

Rogers' humanist theory

Iara Maria Mora Longhini¹, Jaime Pacheco da Silva Filho².

ABSTRACT

Human beings have been in a constant search for explanations to questions that have been troubling their minds since the beginning. Despite the many answers produced that form the basis of the knowledge disseminated in today's civilization, new questions arise, in line with the development of humanity. The main method of building the human being is supported by education, through a progressive process of teaching and learning.

Keywords: Human development, Teaching and learning, Carl Ransom Rogers' theory.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings have been in a constant search for explanations to questions that have been troubling their minds since the beginning. Despite the many answers produced that form the basis of the knowledge disseminated in today's civilization, new questions arise, in line with the development of humanity. The main method of building the human being is supported by education, through a progressive process of teaching and learning. Nunes and Silveira (2015, p. 24), "[...] present a conception of the human being as endowed with a capacity for constant growth and permanent updating of their potential". With regard to the process of construction and unfinished work of human beings, it is important to emphasize that:

All human beings have a tendency towards increasingly complex development towards constructive realization, regardless of their environment. For the author, the psychological structure of the human being and the constitution of oneself derives from the relationship and interrelationship that is created between people from the beginning of life (Rogers, 1983, p. 133 *apud* Oliveira *et al.*, 2021).

The formulated theses that set out to provide answers invariably encounter opponents, thus giving rise to the conflicts that result from the production of knowledge. In this field of tensions lies the question of how intrinsic learning occurs. Many researchers have looked into this question in an attempt to offer an answer as a sufficiently robust foundation that could pacify the established conflictual environment.

I believe that very few people are aware of the extent, breadth and depth of the advances that have been made in recent decades in the behavioral sciences. Fewer still seem to be aware of the profound social, educational, political, economic, ethical and philosophical problems posed by these advances (Rogers, 1987, p. 423 *apud* Oliveira *et al.*, 2023).

¹ Prof. Dr. Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU) - Minas Gerais

² Undergraduate student in Biological Sciences Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU) - Minas Gerais



Nowadays, even with the formulation of theories that are largely consensual and have provided the desired answers, tensions in the field of education still persist over various issues, especially regarding theories of learning. The answer can probably be found in the excerpt below.

More often than not, learning theories are presented without adequate development of historical, philosophical, psychological and educational correlates, which can rob them of potential enrichment of understanding and meaning. Despite the uncertainty or confusion among students and educators about the meaning of learning theory, one can agree on one statement: *Teaching is an activity that emerges from some conception of how learning occurs.* (Milhollam; Forisha, 1972, p. 10).

School is recognized, among other things, as the main place for disseminating knowledge and educating the general population. From an early age, children are sent to educational institutions to undergo a long teaching-learning process. In the quest to better understand the issues that permeate this process, it is imperative to focus on the theories that guide learning. In this sense, it is not my intention to discuss various theories, only to highlight the revolutionary theory defended by Carl Ransom Rogers. Even though I am aware that this approach is laden with intentionality and therefore, in some way, explicitly or implicitly, biased. The aim is to highlight the assumptions of education defended by Rogers, a process that introduces paradigmatic changes in teaching, especially in the focus on the student.

An educated person is able to adapt to the changes that occur during their life (learning is continuous). Life is a process of change - everything around you is questionable and everything blends together. Therefore, there is no such thing as the one who knows and the one who teaches, everyone knows something and everyone learns something from someone. It was in this context that Rogers set out his theory (Azevedo, 2023).

The main question of education is not based on outlining a natural model of man in the present time that will become historical. Over time, this question has been the subject of debate by various thinkers, philosophers and researchers. On this subject, it is worth highlighting:

It is dangerous to show man too often that he is like the beasts, without showing him his greatness. It is also dangerous to show him too often his greatness without his baseness. It is even more dangerous to leave him ignorant of both. But it is very desirable to show him both together (Milhollam; Forisha, 1972, p. 128).

According to Capelo, Albert Einstein challenged the education offered to young people and emphasized that one of the main presuppositions of education would be to sharpen students' curiosity. Once in place, this would lead to the pursuit of constant learning, and in partnership with freedom, these are the main pillars of learning.

In fact, it is little short of a miracle that modern methods of education have not yet entirely strangled the sacred curiosity of inquiry, for this delicate plant, in addition to stimulation, needs freedom above all; without this, it is inevitably led to destruction and ruin. (Capelo, 2023, p. 1).



It is important to note that man evolves and is therefore in a constant process of transformation. When this happens, the process of internal change takes place, with external consequences resulting from the acquisition of new knowledge. The aim here is to focus on the theory of an eminent psychologist, Carl Ransom Rogers, who was interested in education and learning, without pretending to exhaust the subject.

I have little sympathy for the widespread idea that man is fundamentally irrational and that his impulses, when unchecked, lead to the destruction of himself and others. Human behavior is extremely rational... The tragedy for many of us stems from the fact that our defenses prevent us from surprising this rationality, so that we are consciously moving in one direction when organically we are moving in another. (Rogers, 1969 *apud* Pinto, 2001).

OBJECTIVE

Over the course of history, Brazilian education has undergone profound transformations, whether in terms of the structure of schools, the composition of students or the professional profile of its teaching staff. It is undeniable that there is a crisis in national education, based on data from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) and proficiency levels achieved in the National Student Assessment Program (PISA). It is clear that a real revolution is needed in national education if there is to be a drastic change in this crisis scenario. The proposed changes not only concern the structural and material field, but above all the theoretical approach that governs the teaching-learning process and provokes attitudinal changes in teachers and students.

The aim is therefore to present the main foundations of the humanist theory coined by Carl Ransom Rogers through a brief literature review. This theory imposes paradigmatic changes on teaching, removing the centrality of knowledge from the teacher. It transfers the responsibility for learning, in a shared way, to students and teachers who form a partnership in the search for meaningful learning - the main objective of the humanist theory. In addition to changing the asymmetrical relationships present in the school environment, it makes didactic-pedagogical resources available to the student, not as an imposition by the teacher, school or education system, which decides how and when to use them.

DEVELOPMENT

Rogers' ideas were in opposition to vertical, top-down education, which focuses on the teacher as the source and main disseminator of knowledge. While the student was a passive recipient, these premises made up traditional educational theory, as mentioned below.

In this educational perspective, the relationship between the teacher and the student is characterized by verticalization, marked on the one hand by the command, demands and guidelines established by the teacher, who holds decision-making power, especially regarding the form of interaction in class, the methodology, the content, the evaluation, and on the other hand, by the obedient, passive, subservient student who accepts, follows and obeys what is determined by the teacher. (Oliveira et. al., 2021, p. 141).



The precepts coined by the humanist theory state that learning should be student-centered and the teacher should behave as an assistant - a facilitator of knowledge. The student considered educated would be the one who has learned to adapt to the processes of change present in the ever-changing world around them. The proposal is innovative for the educational process.

[...] we are faced with an entirely new educational situation, the aim of which is to facilitate change and learning. The educated person is only the person who has learned how to learn, the person who has learned how to adapt and change, the person who has realized that no knowledge is safe, that only the process of seeking knowledge provides a solid foundation. Change, trust in a process rather than static knowledge, is the only attitude that makes sense as a target for education in today's world (Rogers, 1969, p. 104).

Thus, Rogers' theories emerged at a time when the technicality of teaching, disseminated by the behaviorist current, prevailed in the educational community. There were a variety of methodological procedures available to the teacher so that it would be possible to teach the student, who would passively receive the knowledge and internalize what was taught. However, the teaching-learning process does not take place in such a simple way.

We must find a way to develop, within the educational system as a whole, and in each component, a climate conducive to personal growth; a climate in which innovation is not frightened, in which the creative capacities of administrators, teachers and students are nurtured and expressed, rather than stifled. A way must be found in the system in which the focus is not on teaching, but on facilitating self-directed learning (Rogers, 1986, *apud* Capelo, 2000).

There are many other factors and conditions that permeate and interfere in the process that develops at the heart of the student-learner, recognized as affective, social and psychosocial conditions. For Oliveira et al. (2021), these are recognized in Rogers' work as the attitudes, feelings, affectivity and creativity of the human being. In this way, the teacher has a mission of greater breadth and importance: to prepare the student for life.

The training process is centered on the student with an emphasis on their full development, that is, an educational process that does not only give importance to intellectual development, but is also dedicated to training for social relationships, coexistence, emotional development and other issues that enable the integral growth of the human being. (Oliveira *et. al.*, 2021, p. 140).

Resources are important tools, they must be available for teaching. However, in the humanist theory, the use of resources is not imposed on the student, they decide which one(s) to use and the best way to use them. These are marked differences from the prevailing theories in education.

[...] whatever teaching resources he provides - a book, a workroom, a new appliance, an opportunity to observe an industrial process [...] his own emotional reactions - he would feel that these things are offered for use if they are useful to the pupil [...] he does not intend them to be guides, expectations, commands, impositions of demands (Rogers, 1983, p. 333).



It should be noted that the teacher is a mediator and facilitator of access to knowledge, through the creation of problem situations. Santos (2005) defines the teacher's role in this way: "[...] they must be a 'facilitator of learning', in other words, they must provide the conditions for students to learn, and they can be trained to take favorable attitudes in line with this role." The distance between teacher and student is criticized by the humanist theory, which, according to its foundations, should obey horizontality. The teacher lacks authenticity, the relationships established become asymmetrical and the role played by the teacher becomes theatrical and imposing.

The first quality refers to the Authenticity of the facilitator, which Rogers considered to be the most basic and which he refers to as the facilitator's ability to be real, without a mask or façade in the relationship with the student (Rogers, 1986: 128). In this way, the author criticizes traditional teaching insofar as the teacher is an actor, playing a role and not an authentic person (Idem: 128). Rogers' proposal translates into a person-to-person relationship and not a teacher-to-student role (Capelo, 2021).

From Rogers' perspective, the student is the protagonist of meaningful learning. Not just in the cognitive aspect, but in its entirety. The student is seen and treated as an inseparable unit in the cognitive and affective aspects. According to Rogers (1978), the initiative to learn comes from the student, i.e. it is self-initiated, even if the stimulus for initiation comes from the outside world. For learning to take place and be meaningful, it is essential that involvement occurs not only at a physical level, but also at a cognitive and affective level.

[...] It has the quality of a personal involvement - the person as a whole, from both the sensitive and the cognitive aspects, is included in the fact of learning. It is self-initiated. Even when the first impulse or stimulus comes from outside, the sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and understanding comes from within. It is penetrating. It brings about changes in the behavior, attitudes and perhaps even the personality of the learner (Rogers, 1978, p. 05).

The student is now considered in his or her uniqueness, in the dimensions that bring together feelings and intellect. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt measures "to involve feelings (affectivity) and intellect in their entirety, so that the student takes direct ownership of what they are learning." (Oliveira *et al.*, 2021) so that experiential learning can take place. If this doesn't happen and the student doesn't feel valued, honored and stimulated in the school environment, failure is certain. According to Ipea's text for discussion number 1300, entitled Repetition in the international context: what do the data from evaluations in which Brazil does not participate say? focuses on the fact that the failure strategy is not capable of increasing the proficiency rate of students who repeat the year. However, it does prove to be effective in keeping students away from school.

There is a vast body of literature showing that expectations, perceived competence and self-esteem are fundamental factors in the educational process. Convince a child that they are incapable, and they will be. Convince him that math or reading are beyond his reach, and they will be. Fail him,



signaling that his only alternative is to choose between manual labor and various types of marginality, and he will believe it, especially if he is poor and lives surrounded by people whose lives have been defined in this way. Forcing a student, after a whole year of struggling to learn something in a school with unmotivated and underpaid teachers, to return to the same grade in the same school, is to give him a certificate of incompetence. This certificate is all the more dramatic because this same student sees most of his classmates, who are generally less poor and whiter, making progress. When you think about it, the coefficients presented in this paper are not a mystery. The mystery is our country's continued rejection of a policy as sound as continuous progression (Soares, 2007, p. 15).

With the attention focused on the student, the learning process gains relevance in the sense of offering favorable conditions through problem situations that involve them in the challenges posed in their constructive journey, a task entrusted to the teacher. However, teacher and student go hand in hand, one learning from the other. We can glimpse the premises of the student's leading role, their involvement, their taking the initiative in the search for knowledge in the following statements.

[...] the only learning that significantly influences behavior is that which is self-directed and self-appropriated. [Such self-discovered learning, the truth personally appropriated and assimilated in the course of an experience, cannot be directly communicated to another. As soon as one tries to communicate this experience directly, often with natural enthusiasm, it becomes teaching, and its results are inconsequential (Rogers, 1978, p. 151).

In the humanist perspective of education, profound and radical changes are suggested, one of which lies in the school itself. Thus, in addition to requiring the training of a teacher who has the characteristics of a facilitator, as mentioned above, the environment must be welcoming to the student and in line with the assumptions we want to achieve.

In the Humanist conception based on Rogers' (1978) assumptions, in order for meaningful learning to occur, the educational environment needs to be stimulating and pleasant, enabling the student to engage with the object of study in a spontaneous way, providing a favorable climate where the student and the teacher feel free for new discoveries, for the promotion of dialogue and access to knowledge. (Oliveira *et. al.*, 2021, p. 140).

It's important to note that the humanist concept advocates changes at all levels of education, so that thinking and knowledge evolve. In this way, students take an active stance, intervening in the workings of the school. This does not mean that teachers and managers should abdicate their responsibilities, but that they should allow students to participate in the development and construction of the teaching-learning process, in which they are the main target and are jointly responsible.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of this text is to briefly discuss the main educational premises that underlie the humanist theory of education defended by Rogers. These theories have their origins in the psychotherapeutic counselling of the person-centred approach, and subsequently entered the field of education. Rather than



highlighting its theoretical foundation, the aim was to emphasize the paradigmatic shifts that resulted from its proposition.

This theory suggests profound changes in education. However, these changes are not related to physical structures or content, but primarily to the way of educating. Above all, the changes are in the attitudinal areas of its main players: students and teachers. The proposal is for students to be the protagonists of their own learning. This does not mean that the teacher would be dispensable in this process, quite the contrary, teacher and student would work together to achieve meaningful learning.

While the student takes the lead in learning, the teacher stands by their side to create problem situations that instigate and stimulate critical thinking. The centrality of teaching no longer lies with the teacher, but with the student, who becomes co-responsible for the learning process. Thus, as well as putting on a mask (acknowledging that they don't know everything and are not the source of knowledge), the teacher becomes the student's partner in the quest for knowledge.

In addition to profound changes in the asymmetrical teacher-student relationship, which would move from verticality to horizontality, teaching resources would be made available to the student, who would decide which ones to use and when. The bet is that the student's protagonism will stimulate learning, that the student will find meaning in what they are studying and that the content will become meaningful. And if they find meaning in what they are studying, their involvement in the teaching-learning process will be complete, on both cognitive and affective levels. The organicity of learning would revolve around the autonomy given to the student and the school's function would be based on preparing them for life.



REFERENCES

- Azevedo, E. de M. K. (n.d.). Carl Rogers' conception of learning. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://elisakerr.wordpress.com/concepcao-de-aprendizagem-de-carl-rogers/>
- Capelo, F. de M. (2000). Person-centered learning: A contribution to understanding the educational model proposed by Carl Rogers. *Revista de Estudos Rogerianos*, 5. Retrieved January 12, 2024, from <https://encontroacp.com.br/textos/aprendizagem-centrada-na-pessoa-contribuicao-para-a-compreensao-do-modelo-educativo-proposto-por-carl-rogers/>
- Unibanco Institute. (n.d.). High school: How to increase attractiveness and avoid dropouts? São Paulo: University of São Paulo. Retrieved January 6, 2024, from https://www.institutounibanco.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/ensino_medio-como_aumentar_a_atratividade_e_evitar_a_evasao.pdf
- Milholland, F., & Forisha, B. E. (1978). *Skinner x Rogers: Contrasting ways of looking at education* (5th ed.). Summus Editorial.
- Nunes, A. I. B. L., & Silveira, R. N. (2015). *Psicologia da aprendizagem*. EdUECE. Fortaleza.
- Oliveira, G. S. de, Santos, A. O., Cardoso, M. R. G., & Oliveira, C. R. de. (2021). Rogers' ideas and the math teaching-learning process. *Cadernos da Fucamp*, 20, 131-150.
- Pinto, M. A. da S. (2001). *Carl Rogers: The person-centered approach*. São Paulo, SP. Retrieved January 12, 2024, from <https://encontroacp.com.br/rogers/>
- Rogers, C. R. (1978). *Freedom to learn*. Interlivros. Belo Horizonte, MG.
- Rogers, C. R. (1983). *A way of being*. Editora Pedagógica e Universitária. São Paulo.
- Santos, R. V. dos. (2005). Approaches to the teaching and learning process. *Integração*, XI(40), 19-31.
- Soares, S. S. D. (2007). Repetition in the international context: What do the data from assessments in which Brazil does not participate say? *Texto para Discussão*, 1300. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from <http://repositorio.ipea.gov.br/handle/11058/1392>