of the individuals.
10. The student influences the syllabus of learning. He consciously chooses his own line of learning and expects to bear the consequences of his choice.
11. Students are entitled to be given a chance to take responsibility for the process of learning.
12. The teacher's task is to support the process of learning and create a situation where the group, including all the members together with the teacher, transform into a community of learners.
13. Support for the process of learning is partly determined by features inherent in and revealed by the personal relationship between the teacher and the learner.
14. Personal features that support the process of learning are the teachers authenticity, empathy, and capacity for accepting others.
15. Pedagogical knowledge is permanent and undoubtedly not only external, having the source in books and lectures, but emerges out of the process of engaging with students personally and emotionally.
16. Learning by experiencing is a chance to engage oneself emotionally and to come to some theoretical conclusions.
17. The teacher's task is to keep up the ongoing process of learning.

18. The effects of teaching are evaluated on the basis of the pupil's visible progress in the ability to learn "how to learn" what he wants to know.
19. The evaluation of the student's learning is done by herself and is enriched by reflected information from other members of the group and from the teacher.
20. The following attitudes and behaviors (rules) are considered essential for the true process of learning:
  - You are here because you want to achieve something; but the others also expect something from you.
  - You decide when and in what way to speak.
  - Pay attention to body signals sent by you and others.
  - People do not speak simultaneously but one by one.
  - Interrupt a discussion if you cannot take part in it, your and my troubles have priority.
  - Do not use impersonal constructions such as "you" or "we" but "I"
  - Try not to ask questions when answering a question
  - Try to imagine and foresee the results of your opinion.

## Workshop Description

### Interpersonal Foundations for Course Development

This first list elucidates early, seminal, interpersonal foundations to which the instructor focuses her attention in course development:

1. The "face-to-face" principle is a basic condition of the teaching process that undergirds the essential class organization.
2. The first contact, and getting acquainted with the pupil are very important.
3. Three features of the teacher's personality condition his relationship with the pupil: a) Empathy; b) Acceptance; c) Authenticity.
4. Two interpersonal capabilities of the teacher condition her relationship with pupils: a) Listening; b) Open, developmentally relevant, and inoffensive communications.

The workshop usually begins with deep concentration, attunement to one's own emotional condition, and identifying the source and the ground of one's psychophysical state. I inform students that my intention is to discuss interpersonal skills. Everybody receives a set of points concerning the workshop:

- Interpersonal skills can be described in terms of specific rules (accepted attitudes and behaviors) that can be easily mastered.
- Mastering the technical side of e.g. proper listening, developmental praising or feedback do not guarantee favorable pedagogical results.

- Using principles of “proper” interpersonal communication leads to expected results only if these principles are combined with empathy, acceptance and authenticity.
- The principles of proper interpersonal communication combined with empathy, acceptance, and authenticity of the person interacting with others creates a chance for expected pedagogical results.

It is considered impossible to create an atmosphere of inner security, trust and openness within the group if the teacher is not emphatic, authentic, and accepting; and if the teacher does not work at developing his own interpersonal skill..

Observations of this approach have taught me that many students experience a sort of disability, or discomfort after reading the points. This kind of discomfort is an element of every learning process, and I would be worried if I did not witness it at a certain phase of my work with the students.

I believe in creativity of the students. Indeed, the moment of overcoming some difficulties is usually fruitful for the process of learning as their triumph over struggles is experienced as a moment of success. Students perceive problems that give rise to questions. Their questions help the group to seek convincing answers. Theory alone is not considered a satisfactory answer for them. Furthermore, it is the irony perhaps, that while it is difficult to put the knowledge into practice, without practice, the theory is completely unintelligible.

### **Authentic Expression as an Essential Behavioral Principle**

Perhaps the most difficult principle is that of openness and authenticity in interpersonal relations with the pupil. Here are some questions formed by the student teachers that show the difficulty:

- Is the teacher entitled to show his emotions towards the pupil in an open and authentic manner?
- How can the teacher be accepting, supporting the pupil, if he is not given a chance to show his attitude towards the pupil? There was such an authentic and open teacher in my school. We used to ask the pupils who had lessons earlier about his actual mood. His mood determined what happened during our lesson.
- If I suppress such negative emotions as anger, aggression, disappointment, and impatience I shall not be authentic and square with my conscience.
- If I reveal these emotions I shall be just like the teachers the pupils are afraid of and try to avoid. So how is it possible to put the theory of interpersonal communication into practice? How do I learn it, and how long does it take to learn?

These and similar questions show that interpersonal communication cannot be learned solely by studying the literature. Dialogues are encouraged regarding real-life experiences in the classroom, including discussion of fears, anticipations, and actual reactions of others. We thus begin to approach putting the knowledge into practice. Students nearly always discuss the right of a teacher to reveal negative emotions toward pupils, a topic that usually concludes on the

point that: "If we agree that the teacher's authenticity in his relation with the pupil should be *apart from* his conditions of unconditional positive regard (UPR) and empathy, a guiding attitudinal principle and a professional duty, then the teacher has not only got the right, but the responsibility to show emotions commonly described as negative."

I agree with the students that the teacher's contact with personal emotions makes her authentic, honest, and in the experience of her students, trustworthy. The question that follows is: What can be done to make the teacher's authentic and open feedback inoffensive and developmentally constructive? The answer to this question is the subject of this and the next classes, as described below.

### **Inoffensive and Developmentally Constructive Authentic Expression**

To explore the parameters of authentic expression I present student teachers with the following scenario: "I'd like to recall your school experience. Think of some banal, unimportant situations that annoyed your teachers." Students share a lot of examples, but the one teacher-student conflict that nearly universally emerges is that of "untidy notebooks." It turns out that the notebook was often a source of conflict between teacher and pupil; and sometimes this conflict extended to the entire class. Notebooks became a problem that engaged even parents. The notebook conflict is often reported to have never been truly resolved, that is, even if the notebooks conformed to the teacher's demands, the conformity typically resulted from some external pressure; not the pupil's internal decision.

Students are asked to analyze the above situation for reasons that might explain a pupil's disobedience. Using the psychodrama technique, the stage is set for two students to interact playing the roles of teacher and pupil. The scenario is described thusly:

Imagine a situation like this. The teacher has clearly stated his demands concerning the notebook for his lessons. Tom behaves as if nothing the teacher said concerned him. Tom's notebook looks worse and worse over time. The teacher decides to do something to get an advantageous effect. He is annoyed and angry with Tom and does not hide his emotions. In your opinion, what should the teacher's action be in order to authentically show his discontent with Tom's behavior, having in mind the pupil's right for respect and his right to decide about himself? Within these conditions, can the teacher aim to inspire Tom's inner motivation, which would express itself in his attitudinal change towards his notebook?

That is our task. The person who plays the role of the teacher will approach someone and show what she would do in such a situation. Or she may present her own former teacher's actions. Other class members are asked to watch the scene carefully, and afterward, to disclose feelings evoked by the actor. Typically, many students take part in the psychodrama. The scene is repeated several times-- without satisfactory solution. Feedback to the role-play teacher converges on the point that her pedagogical actions are ineffective. Below are some of the pupils' remarks:

"I thought that you were harping on me, as usual. Nothing new."

"When you were asking me to change my notebook, you seemed ridiculing."

"I thought I would have to rewrite that notebook, otherwise I would get a 'D', " but I was angry with you."

"I was annoyed because you called me a sloven and a slut without ambition. It was very unpleasant and I decided you wouldn't live to see another notebook."

"I felt you were encroaching upon my right to decide about myself. My notebook is my personal property and is to serve me. It isn't for someone to like it, it's for me. I like it as it is. think margins, underlined words and colors are infantile accessories."

The task remains unsolvable because of a mistaken assumption that the teacher should aim to motivate the student to achieve the teacher's ends. Thus there has been a mistaken approach in the communication of authenticity. For intents and purposes of being inoffensive and developmentally appropriate it is an effective communication transmitted sans empathy; sans unconditional positive regard.

After experiencing the incongruence between authentic expressions that occur without regard for empathy and UPR, (that aim to change a student's motives and behavior), and those that intend communicating empathy and UPR, I suggest to the students that I play the part of the teacher twice. My first time around I play out the teacher making all the mistakes we just observed. In the second scene I work toward problem solution according to principles of constructive, developmentally attuned, inoffensive feedback.

Teacher: Kowalska, you, as usually, ignore what I tell you. You will never change. Look at her notebook! You are a slut and you have no ambition, you aren't neat. Change your handwriting-- You've got a week. If you do not rewrite your notebook, forget about a satisfactory mark. A sixth-grader should know how to keep her notebook. Are you lazy, or are you doing this just to spite me?"

Both role play and observer participant feedback includes:

Students: I felt my annoyance towards that teacher growing... I felt hurt because she was judging and making fun of me in front of the whole class... I felt helpless; and her point that she didn't like my notebook seemed funny... I knew I would have to rewrite that notebook because there was no other way out, but I would do it in spite of myself... I didn't really know what it was all about, why she was bothering me again.

Observers added the view that the above situations at school were, verily, nothing extraordinary; and that they felt rather unemotional-- not surprised. We together confirm that the solution to the problem has not been found; so I ask: "What is the teacher's basic mistake? All [or most] of you played the part of the teacher. The problem was solved neither by threatening, nor moralizing; not by didactic advising nor instruction; and not by the accusing, mocking, and non-empathically sympathizing or helpful teacher.

Why are all of these attitudes ineffective? Invariably, students conclude that a reasoning error occurred. Responses were ineffective because the notebook problem did not belong to the pupil. He thought his notebook was all right. It was the teacher's problem. I agree with this logic and explain that the teacher must be conscious of various sources of his emotions. In the above case, the subject of the teacher's discomfort was the pupil's shabby notebook.

Classifying the problem as belonging to the teacher rather than student emerges from analyzing one's own feelings and reactions. If the teacher is feeling anger or irritation; or is hurt or experiencing somatic symptoms (e.g., headaches, stomach-aches, etc.) he should nearly always perceive them to be expressions or signals of problems within himself. The above case illustrated not only the teacher's futile efforts to change the pupil's notebook, but the personal strain residing in the teacher.

To review, the role play teacher behaved as if the problem of an untidy notebook was [or should be] the students problem. In truth, the pupil approved of his notebook. One's own problem can only be solved through personal change. Although a particular pupil might actually change her attitude and behavior to conform to the desires of the teacher, the prospects for a long lasting solution are grim if they rely on the other person's commitment to change, particularly when little empirical, experiential evidence exists to support the conclusion that the student genuinely wishes to change.

In the second example the teacher's expression is genuinely authentic.

Teacher: "Excuse me, but I've got to take a break. I can't concentrate on the lesson. I want to tell you Agata, that when I look at your notebook I feel irritated and it disturbs my work. Together we've agreed as to the form of the notebook, so I think that my disappointment is justified."

Pupil: "What shall I do?"

Teacher: "You'll decide what is right. It's your choice. I've just told you about my feelings concerning your notebook."

At this point the student teachers generate the following types of feedback:

Student Teachers: At first I was surprised... I felt guilty for the teacher's discomfort... I thought she was right and I understood her... You can get irritated at the sight of an extremely untidy notebook... I asked what to do and I awaited her advice... She surprised me for the second time when she told me the decision was mine... She said my notebook annoyed her and it disturbed her in her work. That was her argument... Right then I was sure I wanted to change the notebook.

In the follow-up summary discussion students seek to solve the question, "What has the teacher done to achieve his aim, that is, to influence the pupil's internal motivation?" Students conclude that the teacher:

- identified the problem within himself; not the pupil
- did not evaluate the pupil
- did not talk about the student, but about the notebook
- talked about himself; not about the pupil
- communicated his feelings related to the given situation
- respected the pupil's right to decide her actions
- spoke authentically about what he was experiencing in the moment
- was open with the student, treating her as a partner who could hear his problem
- did not manipulate the pupil (neither threatened nor talked about punishment)
- showed a certain degree of trust ("you will do what you think is right")

At the end of the workshop I present a chart with recommendations for providing feedback. Feedback informs the recipient with information about a) how I perceive her, b) how I experience my contact with her, and c) feelings evoked in me in response to her behavior.

Recommended guidelines for providing feedback are as follows:

1. Talk explicitly about what the other person was doing when he/she certain feelings were evoked in you.
2. If you talk about what you don't like in the other person, focus on problems the other person would be able to change if he/she wanted.
3. Be cautious: Don't evaluate; don't advise.
4. Remember that constructive, developmental feedback involves talking about oneself as connected to another person's behavior; not about them.

I think this workshop moves the students toward believing in the possibility of more fully functioning educational systems. After copying down information from the feedback recommendations chart, it is characteristic for students to begin whispering to one another; and when all are done copying, they begin expressing their doubts aloud.

- "How is it possible that such simple principles do not function in schools?"
- "Theory is always a simplification. My mother is a teacher and says that theory has nothing to do with practice."
- "I used to go to school, but I simply cannot imagine a situation when a teacher admits he's got a problem or is experiencing some difficulties."
- "There are certain conventions that function in schools, and there's no room for respect for the pupil. That is what my experience shows."
- "I am really annoyed with what you are saying. It seems as though you were saying that 'School cannot be changed.' If that's the case, then what we are doing here has no sense. We've got to believe that school can be different from what it is now. In more advanced western countries, school is different, and it's our job to create a new school."
- "What you've said is great, and I wanted to add that for me, new school means new interpersonal contacts and a place where the pupil feels he is gaining knowledge."

After listening to the students' remarks, I pose the question: "What did your teachers usually communicate in various educational situations? Try to name the type of communication, and give an example. Drawing from their own experiences students brainstorm various types of communication. Then, we begin to sort, categorize, and interpret to make the categories of communication they've experienced more comprehensible. The three primary types of teacher communications observed, and varieties and examples of each are presented in the table below.



**Table 1. Types and Examples of Commonly Experienced Teacher Communications.**

Communication Type	Varieties and Examples of Communication Types
<i>Giving ready solutions</i>	<u>Instructions and orders</u> : "Write" "Do" "Go out" "Sit down" "Stop" <u>Warnings and threats</u> : "I'll call your parents if you don't change" "Don't expect a good mark" <u>Advice</u> : "Kowalski should be an example for you" "Start working really hard" <u>Admonishing and moralizing</u> : "A sixth-grader should know what to do" "Pockets are not to keep your hands in" "Throw your waste into the waste basket" "When you are at school you should listen and do what you are told to do"
<i>Expressing restraint</i>	<u>Making fun of pupils and calling them names</u> : "What is that on your head! A bird's nest?" "You are dressed as if for a cabaret, not for a decent school" <u>Interpreting, diagnosing, judging and accusing</u> : "You behave as if you wanted to spite me" "You are lazy" "It's thanks to you" "If you respected your parents, your attitude towards the teacher and school would be different" <u>Pseudo-sympathy</u> : "Life isn't easy at school, is it?" "The sun is shining and you have to sit and learn math... My poor dears" <u>Praising</u> : "You come from a respected family"
<i>Indirect remark</i>	<u>Digressions, funny comments, caustic remarks</u> : "It's difficult to believe in your effort" "My my, congratulations!"

Ready solutions are not effective, despite any superficially useful data, because they all contain obvious or hidden criticism of the pupil. They violate the pupils right to make independent decisions and choices, and simultaneously negatively influence the student's attitude towards the teacher. Ready solutions are close to manipulation of the pupil and suggest that "it is I and not you who knows what is good for you." Ready solutions may cause temporary change that is not internally motivated.

Communications that express restraint also have no formative effect. They contain insidious, hidden information that something is wrong with the pupil. They necessitate protection and cause negative attitudes towards the teacher. Indirect remarks achieve even greater deleterious effect. They are perceived as an intention to humiliate the pupil.

Each student-generated example of a typical teacher communication falls in the category of a "You statement." You statements, which focus on the pupil rather than teacher, belie the recommended feedback process and problem locus suggested in the workshop. These student-directed communications point to the teacher's helplessness and lack of professional competence in communication.

## Concluding the Workshop

When the group work is over, one of the students says: "My mother used to come home very irritated after meetings at school. And I know the situation was identical with other parents. Our teacher used to call our class a difficult class and also called me a difficult pupil. In my opinion our class was quite ordinary, I couldn't understand why I was called difficult. Now I'm beginning to understand it. The teacher should rather have said that his work in the school and with

children is too much for him and he is not prepared for it.”

This opinion opens the way for a great agitation in the group. Students express their views and confirm what was said. Teachers used to have poor opinion of their classes and usually called them difficult. As the students expect my opinion, I summarize the discussion:

“ I ’ m very glad you are so active and your conclusions are good. There are no difficult children and no difficult classes. Children always react adequately to the stimulus they are given. I deplore teacher training which manipulates the pupil, adjusts him to the system, violates the pupil’s right for respect, and considers this reasonable behavior. The aim of today’s workshop was to supply you with experiences which would clearly show that a given impulse causes a given, easy to be foreseen reaction, adequate to the stimulus. That’s why recognizing the principle of the constructive, developmental and inoffensive interpersonal communication is so important.”

We finish our workshop with exchanging information concerning our actual psychophysical state—a feelings check. The titles of the consecutive workshops I include in my program of psycho-pedagogical education of teachers follows.

- Solving in a creative way conflicts and problems in interpersonal relations
- Punishments: Inefficient and harmful ways of upbringing, and solving the problems of such an upbringing
- How should the development of independence be stimulated?
- Conditions of developing interpersonal relations
- Approval - the feature that stimulates the development. Principles of properly transferred approval
- Self-opinion in the process of training
- Summary and suggestion of how to put the program into practice

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