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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Rogers, Carl R.

Carl Rogers on Personal Power

New York: Delacorte Press, 1977. Pp. xiii + 299.

The thesis of this new volume by one of our country's foremost psychotherapists is a challenge to the usually accepted concepts upon which American society is based. Theoretically, in a democracy, government and societal institutions exist by virtue of power shared and strength manifested by the majority of the people. Constitutional safeguards and popular enfranchisement notwithstanding, in America today power *shared* is infinitesimal in comparison to power *over* and strength *to control* exercised by the private sector. Two recent Senate reports state that decision-making by agencies which regulate much of American life is influenced primarily by private interests with formidable financial assets to represent their views to the public. Alone, with limited resources, the consumer is virtually powerless to execute political force for effective growth and change in his life. Here, in this book, Carl Rogers suggests that what is needed, even possible, is a humanistic network of persons cutting across all party lines for "empowering persons in their own places to live more effectively, in their personal lives and in the realm of 'politics' . . ." and to provide a vehicle for those "who want to attend simultaneously to their own personal growth and to their concern for humanistic social change."

Traditionally, persons in so-called helping professions have attempted to help others by assisting in solving problems. In his person-centered approach, Rogers has a genuinely different goal. His aim is to assist individuals to grow so that they can cope with their present and future problems in a more integrated fashion. Further, he suggests that the word "politics," as currently utilized, has acquired new meanings. It definitely relates to power and control; maneuvers, strategies, and tactics; the locus of decision-making power: all the means by which persons desire and attempt to obtain, share, or surrender power and control. The whole world and meaning of politics has to do with what happens in relationships between persons, or groups, or persons and groups as they engage in processes of power-taking, power-relinquishing, power-sharing.

If one agrees with this author that the individual possesses "within himself vast resources for self-understanding and for altering self-concept, attitudes, and self-directed behavior," the revolutionary nature of such forces is apparent. Within a safe, facilitative psychological climate, these resources may be tapped, freeing individuals or groups of persons for normal growth, health, and adjustment. Rogers maintains that this can happen not only in individuals, or small social groups, but within com-

munities, racial groups, and even international groups representing great diversity of nationality, race, and culture when *persons* are discovered, attended to, and accepted. He cites examples of self-empowered relationships functioning positively on every level, from the intimacies of marriage to the intricacies of international mediation.

Central in the book, both in a figurative and a literal sense, is a detailed description of a person-centered workshop, planned and implemented by this author. The politics of this situation in which many individuals, possessing the richness of diversity of any large group, learned to live together is summarized as an ecologically related process:

Here every individual leads; no one leads. The locus of choice resides in each person, and intuitively the community choice becomes a consensus taking each of these individual choices into account. Power and leadership and control flow easily from one person to another as the differing needs arise.

When groups turn always and only to authority, or a leader, for answers to their questions, or direction for their lives, they will be restricted in learning and growth by the limits of the leader. In whatever group they are, people need to be facilitators of learning for themselves and for each other. Rogers believes that once individuals exercise this kind of responsible freedom for learning, it becomes an *irreversible* force in their lives. It cannot be eliminated or extinguished. The exhilaration and excitement of striving for it will last a lifetime.

Beyond even this, Carl Rogers believes *there is evidence* that the person-centered approach can make significant changes in the way people perceive the possible. At the close of his book, he condenses some cherished views of the national culture, contrasting these elements with evidence which contradicts them. Some of these might be directly applicable to education. However, for many teachers and educators, the implications of trusting that the actualizing tendency in the student/learner is basic to motivation for learning present grave risk-taking. Such a belief leads to a trend away from control by external forces toward self-regulation by learners. It means that young persons cannot be caused directly to develop in one way or another, but that if optimum conditions for permitting survival and growth are provided, growth will come from within. Instead of contributing to repression of speech in the classroom, it means attending to children's language as authentic expressions of thoughts and feelings of their inner selves. It means replacing much of teacher/leader *presentation* of materials and procedures for learning with *observation* of students' needs and modes of learning. It leads to a "continual educational process of testing hypotheses in thought and action, discarding some, but following others. It recognizes that there is no such thing as static truth, only a series of changing approximations to the truth." It precludes teaching any curriculum exactly the same way twice. All this takes concentrated, consistent effort on the part of teachers, but makes for easier, more deeply

involved learning by students. More than this, perhaps most perplexing and precarious of all, it means for leaders to put themselves in order and in harmony with life, being willing to offer what they have experienced and felt, as well as to share an appropriate part of their own passion for the incredible gift of being alive.