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Core Conditions in Student-Centered Learning

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CORE CONDITIONS IN STUDENT-CENTERED
LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Dr. Ginger Dickson, whose unwavering positive regard inspired me to continue and complete this project when my own optimism dwindled. Her belief in me and the importance of the material presented carried me through a serpentinuous labor that I admit I sometimes doubted was going to produce something relevant and valuable.

CORE CONDITIONS IN STUDENT-CENTERED
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by

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ABSTRACT

This study explored core conditions in student centered educational settings by utilizing an ethnomethodological design to examine the experiences of self-selected educators throughout the United States. Through surveys and follow up interviews, educators reported their professional experiences regarding the core conditions in student centered learning as outlined by Carl Rogers and the impact these conditions played in the quality of educational experiences for the educators and their students in diverse settings. This study was also concerned with educators' self reports regarding their training and education regarding core conditions in student centered learning environments. This paper shares with readers a literary review of previous and current material on this subject matter, as well as the methodology, research findings, and discussion of the implications.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 SEEDS FOR CHANGE

The seeds for Carl Rogers' (1939) core conditions, client-centered therapy, and ultimately student-centered learning can be found in his first published text. Although it was not until much later that the term "core conditions" appeared in print (Rogers, 1954), it was in his seminal text that Rogers first identified the four key conditions necessary for learning, change, and therefore, growth. The first condition, "objectivity", he defined as a "capacity for sympathy which will not be overdone, a genuinely and interested attitude, a deep understanding which will find it impossible to pass moral judgments or to be shocked and horrified". With the second, a "respect for the individual", Rogers wrote that "the aim is to leave the major responsibilities in the hands of the child as an individual going towards independence". Third, "understanding of the self", he explained as the "therapist's ability to be self-accepting as well as self-aware". And fourth, "psychological knowledge" was described as "a thorough basis of knowledge of human behavior and of its physical, social and psychological determinants"(Rogers, 1939: 279-84).

Rogers' (1939) underlying premise regarding human beings - our nature and motivations - were initially viewed as "optimistic" by fellow colleagues (Kirschenbaum, 1979); however, this premise currently comprises the foundation of humanistic psychology (Thorne, 1992). Rogers (1954) held human beings in the highest regard, as beings that carried forth the inherent motivation and potential to self-actualize. However, given that our society's priorities were not necessarily driven by human developmental needs, Rogers argued that for humans to access their potential, therapists, and ultimately teachers and group facilitators, must create and uphold an environment conducive for human healing and growth (Rogers, 1946; 1969).

Although he had scattered the core conditions seeds throughout his first text, Rogers viewed the 1940 presentation of his paper in Minnesota as the birth of "client-centered" therapy (Kirschenbaum, 1979; Thorne, 1992). With his next psychological treatise in text form, , Rogers (1942) broke completely from traditionally-accepted analytical psychotherapy doctrines and methodologies, and described his experiences as a therapist that led him to learn about a simple way of working with

“clients”, a way based simply upon listening and awareness. Seventeen years later, Rogers (1959) described the core conditions: convergence, acceptance, and empathy; considering these as essential aspects to create an environment in which real learning and change could be cultivated (Thorne, 1992: 36-40).

Convergence, now referred to as genuineness, which Rogers (1959) considered the most elusive and necessary condition, demanded that the therapist be able to be who s/he was “without façade” and “without any attempt to hide behind the professional role” (Rogers, 1959). This condition demanded therapists practice a consistent effort to attain self-awareness (Rogers, 1959, 1980; Kirschenbaum, 1979; Thorne, 1992). Rogers (1939) defined acceptance as “respect for the individual” and described the need for the client to receive positive regard (unconditional acceptance) from the therapist in order to become self-accepting (Rogers, 1959; Thorne, 1992). Later, Rogers (1980) termed this acceptance as “unconditional positive regard”. Rogers stated that this attribute would engender trust and lead to deeper self-exploration by the client. In regard to empathy, Rogers (1980) wrote, “It is one of the most potent aspects of therapy because it releases, it confirms, it brings even the most frightened client into the human race.” Rogers maintained that “if a person can be understood, he or she belongs.”

According to Rogers, if a therapist provided the genuineness, positive regard, and empathy within a given therapeutic environment, clients would see themselves more clearly and act on that clarity to make necessary changes to fulfill their lives (Kirschenbaum, 1979; Rogers & Sanford, 1989; Thorne, 1992).

1:2 CORE CONDITIONS ACROSS THERAPEUTIC MODALITIES

Since Rogers’ (1939) initial introduction of the core conditions, their purpose and importance permeated many therapeutic models and have been associated in research studies with positive client and patient outcomes regardless of modality.

Lambert and Cattani-Thomson (1996) reported findings regarding counseling outcomes showing that clients point to the importance of genuineness, positive regard and empathy as critical in their own healing and development regardless of therapeutic modality. In an earlier study, Lambert and Bergin (1994) reviewed common factors related to positive client outcome. They reported that the factors that

received the most attention in research studies focused on positive client outcomes were “...those variables that form the core of client-centered counseling...” (p. 603).

Miller, Taylor and West (1980) were among the first to study therapist empathy in conjunction with client outcome. They reported a strong relationship between empathy and client outcomes based on follow-up interviews. Six to eight months following therapy, clients of therapists who ranked highest on empathy reported the most positive outcomes. Lafferty, Beutler, and Crago (1991) stated that empathy was the significant factor in the counseling situation outside of client-centered modalities.

Cooley and LaJoy (1980) pointed to Rogers’ core conditions as essential to the development of a successful therapeutic alliance and experience for client and therapist. Lambert (1992) reported core conditions as the second most important factor in positive client change, responsible for up to 30% of client-perceived positive change. “Even behavior therapies, which place little theoretical emphasis on relationship variables, have found evidence supporting the importance of counselor-client relationship factors” (Lambert and Cattani-Thomson, 1996: p. 603). Josefowitz and Myran (2005) argued that even cognitive behavioral modalities, which have utilized interventions and techniques viewed as counter to person-centered approaches, are best practiced by highly empathic therapists and counselors.

1.3 CORE CONDITIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Forty years ago, psychologist Carl Rogers (1969) drew from his experiences, theories and practices from the counseling realm to develop what he termed “student-initiated learning” (Rogers, 1969:p. 5). Rogers’ text opens with a quote attributed to Albert Einstein:

It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail (p. 1).

According to Rogers (1969), as with client-centered therapy, student-centered education demanded that a facilitator provide the core conditions and an awareness of them in order to create an environment in which learning could occur. Aside from this provision, the facilitator needed only to allow students to explore the subject matter which interested them. Methodologies and techniques were

peripheral according to him, and he continued to assert that “how” a facilitator created and supported core conditions mattered little.

What did matter to Rogers was that the core conditions and the inner effort they demanded of the facilitator were critical in informing the methods, which, again, were peripheral, dependent upon the situational context, necessarily malleable, and certainly expendable should they not serve the larger purpose of providing the core conditions. If this progression occurred, all would be fine. In fact, relying upon specific methods and techniques could actually be considered antithetical to student-centered learning according to Rogers (1969). In discussing counseling and educational arenas, he consistently stated his concern that should specific techniques and methods become the priority, the inner work of the facilitator and therefore the clients’ and students’ genuineness, positive regard and empathy would lose their pivotal position; this digression would diminish opportunities to create an environment that would serve the students’ need for exploration and growth (Rogers 1969, 1980).

The core conditions of genuineness, positive regard, and empathy were delineated by Rogers (1969, 1980) throughout his writing regarding a new way of education. He discussed them and the many variations through which they could be utilized as central tenets for creating a classroom environment in which “real, lasting learning” (1969:p. 8) could occur. To this end, Rogers (1980) shared a compendium of documented educational experiences that he and others had facilitated with various populations and within myriad educational environments. Though the experiences represent a diverse array of techniques and methodologies, all hold fast to the mast of inner core conditions, and the awareness and inner work they require of the facilitator. The bottom line was the relationship which could then develop between the facilitator and students.

Rogers (1969, 1980) discussed the common denominator for the core conditions’ effectiveness in education, the relationship between facilitator and learner, in detail throughout several of his texts. According to Rogers (1980), educational facilitators must be devoted to cultivating the core conditions within themselves such that they could model this behavior for the students. It was only in an environment of these cultivated conditions, he asserted, that a relationship could evolve that would allow

the core conditions to deepen and, ultimately, allow the learner's educational work to become more "thorough, meaningful and useful" (p. 5).

1.4 RECENT STUDIES

1.4.1 STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

Countless articles have been written discussing "student-" or "learner-centered" education within a technological context, termed 'eLearning' by Derntl and Motschnig-Pitrik (2005). Other articles have described effective teaching techniques and methodologies that, when implemented within the conventional classroom context, served to create a student-directed learning environment. Although the articles described what the writers referred to as effective strategies, none referred to the necessity for the instructor's inner work toward self-actualization, the importance of all of the core conditions being present, or how these efforts integrate to become the essential environment (Derntl & Motschnig-Pitrik, 2005; Holzinger et al., 2005; Tolman et al., 2007; Hayes, 2007) .

Technology, science and on-line medical school professors have written articles regarding student-centered learning in the context of technologically-based learning environments, particularly when working with large, heterogeneous student groups (Motschnig-Pitrik, 2005; McConnell, 2002; Holzinger et al., 2005; Zwyno & Waalen, 2002). According to these studies, eLearning liberated instructors from delivering lectures and conducting class discussions, and therefore allowed them to focus more attention on individual student needs. These professors asserted that conventional teaching responsibilities of lectures, note taking, written responses, and even exams, addressed by computerized instruction, permitted students to receive more individualized attention. They claimed that educators could tailor instruction to meet a variety of learning style, and used this as the qualifier for student-centered learning (Motschnig-Pitrik & Derntl, 2002; Motschnig-Pitrik, 2005; Derntl & Motschnig-Pitrik, 2005; McConnell, 2002; Zwyno & Waalen, 2002).

Motschnig-Pitrik and Holzinger (2002) combined some of the attributes associated with student-centered learning with internet-based studies, termed "Student-centered eLearning (SceL)" (p. 1). They proposed that student-centered learning demanded too much from a facilitator, specifically in regard to understanding student learning styles and idiosyncratic interests, and that it was impossible to balance

these demands with other demands in large, heterogeneous settings, particularly in the exam-driven tension of larger state and university systems. Their study explored how computerized internet instruction in a web-based engineering class availed the instructor of more time to attend to the students “...by means of transparent, open, respectful and empathic interactions...” (2002: p. 13).

Catalano and Catalano (1997) studied the movement from teacher-centered to student-centered engineering education. They listed seven “roles for teachers” who wish to create a student-centered learning environment. These included modeling thinking and processing skills, identifying students’ cognitive development, developing questions to facilitate exploration and growth, utilizing visual tools which aid in establishing connections, providing group learning activities, using analogies and metaphors, and providing a ‘no-risk’ student feedback channel. Of the seven roles listed, only one converged with Rogers’ core conditions. The provision of a “no risk” feedback channel could be construed as partially synonymous with Rogers’ unconditional positive regard.

Despite Rogers’ warnings against substituting techniques for inner work, Catalano and Catalano (1997) were not alone in their discussion of specific techniques as integral to the cultivation of student-centered learning environments. Many other researchers and writers outlined specific teacher behaviors and methods. Very few mentioned Rogers or the core conditions, and when they did, references made were often incomplete, out of context, or both. (Motschnig-Pitrik, 2005; Baxter & Gray, 2001; Catalano & Catalano, 1997; Gamboa et al., 2001; Sanderson, 2002; Hayes, 2007.)

In a several-hundred page on-line paper regarding educational reform funded by the International Youth Foundation, several case studies described situations in which children were “put at the center” of the educational paradigm (2007: p. 78). Within this exhaustive report of students and educational environments, not a single reference was made to Rogers, core conditions, or instructor awareness. Many of the studies that outlined techniques also discussed student-centered learning in the context of recent intensified attempts to standardize instruction in public school, colleges and universities (Motschnig-Pitrik, 2005; McConnell, 2002; Kohn, 2006; Sanderson, 2002; Zwyno & Waalen, 2002; Hayes, 2007).

Rogers (1969, 1980) clarified the attributes a teacher or facilitator must embody such that real learning may occur. Particularly, he insisted that educators must not make the mistake of confusing teaching methods or techniques with the demands of “becoming,” which was what, he wrote, real student-centered learning demanded. In contrast, recent studies and articles have focused more upon methods and techniques. In fact, all of the contemporary articles that focused on student-centered learning sought to outline pedagogies, methodologies and specific classroom techniques.

1.4.2 CORE CONDITION RESEARCH

An attempt to research articles regarding Rogers’ core conditions in educational and psychological journals yielded an awareness of what was missing more than what was available. As stated previously in this paper, countless articles discussed the benefits and attributes of specific methodologies used in student-centered learning contexts, particularly within the newly-discovered realm of standard-based learning and technologically-rich atmospheres. Most articles, written by educators, called upon the educators’ own experiences to suggest specific techniques to create “a student-centered learning” atmosphere. These articles did not address core conditions in the classroom. Despite their insistence that their experience and research had been conducted within the context of student-centered classrooms, the writers’ reports when juxtaposed alongside Rogers’ written definitions of person/student-centered environments clearly displayed at best a lack of understanding regarding Rogers’ own warnings, and continued to form a searing chasm where the core conditions and the instructors’ awareness would have been situated.

1.4.3 NEED FOR CURRENT STUDY

There are several educational trends in United States’ public schools, not the least of which is the one most recently re-generated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. This trend demanded that state and national mandated examinations assess students’ academic knowledge. In the furor that exists around the rampant demands that teachers and students meet and exceed expected assessment quotas (Kohn, 2000) many districts, schools and teachers continue to classify themselves as student-centered.

Given these trends, as well as the severe lack of research pertaining to the core conditions’ which Rogers clearly stated demanded first and foremost a facilitator’s commitment to one’s own inner work,

it seems prudent to conduct research that has as its intention the exploration of core conditions in learning environments that claim to be student-centered. Though there has been a serious lack of research into this realm, this lack cannot be misconstrued as proof that the core conditions are absent. Indeed, it may be that they are so solidly a facet of the environment that the focus of research studies has turned instead to the diverse array of methods and techniques utilized by facilitators in the learner-centered environment.

The research undertaken in this study sought to discover what some teachers and students may be creating in the classroom setting, particularly in relationship to the teachers' implementation of the core conditions, their perceptions of how creating a learner-centered environment relates to the students' learning process, and what the teachers have seen in regard to utilizing empathy, positive regard, and genuineness.

METHODOLOGY

1:1 PARTICIPANTS

Participants ranged in teaching experience from 8 through 27 years and represented teachers from preschool through college settings. Two educators responded from each state (TX, NY, NC, and PA.) These were the first eight received and therefore included. The respondents ranged in age from 30 through 58 and represented suburban, rural and urban environments as well as public, private, alternative and independent school settings. Some teachers held accumulated experiences in each of these environments. All participants considered their classroom environments to be student- or child-centered. No participant had heard of Carl Rogers' "core conditions" prior to participation in this study.

2:1 APPROACH

2:1:1 QUALITATIVE ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The current study utilized a general qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) and ethnomethodological design (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995; Creswell, 1998; Hooey 2007) to gather information from experienced teachers from diverse settings throughout the United States.

Ethnomethodological research blends ethnography with research phenomenology. Ethnography has its roots in anthropology, and has been described as a research methodology which seeks to provide a "detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice" with an aim toward a cultural interpretation (Hooey, 2007). Phenomenology, according to van Manen (1990), seeks to explore the nature of human beings' perception and meaning of their "lived experience". Ethnomethodology, built upon social phenomenology's shoulders (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974), combines phenomenology's concern with insights into individual's reflections and understanding of their daily experiences with a concern for social practices and the social themes that may be derived from such insights when viewed through the larger social context. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995). According to van Manen (1990), ethnomethodologists have as a primary aim the illustration of causal relationships between motivational patterns and observed behavior by utilizing individuals' self-reported descriptions.

This study was designed to discover educators' experiences and insights associated with genuineness, positive regard and empathy and facilitators' interpretations regarding causal relationships between core conditions (Rogers 1969), student learning experiences, and the quality of the educators' personal and professional awareness and experience in the classroom. Accordingly, the self-reported experiences of individual teachers were studied to illuminate the relationships between the level of core conditions in the classroom and the students' learning experience. This purpose fits readily into the prescribed aims for an ethnomethodological study.

2:1:2 MAJOR CONCERNS

Two major questions guided this study. The first, what occurs when teachers utilize the core conditions as defined by Carl Rogers (1969) within the context of the classroom, sought to gain a clearer perception of the utilization of core conditions within current educational settings. The second question addressed more specifically instructors' experiences of creating and maintaining core conditions within the learning environment and what they perceived resulted in regard to learning and teaching. This research study sought detailed information from educators that could be thematically sorted to establish a baseline understanding of educators' knowledge and perceptions regarding core conditions and the resultant quality of learning experiences of the teachers and students.

The initial questionnaire (see Appendix II) consisted of seven primary questions, three of which contained three other more specific questions within. Educators with more than three years teaching experience responded through self-reported narrative responses. Questions pertained directly to participants' experience with genuineness, positive regard, and empathy in the classroom environment. This study's questions were designed to permit instructors to share their subjective analysis regarding any relationships between the presence and/or absence of these core conditions, the students' learning experience, and the educators' experience.

Questionnaires were dispersed randomly via email to myriad teachers in diverse educational settings throughout New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas with a request that they be passed along to any other teachers who may be interested. The first eight responses received were

chosen for inclusion in this study. Written narrative responses were followed up with phone and personal interviews to gain more specific information, limit assumptions, and clarify observations.

2:1:3 STUDY FORM DETERMINATION

Rather than a number-driven quantitative analysis, the qualitative design was chosen as it was most convergent with Carl Rogers' work and his expansive view of the scientific research paradigm. In a statement near the end of his text, Rogers (1969) states:

Because of questions of this sort we realize that we are groping toward some new science of the person that we can but dimly see. It is for this reason that we have come to lean more and more on phenomenological data where we are trying to get inside the experience of the individual in order to estimate the impact which he or she has felt in the many different aspects of the project. Some will scoff at this data as being merely 'self reports.' Some will begin to recognize that such self reports, taken over extensive periods of time, may be the very best of 'objective' evidence. At any rate, our project has raised for us many profound questions in relation to the term 'science' when it is applied to the science of man, and when we are trying to study the incredibly complex variables which enter into a human system. We have almost come to the point where we desire 'knowledge' rather than 'science' (p. 331).

Given that the research was informed and inspired by Rogers' work, it seemed that a design which corresponded directly with his perspective would best reveal further insights regarding core conditions in the classrooms. Responses were reviewed and this study utilized a cross-case analysis and variable-oriented strategy which sought to discover themes which consistently appeared throughout narratives, and which allowed for further pattern clarification (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995).

RESULTS

1:1 EMPATHY

Themes which cut through individual responses to empathy questions fit into five categories and are related here in the order in which they appeared: The first, most prevalent response involved relating to students empathically with whom one shares some background or similarities. The second pertained to empathic responses based upon recognizing a basic human connection between teacher and students without regard to personal similarities, and the third discussed establishing more of an empathic relationship by consciously choosing to develop shared experiences which transcended the traditional classroom setting. Fourth, respondents reported teacher perceptions regarding student performance based on the empathic environment; the fifth and least common theme reported the consistent presence of empathy within the classroom as a shared and necessary aspect of the learning dynamic.

1:2 EMPATHY RESPONSES

All of the respondents reported empathic experiences in which they related to students with whom they shared some background or similarities. Teachers reported this as a basic need for the development of empathy - to relate with their students on a level of shared experience. When respondents felt that this most basic premise was missing, they sometimes reported looking for or creating a shared experience such that the empathy could be realized within that experiential construct.

In some cases, study participants reported an experience which drew them into an empathic relationship. As the initial teacher experience was quite specific, it was directed to a specific student or student population, or educational study. One teacher said she was “terrified” of mathematics as a child herself; she stated that due to her own experience, she understood her students’ fears regarding math and tries to help them through this. Since she was “once a girl”, she reported that she was especially empathic and helpful with “the girls”. One respondent reported a strong connection with children from a similar background as his and reported that “...remembering ‘how it was’ helps me to empathize with students”.

A teacher from Brownsville, Texas, a border city between the United States and Mexico, herself a child of immigrants who came to this country without any understanding of the English language

stated that, “When a student comes to class and has difficulty with the English language I think of my personal journey as an English language learner when I first went to school.” She reported that she spoke little to no English when she began school in the U.S. and at that time she was not permitted to use or “fall back on” any of her own native language. “I too was in their shoes not long ago,” she said. “I can’t forget that.”

In direct response to her own and her student’s experience with language learning, she said she allowed them “...to write in Spanish as a crossover to English,” interspersing their poetry with both English and Spanish, as some of the translations, she pointed out, simply “don’t convey the emotions in another language.” She reported using a Spanish term to describe a more English concept when this helped the student more readily understand. “When I allowed my students to write in Spanish in English class, I saw a totally different student emerge,” she stated, “a more confident student - a student with hope.”

Another respondent taught a population far different than the cultural and socio-economic population he was derived from. He stated that “It was difficult in some ways to identify with students because I didn’t share their demographics and culture.” However, he claimed to reach a bit deeper to discover a similarity, and found he could empathize with his students more when he admitted that he simply remembered “...what it was like to be ‘young’ ”.

Another respondent said that due to her own negative experiences of being from a marginalized culture and not ever really fitting into the public school environment, she was “often able to empathize with those families and children that don’t naturally flourish in our typical public school environment”.

One respondent conveyed a sense of connection between empathy and self-authenticity:

There needs to be some point of similarity I can be aware of in our experiences; it doesn’t have to be terribly extensive, but I find it very difficult to identify with someone who seems utterly unlike me. Sometimes I have to consciously search for that point of similarity, that place where I can see in my heart that we’re in the same boat (or shit-heap or whatever) and then develop a deeper relationship from there. Often it’s being able to

see their discomfort, their weaknesses, and relate them to my own mind-boggling gallery of discomforts & weaknesses that allows my heart to open to them.

Fewer respondents reported recognizing a basic human connection between teacher and students without regard to personal similarities, though some certainly did so. This experience of empathy was reported not only less frequently but also in more generalized, humanistic, and at times perhaps even existential terminology. One respondent claimed that one of the primary reasons he teaches is to develop his empathy outside of his own personal experiences.

“For me,” he stated, “one of the many reasons why I teach is in order to have the opportunity to be in a situation where I need to empathize with significant numbers of people who are different from me. This is central to my personal and professional human development.”

He admitted that this “...does not always happen, especially if the student is hostile or otherwise difficult to deal with.” He claimed that he was still unsophisticated in his ability to truly empathize with students who “are just driving me nuts & pissing me off, even though these are the ones that I most desperately need to connect with.”

Three of the teachers, including the eldest and youngest, claimed that they actually “found” themselves in “ALL” [respondent emphasis] their students, “in bits and pieces”. These two as well as another respondent reported that with this experience, the students reminded the instructor of who they may be at the human level, rather than as unique, idiosyncratic individuals. One respondent went beyond her own experience of empathy and drew from the experience she sensed from her students as well. She reported that “... we rely on, believe in, trust and thrive on the possibility and actuality of realizing the oneness between us all.” Another stated that “... The struggles of humanity are universal,” and said it didn’t require much to be reminded of this if one was present to the students and their concerns.

Five of the eight respondents reported establishing more of an empathic relationship due to experiences which transcended the traditional educational context. In one case, a teacher was assigned initially to a first grade classroom; in the next few years her assignments had her moving to a third and then a fifth grade classroom. As it turned out, the timing of her movement as a teacher was consistent with some of her first grade students. She reported that the children she worked with in all three of these

grade levels, she had “...established a bond that lasts even today.” Other educators responded with stories of building projects or journeys which allowed the teacher-student relationship to develop; in such cases, everyone involved reported empathic experiences.

A German teacher who took students on summer journeys to Germany said that “there is a unique bond created when traveling abroad with students.” She said she was “no longer *just* [her emphasis] a teacher.” She reported that everyone on the journey - teachers, students, guides, and parents, experienced empathic moments. “After the trip,” she stated, “there is a totally different dynamic between teacher and student.”

Two respondents reported that when people “get out of the classroom” and create something or experience something as a group, particularly when they are put into a position to truly depend on each other, “empathy is just part of the bargain.”

The majority of respondents described a direct, causal relationship between student performance and teacher empathy; they drew the conclusion that this also yielded an empathic classroom environment. These same respondents addressed student performance as something that went beyond the most basic test-driven assessments. “When they [students] feel a common thread and trust,” one respondent stated, “they [students] will do better academically, and even more importantly, interact better socially.”

“All this teaching can be seen, on the surface,” one respondent stated, “as the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student or the facilitation by the teacher of student experiences which result in learning.” He qualified the underlying, foundational importance of the empathy involved. “Below the surface,” he stated, “the connection between people is an important part of it, perhaps more important than the superficial interactions [of the actual lesson].” One study participant stated that empathy “...sets us at ease, allows us to be ourselves, and achieve what is best and necessary.” She added that students often did well in her setting. This same teacher consistently asked herself “what else can I do, what angle do I need to try?” when a specific technique was not working. From her perspective, this is the effort required to create an empathic teaching environment. She asserted that teachers who make this effort are all “better teachers” due to their efforts to connect with students empathically. She contrasted

her own perspective with what she termed “the regular education, mainstream viewpoint” which she defines as “believing that there is a spectrum that all should function within and those that don’t ‘need help’ to fit in.” Another teacher said that as a result of her efforts to empathize, her students worked harder and pursued the more difficult studies for a longer period of time.

Most respondents addressed the consistent presence of empathy within the classroom as a shared and necessary aspect of the learning dynamic. Some responses regarding empathy overlapped or converged into core condition of genuineness.

One respondent stated that “empathy and understanding happens all day, every day.” Yet another asserted “I am forever identifying with my children’s experiences. This seems to be a constant flow, an essential ingredient, an unavoidable part of life...” One of the eldest teachers found it helpful that she was older, as she had more personal experience to draw from to better empathize with students. Another respondent echoed this experience and went even further with it, asserting that when he “freely confesses: his own experiences of inadequacy,” his willingness to sharing oftentimes bridged a more surface difference that may have been getting in the way of students sensing his empathy.

“On a practical level,” a respondent wrote, “the whole knowledge and experience conveyance process depends upon a high level of understanding of who you (as teacher) are dealing with; not knowing/understanding our students seems to engender ineffective teaching.” Yet another respondent summarized:

That heart-opening is perhaps really what it’s all about. Obviously, there’re all sorts of other things going on in educational work, some good, some awful, but I suspect that the opportunity to empathize and further develop empathy in the world is the chief reason I and many others who have been called to teaching keep coming back to it despite its many disheartening times.

2:1 POSITIVE REGARD

As with the responses to questions regarding empathy, those which addressed positive regard constituted five basic themes. The most consistent theme that ran through responses was the interpretation of positive regard as positive feedback. A second consistent theme was the focus for the

positive regard. The third theme addressed blocks to positive regard, both student and teacher sourced. A fourth theme concerned specific examples of how teachers afforded positive regard; participants who offered specific examples also often discussed connections between positive regard and students' efforts. Fifth, though infrequent, was the presence of some awareness on the part of the teachers of positive regard in a manner consistent with Rogers' own descriptions.

2:2 POSITIVE REGARD RESPONSES

In discussing positive regard within the learning environment, all of the respondents' descriptions used the term "positive feedback" at least at one point in the discussion. All spoke to some degree about "positive feedback" of a specific effort or action. One elementary teacher said that she had "high expectations of my students" and that she conveyed these by offering "positive feedback as a reward for achieving at this level." Another opened her response with the statement that she hoped "every person who interacts with children gives them positive feedback". One teacher stated that "Humans love and deserve positive feedback. I love it." One of the older, more experienced teachers stated that she "grew up in an environment where the words 'positive feedback' hadn't yet been coined." She said that when she started teaching, "the pendulum had swung all the way from negative feedback to positive feedback". She described a method she uses in responding to students which she said was more objective, and was therefore less concerned with positive or negative statements.

One of the respondents discussed positive regard in detailed terms via a "standard "positive feedback" situation" which had to do with "evaluating students' work." This respondent wrote and spoke only in regard to "evaluations". "The best evaluation is the self-evaluation," he stated. "I find that students will be harder on themselves than I am if I give them the tools to evaluate themselves like a rubric." He did not clarify why he believed that students' being harder on themselves was necessarily positive.

A teacher of much younger children offered a list of occasions for "positive feedback" including "learning to read – understanding where that snowball we brought into the classroom went – to that first poop in the pot and finally getting our socks on by ourselves." She stated that she felt that there were

“endless occasions for positive feedback”. Another respondent echoed this, saying, “There isn’t a day when I teach when I don’t tell a student they are doing a great job one way or another.”

A teacher of language arts said that whenever she graded a student’s essay, she always looked for “at least one positive point” and then wrote it down on the front of the paper. Another teacher who said he had problems “complimenting” students about their more academic work said he’d “always been very encouraging, expressing positive feedback when engaged in some sort of active work – making or building something or doing some group task, like cooking a big meal or moving some very heavy object”.

One respondent spoke about “praising” students for their “accomplishments” and “successes” that she heard about over the morning announcements or through other faculty and staff. None of the respondents made any statements about positive regard of a student for simply being.

The majority of respondents discussed what got in the way of the practice of positive regard within the learning setting. Several of the teachers spoke of the difficulty in offering something positive to a student who was “embroiled in constant turmoil in the room (i.e. aggressive and doesn’t get along with others)”. Another said positive feedback flows continually in her classroom until it is interrupted “when one of my children gets on my last nerve (or I get on theirs)”.

One teacher offered a method with which she overcomes the blocks a student’s attitude may put in the way of receiving any positive regard. “When I am finding a hard time finding something positive to say,” she wrote, “I imagine the child sans (without) the personality trait that may come across as the most negative.” She said that when she erased the “most troublesome negative quality” it was much easier “to peel away something special”.

Respondents’ honesty about what blocked positive regard included one teacher who said although she knew it was important to offer something positive to students about their work, sometimes it was “difficult to find one item” that she felt she could be positive about. “But I force myself to do it,” she added. “I tell them that I will find at least one positive item in their paper. It puts me on the spot to have an eagle eye on their paper sometimes to read and reread their papers to find a needle in a haystack at times”. Another respondent said that his tendency is “to be somewhat stingy in terms of

complimenting students.” He added that he had worked on this and he had “gotten better about it since I began working with fairly young ones.”

There were as many variations of specific examples of positive “feedback” or regard as there were respondents and situations. One teacher of younger students defined “positive feedback” as “words of excitement, encouragement, celebration, joy, amazement...” She described it as “an energy we keep moving around the classroom” and stated that “...we need it, we create it, when it’s not there we miss it.” Her more specific examples included “a glance across the room, a hopping clapping dance, a long loud laugh, a lap, a hand to hold” and ended with an admission that “our list is endless”.

A high school teacher offered a detailed manual for positive regard as an evaluation process of student work:

I lead the activity by evaluating their work for them at first, but balance their own assessment against mine. This should be done right after the assignment is delivered, if it is a performance. If it is written, I encourage or assign an evaluation rubric to be filled out beforehand. I lead an assessment with praise, usually, and try to make helpful suggestions for further improvement... referencing the rubric always. This really puts the onus for improvement on the student. I don’t want them relying on my talent as an entertaining teacher to make the lesson happen, that has its limits. I would rather they evaluate themselves and learn the tools to do that from me.

He added that “...an excellent thing to do after all of the student evaluations is to have the students evaluate the teacher’s performance. A simple question like what could you have done better is a good start. You can learn a lot by having students critique you.”

A special education teacher said she was learning about “choice words.” She noted that as she has “...matured as a teacher, rather than positive feedback, I believe my feedback has become more accurate, descriptive and structured”. She said she is currently working “...to follow a structure for feedback and learning” and outlined this process:

First I acknowledge an effort or accomplishment. Then I offer suggestions for further learning. This is all part of the workshop model. I start with a compliment of something

that the student has done, and then offer a suggestion for what the student can do to improve. I try to do this as often as possible.

She added that she often stops to consider her choice of words and the power they convey. She noted that her “instruction” and “management have improved” though she did not offer any input about how this process affected student achievement nor did she address its impact on her as a person. Other respondents offered perspectives about the dynamic between the specific positive regard they offered in the classroom and the impact it held for their students.

One respondent stated that “...common courtesy and compassion allows positive regard to occur throughout the day” and suggested that “...without that, children will shut down and progress comes to a halt”. One respondent offered her summary in a single sentence: “Kind words heal all wounds.” Another teacher said that “...whether it’s a hug, thumbs up, smile, it makes the child being rewarded, as well as observing children, pick up the pace of their own efforts”.

One teacher claimed she couldn’t make any “direct correlation” between her positive comments and students’ performance, though she said that she had a “...sense that I’m seen as a teacher who cares about students in and out of the classroom”. She said that “...students are less likely to rock the boat for a teacher that they know cares” and said that she made a point of really being positive with her homeroom students in recognizing their efforts outside of the academic setting. She mentioned that in her school setting, teachers are assigned a group of freshman every four years whom they attended to throughout their high school years. Due to this arrangement, it was evident to her at graduation that “...there’s a difference between [students who had] homeroom teachers who simply take roll and those who take an active interest in their homeroom members”.

The respondent who admitted to having difficulty finding one positive remark to make on student papers thought that her efforts paid off for the students. “I think it works because they know that I want to help them genuinely”. Another teacher said that while “conventional verbal compliments” may be useful, he thought it was more important to maintain as much as possible “a positive attitude and a lot of good energy”. “People feel that [positive energy] ,” he said, “even if it’s not directed specifically at them.” He described his free-flowing view of how this works in a learning setting:

To move around, laughing, joking, making fun of myself, of the situation, of whatever it is we're all doing, but also be on top of people's needs, anticipating and/or responding to those needs, whether it's for information, or materials, or physical assistance or even just to be told yes that's it you're on the right track, or even just, hold on, that's not really gonna work, try doing this and I think that will work better for you – there's a way to give what on paper might appear to be negative feedback (essentially trying to get someone to do something different from what they are already doing) in a way that's very affirming to the person receiving it: delivering them information in a way that assumes that they are intelligent & caring people who are making an honest effort at whatever task and that they are capable of hearing and understanding and acting responsibly upon what you tell them. People sense all of that when you approach them in that way and tend to appreciate it.

This study participant echoed more and more of Rogers' own statements and commitments about positive regard in the educational context, though he had not read anything of Rogers' work regarding education. He said he had no question about the relationship between positive regard and student learning/growth:

Students respond well to this – they want to be treated respectfully and be part of something that not only is successful but also that engages them as fully as possible. Positive reinforcement, at least what I'm talking about, helps them to stay in, to feel confident that what they're into is really OK, maybe even great. The alternative to this is students skating on the surface, not committing, sensing that the whole thing may be bullshit.

In a statement that converges over and into the core condition of genuineness, he posited, "If the person leading them on isn't confident and honest, how can we expect this of the students?" In speaking about how the teacher may be affected by creating and maintaining a learning environment in which positive regard emanates, he stated that "For me, this is just a big thrill". He added that:

One of the situations in life when I feel the most alive is when we're all doing it (whatever that might be) & the thing is really humming. I have rarely seen that happen when I wasn't moving that particular kind of energy. I guess it doesn't always have to be there, but if it's the opposite – if I'm bummed, negative, fearful, defensive, really unclear or dishonest, then the energy gets poisoned.

One teacher admitted that it made her “feel great to see success” knowing she had helped it along. Another respondent said simply, “There is no better feeling than when a child smiles at you and you know you have made a difference.”

3:1 GENUINENESS

There were five themes noted throughout the responses about genuineness and its effects on students, learning, and teachers. The first theme gathered the respondents' detailed descriptions of what they shared of themselves in the classroom with students. These responses were almost always followed up by or intermingled with how students responded to the teacher's act of genuineness, and therefore, student responses to a teacher's genuineness comprised theme two in this study. In theme three, 4 of the 8 respondents voiced concerns about what could get in the way or when it is not appropriate to share genuinely with students. Theme four included 4 respondents' statements about what allows or even demanded teacher genuineness. Theme five included descriptions regarding the effect such sharing had on the teacher and his/her experience in the classroom setting.

3:2 GENUINENESS RESPONSES

In describing what she shares genuinely of herself with her students, one respondent, an elementary school teacher, said: “The times I am real and genuine with my children without losing professionalism is during oral reading time and during our shared exercise time”. She said she loves to read to her students, and shares with them one of her favorite authors, Roald Dahl. “I read with exceptional expression,” she explained, “replete with accents and voice changes”. She reported that her students “are mesmerized” when she reads; she believed they became better readers and writers as a result of her sharing. “During exercise time,” she said, “the kids get to see their teacher sweat, bounce

around, and become red in the face.” She reported that this allows her students to see her as human “without looking silly”. “They love it!” she said. “And we are all getting in shape.”

Another elementary school teacher reported that: “My kids seem to get quite upset when I cry while reading them a book. **Stone Fox** is one I cannot read without blubbering. Kids don’t know what to do with that”. She said that she tried to “...be genuine and real all day, whether I am in the classroom or about town”. She spoke of genuineness with compliments, and she stated that “When you give children a genuine compliment they know it. A trust develops that can’t be ‘faked’”. The respondent also believed that due to her own genuineness in the classroom, “Socially the children find their place and in turn, academically things improve. I hope that in the end of each day that my students know that I care for them and I want them to succeed”.

A respondent who works with three- and four-year-olds in an early education program said that: To be ‘real’, to be ‘genuinely human,’ is to cry, laugh, dance, sing, yell, scream, run, jump, make art, sleep, play, be really mean to one another, be really kind to one another, take care of each other, grab stuff from each other, ignore each other, hide in our cubbies, listen, make circles, interrupt each other, forget each other, love each other, share, smile, tell stories, read, love ourselves, take care of ourselves – all of which we do every day. We don’t know what else to do. This is the only way we learn.

“I believe I am always real with my students” stated a teacher of high school students who had been labeled emotionally disturbed (ED). She said that her most important policy was the establishment of community within the group. “I tell my students, ‘we are in this together like a family; we aren’t throwing anyone out’. I say, ‘if you hurt your hand and it is really bothering you, do you cut it off and throw it away? You think of what to do to make it better’”. She went on to explain that the group verbally “...process lunch and recess daily for about 10 to 15 minutes and problem solve difficulties they identify”. She said she gives the problems back to them, asking them for their own input and solutions.

As a result of being genuine and inclusive, she said she believed that the “children in our room know that they belong, that they are important”. She said that her choice to be genuine with her students,

and to make choices regarding educational style which often put students in the position of also needing to dig deeper for their own genuineness and ingenuity, was due to her belief that education is “not only about children accomplishing the academics, which I totally value, but it is also about their ability to believe there is no one way; all the ways, all of *them*, are important.”

One respondent who taught high school aged students Honors English said simply that he thought admitting “mistakes freely, asking for forgiveness, and working honestly to improve” his teaching was “about as ‘real’ or as ‘genuinely human’ as anyone can expect”. A teacher of High School German said she often shared stories with her students about the faux pas she made with the German language, as well as the difficulties she experienced when she was in Germany. “Showing your human side in languages (which generally involves talking about a humiliating moment abroad) helps students to overcome motivational problems when the language gets tough,” she observed. She added that such stories help “spark interest when students get bogged down with language learning”. Both of these respondents stated that though students may forget other material taught, they always remember the “anecdotes and the cultural significance attached to them”.

“I hope I am real and genuine all day,” said one respondent who works with high school and college-aged students.

I shared with them how writing saved me when I was diagnosed with cancer - how my journal writing was my outlet in the hospital. I tell them this early in the semester - the first or second week of class. I am very honest with my students always; since I teach college it is easy to speak the truth. As my own honesty and genuineness as a human being occurs daily, I believe it allows my students to ask me whatever they want in regards to the lessons presented.

One of the older respondents with the most diversified experience said in his choice of being genuine, he tries to be honest with himself and his students regarding his choice of what and how to teach, as well as his choices of dress, language, etc. “I try to be as upfront as possible about what I am doing, what I’m trying to do, how I’m going about it, about the institutional, legal, cultural constraints upon me and us, about my own limitations and failings, about what I see in the students themselves.”

He mentions a school where he first worked as a teacher which he clarifies as “all about radical honesty” and uses the term radical in its original context of rooted in truth/reality. “I felt that I was encouraged by my colleagues in this direction and so everything was an expression of that.”

In regard to what could get in the way or limit genuineness in the classroom setting, one of the elementary teachers felt that it was important to share herself as a human being with her students but that she needed to do so within boundaries and constructs which allowed her to maintain her “professionalism” in her own eyes as well as her students’. Another of the teachers, also an elementary school teacher, believed that there are times when “my real options aren’t shared (for example – politics) because there is value in teaching personal choice without bias if possible.”

A respondent who taught in the upper grades reported that some interpretations of genuineness could be problematic for him and his philosophical sensibilities:

If you are asking if I let the students think we are one and the same as far as authority, responsibility, and leadership is concerned, then I am not ‘real’. They will teach, but I am the teacher, I will learn, but they are the students. I am not their ‘buddy’ and they are not my equal in some respects. I do not abuse these facts, but I do not dance around them either.

Another respondent with experience teaching in both upper and elementary grades admitted that balancing genuineness with a certain façade could be “more or less problematic”; he thought it was more so with the younger students “and in more uptight environments”. However, he also added that despite the potential problems related with being genuine with youngsters, he couldn’t see himself not making that effort, as it was so essential to teaching in a “real manner”, one which he described as “full of depth”, and wherein he was consistently willing to “root out face-saving and other hypocrisy rather than to teach it”. “I can’t seem to do anything else,” he said. He admitted however that this effort has been particularly difficult and even impossible in learning environments and schools in which “the context has not been set up to strongly support honesty”. He added that “...my sense of it and how it’s fostered is too weak to carry me through in these less than supportive situations”.

In addressing what made genuineness essential and valuable in the classroom, one respondent said simply, “Teenagers are the ultimate hypocrisy detectors. And, in today’s schools, they have no qualms about confronting adults who say one thing and do another. This is a mixed blessing, but at best, it does keep you honest”.

Two other teachers who worked with older students kept their statements simple, with one leaning toward practicality and the other more existentiality. One reported that she needed to be genuine because if she wasn’t, she noticed that her basic lessons of “grammar and vocab [sic] explanations fail to stick with students”. Another stated simply that, “Honesty and sincerity are the best policy whether I am at home or at work”.

The respondent who wrote the most about his experiences and concerns regarding genuineness in the classroom said that: “One of the central goals of my teaching is to be as honest as possible with the students. Part of this stems from my own revulsion at being lied to as a child, a trait I see evidenced in the behavior of many young people, who either feel outraged at being deceived by people they are expected to (and often do) trust, or come to the education process thoroughly jaded after enduring years of official fakery”. He said that he believes “We absolutely owe them that, they are entitled to this, if nothing else.” He admitted that this was a constant struggle for him and others at the independent alternative school where he first taught and received his training as a teacher, however, he reported that:

In a sense, that was one of the major components of our curriculum, which was essentially about helping the students to be whole, integral. Without a high degree of honesty, no one can really aspire to wholeness and integrity. For children, particularly in this cultural milieu, all of us choking on artful bullshit, there’s a powerful need for elders to model this. Also, in order to gain students trust, a teacher must be trustworthy. If the relationship is very narrow, then it’s possible to establish trust in a narrow strip of our shared lives and work within that. Where the goal is a much broader & deeper relationship, the segmentation is not possible.

4:1 TEACHER TRAINING RESPONSES

Six of the eight respondents received teacher training through college and state certification programs. The remaining two respondents took positions with alternative or independent schools which did not require formal teacher certification. The six respondents who had received formal training reported no training or classes regarding the core conditions in the classroom despite the fact that they had participated in classes which assigned work based on student or learner centered education. In some cases, one or two professors had made statements which the respondents could relate to the core conditions, such as one professor warning his students to “be real, or else.” No further clarification or context was offered with the warning. The two respondents who had no formal teacher training reported that what they had learned about teaching came from a mixture of learning from simple experiences in the classroom. They reported that they learned most of what was valuable to them and their students from the students themselves, and that this knowledge based in experience was then illuminated and reinforced by other more experienced teachers at the given schools where they were teaching. None of the respondents reported any knowledge of Carl Rogers, his writings, nor his statements concerning the core conditions of empathy, positive regard, or genuineness.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study begin to address the gaps in research regarding learner-centered education and the use of core facilitative conditions in current educational settings. Although respondents intimated the importance of genuineness, positive regard and empathy in the learning environment for teacher and students, rarely did respondents speak of these as necessary core conditions, nor did anyone mention Carl Rogers and his seminal work as the founder of learner-centered education. Only once did any of the respondents mention the conscious effort necessary to cultivate any of these conditions.

Apparently, study respondents were not familiar with Rogers’ writing regarding the importance for facilitators to be cognizant of core conditions in any learning/growth context such that conscious development could occur. Of the three primary conditions in this study, empathy was the core condition of which respondents reported the most prevalence and awareness.

1:1 EMPATHY

Although empathy themes are placed into individual categories for the purposes of this study, it is important to note that there were many overlaps and relationships established between these categories in any given response. In some responses, all five themes were present and corresponded directly with each other such that a clear causal movement was evident. For example, educators reported that the empathy shared due to similarities allowed for a deeper empathy that transcended similarities. This then permitted the instructor to step into experiences that transcended the classroom environment, such as coaching, mentoring, field trips and even travel abroad, thus developing a broader and deeper empathic relationship.

Instructors who reported a consistent effort to create and cultivate empathy within the classroom, considered it as “vital” or “essential” for learning and growth. These teachers claimed to see clear indications throughout their years of experience that led them to believe that in creating the empathic environment, they were also creating opportunities for their students to engage more fully and consistently in their own learning, and realize more success as a result of their renewed efforts.

Some participants reported a direct relationship between empathic teacher-student relationships, student efforts, and student success. Student achievements attributed to empathic teacher-student relationships were not limited to academic efforts and successes; some teacher responses included emotional, social, and artistic efforts and successes as well. Additionally, respondents reported that student emotional, social and creative achievements appeared to have had a direct and positive influence on students’ academic pursuits.

Examination of the language used in self reports revealed a correlation between respondents’ use of first person possessive pronouns and reported empathic experiences. Six respondents consistently used first-person possessive pronouns (mine, my, etc.) when describing the classroom environment and students. The respondents who referred to the classroom as “my” or “mine”, and the students as “my students,” reported fewer empathic experiences across fewer themes than did those respondents who did not utilize possessive pronouns to describe students.

This finding would certainly follow from Rogers’ (1969, 1984) own writings. He was clear and passionate about the importance of each group member owning his/her responsibility and awareness that

would facilitate their work together with others in order to create and maintain core conditions within the given environment. This has one primary implication with multiple extended implications. Should the teacher or facilitator claim authority and sole ownership of the group and their experiences, it may disallow others from claiming their own sense of authority, ownership, and therefore responsibility for creating and maintaining a learner-centered environment. Indeed, if guided by Rogers' writings, it may seem rather antithetical to a learner-centered environment for a teacher to believe s/he is "in charge" of creating something which can only be created by a group.

1:2 POSITIVE REGARD

When Rogers (1980) wrote of unconditional positive regard, he defined it as "...acceptance, or caring, or prizing.." (p. 116). However, in four of the five themes uncovered in this study, there is no mention of positive regard. As with the themes identified in responses regarding empathy, the five themes depicted in response to unconditional positive regard convey causal relationships, and at times overlap with other themes as well as with other core conditions.

The five themes identified in the study in the order of most often to least often mentioned included positive regard being misconstrued as positive feedback, focusing the feedback offered on student academic work and work efforts, the blocks teachers encountered in attempting to provide positive feedback, the methods of positive regard/feedback and their effectiveness particularly on student efforts, and the awareness or lack of awareness of positive regard in line with Rogers' original definitions and later clarifications.

All study participants used the term positive regard interchangeably with positive feedback and other less objective terms. Based on self reports, the focus of the teachers' "feedback" for all of the teachers at one point or another and for 6 of the 8 respondents 100 percent of the time, was the students' academic work and work efforts rather than the students' inherent sense of self. Teachers of the youngest students or of students diagnosed as emotionally disturbed reported examples of offering positive feedback and holding positive regard for students' personal behaviors; teachers of these populations did not report limiting feedback to academic work as frequently. Had there been more

understanding of unconditional positive regard, perhaps the discussion of the focus would have been more concerned with the human beings and less with the work completed.

Study participants using positive feedback synonymously with positive regard connoted a discrepancy in their understanding of the Rogerian concept. Respondents also used the terms evaluation, compliment, assessment, praise and critique synonymously with positive regard. These terms in particular imply a judgment or criticism antithetical to Rogers' original, refined intention of reflecting unconditionally and positively upon the humanity of the person or people in the room. This misunderstanding, as the most dominant theme for the positive regard section of the study, may represent a pervasive lack of knowledge and therefore awareness among respondents regarding the Rogerian core concept of unconditional positive regard.

Rogers' (1969) intention for unconditional positive regard demanded an attitude of openness and appreciation for the essence and human potentiality of the student as well as fellow teachers, support personnel, and anyone who participated or moved through the learning environment. More often than not, the student's more tangible, traditional academic work became the focus for positive statements expressed (verbally or in writing) by the teacher to the student. Six of the respondents discussed the focus for positive regard, (or positive feedback), exclusively as the students' academic work.

Interestingly, 6 of the 8 teachers who claimed to be facilitating a student-centered classroom chose to regard only the academic work and work efforts of students as that which deserved attention or positive feedback. In addition, these same respondents also admitted, and reported some degree of pride in the fact, that they attributed their attention as teachers to students' work as the determining factor in the students' academic progress and efforts made toward improving themselves academically. When these same teachers were asked in follow-up interviews if it followed for them logically that should attention focused on work allow work to improve and develop, if and when that same focus of positive energy was directed to the complete human being in front of them, simply for being, could this attention then allow that same student to develop further into themselves, the responses were diverse.

Half of the teachers said this was not the point of education and that they had too much "on their plate" to be concerned with anything other than academic work and particular the work for which

students would be tested in standardized and/or end-of-year state exams. Two said they could see the point but that they did not see how this could fit into all the other concerns they had in the classroom environment. One of these instructors had read an article on “positive psychology” which she tried implementing as much as possible in the classroom. Two respondents conveyed a degree of awareness about positive regard in a manner consistent with Rogers’ definitions, replete with an understanding of how important it was for the teacher as well as students to be aware that positive regard was a standard practice in the learning environment. However, they did not attribute this knowledge to Rogers and his work.

1:3 GENUINENESS

The five themes delineated throughout the responses regarding genuineness included how and what teachers shared of themselves, student responses to the teachers’ efforts to be genuine, barriers which disallowed genuineness, what allowed or even demanded genuineness, and the effect genuineness or the lack thereof had on the teachers, students, learning environment and student success.

Although 4 respondents included statements about what allowed or even demanded that teachers share their more human/personal aspects/experiences in a genuine manner, only one respondent went into any depth regarding this. Three respondents described the effect such sharing had for him or herself as a teacher but no one addressed how being genuine in the classroom context affected her/himself in any essential way as a human being despite this being a survey question as well as a central tenet of Rogers’ (1969) work.

Rogers wrote about the importance of genuineness and described it simply in terms as a willingness to be truly human with others, particularly those with whom one is responsible for facilitating some change, (i.e. a client or student or patient). Given that being genuinely ourselves is perhaps the closest to the heart of being human together, the absence of responses regarding genuineness is glaring in teachers’ responses and therefore in this study.

The absence of these responses can carry many diverse meanings. It could simply have to do with teachers, as human beings, being uncertain about their own sense of themselves and therefore being genuinely who they are would be, at best, problematic. Coupled with the responses regarding how the

system within which they work demands that they present a certain façade, which many of the respondents spoke of, it could also mean that in the context of the learning environment there is little to no room for teachers to be genuine. Some respondents spoke of their own fear of letting the students know them too well, as it may be either inappropriate or risky as some students may take advantage of a genuineness which demands a level of trust the teachers are not experiencing in the context of the classroom or school environment. Only one respondent reported that in their teacher training, the professor urged them to “be real”. Many others spoke of being warned to not even genuinely smile prior to the winter holidays both in their college education classes as well as during their new teacher training by mentors and other seasoned professionals within their teaching system. One respondent told a story wherein during a planned observation, one of the assistant principals scolded her in front of her students for “smiling too much and enjoying herself”. In this case, teachers are not merely saying they do not understand how to be genuine, but that such a core condition is frowned upon by the system itself.

According to Rogers (1969, 1980), as well as countless philosophical, religious and psychological predecessors, being genuine, or not, is perhaps a central human frailty, foible and effort. The finding that genuineness has limited classroom application for the teachers in this study is not any surprise, given that this qualitative study could be considered as a mere microcosm of our larger society and metaphorical design for central human struggles. Therefore, discovering that teachers have difficulty in knowing themselves and in sharing what they do know with their students and even fellow teachers is not necessarily novel. However, the fact that every one of the respondents reported that the system they worked within made efforts to be genuine difficult, or even declared the more genuine stance as unprofessional, certainly holds some implications for possible specific changes within the system.

The findings of this study imply a certain amount of success (defined as a realization of any given intention or aim, be it academic, personal, artistic, social, etc.) in learning environments for both teacher and student when core conditions are implemented even minimally and haphazardly. The findings also imply a need for more training regarding the core conditions in programs that claim to be student- or learner-centered. It would seemingly follow that with more conscious knowledge and awareness of the core conditions; even more success could be realized.

2:1 IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study present several immediate implications for teacher training and revisions of educational programs as well as possibilities for further research. The findings may be used as a foundation from which to develop myriad and far-reaching explorations in current educational paradigms, such as seeking out cooperative ventures with educators and educational agencies to design, implement and assess pilot programs in teacher training, mentoring, and curriculum and instruction. These training efforts could address many of the gaps and misinformation discovered in this study regarding study participants' knowledge base and therefore more conscious utilization of Rogers' core conditions.

According to teacher self reports, the importance of attending to the whole student simply for being rather than attending only to their academic work is not mentioned as an aspect of teacher training prior to teaching, nor as a facet of mandated training provided through the schools and districts. Should districts and schools with mottoes such as, "where students come first", decide to more actively assert their mottoes, more attention from the districts in the form of teacher seminars as well as teacher mentoring may be useful. Specifically, training regarding Rogers' (1969) core conditions would allow teachers and students alike to make the heftiest investment in their own development, thus becoming the rich and diverse and creative beings Rogers believed we all carry the innate motivation to become.

Given the teacher training experiences described by the respondents, to reframe the perception of themselves as facilitators rather than authority figures would demand a great deal. In follow-up interviews discussing this concern, respondents reported that initially, it would require turning against years of their own education first as students themselves in the context of the teacher-led classroom, and teacher-in-training in programs that, according to respondents, demanded that they "take charge" rather than allow students to assist as team or group members in cultivating a learning environment. This "take charge" pedagogical stance, according to respondents, diminishes opportunities to create an environment wherein core conditions reign and everyone in the class has some sense of responsibility for the awareness, maintenance and therefore growth possible for each individual. Certainly, there are clear possibilities for working to resolve such pedagogical misconceptions at many levels within the existing system.

Throughout the interviews, study participants discussed focusing their feedback on student academic efforts and success far more often than they did on more developmental aspects. Rarely did respondents mention attending to emotional and social behavior, or to intelligences which remain unexamined by standardized testing but which have been clearly delineated and discussed by contemporary educational and developmental psychologists (Gardner, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Goleman, 2006; Kohn, 1999). Though these contemporary educators and writers do not necessarily lay claim to using Rogers' work as a foundation, such new paradigms in many ways certainly stem from the tide of core conditions outlined in Rogers' books and lectures. Simply affording training sessions which would afford current administrators, teachers, and counselors knowledge of the current and ongoing work of educators and educational psychologists would be advantageous to the students in many ways.

Many of the study participants discussed the difficulties in attending to a student positively when that student was "acting out" as well as difficulty in being positive as a teacher when this was not his/her nature or tendency or even when s/he was simply not feeling well. These statements suggest that teachers may not have cultivated positive self-regard to the degree that it could replace more surface moods, as well as support an inner constitution through which positive regard for others would allow them to attend to the deeper aspect of the human being, surpassing the more surface and less vital aspects of student academic pursuits, personality styles, temperament, and moods. Perhaps teacher work groups which would afford an opportunity to bring specific concerns to a table of colleagues gathered to support each other using the core conditions themselves could allow them to further invest in themselves as human beings and as educators.

All of the respondents discussed concerns about balancing being genuine in the learning environment with what was permissible or expected by a societal structure which demanded that they fulfill a certain role. According to study participants, this role often demanded that they maintain a "professionalism" in which it was absolutely necessary to maintain a certain emotional and personal distance from their students.

Again, the suggestion for teacher training inclusive of course work which would allow or demand a certain amount of individualized work in "knowing oneself" could be entertained at the least.

Classes in ethics would allow teachers in training as well as current teachers to balance genuine caring with professional boundaries so they may better understand how to be real with their students and colleagues in a system which does not hold much regard for such matters, and in some cases, even has policies imposed which make such genuine exchange almost impossible.

We would regard the merits of learning to strike a balance between genuineness and professionalism to be worthwhile to teacher training programs as well as established district training programs. The value of being genuine juxtaposed against the dangers of being inappropriate represents a real concern for many teachers. According to self reports, teachers say they have been warned against being too genuine, to the point of being regularly threatened and warned about the litigious factors involved with the dangers of being unprofessional by being genuine. According to respondents, this dilemma has not ever been addressed in any formal manner in their training prior to or after becoming teachers.

Future research may allow broader and deeper investigation into teacher training programs, particularly in regard to the conveyance and understanding of Carl Rogers' work and the cultivation of awareness and core conditions within the context of public school environments which claim to be learner-centered.

Throughout follow-up interviews, many respondents spoke of their frustration with a system that pressed for "teaching to the tests" and demanded what was more than once referred to as "meaningless meetings and paperwork". There were also many comments made regarding the press for mere academic knowledge which could be tested in some standardized format; respondents who shared their frustration with these aspects of the current system questioned the validity and value of a system that seemingly disregarded many of the more valuable human attributes such as social skills, self respect, creativity, etc. One respondent wondered aloud what had happened with Gardner's (1983) research of "multiple intelligences." Several wondered why current educational systems seemed disinterested in what educational researchers and teachers had to say about the devastating effects of standardized examinations, (Kohn, 2006) as well as the importance of the development of emotional and other intelligences (Goleman, 2006) within the context of the classroom. One teacher asked how anyone could

expect a teacher to attend to 34 children at a time several times a day and still maintain sanity, "...let alone accomplish anything healthy". Due to time and space constraints as well as the need to not become overly tangential, we chose to take heed of such remarks as seeds for potential further studies yet did not include them in the body of this research paper.

We urge further qualitative and quantitative studies that examine student and teacher experiences regarding core conditions, learning, multiple intelligences, resiliency studies, cultural diversity studies, and standardized testing. It would be interesting to utilize specific studies regarding the previous mentioned topics in combination with further studies of learning paradigms with the presence of core conditions as measures for what success may be realized within the context of the learning environment with and without the presence of core conditions. It would also seem fortuitous to discover more about teacher psycho-spiritual development, resiliency studies, teacher sustainability, creativity levels, etc. in the context of an environment where core conditions are consciously sustained.

Other research questions that have yet to be formulated and explored in published academic papers include the facilitator's experience and potential growth related to the inner work of creating and maintaining a richly diversified student-centered environment wherein the core conditions and the awareness they demand are all practiced. Potential relationships betwixt learner-centered environments, learner personal and social welfare, and academic prowess as sighted via examinations and qualitative measures, teacher longevity, and teacher training programs are all points of departure for further studies.

2:2 LIMITATIONS

The findings of the current study must be considered in light of societal limitations. One limitation was the design of the survey questions. Four primary questions were drafted based upon Rogers' three core conditions and the concerns regarding how these interacted with teacher preparation and training. With each of the questions regarding core conditions, further specific questions were designed to allow specific responses from study participants.

Denzin (2008) and others have suggested that prescribed survey questions limit the more intuitive and deeply meaningful material that may be better elicited from personal interviews which begin with one major question, the research question itself perhaps, and are then guided only by the

intuition of the researcher as well as the interviewee. It could be that other and more pertinent information may have been garnered from designing the questioning and responding in this more fluid manner.

Though Denzin (2008) suggests optimal questioning would be done more “in the moment”, geographical and temporal constraints demanded that the study, and therefore the questioning process, be designed differently. Because we had decided to interview participants from various geographical locations within a specific amount of time, we chose the survey and email response method. However, whatever limitations may have ensued from this design was mitigated by the follow-up phone and personal interviews. It is important to note that participants were provided with several opportunities to elaborate on their stories and clarify specifics during follow-up interviews. Both responses to written surveys and the elaborations and clarifications in follow-up interviews provide pertinent and useful information regarding the study respondents’ perceptions of empathy, positive regard, and genuineness in the learning environments, as well as their knowledge and interest in Rogers’ core conditions.

One specific example of this limitation in this area was reported in the findings section in the discussion of positive regard, wherein the questions regarding positive regard may have been miscast due to an embedded definition of “positive feedback” within questions about “positive regard”. The respondents’ interpretation of positive regard as positive feedback may have been due to the inclusion of the term positive feedback within the context of the written question. Ironically, in writing the survey questions, our concern for the teachers’ lack of knowledge regarding the term positive regard may have backfired on us and therefore limited the potentiality of the study.

McCracken (1988) states that the optimal number of respondents for an ethnomethodological study is between 8 and 12; given that this study drew from and incorporated 8 respondents we have met this particular criterion. However, we would also not wish to detract from the research information inherent in even a singular case study that predates most all psychological studies (Freud, 1887). The current study drew from the first 8 respondents and discovered a multitude of information from said respondents.

We may list as a limitation however that these 8 were all volunteers, unpaid and responsive to a request via email. Responses from volunteer respondents may vary from non-volunteer respondents. Had we opted to canvass teachers via phone or in person, we may have received information not inherent in the technical savvy, willing (and therefore potentially exuberant and/or outspoken teacher) volunteers. Additionally, all of the respondents stated that their classroom settings were child-, student- or learner-centered. Had we canvassed and interviewed teachers who did not hold that claim, other information may have been gathered.

These concerns however are hypothetical concerns and ones we cannot test without further experience with qualitative research design work. Certainly, the 8 respondents who were canvassed supplied much pertinent information from which many future research designs and implications may be derived.

This study does not claim to have garnered information which represents the entire spectrum of the educational field in the United States, though it is research which allows us a view through a window of classrooms which until now has remained closed and which has represented a chasm in educational research.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I: DEMOGRAPHIC CHART

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|---------|
| Teacher Race/Ethnicity | Caucasian | Hispanic | African-Am. | Asian | Mixed |
| | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Teacher Age | 20-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60 | 61+ |
| | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Teacher Experience | 3-5 yrs | 6-10 yrs | 11-18 yrs | 19-23 yrs. | 24+ |
| | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| School Environment | Rural | Suburban | Urban | Exurban | Mixed |
| | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| School Format | Public | Private | Independent | | |
| | 5 | 1 | 2 | | |
| Geographical Area | Northeast | Midwest | Southeast | Southwest | |
| | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | |
| Student Population | Pre-school | Elementary | Middle | Secondary | College |
| | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 |

APPENDIX II: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been teaching and what are the schools and teaching experiences you have had?
2. Could you talk about experiences in your teaching career when you identified with an individual student's experiences? In what ways have you conveyed this empathy to your student(s)? What allows/disallows you to empathize with student(s)? How often does this occur? How has this impacted student academic efforts and/or performance? How has this impacted you personally and/or professionally?
3. Could you talk about situations wherein you afforded students positive feedback? In what ways have you conveyed this positive regard to your student(s)? What allows and/or disallows you to afford positive regard? How often does this occur? How has this impacted student academic efforts and/or performance? How has this impacted you personally and/or professionally?
4. Could you talk about experiences wherein you were able to "be real" and "genuinely human" with your students? In what ways have you conveyed this genuineness to your student(s)? What allows/disallows you to be genuine with your student(s)? How often does this occur? How has this impacted student academic efforts and/or performance? How has this impacted you personally and/or professionally?
5. Where did you receive your training and/or what sort of program did you complete to acquire your teaching certification?
6. Did any aspect of your training prepare you to convey empathy, positive regard and/or genuineness to your students?
7. How have teaching situations affected your conscious conveyance of empathy, positive regard, and/or genuineness in the classroom setting?

CURRICULUM VITA

Margaret Hartford was born in Rogers City, Michigan in 1959. The daughter of a Native American father and immigrant Irish mother, she moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1964 with her parents and seven siblings. She left home at a very young age and lived and worked throughout the United States in California, New Mexico, Texas, North Carolina, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Wyoming and Oregon. She has been a teacher and counselor for more than twenty years and in many diverse settings. She received a bachelor's in Professional Writing and Psychology from SUNY-New Paltz in 1985 after which she worked as a writer and editor in the publishing field. She has published many articles and essays in local and national publications concerning politics, education, human development and spirituality. She completed coursework earning teaching credentials in secondary education (1989) and gifted education (2002). In 1989, she started an independent school which had as its aim educating young people who were considered "at-risk" and "gifted". She has since worked in public schools as a teacher, counselor and gifted education coordinator for districts in under-served areas. Ms. Hartford is a teaching consultant with the National Writing Project and has worked with teachers, students and community organizations. She will receive her masters of arts in educational psychology - community counseling in May of 2009 summa cum laude.

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