

THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH — II

by John Keith Wood

An "approach" always guided the work of Carl Rogers.

The concept "person-centered," as far as I know, first appeared in print in 1955. In "Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question," an article published in *The American Psychologist*, 10 (7) 267-278, Rogers wrote, "person-centeredness."

The phrase, "the person-centered approach" came into common usage around 1974. And because it was applied to various phenomena by people interested in psychological counseling, it was subsequently associated with a hodgepodge of activities, scented by psychotherapy, instead of, as it should have been, tinged with the essence of client-centered therapy, that is, "person-centeredness."

Replete with *category errors* in its usage, the term "person-centered approach" rapidly spread to 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. Along these lines, it might be pursued as a "method of counseling," as a "professional status," as membership in a "school of thought," even as a personal "identity." More often than not, phrases involving the words "person-centered approach," appear as *flatus vocis*, mere verbal utterance. It has become anything anyone wishes it to be, except merely what it is, an *approach*.

And it has always been an *approach*, intended as nothing more, nothing less. Consider Rogers's own relation to this perspective:

Date	Name	Major Publication	Concentration
1928			Creating an "ambiance."
1937	An Approach	Paper given to National Council of Social Work: The Clinical Psychologist's Approach to Personality Problems.	"Moving away from any approach which is coercive or pushing."
1939	An approach	<i>The Clinical Treatment of The Problem Child.</i>	An approach to psychotherapy based on successes of known methods of the 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. I No. 10.	The approach 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 approach to other activities: group-centered leadership, student-centered teaching.
1961	Client-Centered Approach	<i>On Becoming a Person</i>	Application of the approach to daily life.

1969	Client-Centered Approach	<i>Freedom to Learn</i>	Application of the approach to schooling.
1970	Client-Centered Approach	<i>On Encounter Groups</i>	Application of the approach to small group encounter.
1974	Person-Centered Approach		Application of the approach to societal issues through large-group encounter.
1977	Person-Centered Approach	<i>On Personal Power</i>	Social and political implications of the approach .
1980	Person-Centered Approach	<i>A Way of Being</i>	Relation of the approach to the integration of social and subjective perspectives. Emphasis returns to "creating an environment."

The chronological growth in the name's usage has naturally suggested analogies that portray the approach as the superficial and colorful foliage of a tree whose roots are the ample and reliable client-centered therapy.

Whereas, in my view, 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 most completely developed "branch" is client-centered therapy.

Other branches are student-centered learning; small group encounter for personal growth; large group dialogue for exploring inter-group conflict resolution and improving trans-cultural understanding and, perhaps most of all, for learning (largely through large-group workshops) about culture, its formation and transformation.

Rogers's legacy is (or could be) much more than the formulation of a successful method for effective psychotherapy in a particular time and place. It could become, with understanding, the cultivation of an **approach** that could be applied creatively by people at various times and places, under various circumstances, in various endeavors.

A summary of facts and perspectives already in print.

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