

Module code: **ECIE4001**

Module name: **Supporting the Learner**

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Humanistic theories have shaped education by focusing on the whole child and showing that learning is closely tied to emotional well-being, relationships, and self-worth. This approach is especially important for Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), who give daily support to learners with additional learning needs (ALN). Carl Rogers' person-centred approach helps explain how empathy, acceptance, and authenticity support children's growth and engagement. When considered with Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Noddings' ethics of care, Rogers' ideas show that positive relationships are key to learning, especially in specialist settings. These theories are very relevant in STF units that support children from Reception to Year 2 with severe autism, ADHD, behavioural challenges, and communication difficulties, where emotional security is essential for participation and progress.

Rogers' person-centred approach is built on the idea that people can grow when they are in a caring, respectful, and non-judgemental environment. He believed that people develop best when they feel understood, accepted, and valued (Rogers, 1957). Rogers described three main conditions that help this growth: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. While these ideas started in therapy, they also work well in education, especially with vulnerable learners. In STF units, where many children face anxiety, sensory issues, or trouble communicating, strong adult-child relationships can make a big difference in emotional regulation and readiness to learn.

Empathy is a key part of Rogers' theory and means understanding someone else's experiences and feelings from their point of view. Rogers described empathy as seeing things from another's perspective "as if one were the person, but without ever losing the 'as if' condition" (Rogers, 1957, p. 99). For TAs and LSAs, empathy is vital when working with children who may not speak or who show distress through their behaviour. This requires watching for non-verbal cues like body language, sounds, facial expressions, and changes in behaviour. For instance, a child with severe autism might get upset during transitions or new activities. An empathetic response could be to lower demands, use visual aids, give more time, or offer comfort through familiar routines. These actions show understanding of the child's feelings and help lower anxiety, making learning possible.

Unconditional positive regard is another important part of Rogers' approach and is especially useful when helping children with behavioural challenges linked to ASD or ADHD. Rogers

described unconditional positive regard as accepting and valuing someone without judging them, no matter how they behave or express their feelings (Rogers, 1957). In schools, this means seeing the child separately from their behaviour and responding with patience, respect, and consistency. In STF units, some children may act out, avoid others, or withdraw because of frustration, sensory overload, or unmet needs. When TAs and LSAs show unconditional positive regard, they protect the child's dignity and self-worth, even during difficult moments. Over time, this steady acceptance builds trust and emotional security, which are key to engagement, communication, and learning.

Congruence, the third main condition, means being genuine, consistent, and emotionally honest in relationships. Rogers said that helpers are most effective when they are real and open, not distant or too formal (Rogers, 1961). In schools, congruence shows in predictable routines, clear communication, and calm responses from adults. Children with autism often need consistency and can be upset by unpredictable or mixed signals. When TAs and LSAs stay calm and aware of their own emotions, they give children a sense of stability and safety. Congruence does not mean there are no boundaries or expectations. Instead, it means combining warmth and understanding with structure, routines, and clear limits to support safety and learning.

Rogers' person-centred approach helps children's emotional growth by encouraging self-worth and independence, even for very young children with complex needs. While children in STF units often need a lot of adult support, Rogers believed they should still be seen as active participants in their own development, not just as recipients of care (Rogers, 1961). For TAs and LSAs, this means giving choices when possible, respecting how children try to communicate, and noticing their preferences. For example, letting a child pick between activities or sensory tools can help them feel more in control and less anxious. These practices support independence in ways that fit each child's developmental stage. Over time, this approach can help children gain confidence and start to manage their own feelings, which are important for learning and social skills. This shows how person-centred values can be part of daily classroom life, even in very structured settings.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs adds to Rogers' ideas by showing how unmet needs can block learning. Maslow said that people are motivated by a set of needs, starting with basic things like food and safety, and moving up to belonging, self-esteem, and reaching their potential

(Maslow, 1943). He believed that people cannot focus on learning or personal growth if their basic needs are not met. In STF units, many children have high anxiety, sensory issues, or trouble managing emotions, which can stop them from joining in learning activities. TAs and LSAs help by making the environment calm and predictable and by supporting children's emotional and sensory needs.

Maslow's focus on safety is very important for children with ALN, who might feel stressed by loud noises, changes, or new routines. By giving steady support, using visual schedules, and setting clear expectations, TAs and LSAs help children feel safe at school. Maslow also said that belonging is a basic human need, showing how important relationships are for motivation and well-being. For children in STF units who have struggled in mainstream schools, feeling like they belong is crucial. Building strong, trusting relationships with familiar adults helps children feel accepted and valued, making them more willing to join in learning and social activities. This idea is similar to Rogers' unconditional positive regard, as both focus on acceptance as the basis for growth.

Noddings' ethics of care makes humanistic approaches even more relevant in education. Noddings said that caring relationships should be at the heart of education, stating that "the primary aim of every educational institution should be the maintenance and enhancement of caring" (Noddings, 2013, p. 7). In STF units, care is part of everyday work and is evident in how TAs and LSAs support children with emotional regulation, communication, personal care, and transitions. These caring actions are especially important for non-verbal children, who need trust and secure relationships to take part and develop.

According to a 2006 article on responsive teaching, educators are encouraged to adapt their approach to meet the unique needs of each child, which may involve changing activities, tasks, or expectations when a student is upset or having difficulty. For example, a TA working with a child with ADHD might use movement, sensory play, or games to help them focus and join in. Similarly, a child who becomes overwhelmed during group activities might benefit from a quiet corner with soft lighting and familiar objects, allowing them to regulate their emotions before rejoining the group. These responsive strategies acknowledge that children's capacity to learn fluctuates throughout the day based on their emotional state, sensory experiences, and physical needs. By remaining flexible and observant, TAs and LSAs can adjust their expectations and methods in real time, ensuring that support remains

appropriate and effective. These methods respect each child's differences and help make learning open and meaningful for everyone. Noddings' ideas fit well with those of Rogers and Maslow, showing that learning works best in relationships built on care, empathy, and understanding.

Thinking about my work in an STF unit with twelve children from Reception to Year 2 who have a range of ALN, including severe autism and ADHD, I see how these humanistic ideas shape my daily practice and decisions. Using Rogers' focus on empathy and unconditional positive regard helps me respond calmly and consistently to distress and behaviour. Maslow's hierarchy reminds me to put emotional regulation and safety first, before learning can happen. Noddings' ethics of care shows in the trusting relationships I build with pupils, especially those who are non-verbal, as these bonds are the basis for engagement, communication, and progress over time.

In summary, Carl Rogers' person-centred approach offers a useful way to understand how emotional safety, acceptance, and being genuine help children learn in schools. When combined with Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Noddings' ethics of care, these ideas form a clear humanistic view that puts relationships at the centre of education. These theories are especially important in STF units for young children with ALN, autism, and behavioural needs, where learning is closely linked to emotional well-being. By using empathy, steady routines, and caring relationships, TAs and LSAs put humanistic values into practice every day, helping all learners take part, engage, and achieve positive results.

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