



Person-Centered Education

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Abstract

Education, together with family and culture, is one of the fundamental building blocks of the social construction of reality. It is more and more evident that we need a paradigm change in the field of education in order to enable people to deal effectively with the mounting challenges facing humanity.

This retooling needs to start with our frames of reference.

We need to create a new paradigm of education in order to enable education to serve people's needs and to have relevance in public service, social responsibility and sustainable governance and development.

Education is one of the main narratives to prepare new generations to be an active and constructive part of the society and is one of the main carriers of values. Values can be implicit or explicit. In Person-Centered Education (PCE), also called student-centered education, values are made explicit to facilitate students to have a critical and proactive role and an effective training to become fully functioning members of the *Polis*. The Person-Centered Approach (PCA) was originated by Dr. Carl Rogers. PCA is a scientifically validated systemic, holistic approach with applications in almost all professions: Psychology, Education, Medicine, Social Work, Management, Intercultural Communication, Conflict Prevention, etc.

“The purpose of Person-Centered Education is to protect and promote a person's innate creative capacities of learning from their experiences, to promote wholeness and integration in the individual by focusing on their personal growth, and develop them into creative and competent members of the society who can contribute effectively to their community.”

The central hypothesis of the Person-Centered Approach is that individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for changing their self-concepts, basic attitudes and self-directed behavior, and these resources can be tapped if a climate of facilitative psychological conditions is provided. PCA focuses on health, not illness; on

solutions, not on problems. PCA empowers rather than cures and promotes the development of potentialities of individuals, groups and organizations through interpersonal relationships characterized by respect, trust, empathetic understanding and authenticity. It makes people responsible for what they do rather than encouraging dependency.

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A large body of research carried out by David N. Aspy and Flora N. Roebuck and many other colleagues shows that schools, colleges and universities with student-centered education attain higher rates of student retention and better learning.

The student-centered approach requires a willingness from teachers to share their power and have better trust in their students.

At the Person-Centered Approach Institute (IACP), the post graduate courses are organized as a learning community where professors and students intentionally create a facilitative climate of learning and collaboratively strive to achieve common goals. Every day there is an encounter group and students can call a community meeting if they want to address specific problems.

Exams at IACP are very different from traditional practice: the students share their self-evaluation with the group and receive their peers' and the professors' feedback. In addition, each professor and tutor receive feedback from the students. The secretaries and the facilities are also evaluated by the students. Suggestions for improvements are given to each professor, tutor and secretary as well as to each faculty member. The feedback of the students is discussed in a staff meeting after which the course director and the local IACP branch director communicate to the students the changes and improvements that they are willing to make and they implement this with the students' active involvement.

During written exams, questions are distributed and a time duration is set, but at the end of the allotted time the students don't return their answer sheets, but take them home and evaluate their answers by consulting the literature, edit what they have written in the classroom and send the answer sheets to their professors.

Thus, the role of the student-centered teacher is a professional commitment to learning and towards effective, democratic and value-based education, the capacity to share her/his passion about learning, relating to the students with respect, empathy and congruence.

The teacher needs to be capable of being in touch with herself, her students, the members of her community and the world and having the needed skills and attitudes to be a facilitator of learning, an effective mentor promoting student creativity and autonomy and capable of helping students develop their personal and social skills.

The role of the student in Person-Centered Education is learning to take responsibility for their own personal development, with interest in the development of social, personal and problem-solving skills, and for learning to learn, learning from mistakes, willing to contribute to a cooperative and tolerant school ethos and able to learn how to relate to herself/himself and others with respect, empathy and congruence.

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