

## THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH I

by John Keith Wood

As far as I know, the first time the person-centered approach was referred to in print was by Rogers in 1955 ("Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question" in *The American Psychologist*, 10(7) 267-278) when he wrote, "person-centeredness." The phrase, "the person-centered approach" came into common usage around 1974.

Because the phrase appeared around half-way through the sixty-year chronology of Rogers's work and because it began being applied to a hodge-podge of activities, its historical and practical significance has been obscured.

Currently, the approach itself, the common essence of client-centered therapy, student-centered learning, group-centered encounters, is almost universally misunderstood. Replete with category errors in its usage, the term "person-centered approach" may denote almost anything, from a "science," to a "philosophy," to a "political movement," even to a body of followers of tenets that resemble a religion. It is pursued as a "method of counseling," as a "professional status," as membership in a "school of thought," and as a personal "identity." Anything, it seems, except merely what it is, an *approach*.

Even worse, due to the chronological development of the name, analogies suggesting that the approach is the superficial and colorful foliage of a tree whose roots are the ample and reliable client-centered therapy are abundant.

***Whereas, this image should be turned upside down.***

The person-centered approach may be more precisely and more constructively conceived of as the "root" of a "tree" whose principle "branch" is client-centered therapy.

Other branches are student-centered education; small group encounter for personal growth; large group workshops for trans-national understanding, for the resolution of inter-group conflicts and, most important, for learning (largely through large-group workshops) about culture, its formation and transformation.

Carl Rogers's most important achievement, in spite of a long and distinguished career as a psychotherapist, may not have been so much the development of a successful method for effective psychotherapy in a particular time and place. It may have been the cultivation of this *approach* that could be applied creatively by people at various times and places, under various circumstances, in various endeavors. (Estância Jatobá, March 1999)

Rogers's PCA

date	name	publication	concentration
1928			creating an "ambience"
1937	an approach	paper given to National Council of Social Work: The Clinical Psychologist's <b>Approach</b> to Personality Problems.	"moving away from any <b>approach</b> which was coercive or pushing"
1939	an approach	<i>The Clinical Treatment of the Problem Child</i>	an <b>approach</b> to psychotherapy based on successful aspects of known methods at that time
1942	the non-directive approach	<i>Counseling and Psychotherapy: New Concepts in Practice</i>	attitudes of the psychotherapist
1946	client-centered approach	Significant Aspects of Client-Centered Therapy in <i>The American Psychologist</i> , Vol. 1 No. 10	the <b>approach</b> applied to psychotherapy
1951	client-centered approach	<i>Client-Centered Therapy: It's Current Practices, Implications and Theory</i>	distillation of method of psychotherapy and tentative applications of the <b>approach</b> to other areas: group-centered leadership, student-centered teaching.
1961	client-centered approach	<i>On Becoming a Person</i>	application of the <b>approach</b> to daily life
1969	client-centered approach	<i>Freedom to Learn</i>	application of the <b>approach</b> to schooling
1970	client-centered approach	<i>On Encounter Groups</i>	application of the <b>approach</b> to small group encounter
1974	person-centered approach		application of the <b>approach</b> to societal issues (large groups)
1977	person-centered approach	<i>On Personal Power</i>	social and political implications of the <b>approach</b>
1980	person-centered approach	<i>A Way of Being</i>	integrative <b>approach</b> : social and subjective perspectives with emphasis on "creating an environment"