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To cite this article: Carl Rogers, Maria Villas-Boas Bowen, Joann Justyn, Jared Kass, Maureen Miller, Carl R. Rogers, Natalie Rogers & John K. Wood (1978) Evolving Aspects of Person-Centered Workshop, *Self & Society*, 6:2, 43-49, DOI: [10.1080/03060497.1978.11086697](https://doi.org/10.1080/03060497.1978.11086697)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03060497.1978.11086697>



Published online: 21 Jan 2015.



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Evolving Aspects of Person-Centered Workshop

By the Staff:

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"We have no investment in the specific outcomes of these workshops. We are invested, and skilled, in initiating a process, in which the individual and the community become more free to select directions and activities which are enhancing, rewarding, socially effective, and growthful. What these outcome may be we cannot fully predict. . . . So it is the process that we initiate and trust, and we wait expectantly for the outcomes, which often surprise us with their freshness and richness."

"In our recent workshops we help to create a climate which responds to a human tendency to 'reach out'. The separate person 'reaches' to become all he or she can become. As a consequence, an emotional energy is generated in the group and 'separateness' of consciousness is raised to 'one-ness' of consciousness."

"We have found these experiences to be carriers of the seeds of profound social change: seeds which come to fruition long after the workshop is over."

This summer a workshop entitled "A Person-Centered Approach" will be held in England. It is the sixth in a series, each program being held in a different summer location. We have convened workshops in various locations throughout the United States, and we are convening the 1978 program in Great Britain. Each time we have drawn upon a differing population, and the current workshop is expected to be of especial interest to individuals from the continental European countries and Great Britain. The number of participants has ranged from 60 to 135. (1)

It is believed that these workshops are developing in unique ways, and it is the purpose of this article to sketch some of the more unusual aspects.

The Evolving Staff Function

When we began, the staff - which has remained relatively constant over the years - saw its function in somewhat traditional ways, In meetings held prior to the workshop we spent much time in making alternative plans and designs for the program, and in devising optional schedules. We made plans for intensive small groups and other special activities. We wished

to "give" as much freedom of choice as possible (as though it were ours to give). We saw ourselves primarily as specialists having different interests and skills to offer; as teachers and facilitators. We endeavoured to be prepared, and to offer a wide variety of resources for learning.

Within the staff itself we spent time working through interpersonal frictions and differences, which we did not wish to expose to the participants.

Gradually we have come to see our function as a staff in a very different way. Briefly, we believe that our major task is to *be ourselves*. To this end we spend time together, before the workshop convenes, so that insofar as we are capable:

we can be fully open to each other, and later to the whole group;

we can explore new and unknown areas of our own various life styles

we are truly acceptant of our own differences;

we are open to the new learnings we will receive from our fresh inward journeys, from the group and from each other, all stimulated by the group experience.

Thus it can be said that we now prepare *ourselves*, with much less emphasis on plans or materials. We value our staff process and want that to be available to the group. We have found that by being as fully ourselves as we are able - creative, diverse, present, open and sharing - we somehow become tuning forks, finding resonances with those qualities in all the members of the workshop community.

In the relationships we form with the group and its members, the power is shared. We let ourselves "be"; we let others "be". At our best we have little desire to judge or manipulate the other's thoughts or actions. When persons are approached in this way, when they are accepted as they are, we discover them to be highly creative and resourceful in examining and changing their own lives. While we do not persuade, interpret, or manipulate, we are certainly not *laissez faire* in our attitude. Instead, we find that we can share ourselves, our own potentialities and our skills in active ways. We are each free to be as much of ourselves as it is possible for us to be.

We do not stop here. We as a staff are continually exploring new facets of our own experience as individuals. Recently this has meant uncovering the learnings we are gaining from our relationships with those with whom we are intimate in our alternative life styles. It has meant facing openly the increasingly intuitive and psychic aspects of our lives. As we push on into these unknown inner areas, it seems to enable each new workshop community - individually and collectively - to probe more deeply into their own worlds of shadow and mystery. This has brought us learnings we did not anticipate.

One striking example is that the community has an almost telepathic knowledge

of where the staff is, in its own process. One year, in meetings of staff, we discussed in depth the sexual overtones and sexual behaviours which appear to be a part of workshops, and we openly shared these same sexual aspects in ourselves. In the workshop which ensued, this topic, without any suggestion from us, was for the first time openly talked about and considered.

One final statement about the way we function. We are a thoroughly open staff, with no leader and no hierarchical organization. Leadership and responsibility are shared. We have become a very close team, living our relationship in the most person-centered manner we know, and each year discovering new ways of person-centered behaving and being.

Our Changing Attitude of Trust

We shared a background experience of having learned that the individual in therapy, in a suitable psychological climate, could be trusted to move in the direction of greater self-understanding, wiser and more socialized choices of behaviours. Our trusting attitude was deepened in our experiences with encounter groups of ten to twelve people. It was more profoundly confirmed as we came to trust community groups of more than 100. Recently some of us in Brazil found ourselves continually surprised by the wisdom of groups as large as 800, in their capacity to understand their own predicaments, meet their own dilemmas, move in caring and solid directions. The group flowed organically, not by any structured process.

One staff member describes something of the learning we have all gone through. "In our first workshop I sat impatiently through the community meetings. I could see clear and simple solutions to the issues we were facing. Yet when I presented those neat solutions they were rejected, or more often, ignored. Only gradually did I recognize that the final solution, often reached after prolonged struggle, was a much better informed decision than my premature solution. Gradually I have reached the point where I *really* trust the group, not in words only, but in a sense which I can feel in my viscera as well as in my mind. I observe with awe the wisdom of the group's beautiful crafted solutions to highly complex issues, in which the interests and needs of each person are carefully and caringly met."

Some Distinctive Features

We have distilled out of our experiences together some policies which work for us, and which are rarely emphasized to the same degree in other groups.

Self-determined fee. We have consistently taken the risk of asking applicants to set their own fee, guided on the one hand by knowledge of their own income and resources, and on the other hand by the need of the workshop to be self-supporting. While this has meant a minimum income for ourselves, it expresses operationally our desire to have the widest possible representation of the socio-economic spectrum. It is also, in a way, a political statement that possession of money is not, in our minds, a measure of worth.

Equality of sexes. We represent, in our staff membership and staff responsibilities, a balance of men and women. This is an important value to us.

Collective planning. The process of decision-making of building workshop plans, is the task of *all* of us, participants and staff functioning as one group. Each person shares in the power, and affects the course of the workshop. We find this *process* to be as important as the highly diverse pathways of learning which are chosen and developed. We are continuously exploring new ways of working together which allow each individual and the total community to discover their power in a reciprocal, cooperative fashion.

Attention to beginnings. We go to great lengths - others might say absurd lengths - to look at the consequences of every decision we make prior to the workshop. We do not want to follow old models for the sake of convenience. We keep raising our own consciousness as to the political and social consequences of each initial step. From the moment the participant enters the workshop grounds we want him or her to feel as important and empowered as we do, someone who affects what happens. We pay enormous attention to the initial details. So we consider the way in which participants are greeted (all the staff are part of the process). Each person has the opportunity to choose his or her own room (even though 100 dormitory rooms are much alike), and room-mate(s). Each person may decide whether to use a sex-segregated bathroom (male only, female only) or a mixed bathroom ("coed").

As soon as they are settled in, early arrivals are invited to share responsibility as greeters, guides, assistants for the later arrivals.

Why all this attention to initial details? Because we wish each person to experience from the first that this is his or her workshop. It is not "our" (the staff's) workshop. We try to be sensitively and poignantly aware of the insecurity and anxiety which any person feels, coming into a strange situation. We wish to change the anxious question, "What will they do to me here?" into a surprised self-affirmation, "I find I am in control of my need for privacy, and for relationships. I can make choices. I can contribute I am significant in what happens."

In our experience this attempt to take careful account of the incoming participant as a feeling person with power of his or her own, has clearly been a positive force for community.

The staff as learners. One of our major staff aims is to learn in and from a community. Thus there is a dual role for us. We convene and initiate the workshop, and we rapidly become co-participants and co-learners. This changes us. We have learned from persons. We have also learned from the different cultures in which we have worked - the quite different ambience of the western and eastern areas of our own country, and from the exciting culture of Brazil. We have learned from the citizens of more than a dozen foreign countries who have participated in our workshops. We look forward expectantly to learning from *many* cultures this summer, especially the British and the varied continental European peoples. As we function in different settings the more parochial aspects of our approach

drop away, and we perceive more clearly the core of the quiet revolution which seems to be the heart of our endeavours.

Some Characteristic Developments

It has been our experience that under the policies and circumstances described, a powerful though temporary learning community creates itself. This community is a microcosm of the outside world in which we live. As such it becomes an opportunity to develop a new level of consciousness and some of the skills necessary to face the challenges of a rapidly changing world. We find that both individual strength and community power are discovered. In our recent workshops we help to create a climate which responds to a human tendency to "reach out". By exaggerating individuality, the separate person "reaches" to become all he or she *can* become. As a consequence, an emotional energy is generated in the group and "separateness" of consciousness is raised to a "one-ness" of consciousness. In this whole way of working and being we are developing a non-violent revolutionary model for empowering the person in the building of a cooperative community. While it is only a temporary model, it has implications for long-range societal issues. It is, particularly in its power aspects, the reverse of the established models of government, education, industry, and the family.

We have found that each person not only perceives the workshop as a place to meet personal needs, but actively forms the situation to meet those needs. One individual finds new ways of meeting a difficult transition in marriage or career. Another gains insights which enable inner growth. Another learns new ways of building community. Still another gains improved skills in interpersonal relationships. Others find new means of spiritual, artistic and aesthetic renewal and refreshment. Many move toward more informed and effective action for social change. Other experience combinations of these learnings. The freedom to be individual, to work toward one's own goals in a harmony of diversity, is one of the most prized aspects of the workshop.

As to the longer-range influence of these workshops we feel definitely encouraged. We have found these experiences to be carriers of the seeds of profound social change: seeds which come to fruition long after the workshop is over.

One frequent outcome is the development of temporary or permanent networks of persons, continuing or forming after a workshop. These become true support groups which provide nurturance for the individual as he or she continues to take fresh steps in personal social behaviour.

Perhaps it is clear from the forgoing, that we have no investment in the specific *outcomes* of these workshops. We *are* invested, and skilled, in initiating a *process*, in which the individual and the total community become more free to select directions and activities which are enhancing, rewarding, socially effective and growthful. What these outcomes may be we cannot fully predict. Often we have found ourselves drawn, even pulled, by the ongoing dynamic of the group, into ways of being we had not even considered.

One example is the way in which one workshop drew all of us into an intuitive, organic way of meeting - for community sessions and special activities - with no clearly defined schedules or plans. We learned many things by trusting our intuition, a new experience for most. So it is the *process* that we initiate and trust, and we wait expectantly for the outcome, which often surprise us with their freshness and richness.

Questions We Face

As individuals and as world communities we are facing highly complex and perhaps unanswerable questions. We recognize that these workshops constitute an environment where these issues can at least be considered and confronted. Let us mention a few.

In this complex technological, mass-organized modern world, how can the individual develop any sense of his or her own power? How can he or she affect the system? What kinds of social forms, relationships, educational and political strategies offer any hope of creating a more human world?

In considering such broad questions, individuals come face to face with their personal starting points. How can I empower myself? How can I discover the resources which exist for me in other persons? How can I be nurtured physically, intellectually, spiritually, aesthetically and emotionally? What kind of community can we create which respects and values ourselves as evolving beings?

It is our experience that the ambience and the interpersonal relationships in a person-centered workshop are conducive to facing such questions on various levels - emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physiological. So we convene such workshop, bringing together people who are stirred by such questions and who desire to be in close relation to other seekers. It is our hope that in these experiences more of the mysteries will be illuminated and become a part of our evolving collective wisdom.

The 1978 Workshop (2)

Our attitude toward this 1978 workshop can be stated very simply. We anticipate new learnings. We are certain only that the workshop will be different from anything we might predict in advance. We come to it willing to trust in the wisdom and creativity of the group, knowing it is probable that whatever evolves will be exciting and constructive.

References

(1) *For detailed description of one of these workshops see Chapter 8 in Carl Rogers on Personal Power, New York: Delacorte, 1977; Great Britain: Constable, 1977.*

(2) *The workshop referred to is being held at Nottingham University, Nottinghamshire, England, August 19th - September 2nd, 1978. Further information and applications may be obtained from Joann Justyn,*

Centre for Studies of the Person, 1125 Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla, California 92037, U.S.A. Carl Rogers will also be a staff member at the 1978 workshop of the Facilitator Development Institute (British Centre), which will take place at Chrarlote Manson College, Ambleside from 5th - 13th August. Further details of this workshop, which is similarly based on the person-centered approach can be obtained from David Mearns, Psychology Department, Jordanhill Colelge of Education, Glasgow, G13 1PP, Scotland.

Cloudwater

Proposal for a rural growth community

I am currently living and working in London. I have a regular day time job. In the evening and at weekends an increasing amount of my time is involved in the growth movement.

My involvement with the growth movement has spanned some five years. Before this I had many experiences with other ways to personal growth, the most influential being Zen. I have in the last two years or so intermittenly led my own groups and one-to-one work with people. This process is now continuing with my involvement with the London Gestalt Centre from whom I am seeking training. During my period in London I would like to have contact with people who find themselves in harmony with the community proposal that follows.

The basic aim of any community, in which I am involved, I would like to see as increasing awareness, expanding consciousness, achieving an autonomous and more integrated self. Improving relationships with others, and finally to reduce the discrepancy between who we think we are and how we behave; between what we want and what we get. Creating a constantly richer and more authentic experience of living. Values of openness, love, caring and sharing; an extended family.

The predominant lifestyle I would like to see is a wholefood vegetarian one. In touch with the seasons and other natural rhythms in the environment and ourselves.

As to area, my ideas so far embrace the possibilities of South/South West England, Northern England and Southern Ireland; but this is a decision to be made by all the members in the formative stages of the community.

Some degree of self sufficiency would be desirable, but I forsee most of the members being involved in activities that would make the energy needed for total self sufficiency impossible.

The style and activities of the community obviously depends on the personalities of those in it, but I can imagine they would include various arts and craft and personal growth workshops. These could form our main source of finance.

I feel it would be important and valuable to integrate the values and philosophy of the growth movement into the daily life of the community without necessarily having everybody involved as participants of any group run.

The most importnat gift that such a community offers is to discover our true selves, to extend our awareness, learn to develop our individual creative potential and realize true individual freedom within the context of a communal group