

THE PRESENCE OF THE EDUCATOR IN 'EDUCATION TO EXPRESSION' IN THE WRITINGS OF CARL ROGERS

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1. Introduction

At first blush, Carl Rogers (1902-1987) and Don Bosco (1815-1888) seem very disparate in their pedagogical convictions. But when we study them more closely, we cannot fail to recognise that both placed a high premium on the integral growth-enhancing presence of the educator to his charges.

When Don Bosco called for 'presence' in his system of education, his emphasis lay on reason, religion, loving-kindness, assistance, familiarity, animation, creativity and joy. Every Salesian is familiar with these parameters. But what kind of presence would Rogers call for, in order to bring about the optimal growth of the educand? This is the central question I propose to answer in this essay. Before we take up that question, it would be worthwhile to take a quick look at Carl Rogers' basic convictions regarding human nature.

2. Carl Rogers on Human Nature

Carl Rogers' basic perception of the nature of human beings has sometimes been contrasted with that of Sigmund Freud on the one hand and with that of personality theorists on the other. Freud's view of human nature was essentially negative. He believed that the human person is fundamentally hostile, antisocial and carnal. Personality theorists, on the other hand, take a neutral view of human nature. Rogers, instead, is compared to the French thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who believed that every human being comes from her/his Maker an essentially perfect being, and that, unfortunately, this pristine splendour is corrupted by an imperfect society.¹

¹ Cf. Carl Rogers, "A Note on the Nature of Man," *The Carl Rogers Reader*, ed. Howard Kirschenbaum and Valerie Henderson (Boston:

Speaking for himself, Rogers would rather not have himself compared with anyone. Rogers' own views of the most basic characteristics of human beings were formed by his experiences in psychotherapy. They include observations as to what human beings *are not*, as well as some description of what human beings *are*. Rogers observes:

I do not discover man [*sic*] to be well characterized in his basic nature by such terms as *fundamentally hostile, antisocial, destructive, evil*. I do not discover man to be, in his basic nature, completely without a nature, a tabula rasa on which *anything* may be written, nor malleable putty which can be shaped into *any* form. I do not discover man to be essentially a perfect being, sadly warped and corrupted by society. In my own experience, I have discovered man to have characteristics which seem inherent in his species, and the terms which have at different times seemed to me descriptive of these characteristics are such terms as *positive, forward moving, constructive, realistic, trustworthy*.²

Rogers remarks that when an individual is studied in the context of a relationship that is characterised by safety, absence of threat and complete freedom to be and to choose, he may initially express all kinds of bitter and murderous feelings, abnormal impulses, bizarre and antisocial desires. But as the individual continues to live in such a relationship, expressing and being more of himself, a certain innate nature emerges. He shows up to be a basically trustworthy individual, whose most deep-seated tendency is towards development, differentiation, co-operative relationships; whose life tends fundamentally to move from dependence to independence; whose impulses tend to harmonise into a complex pattern of self-regulation; whose innate tendency is to preserve himself and his species and move it towards its further evolution. In short, the human being is the most widely sensitive, responsive, creative and adaptive creature on earth.³

Houghton Mifflin, 1989) 401-402. Henceforth this book will be abbreviated as *CRR*.

² Rogers, "A Note on the Nature of Man," *CRR* 403.

³ Cf. Rogers, "A Note on the Nature of Man," *CRR* 404-405.

Rogers has little sympathy with the rather prevalent notion that man is basically irrational, and that his impulses, if not controlled, could lead to the destruction of self and of others. On the contrary, Rogers believes, “Man’s behaviour is exquisitely rational, moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goal his organism is endeavouring to achieve. The tragedy for most of us is that our defences keep us from being aware of this rationality, so that consciously we are moving in one direction, while organismically we are moving in another.”⁴ The rationality that Rogers speaks about is obviously broader than the rationality of articulated, syllogistic reasoning.

Needless to say, this basic hermeneutical stance of Rogers on the nature of the human person, colours his approach to every helping profession (including education) through and through. He calls this the ‘person centred’ approach.

The central hypothesis of this approach [...] is that the individual has within himself or herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes, and self-directed behaviour—and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided. There are three conditions that constitute this growth-producing climate, whether we are speaking of the relationship between therapist and client, parent and child, leader and group, teacher and student, or administrator and staff. The conditions apply, in fact, in any situation in which the development of the person is the goal.⁵

Rogers further proceeds to state these three conditions on the part of the caregiver as (a) genuineness, realness, or congruence, (b) acceptance, or caring, or prizing—also designated as unconditional positive regard, and (c) empathic understanding.⁶ In short, the person-centred approach is a way of being that finds

⁴ Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1969) 291.

⁵ Carl Rogers, “A Client-Centered/Person-Centered Approach to Therapy,” *CRR* 135.

⁶ Cf. Carl Rogers, “A Client Centered/Person-Centered Approach to Therapy,” *CRR* 135-136.

its expression in attitudes and behaviours, on the part of the facilitator, that produce a growth-promoting climate.

With that much said, we are now in a position to study more closely the various characteristics of a growth-producing presence of the educator in the life of his educands, according to the mind of Carl Rogers.

3. A Presence that is Real / Genuine / Congruent

Rogers considers realness, genuineness or congruence to be *the* most important requirement of an effective educator. An educator is said to be ‘real, congruent or genuine’ when he enters into relationship with the learner without presenting a front or a facade, either knowingly or unknowingly. He is aware of the feelings that he is experiencing, and is able to live these feelings, to be them and to communicate them if appropriate. “It means that he comes into direct personal encounter with the learner, meeting him on a person-to-person basis. It means that he is being himself, not denying himself.”⁷

But, one might ask, is it always helpful to be genuine? What about negative feelings? What if the educator’s real feeling towards the educand is one of annoyance or boredom or dislike? Rogers opines that even with such feelings as these it is preferable for the educator to be real rather than to put up a facade of interest, concern or liking that he does not feel. This does not mean that one has to impulsively blurt out every passing feeling and accusation with the idea that one is being genuine. What is more important for realness, is the ability to stay aware of the complex flow of experiencing going on within oneself—a flow marked by continuous change.⁸

Thus, if at any given moment the educator should experience negative feelings towards his students (even as a group), when he can accept these feelings as his own and even express them to his students matter-of-factly in the first person singular, he has

⁷ Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 106.

⁸ Cf. Carl Rogers, “The Interpersonal Relationship: The Core of Guidance,” Carl Rogers and Barry Stevens, *Person to Person: The Problem of Being Human* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972) 87-88.

no need to impose them on his students. Moreover, he comes across to his students as a *person*, not some faceless embodiment of a curricular requirement or a sterile channel through which knowledge is handed down from one generation to another. Instead, when realness is lacking, teachers show themselves to pupils simply as roles. When ‘on duty’ they put on the mask or the facade of being a teacher, and take it off only when they leave school in the evening.⁹

Rogers clarifies that it is neither necessary nor possible that a therapist—read ‘educator’—be a paragon who exhibits a superlative degree of personal integration and wholeness in every aspect of his life. It is sufficient that he is accurately himself when relating to his clients—read ‘students.’ That’s what makes for realness or genuineness.¹⁰

‘Transparency’ is another term that Rogers uses to describe the element of personal congruence. If the educator can allow the students to ‘see’ everything going on within him through-and-through as it were, and if the educator is willing for his realness to show through in his relationships, then he can be almost certain that this will be a meaningful encounter in which both educator and students learn and develop.¹¹

In Rogers’ own estimation, realness is *the* most difficult quality for the educator to attain. Even when one *wills* to be truly genuine, it occurs but rarely, because genuineness is not simply a matter of using the right words, but of being close to one’s feelings, capable of being aware of them. Furthermore, one must be willing to take the risk of sharing them as they are inside, not disguising them as judgments or projecting them on to other people.¹²

⁹ Cf. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 106-107.

¹⁰ Cf. Carl Rogers, “The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change,” *CRR* 224.

¹¹ Cf. Rogers, “The Interpersonal Relationship: The Core of Guidance,” *Person to Person* 89.

¹² Cf. Rogers, “The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning,” *CRR* 313.

4. A Presence that is Appreciating / Prizing / Trusting

The second quality that Rogers considers as necessary for an effective educator is an attitude of ‘prizing’ the educand, his feelings, his opinions, his person. By ‘prizing’ Rogers means a non-possessive caring. It is an acceptance of the student as a separate person, having worth in his own right. It is a basic trust in him, sustained by the belief that the other person is somehow fundamentally trustworthy.¹³

An attitude of trust, acceptance or prizing—Rogers treats these as equivalent terms—shows up in a variety of observable ways. The educator who has a considerable degree of this attitude is able to fully accept the fears and hesitations of the student as he approaches a new problem, as well as the pupil’s satisfaction in achievement. He can accept even the student’s occasional apathy, his erratic and fickle desires to explore by-roads of knowledge, as well as his disciplined efforts to achieve major goals. He can accept personal feelings which both disturb and promote learning, such as rivalry with a companion, hatred of authority, and concern about personal inadequacy.¹⁴

Another equivalent expression that Rogers uses to denote appreciation, trust and prizing is ‘unconditional positive regard.’ It means that there are no conditions of acceptance, no feelings of ‘I-like-you-only-if-you-are-thus-and-so.’ An educator with a selective evaluating attitude—as if to say: ‘you are bad in these ways and good in those’—is incapable of showing *unconditional* positive regard, because the latter involves as much acceptance of the student’s painful, fearful, anxious and defensive feelings as of his positive, mature and confident feelings, as much acceptance of ways in which he is inconsistent as of ways in which he is consistent.¹⁵

We must however, add a caveat here. Rogers himself warns us that the expression ‘unconditional positive regard’ is easily

¹³ Cf. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 109.

¹⁴ Cf. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 109.

¹⁵ Cf. Rogers, “The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change,” *CRR* 225.

misunderstood, since it sounds like an absolute, all-or-nothing dispositional concept. If it were indeed so, then ‘unconditional positive regard’ would exist only conceptually or theoretically, and never in practice. The fact is that the therapist’s/educator’s *level of regard* for his client/student can vary during the many moments of his contact with him. It peaks when it is unconditional-positive, and wanes when elements of conditionality creep in, albeit inadvertently. In this sense, unconditional positive regard exists as *a matter of degree* in any relationship.¹⁶

Unconditional positive regard means caring for the client/student but not in a possessive way or in such a way as simply to satisfy the therapist’s/educator’s own needs. It means caring for the client as a separate person, with permission to have his own feelings, his own experiences. Rogers writes:

It means a kind of love for the client [/educand] as he is, providing we understand the word love as equivalent to the theologian’s term *agapé*, and not in its usual romantic and possessive meanings. What I am describing is a feeling that is not paternalistic, nor sentimental, nor superficially social and agreeable. It respects the other person as a separate individual and does not possess him. It is a kind of liking which has strength, and which is not demanding. We have termed it positive regard.¹⁷

The good educator is fully aware that his students are imperfect human beings with many limitations. His prizing of the students despite this awareness is an operational expression of his essential confidence and trust in the dynamic capacity of the human organism to seek out and attain ever-increasing levels of integral growth.¹⁸

Rogers regrets that almost all of education and much of religion is based on a *mistrust* of the person and his inner

¹⁶ Cf. Rogers, “The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change,” *CRR* 225 (note).

¹⁷ Rogers, “The Interpersonal Relationship: the Core of Guidance,” *Person to Person* 91.

¹⁸ Cf. Rogers, “The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning,” *CRR* 309.

dynamism. Goals must be set, rules must be laid down and commandments must be proclaimed because the person is considered to be incapable of choosing suitable aims. The individual must be guided towards the set goals, since otherwise s/he may stray from the right path, being innately sinful, destructive, lazy, or all three.¹⁹

If the educator distrusts the human being, then he is apt to cram the student with information of his own choosing, lest the student go his or her own mistaken way. But if the educator trusts the capacity of the human individual for developing his or her own potentiality, then all he needs to do is provide opportunities and permit the student to choose his or her own way and direction in learning.²⁰

The student who feels prized by his educator—the student who consistently experiences unconditional positive regard—steadily grows in the conviction that he, as a person, is valued in his separateness and uniqueness. Concomitantly, he slowly begins to value the different aspects of himself. He begins to sense and to acknowledge, with ever increasing openness, what is going on within him: his feelings, his experiences and his reactions to them; and he ‘owns’ them. When this happens, he is able to use his experiences as a direct referent to which he can turn in forming accurate valuations for himself, that serve as a guide to his behaviour. As this process gets underway, significant changes begin to occur in his approach to values.²¹ He feels less and less compelled to live in such a manner as merely to please others or win their approval. He seeks more and more to live by the wisdom of his own organism, doing what ‘feels’ right to him, according to his own internal compass. Thus, unconditional positive regard is perhaps the most significant factor in the educator’s relationship with the

¹⁹ Cf. Rogers, “A Client-Centered/Person-Centered Approach to Therapy,” *CRR* 136-137.

²⁰ Cf. Rogers, “The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning,” *CRR* 313.

²¹ Cf. Carl Rogers, “Towards a Modern Approach to Values: The Valuing Process in the Mature Person,” *CRR* 176-177.

educand, for helping the latter to live with personal responsibility, trusting his own judgments in every situation.

5. A Presence that is Empathic

The third element that Rogers considers a *sine qua non* for creating a climate that is conducive to the growth of the educand, is an attitude of empathy on the part of the educator. Empathy, in this case, is the attitudinal praxis of standing in the student's shoes and viewing the world through the student's eyes. Empathy is the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside. It is a sensitive awareness of how the process of education and learning seems to the student. This kind of understanding is sharply different from the usual evaluative understanding, which follows the pattern of 'I-understand-what-is-wrong-with-you.' When there is sensitive empathy, the learner is spontaneously encouraged by the realization that 'at last someone understands how it feels and how it seems to be me, without wanting to analyse me or judge me.' This is when he begins to blossom and grow and learn.²²

But empathy can and must extend beyond the educator's attempt to understand the student *qua* student. The educator must seek to understand the student as a human being, whose life and whose interests go beyond academic pursuits. Empathy, in this case, amounts to an accurate understanding of the educand's private world of personal meaning as if it were the educator's own, yet without losing the 'as if' quality.²³ If this 'as if' quality were lost, there would be identification!

In one of his later books, *A Way of Being*, Rogers deepened his idea of empathy. He came to realize that empathy was better described as a process than as a state. It is a complex, demanding, strong yet subtle and gentle way of being. I quote Rogers at length:

²² Cf. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 111-112.

²³ Cf. Rogers, "The Interpersonal Relationship: The Core of Guidance," *Person to Person* 89.

The way of being with another person which is termed empathic has several facets. It means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever, that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in her/his life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meanings of which he/she is scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover feelings of which the person is totally unaware, since this would be too threatening. [...] To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another's world without prejudice. In some sense it means that you lay aside your self, and this can only be done by a person who is secure enough in himself that he knows he will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange or bizarre world of the other, and can comfortably return to his own world when he wishes.²⁴

Rogers observes that the empathic kind of 'understanding another' is extremely rare. The type of understanding that we most often come across is epitomised by the words: 'I understand what is wrong with you' or 'I understand what makes you act that way'—in other words, it is an analytic, evaluative and judgmental understanding, from the 'outside' as it were. We tend to shy away from true understanding, because if we are truly open to the way life is experienced by another person—if we can take his world into ours—then we run the risk of seeing life in his way, of being changed ourselves... and change is something we all resist. So we tend to view the other person's world only in our terms, not in his.²⁵

Empathy admits of grades, of course. None of us ever achieves a thoroughly empathic disposition, but we can always grow in our ability to empathise, through 'sensitivity training' of the kind that is often given to industrial management personnel. Such training enables one "to listen more sensitively, to receive

²⁴ Carl Rogers, "Empathic: An Unappreciated Way of Being," *A Way of Being* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980) 142-143.

²⁵ Cf. Rogers, "The Interpersonal Relationship: The Core of Guidance," *Person to Person* 90.

more of the subtle meanings the other person is expressing in words, gestures and posture, to resonate more deeply and freely within himself to the significance of those expressions.”²⁶

Rogers then goes on to add that while empathic understanding of the other is highly desirable, the *communication* of the *intent to understand* is also helpful, because it subliminally communicates to the other the value that I—in the role of helper—place on him as an individual. It gets across the fact that I perceive his feelings and meanings as being worth trying to understand.

The *communication* of empathy is itself a delicate art in its own right. It is far from the wooden technique of pseudo-understanding in which the helper reflects back what the ‘helpee’ has just said.²⁷ The primary intent of the helper should not be to ‘reflect expressed feelings’ back to the helpee, but rather, to try and determine whether his understanding of the helpee’s inner world is correct, whether he is seeing that inner world in the same way as the helpee is experiencing it at this moment. Each response of the helper contains the unspoken question: ‘Is this the way it is in you? Have I caught just the colour, flavour and texture of the personal meaning that you are experiencing right now? I want to bring my perception in line with yours.’²⁸

Rogers marshals a plethora of scholarly empirical research studies to show the positive effects of an empathic climate, not only in the field of psychotherapy but also of education, and the helping profession in general. Here, in a nutshell, I present those findings that are relevant to education. (a) Empathy dissolves alienation. The student who receives empathy finds himself/herself a connected part of the group. (b) Students receiving empathy develop a sense of self worth. (c) *Because* empathy is always free of any evaluative or diagnostic quality, the student who receives it grows in self-acceptance. (d) An

²⁶ Rogers, “The Interpersonal Relationship: The Core of Guidance,” *Person to Person* 90.

²⁷ Cf. Rogers, “The Interpersonal Relationship: The Core of Guidance,” *Person to Person* 90.

²⁸ Cf. Carl Rogers, “Reflection of Feelings and Transference,” *CRR* 127-128.

empathic understanding by another individual gives the recipient his personhood, his identity. Martin Buber has spoken of the need to have our existence ‘confirmed’ by another. Empathy gives that needed ‘confirmation’ that one does exist as a separate, valued person with an identity. (e) When the teacher shows evidence that s/he understands the meaning of classroom experiences for the student, learning improves. (f) When a person is perceptively understood, he finds himself coming in closer touch with a wider range of his experiencing, thereby acquiring an expanded referent to which he can turn for guidance in understanding himself and in directing his behaviour.²⁹

6. A Presence that is Student-centred / Person-centred

Parallel to his client-centred approach in counselling and psychotherapy, Rogers advocates a student-centred approach in education. In a thought-provoking article entitled “The Politics of Education,” first published in 1977, Rogers observes that “*traditional* education and *person-centred* education may be thought of as two poles of a continuum. Every educational effort, every teacher, every institution of learning could locate itself at some appropriate point on this scale.”³⁰ Rogers describes the traditional mode of education in the following words:

The teacher is the possessor of knowledge, the student the expected recipient.

The lecture, the textbook, or some other means of verbal intellectual instruction are the major methods of getting knowledge into the recipient. The examinations measure the extent to which the student has received it.

The teacher is the possessor of power, the student the one who obeys.

Rule by authority is the accepted policy in the classroom.

Trust is at a minimum. Most notable is the teacher’s distrust of the student. The student cannot be expected to work satisfactorily without the teacher’s constant supervision.

²⁹ Cf. Rogers, “Empathic: An Unappreciated Way of Being,” *A Way of Being* 151-156 passim.

³⁰ Rogers, “The Politics of Education,” *CRR* 323.

The students are best governed by being kept in an intermittent or constant state of fear.
Democracy and its values are ignored and scorned in practice.
There is no place for the whole person in the educational system, only for his intellect.³¹

Expectedly, Rogers deplores the traditional mode of education. For one thing, it enshrines a politics of the teacher's 'power over' the students. This 'teacher power' is reinforced through the rewards of grades and vocational opportunities, as well as through intimidating devices such as exams and evaluations by the teacher.

By contrast, the student-centred mode, which Rogers advocates with passion, turns the tables around 180 degrees. The educator in this mode is less a teacher than a facilitator. By his *manner* of being present unto the class—congruently, caringly and empathically—he creates a facilitative learning climate. He shares with the students, and possibly also parents and community members, the responsibility for the learning process. He provides learning resources from within himself—his own experiences—and from books, while encouraging the learners to add resources that *they* know of. The students' learning from each other then becomes as important as their learning from books or films. Students, in pursuit of their own interests, develop their own programme of learning, alone or in co-ordination with others.³²

We notice that when the educator adopts the student-centred mode, his primary focus is on fostering the *continuing process* of learning. A course is said to be successfully ended not when the student has learnt all that he needs to know, but when he has advanced significantly in learning *how to learn* whatever he wants to know. To this end, self-discipline replaces external discipline. Even the evaluation of the extent and significance of the student's learning is done primarily by the student himself,

³¹ Rogers, "The Politics of Education," *CRR* 323-325 passim.

³² Cf. Rogers, "The Politics of Education," *CRR* 327.

after receiving feedback from other members of the group and from the facilitator.³³

Rogers vouches that student-centred education generates a growth-promoting climate, in which “the learning tends to be deeper, proceeds at a more rapid rate, and is more pervasive in the life and behaviour of the student than is 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.”³⁴

Rogers is forthright in declaring that an educator cannot possibly be student-centred in the manner described above, unless he is sufficiently secure within himself and in his relationship to others, so as to experience an essential trust in the capacity of others to think for themselves and to learn for themselves.³⁵

7. A Presence that is Freedom-giving and Empowering

Freedom is one of the major themes in Rogersian thought. When it comes to the field of education, Rogers bemoans the fact that most undergraduate educational praxis stifles student freedom. He laments the fact that current educational practices at university level have emphasised abilities in the areas of convergent thinking and evaluation, to the detriment of development in the area of divergent thinking. In other words, students are taught how to arrive at ‘correct’ answers that our civilization has taught us are correct, but are not sufficiently encouraged to go off in new directions, to diverge from the customary, to explore alternative possibilities.³⁶

Alas, knowledge is presumed to have acquired a certain fixity and finality, wherefore it simply has to be handed down from the tutor to the student. The result is a ‘new

³³ Cf. Rogers, “The Politics of Education,” *CRR* 327-328.

³⁴ Rogers, “The Politics of Education,” *CRR* 328.

³⁵ Cf. Rogers, “The Politics of Education,” *CRR* 327.

³⁶ Cf. Rogers, “Current Assumptions in Graduate Education,” *Freedom to Learn* 174.

scholasticism’—astultifying repetition of the thoughts and prejudices of the faculty.³⁷ Furthermore, the current emphasis that is placed on lectures, syllabi and examinations puts the student in such a spot that he “cannot possibly have the sense of fully independent freedom which is clearly at the base of creative professional work.”³⁸

Remedially, Rogers suggests that a whole new method of education be devised, where the emphasis is not so much on ‘teaching’ as on ‘letting learn.’ Learning is at its best when it is self-initiated. This will happen only if the student is faced with a problem—from the course at hand—that he perceives as a real problem for him. Since students are generally so insulated from problems, it may be necessary for the teacher to confront them with situations which will become real problems to them.³⁹ This is where the teacher is challenged to be creative and resourceful.

One thing that the teacher can do in order to facilitate learning, is *provide resources* that will give his students experiential learning relevant to their needs. He can do this by placing pertinent reading matter within the students’ reach. He can also encourage them to call on other persons known to be competent in the field of knowledge concerned. Above all, the teacher recognises himself as a resource, and expressly makes himself—along with his knowledge and experience—available to the students, without imposing himself on them.⁴⁰

Another open-ended device that Rogers proposes to enhance the atmosphere of freedom, is the *use of contracts*. The student commits himself at the beginning of the course to a certain minimal quota of reading and research, after setting goals for himself and planning what he wishes to do. This seems to be a good ‘half-way house’ between complete freedom to learn

³⁷ Cf. Rogers, “Current Assumptions in Graduate Education,” *Freedom to Learn* 179.

³⁸ Rogers, “Current Assumptions in Graduate Education,” *Freedom to Learn* 175.

³⁹ Cf. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 130.

⁴⁰ Cf. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 132.

whatever one is interested in, and learning that is within the limits of some institutional demands.⁴¹

Yet another device that Rogers used with much success during his professorial career was the organization of *facilitator-learning groups*. The educator's role in this context is reflected in the following comments with which Rogers would initiate his series of sessions with the group:

I am a facilitator of learning and you are the learner. There is no teacher in the traditional sense. Whether you learn or not is entirely your own personal responsibility. My sole job is to allow you to take this responsibility by using your own initiative. I am always available for personal conferences. You are urged and advised to start these personal conferences during the first week. In addition, personal conferences are very helpful to me as your facilitator because I wish also to be a learner. I can learn only if you raise questions, objections, and make suggestions to me personally.⁴²

Rogers also mentions other ways in which large classes can be divided into small, functional, self-motivated groups, such as the clustering of members in terms of special interests or in terms of particular topics. He is convinced that if teachers are willing to invest as much time and attention in planning for the facilitation of learning as they invest in the preparation of lectures, many of the seemingly insoluble problems can be resolved.⁴³

In place of examinations, which most students find odious, Rogers proposes that whenever learning is self-initiated, each student be allowed to evaluate his own learning. The student has to decide and accordingly declare what criteria are important to him, what goals he has been trying to achieve, and the extent to which he has achieved these goals, and then evaluate himself on these criteria. Student responses can vary, of course. One student may choose a traditional goal such as amassing a certain amount of testable information in the field of study. Another student may choose to freely respond/react to the resources that have been

⁴¹ Cf. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 133.

⁴² Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 134-135.

⁴³ Cf. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 136.

made available to him. If both students have functioned as responsible learners, then both their criteria of evaluation ought to be equally acceptable.⁴⁴

Rogers is emphatic in declaring that if the educator is intent on creating a facilitative climate, he eschews certain traditional practices. "He does *not set lesson tasks*. He does *not assign readings*. He does *not lecture or expound* (unless requested to). He does *not evaluate and criticize* unless a student wishes his judgment on a product. He does *not give* [/conduct] *required examinations*. He does *not take sole responsibility for* [assigning] *grades*."⁴⁵

At the basis of all Rogers' practical suggestions for revamping education lies his deep-seated conviction that no true learning can take place except in an atmosphere of freedom. The presence of the educator to his students must therefore always be one that encourages the freedom of the latter.

Let it be borne in mind that the freedom that Carl Rogers advocates for students goes way beyond the limits of academia. It also concerns their use of time, their choice of entertainment and the relationships they cultivate. All this is of a piece with Rogers' basic conviction that the growth of students towards integral maturity requires a setup that encourages each of them to take her/his own decisions on the basis of *organismic* valuation rather than on the basis of 'introjected' values, whether from religion or from other external authority.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Cf. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 143.

⁴⁵ Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* 144. Emphasis in text.

⁴⁶ Cf. Carl Rogers, "Toward a Modern Approach to Values: The Valuing Process in the Mature Person," *CRR* 177-180. It is helpful to bear in mind that Carl Rogers perceives the valuing process in human beings thus: The usual adult evinces the following characteristics in his approach to values: (a) Most of his values are 'introjected' from other individuals or groups significant to him, but he comes to regard these values as his own. (b) Thus, the source or locus of his evaluation on most matters lies outside of himself. (c) He stabilises his values according as they will cause him to be loved or accepted. (d) These conceived preferences are most often unrelated to his own process of experiencing. (e) Often there is a wide and unrecognised discrepancy between the evidence supplied by his own experience and these

Rogers is well aware that many scientists and behavioural psychologists deny human freedom, claiming that human behaviour is governed by a rigid determinism. But the freedom that Rogers is concerned with is not an objective, empirical freedom; it is a subjective, existential freedom. “[It] is essentially an inner thing, quite aside from any of the outward choice of alternatives which we so often think of as constituting freedom. [It is the freedom] to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”⁴⁷ In other words, the freedom that interests Rogers is the quality of courage that enables a person to make his own choices in order to become the person he wants to be, rather than resign himself to being a victim of circumstance and happenstance.

Rogers insightfully observes that freedom exists not as a contradiction to the deterministic picture of human nature that psychology throws up, but as a complement to it. The free man “moves out voluntarily, freely, responsibly, to play his significant part in a world whose determined events move through him and through his spontaneous choice and will. [...] Destiny confronts him as the counterpart of his freedom. It is not his boundary but his fulfilment.”⁴⁸

The educator, for his part, must be a catalyst in bringing about such freedom in his educands. He can be one only if he has

conceived values. (f) Because these conceptions are not open to testing in his own experience, he must hold them in a rigid and unchanging fashion. The alternative would be a collapse of his values. (g) Because they are un-testable, there is no ready way of solving contradictions. And because he has relinquished the locus of evaluation to others and has lost touch with his own valuing process, he feels profoundly insecure and easily threatened in his values. If some of these conceptions were destroyed, what would take their place? This threatening possibility makes him hold his value conceptions more rigidly, despite his confusion. Therefore Carl Rogers ventures that if one has to grow, he must move away from external control, and take decisions on the basis of his *organismic* reaction to the issue at hand, rather than on the basis of an ‘introjected’ value system. Cf. *ibid* 175-176.

⁴⁷ Carl Rogers, “Learning to be Free,” *Person to Person* 45-46.

⁴⁸ Carl Rogers, “Learning to be Free,” *Person to Person* 46.

an implicit faith in the spontaneous dynamism of the human organism towards its fulfilment. Unless the teacher holds a somewhat confident view of human beings, he will be reluctant to grant freedom to his students.⁴⁹ He will insist on 'calling the shots' and having all the student 'fall in line'—lest they go astray.

We notice therefore, that freedom in education is both a means and an end. It is a means inasmuch as the educator—in the ideal scenario—deliberately creates a climate of freedom for his students, giving them the 'space' they may want in order to pursue their personal growth in the manner that appeals to them. This freedom is an empowering freedom. It requires that the educator adopt a student-centred approach to the educative project. But freedom is also the end inasmuch as it is the intended goal for the educand. Thus, the educator's liberal stance towards the educand is calculated to enhance the latter's taking responsibility for his own life, as a matter of habitual disposition—which is the touchstone of freedom as an end.

8. Conclusion

Much can be said both for and against Rogers' basic take on human nature. But one thing cannot be denied: if expression and expressivity are values to be cultivated in a student, then Rogers is certainly 'on target' with his well-focused demands on the educator. It is virtually inconceivable that students should grow in expressivity without a supportive role being played by the educator. It stands to Rogers' credit that he has spelt out concretely what this supportive role amounts to in practical terms.

⁴⁹ Cf. Carl Rogers, "Learning to be Free," *Person to Person* 54. Rogers admits that this basically confident view of the human being and the attitudes that it engenders do not appear suddenly in an educator. They come about through taking risks, through acting on tentative hypotheses. It is only by risking himself in new, freedom-bestowing ways that the teacher can discover for himself whether or not these hypotheses ring true. Cf. Rogers, "The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning," *CRR* 314.

There are a number of issues about which Don Bosco and Carl Rogers stand in harmony with each other, despite the differences in their conceptual frameworks and categories. But there are also significant issues on which they disagree. It is not our intention in this essay to take sides or to give a critique of either. On the other hand, some of Carl Rogers' ideas could very well be used to add a new dimension to the Bosconian method of education.

For instance, Carl Rogers' idea of *congruence* is hardly ever adumbrated in Don Bosco's pedagogical and spiritual writings. Yet, on hindsight, one realises how useful it can be for a Bosconian educator as a yardstick for assessing the quality of his presence to the young. He could profitably review his educational praxis by asking the question: "What does it concretely entail to be loving/kind, reasonable and religious *in a congruent/genuine manner* as I interact with the young?" His dwelling on that question will, in all probability, move him towards greater authenticity and consistency.

In the final count, it all boils down to the educator's perception of his own vocation. Given the pedagogical vision of Carl Rogers, I believe that any educator who is attuned to this vision is wont to see himself as some sort of 'midwife,' assisting in the birthing of the 'fully functioning person' or in the metamorphosis of caterpillars into butterflies!

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ABSTRACT

Like Don Bosco, Carl Rogers also believed in the presence of the educator as a *sine qua non* for the integral growth of the educand. In his writings, Rogers explores this kind of educative presence and comes to the conclusion that, in order to be truly growth-enhancing, it must be real/genuine/congruent, appreciative/prizing, empathic, person-centred, freedom-giving and empowering. These convictions spring up from Rogers' basic faith in the deep-seated inclination of every human being towards self-perfection rather than self-corruption.