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Encountergroups for Whole-Person Learning at the Universities of Vienna and Brno – Motivation, Context, Processes, Perspectives

Abstract

The growing complexity of our knowledge society poses novel requirements on precise and empathic communication. There is growing interest in team-oriented persons who are capable of resolving conflict as well as in innovative kinds of teaching and learning. Methods are sought that complement receptive learning with immediate communicative processes involving the whole person at the level of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

We employ the Person Centered Approach, in particular encounter groups, according to C. Rogers to open up new, unique ways of personal development for students' professional as well as personal lives. We activate subjective dispositions that allow for a meaningful and constructive composition of various forms of teaching/learning. We started in Vienna with workshops and proceeded with offering courses that included encounter groups. In this paper we describe concrete group situations, reflect learning- and personal growth processes, and discuss the results of an initial study on the course's influence on personal attitudes. While quantitatively it was primarily an increase in students' acceptance or respect towards their colleagues, the qualitative part of the study resulted in differentiated findings about the effects of the course on the participants. The processes of the encounter groups according to C.Rogers turned out to be the main means to reach the major goal, namely that of improved communication, even though students' professional orientations and targets were different in Vienna and Brno.

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