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THE NON-DIRECTIVE METHOD IN COUNSELING AND TEACHING

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WHEN Carl Rogers published his *Counseling and Psychotherapy* in 1942 (21), he introduced new concepts which appeared very useful not only to the process of psychotherapy and counseling, but to the teaching and classroom situation as well. Since the description and explanation of the non-directive method, considerable research and thinking has been done in the application of this method as a therapeutic and pedagogical technic. This paper will describe the basic aspects of the non-directive method as well as its practical application to psychotherapy, counseling and teaching.

Although non-directive psychotherapy had its root-origins in psychoanalysis, its development seems to have arisen mainly from the criticisms and objections to certain aspects of formal psychoanalysis. Rogers (21, 22) has oftentimes acknowledged the basic contributions of Freud and those who were responsible for the more recent trends in psychoanalysis, especially Rank and his supporters (i. e., Taft, Allen, and the various members of the "relationship therapy" school). In his article which traces the development of the non-directive method from psychoanalysis, Raskin (19) indicates areas of similarity and difference. Estes (9) has indicated that with the sole exception of the use of interpretation, there exists a close relationship between the work of Rogers and many of the most influential post-Freudian psychoanalysts, including Horney, Goldstein, Sullivan and Alexander and French. The essential common denominators involve the roles of unconscious motivation, catharsis, repression, insight, transference (or rapport), etc.

The significance of non-directive counseling is in its contrast to psychoanalysis rather than its similarity. While the outstanding characteristics of traditional psychoanalysis include, as a rule, the use of free association, interpretation and transference neurosis, none of these is employed intentionally in the non-directive approach. Actually one usually finds the opposite in the method of Rogers as shown by Gump's (13) research which compared recording of a series of psychoanalytic interviews with non-directive recording and in Porter's (17) research, which compared typical directive counseling cases with non-directive cases.

Most of the more recent analytically-oriented therapies go along with non-directive in the abandonment of the couch as well as free association, feeling that the face-to-face interview for eliciting repressed material is as good as free association. Patients today, in contrast with those of previous generations, seem less reluctant to verbalize important personal matters in a suitable therapeutic relationship. Experience with various kinds of therapeutic interviews indicates that deeply repressed

needs or activities are more directly articulated during psychotherapy without the necessity for recourse to free association.

With respect to the use of the transference relationship, the non-directive therapist agrees with explanations which involve the existence of a dynamic interpersonal relationship between patient and therapist. He objects, however, to the deliberate development of this relationship as the key to the therapy as happens in psychoanalysis. The objections to the transference neurosis are mainly that the projection of infantile impulses on a "shadowy", role-changing therapist is inappropriate to the present relationship, that it encourages excessive dependence on the analyst rather than the patient's own independence, and that it is time-consuming and slows up therapy. In other words, the transference neurosis as such is regarded as unnecessary and develops only as a consequence of the deliberate and frequent authoritarian role which the psychoanalyst assumes. It can be emphasized that modern patients are much more sophisticated about psychotherapy than they used to be in the early development of psychoanalysis. The problems and attitudes of to-day's patients are quite different as are their relationships with parental figures. It is probably this difference in patient attitudes which makes therapy possible without resort to the transference neurosis.

The arguments against the use of interpretation and giving advice and reassurance are that these interfere with the patient's own development of essential insights, that they tend to represent the therapist's perceptions of the problem, constituting his subjective frame of reference and not necessarily the patient's judgments, perceptions, value-systems or frames of reference. Furthermore, interpretations are frequently resisted thereby delaying the achievement of insight and learning. All of the different schools of psychoanalysis seem to agree with Freud on the central role of interpretation. Many analysts prefer to follow Freud's dictum of watchful waiting until the patient "himself has so nearly arrived at it" (12), while others, feeling perhaps more omniscient, are constantly giving their glib and facile interpretations.

It is a frequently observed phenomenon that, following interpretation, one can give a clear and valid formulation of the so-called dynamics underlying his condition and still show no improvement. This is apparently due to the fact that interpretations, no matter how accurate, have value to the patient only if they are emotionally as well as intellectually acceptable and understood. Insights are more readily assimilated, are less likely to be purely intellectual exercises, where the patient is encouraged to develop them. This is a basic pedagogical as well as therapeutic principle which is well established from experience in the psychology of learning. It is not uncommon, moreover, to see patients who have been treated by several analysts, report different, and in some instances contradictory, interpretations for the same data. Shoben (21) has written on the relationship between the learning process and psychotherapy.

The newer non-directive psychotherapy developed from these criticisms, the differences giving rise to its own methodology. The basic premise is that all individuals have inherent growth forces which represent a drive toward mental health and the proper therapeutic atmosphere helps release these constructive forces from the psychopathology which restrains them. This involves concentration on the individual and not on his problem or symptoms. Rogers (21, 22) and his colleagues (6, 31) have listed as the necessary steps in this non-directive therapeutic relationship the following.¹

In coming to the therapist for help the patient is placed at once in a patient-centered relationship in which he quickly perceives that the therapeutic hour is his to talk or do as he wishes, free from probing questions, history-taking, criticism, directing, interpreting or giving verbalized reassurance. He encounters a warm, accepting and permissive therapist who encourages him to discuss his problem at his own level and pace. The patient decides on the areas which he wishes to discuss or to avoid and there is no special selection of material or areas

¹ I should like to indicate that not all of these aspects are necessarily unique for the non-directive method.

for discussion such as occurs in the dream analysis of psychoanalysis. He also decides the number of visits, the termination of therapy, etc. From the outset the patient is encouraged to assume the main responsibility in the therapeutic relationship.

Since the patient's emotional attitudes and feelings are the essential concern of this therapy, the therapist's role is mainly to accept and clarify the feelings that are expressed. In addition to the cathartic experience, the patient, by being fully accepted and having his feelings and attitudes constantly reflected, becomes able to examine his difficulties more clearly, thereby achieving better emotional self-understanding.

With the gradual awareness of the subtle changes which result from the therapy, the patient is consequently able to penetrate deeper and deeper into his problems—into the unconscious in a sense. Important decisions and actions generally result from this improved self-understanding and, also, as a concomitant greater growth and independence occurs.

At first Rogers was concerned primarily with *technic*, which he stressed in his first book *Counseling and Psychotherapy* (21). In his later book *Client-Centered Therapy* (24), he makes the technic secondary to the therapist's proper *attitude*. In actuality the method becomes an operational aspect of the attitude in that the method or technic is the framework for revealing the genuine interest and attitude of the therapist and his unqualified acceptance of the patient. The misconceptions regarding non-directive therapy seem to have resulted mainly from the earlier excessive concern with the technic. It is interesting to note this change of emphasis from method to patient in the titles of Rogers' two books, although the basic philosophy remains unchanged. Research such as Fiedler's (11), where he compared the results of different schools of psychotherapy and found that therapeutic success is a function of attitude and experience rather than technic, offers strong support to this shift in emphasis by Rogers and others as well.

Several interesting investigations into the nature of the non-directive process have been made. Rogers and his students

have contributed enormously to the basic research and therapy of psychotherapy in attempting to evaluate systematically various aspects of the psychotherapeutic process, as, for example, the role of self-perception or self-concept. Both Snyder (29, 30) and Raimy (18) showed that therapeutic success was correlated with improvement in self-regard. Sheerer (25) showed that the person's acceptance of himself was related to the degree to which he accepted others. Indicative of the nature and emphasis which Rogers and his students place on basic research is the series of six parallel studies (25) which they did on the relationship between adjustment and self-evaluation attitudes.

In addition to investigating the nature of psychotherapy, the non-directive school has developed a theory of personality which subsumes the therapy and which is based on changes in the self-concept. The very recently published *Psychotherapy and Personality Changes*, by Rogers and Dymond (26), effectively presents the theory as well as outstanding research findings. Previously Rogers (23) had indicated that changes in behavior were concomitant with changes in self-perception. Raimy (18) has shown that the changes in self-perception were measurable and predictable while Snyder (29, 30) was able to demonstrate the relationships between self-reference and adjustment. Snygg and Combs (32) consider non-directive therapy within the phenomenological frame of reference, in the sense that feelings or behavior are viewed in terms of the personal or phenomenal meanings that exist for the patient. So that regardless of the objective facts, the belief by a person that he is accepted or rejected will strongly influence his behavior. Symptoms, including psychotic hallucinations and delusions, would be related to distorted self-concepts.

In addition to the studies in the Rogers and Dymond book, several other studies by Combs (5, 5a), Muensch (16), and Reader (20) have demonstrated by means of personality tests the improvement in personality which results from non-directive therapy. While the non-directive method has been widely used

and praised as a counseling technic with students, its therapeutic efficacy has been extended into different areas and problems. Hobbs (24, special chapter) in group therapy, Axline (2) in children, Bixter (3) in reading disability, Morrow (15) in vocational adjustment and Curran (7) in allergy patients all report success with this technic. In his extensive summary article on psychotherapeutic counseling, Snyder (31) gives additional references regarding the areas in which non-directive counseling and psychotherapy have been used.

In the application of non-directive counseling to vocational counseling it appears that, except for the fact that vocational counseling is more specific, the guidance problem is closely related to the problem of general adjustment and hence the approach is similar in both. One frequently sees individuals whose personality disturbance is camouflaged by the smoke-screen of vocational difficulties. On the other hand, however, emotional difficulties frequently interfere with vocational adjustment, some of the more common problem involving aspects of marriage, sex, relationships with authority figures, fears and anxieties, physical disability, unrealistic needs and attitudes, etc. In other words, as shown by the writer in a previous article (15), personal adjustment and vocational adjustment are usually interrelated and most often what effects one involves the other.

The primary objective of guidance should be the vocational, educational and personal adjustment of the individual, the goal being the achievement of vocational satisfaction and independence and the criterion being the individual's self-satisfaction as well as a reasonably objective evaluation of his job success.

The counselor's role is mainly to listen carefully and be permissive; to realize that needs are at least as important as tests and frequently emotional needs transcend physical limitations and test results. One often sees physically handicapped persons who are able to overcome almost all the important phases of their handicap, or students with low I. Q. who can "plug" their way through college. It is most important for the

person to make his own occupational choice. That is, he is given as much information as feasible and more usually encouraged to obtain facts and information on his own. He is then assisted to work out his own salvation and to make his own decisions.

As to the application of the non-directive philosophy to teaching, it seems reasonable to expect that some of the basic principles of the learning experience of psychotherapy should be applicable to the learning process of education. If insight and understanding are among the important goals of education, then the non-directive method which helps develop self-insight and self-understanding is a technic worth trying. Cantor (4), in support of non-directive teaching, points out that growth and understanding come from positive or active forces within the student and that the teacher is concerned primarily with understanding the individual rather than judging him. Snygg and Combs (32) regard education or learning as the process of increasing the differentiation in the individual's phenomenological field and that this can only be done by the individual himself, with the only requirement being practicable and socially acceptable opportunities for growth and development. According to these authors, the basic goal is democratic learning, and this involves: (1) having the students think independently for themselves; (2) making students responsible for their thoughts and acts, the acts being self-initiated and self-directed; (3) emphasizing critical learning and critical thinking, and (4) making learning broad rather than focusing on specific subject-matter. In other words, they pose the educational process of the independent thinking of the student versus reproducing the thoughts of the teacher of the text-book.

In dealing with the problem of "student-centered" teaching, Rogers states several important hypotheses which are: that one cannot teach another person directly but instead one can only facilitate his learning and, also, that a person learns best only those things that enhance the self. We know that a student required to study a subject for its own sake does not learn it as

well as the student who intends using this subject-matter as a means of earning a livelihood.

Eiserer (8) advocates as the teacher's main role the acceptance of students as they are by allowing them to express feelings and attitudes freely without judgment or condemnation and to plan learning with rather than for the students. It has been shown that the classroom climate of permissiveness and understanding provides a situation which is free of threat or anxiety and that consequently the student works without undue defensiveness.

The teacher as the leader sets the tone or mood for the class. His philosophy is one of trust in the group. This, of course, is done in many subtle ways. As the leader, he helps to set the limits of the course and helps develop interaction among the students. Gradually he changes his role from leader to participant as the class becomes more involved. Fundamentally, he organizes the class resources and makes them available to all.

Specifically, he might start off with general introductory questions like: What shall we discuss? or, Are there questions on the assignment or reading? He might even begin with specific questions until the class discussion gets under way and then let the class carry the discussion. From then on his most important function is that of eliciting feelings and attitudes and helping to clarify these.

In adopting this student-centered approach, it is necessary to break with traditional teaching methods. This raises questions about the curriculum itself, such as what to cover in the course, how much to assign and the method of giving grades to students, etc. It is felt that the more traditional teaching methods put too much stress on grades and that the grade often becomes the goal of the course instead of its content and understanding. Grades are too anxiety-laden and every teacher is familiar with the emotional stress which accompanies the competition for grades. Where grades must be given in a course such methods

as having the student evaluate or grade himself or having the group rate itself can be used. If external evaluation or grading is desired, Pass or Fail seems to be acceptable.

When asked to share in the responsibility for determining course content, what and how much to assign, etc., experience has shown that the students generally take this function seriously and make mature, worth-while contributions. The achievement of this is more desirable than "spoon-feeding" pedagogy. Specifically, the broad curriculum with its readings are given the class and the group and individuals assume their own responsibility for learning. They decide on areas of concentration and interest, special projects, and readings. The teacher serves as adviser-participant, helping to organize resources and making them available.

Several investigators have reported on their experiences with non-directive or student-centered classes. These preliminary reports, which involve college students only, are encouraging and justify further consideration with classes below the college level. Schwebel and Asch (27), in trying non-directive teaching in their classes, found that the well-adjusted students approved the method, did more reading and showed greater benefit from the course while the more poorly adjusted students preferred the teacher-directed class. Asch (1) compared a group of students who were taught non-directively with free control groups who were taught in the traditional way, and he found that, while the control groups did better on an objective final examination, the non-directive group fared much better in emotional adjustment. Faw (10) compared one class in general psychology, which he taught in the traditional way, with another class, which he taught in the non-directive way, and found the non-directive class equal or slightly better than the traditional class. The instructor-centered group manifested more information and facts while the student-centered group manifested more social and emotional value without loss of knowledge or facts. McKeachie (14) compared two groups of classes, one group utilizing traditional recitation and question-

answer technic and the other group utilizing the non-directive, group dynamic technic. This involved class decisions on assignments, free expression and discussion, the instructor referring all questions to the group for discussion and gradually weaning the class away from dependence on him, etc. As to content itself, there was no difference between both groups on the final examination, but as part of the experiment both groups were asked to discuss a film which they saw in class, with the class discussion analyzed by two outstanding clinical psychologists. The non-directive group was characterized as showing greater spontaneity and interaction and greater sensitivity to feelings, personality dynamics, etc., while the traditional class showed more aggressiveness and insecurity, were more formalistic and showed little insight or sensitivity to basic problems.

These preliminary studies show that non-directive teaching is content-wise as good as the traditional method, while, in addition, helping to improve the student's personality. Further investigation should be instituted to broaden its academic usefulness. Better understanding of the relationships between psychotherapy and learning will undoubtedly help improve these activities and make them more effective. The non-directive method offers a technic which is useful to both learning and therapy.

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