

Review of Freedom to learn

Resenha de Liberdade para aprender

Curriculum de Liberté pour apprendre

Carl Ransom **ROGERS**

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ABSTRACT

The book "Freedom to Learn" by Carl R. Rogers began with questions about the educational system. He wrote to educators in an attempt to motivate the desire to change and to accomplish something concrete.

To achieve his objective, he made available to all people all that he found to be useful from his personal experience in the education field. He provides examples of how teachers, working at different grade levels, have found ways to provide freedom to learn and the interesting consequences that result from these efforts. The book also highlights the attitudes to be developed by those interested in being a "learning facilitator," and recommends methods to develop these attitudes. Finally, it offers a practical plan for revolutionary changes in education.

Index terms: self-management, creativity, freedom to learn, change

RESUMO

A obra "Liberdade para Aprender", de Carl R. Rogers, partiu de questionamentos a respeito do sistema educacional. Ele escreveu aos profissionais da educação numa tentativa de motivar o desejo de mudança e a realização de algo concreto.

Para tanto, coloca à disposição tudo o que pôde ver de útil em sua própria experiência. Oferece exemplos que mostram como professores, trabalhando em níveis diferentes de ensino, descobriram maneiras de proporcionar liberdade para aprender, e apresenta consequências interessantes destes esforços. Aponta, ainda, atitudes a serem desenvolvidas por quem se interessa em ser "facilitador de aprendizagem", e recomenda métodos para desenvolver estas atitudes. Por fim, sugere um plano prático com vistas a mudanças revolucionárias no sistema de ensino.

Palavras-chave: autogestão, criatividade, liberdade para aprender, mudança.

RÉSUMÉ

L'œuvre de Carl R. Rogers, « Liberté pour apprendre », a partir de questions sur le système d'éducation. Il a écrit aux professionnels de l'éducation dans une tentative de motiver le désir de changement et la réalisation de quelque chose de concret.

Pour cela, Carl met à la disposition tout ce qu'il a pu voir d'utile dans sa propre expérience. Il offre des exemples qui montrent de quel manière des professeurs, qui travaillent à différents niveaux d'enseignement, ont découvert des manières de proportionner la liberté pour apprendre, et l'auteur, aussi, présente les résultats intéressants de ces efforts. Rogers indique, aussi, des attitudes à être développées pour ceux qui s'intéressent à rendre facile l'apprentissage », et recommande des méthodes pour développer ces attitudes. À la fin, il suggère un plan pratique pour un changement révolutionnaire dans le système d'enseignement.

Mots-clefs: auto-gestion, créativité, liberté pour apprendre, changement.

Rogers (1902 - 1987) is considered a precursor of the non-directive Humanist movement in education. His theory was developed from his own experience, projecting what he lived for scientific research exploration.

The initial objective of "Freedom to Learn" was to summarize all that the author had been writing to educators over the years, but it ended up also including new ideas, developing earlier work and dealing with questions concerning a revolutionary model of education. The book is divided into five parts. The first two are practical and provide channels for teachers who can, by themselves, venture into experimenting with their students. The third contains a conceptual basis for such experimentation. The fourth part presents personal and philosophical support for treatment of the theme and finally, the fifth invites the reader to engage in a program of change in education.

Rogers begins with questions about the purpose of learning and the role of the school in regards to social issues. For him, in the modern world, the purpose of learning should be to free (students') curiosity, to allow people to take charge of following the new directions dictated by their own interests, to trigger a desire to research and open everything to inquiry and analysis.

The author presents two kinds of learning: "task" learning: imposed, without personal meaning, deals only with the brain and lacks relevance to the whole person. The second kind of learning is "experiential": self-initiated, with significant influence on people's behavior and gives rise to self-confident and creative learning.

Rogers disagrees with methods that emphasize intellectual performance, which devalue the intuitive and emotional aspects of education. Beyond the act of learning, the book addresses the question of knowledge production; not only that of its "simple" absorption, but that linked to personal interests as motivating factors leading to the building of knowledge.

Rogers values experiential learning and believes that human beings have a natural potential for learning and they are curious about the world in which they live. His premise is that learning is most favored when the student freely chooses the direction of his studies. In this sense, learning is effective when self-initiated and articulated with personal interests – it is when the student is put in direct confrontation with practical and real problems (to him) that he is motivated to build knowledge. When students are allowed the liberty to decide how they will acquire new knowledge, the concepts they do learn through this process are more deeply understood than concepts learned through "task" learning.

The teacher who cares to facilitate experiential learning organizes his efforts very differently from the conventional way and Rogers identifies this type of teacher as a "facilitator of learning." To provide this type of

learning, certain methods used by traditional teachers are discarded: when homework is assigned, the same assignments are not given to all students; there are no standardized or required tests; there is no reading required and the teacher is not the only person responsible for grades.

The facilitator's role is to strive to make available resources for learning in the broadest manner possible. He is considered as a resource and makes his knowledge available to students, but does not impose it. He attempts to bring out each individual students' as well as the class' aspirations. He can be authentic, without flaunting appearances – he becomes a member of the group, expressing both his opinions and his personal feelings. What is most important has nothing to do with training, but rather with attitude. The facilitator needs to create a climate of trust and of acceptance in the classroom; this does not mean that he must love every student, he merely must accept him as an imperfect human being: with all that the other is, he is deserving of credit. In this sense, he allows freedom for unusual ideas, believing that, by being free, the student becomes curious, goes on to pursue his own objectives and learning becomes an exciting quest, not a mere accumulation of information. What makes a facilitator different from a traditional teacher is in his ability to accompany students, rather than leading them.

By sharing a collection of miscellaneous learnings, Rogers emphasizes that each teacher develops his own way to allow freedom in the classroom that is adapted to his style, but recognizes that the beginner is interested in knowing what others have done and what results they had. Thus Rogers shares examples from teachers that had endeavored to give their students the freedom to learn.

He presents the example of Mrs. Barbara J. Shield, a sixth-grade teacher, who was facing problems of low morale and poor discipline among her students. She began a new experiment giving freedom to them, to the extent that she could, because she was not free to disregard the state

curriculum. At the beginning of each week she highlighted themes that the students needed to develop so that they would take these into account when designing their projects: each student chose the areas in which they intended to work. Mrs. Shield called this the self-directed program, "directed" in the sense that they had to work within the *curriculum* and "auto" because each student was responsible for his own planning within this basic structure.

An interesting project was developed with surprising results: the students were motivated to search for issues that attracted them, initiative and creativity grew and they assumed responsibility for their work. Day by day, the students' confidence grew through their self-realization; they became more aware of their ability and they began to be more interested in school and in their own progress. Those who before had to be dealt with disciplinary measures developed standards of behavior for themselves and they acted according to their standards.

The second example comes from a university professor, Mr. Volney Faw. He presented freedom to learn at institutions that operate within strict educational limits. If, on the one hand, freedom was disparate in relation to academic rigor, on the other, in his experience, he showed how both came together and stayed together.

Mr. Faw started his experiment by presenting his students a methodology in which he described some basic elements of a course: people, interactions, processes, content and institutional pressure. "People" and the "interactions" were surrounded by an environment that valued spontaneous and authentic expressions. The "processes" would be used by the students to articulate their interests and institutional requirements. The "content" had an instrumental character and "institutional pressure" referred to the expectations of others (school, parents) that should be considered. From these elements, some examples were described about how to apply this pedagogical methodology that the professor had created, which is easily adaptable, even in institutions with extremely rigid standards.

Roger's third example referred to his personal experience with a course he taught to doctoral students in Educational Leadership and Human Behavior.

Rogers sought to promote the climate of freedom that he insisted upon so vehemently because of the results it brought. However, he acknowledged that giving freedom can be risky – offering a lot of freedom causes anxiety, frustration and anger. Thus he suggests a degree of freedom that seems authentic and comfortable. From this, he started to structure the course without too many interventions, but he did include conventional terms and requirements.

The students were informed about the seminars that they needed to present and were thus given the reading list for the course, purposely containing varied references in order to provide information rather than to be a required reading list. If on the one hand no reading was required, on the other, at the end of the program, students had to turn in a list of what they read and notes on how they read, as well as a self-assessment and an indication of the grade they believe they deserved.

The final impressions about these experiences were a strengthening of self-confidence and an appreciation of their (the students') own experiences, which led students to believe more in their ability and they developed an understanding of the subject at hand that went beyond an intellectual comprehension.

By presenting these examples, Rogers insists that he does not want to instruct readers on what to think or do, but rather invites them to read and to decide for themselves what is important for their profession and life.

The book concludes with a practical plan to change the educational system, facilitated by the experiences of groups. The idea is that those who take part in the groups should be primarily people in positions of authority in educational institutions – voluntary participation is preferable, but if possible, the administration should involve the whole team because, above a

certain level, if a principal joins the group, he might go back to his school with proposals for change. If at the school people are rigid and the system is “very regulated,” there are two options: either he, disillusioned, goes back to his previous behavior or he becomes a “disturbing” influence in the institution.

The group begins waiting to be told how they must act and they get frustrated when they realize that they, themselves, will determine the way that the group will work. The facilitator only encourages interaction, allowing the maximum of freedom for personal expression, so that, gradually, each member put aside his defenses and openly participates in the group.

The quality of the relationships that are developed is amazing. The administrators who have worked together for years find that they had never met and negative feelings that had hampered plans and work were brought to light with assurance that they would be understood. When he is understood, the individual is open to exchanges that allow each person to know how he is viewed by others. This facilitates communications more oriented towards openly declared goals, which enables one to deal with, rather than bury or avoid, conflicts under new rules. By reducing the need for protection through bureaucratic rules, people become more democratic and more willing to take the risk of following new directions. Many people report their experiences in the group as the greatest examples of acceptance in their lives. The popularity of these experiences lies as much in the emotional heat that they generate as in their ability to facilitate personal growth.

It became evident that the orientation of this work is based on a personal, philosophical and value-oriented context, whose focus is the person open to experimentation, able to engage in the construction of his own knowledge. Rogers believed that in each individual a natural ability to

learn exists and there is something that drives him to the actualization of his potential toward his own development.

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