

EDU 6526 Instructional Strategies
Reading 8: Carl Rogers

“Teacher Effects Research on Student Self-Concept”
by Carl Rogers

It seemed to us that if teachers did not respect their students, negative feelings might be reciprocated, so we took a look at the relationship of facilitative levels and disruptive behavior in the classroom. We assessed eighty-eight classes in grades two through six for levels of teacher empathy and respect and the frequency with which the teacher gave praise, accepted student ideas, and asked for thinking from students. We also collected the number of disruptive incidents that occurred in each classroom for a month. Then we tried to “predict” from the teacher measures which classes had had the most disruptive behavior. ...[F]rom 16 to 45 percent of the variance in disruptive behavior can be predicted if you know the teacher’s levels of person-centered conditions. That is, *more* disruptive behavior occurred in classes whose teachers were *low* in empathy, respect, praising, accepting student ideas, and asking for thinking.

This area of investigation expanded into indexes such as discipline, attendance, and attitudes. Thus, as the results of the studies accumulated, it was possible to conclude that, *in general, positive human relations are related to positive human behaviors.*

Since many of our studies cut across all socio-economic levels and two or three racial groups, the question arose as to whether the observed benefits were produced by high scores of middle- and upper-class students masking little or not gain by children from less verbal and less achievement-oriented levels of society. Accordingly, we examined separately data for all students in grades two through six who were scoring significantly below their age-expectancy norms on academic achievement measures, regardless of the reason for such under-achievement. The study involved 296 students from seventy-five classrooms. Findings were that “educationally handicapped” students of teachers offering high levels of empathy, congruence, and positive regard—

1. Maintained or increased their scores on self-concept measures (while students of teachers offering low levels of empathy, congruence, and positive regard had decreases on self-concept measures);
2. Missed fewer days of school during the year;
3. Maintained or increased their scores in I.Q. tests as opposed to decreases for students of low level teachers;
4. Made greater gains on academic achievement measures.

The level of person-to-person conditions the teacher offers to under-achieving students more frequently produced significant main effects on school attendance, gain in reading and math achievement, and change in I.Q. scores and self-concept than any of the following variables: I.Q. levels, race/sex groups, and socio-economic status. In other words, *for students identified as having learning difficulties, the teacher’s level of interpersonal facilitation was the single most important contributor to the amount of gain on all outcome measures.*

Furthermore, interaction effects with race, sex, and socio-economic status supported by the hypothesis that teachers operating with low levels of empathy, congruence, and positive regard were also responding to students on the basis of stereotypes, whereas teachers operating at high levels responded differentially (responded to each student in terms of the student’s needs and goals). From the student’s viewpoint, this means that when she has a facilitative teacher she is not responded to as “That lazy kid,” but as “Janey” who has “lots of creative and achievement potentials but needs some help in activating them.”

One other smaller study of the Consortium (NCHE) is of interest here because it sheds some light on how well students will choose when allowed self-direction. Martha Gallion, a

teacher in the Garland Independent School District, completed a course offered by Texas Women's University that used the NCHE training program as its content. With the permission of her principal, she decided to put her new skills to work by offering the chance to design their own reading program to the students in her... third grade classroom. Every student in the classroom was reading one or more years below grade level.

At first, students found it difficult to believe that they could really design their own program. When they did begin to make suggestions, many of them were negative ones: "We don't want to read out loud in circles every day;" "We don't want to do workbooks every day;" "No wall-chart of what we haven't finished." But they also came up with constructive suggestions: "Could we have a quiet time every day where everybody just reads, including you, teacher?" "Can we just read for you to hear—not everybody else?" "Can we read something else more than the reading book?"

The reading program, as finally designed by the students, included: (1) one half-hour of silent reading every day, with the teacher reading her own materials, (b) reading aloud to the teacher twice a week, (c) doing skills materials during two half-periods a week, (d) reading in the basal reader once a week, (e) reading orally with a partner once weekly, (f) one half-hour a week in which they could do anything related to learning to read that they liked (read aloud to a friend, play a learning game, read to the teacher, read silently, visit the library, or any other activity they could justify a being related to reading).

Martha added two other elements to the total classroom program, although they were not considered part of the reading program designed by the students. Each day, one half-hour was set aside in the morning in which students could tell the whole class anything important about themselves that they wished their classmates to know. A second, shorter, period was set aside in the afternoon in which students could come individually to Martha and talk with her about anything they wanted her to know, including anything that was bothering them about school, or themselves, or exciting things they just wanted to share with her.

At the end of the year, not one of these... children had made less than eleven months' progress in reading; some had made as much as *three years'* growth. An analysis of variance was conducted to compare their gains with the gains of students in the three other third grade classrooms in the same school.... ([T]here is only a 1% probability that the superior gains are due to chance.)

To sum it all up, the research evidence clearly indicates that when students' feelings are responded to, when they are regarded as worthwhile human beings capable of self-direction, and when their teacher relates to them in a person-to-person manner, good things happen. To the Consortium researchers, it seems that children who are in person-centered classrooms learn some important things about themselves, which make it possible for them to grow more healthily and achieve more effectively.