

Discuss how Carl Rogers' person-centred therapeutic approach and other humanist theories support the work of TAs and LSAs in schools.

'We cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate his learning' (Carl Rogers 1951)

The progression of the teaching assistant's role has significantly changed within schools over time. The responsibility given to the teaching assistant has grown exponentially, from classroom displays to classroom management, from sharpening pencils to sharpening the mind. The teaching assistant is pivotal in today's education setting and arguably the person that is most familiar to the students in the classroom. This luxury is afforded to the teaching assistant largely due to the significant budget cuts in education and the ever-increasing demand placed on the performance of the teacher and the systemic target's that education settings must achieve. Teaching assistants in UK schools spend most of their time working in a direct pedagogical role (Blatchford et al., 2012), so how does Carl Rogers influence the way the TA works within the classroom?

The role of the theorists' ideas and concepts within education is largely unknown however according to Dale. H. Schunk, 'systematic psychological research began to appear in the latter part of the nineteenth century, (Schunk, 1996). A theory as defined by The Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary is 'something suggested as a reasonable explanation for facts, a condition, or an event, esp. a systematic or scientific explanation (2019). There are many theorists that have concluded their findings and observations of educational practices and learning outcomes over the last century yet none so relevant to today's practice in the classroom as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Both Maslow and Rogers were classed as humanistic psychologists who developed the person-centred practice currently used in today's education settings. The humanistic approach follows others educational theories such as behaviouristic and psychoanalytical which are prevalent from the early 1900's to present day. Behaviourists such as B.F. Skinner and J.B Watson believed that learning occurs through a process of operant conditioning (a process that reinforces or punishes behaviour dependant on the outcome) and that environmental stimuli and consequences shape behaviour (National University, 2024). Psychoanalytical theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud believed that the unconscious mind (ego instincts) had a big influence on the way people's mind worked. The Psychodynamic Theory, derived from the psychoanalytical theory conceptualises that 'the psychodynamic learning theory is based on the premise that not all learning or motivation is conscious', (Docslib, 2018).

To ascertain the relevance of the theorist in today's classroom it's necessary to see how the theory translates into current practices. The Behaviourist Theory, which looks at either reinforcing or punishing behaviour dependant on the outcome could easily translate in to reward charts, detentions or a point system which are still readily used in classrooms across the UK. This system, despite its current use, focuses on the behaviour rather than the cause for the behaviour and fails to look at the child holistically. Could the behaviour be due to an additional learning need such as autism? Could the poor attendance be due to a chronic illness? Whereas this theory is obviously still prevalent in the classroom, its consequences

have the potential to be damaging to the child and detrimental to the learning outcome. The psychoanalytical theory, which bases itself on the unconscious playing a large part in development too has its place in the education system. Play-based learning is based on the concept that derived from Freud. 'Freud believed that play gives children a way to express inner feelings they are unable to verbalise' (Krieg, et al., 2023). The psychoanalytical theory also covers interventions such as ELSA's (emotional literacy support assistants) and Trauma Informed Practitioners that work on restoring or supporting the child's unconscious difficulties. This is a very much needed strategy within a school, however, fails to support the child as a whole person, only looking at one aspect of their development. Lastly, the humanistic theory developed by Abraham Maslow in the early 1900's. 'Humanism was a response to the common educational theories at the time, which were behaviourism and psychoanalysis' (Western Governors University, 2020).

In order to ascertain how the humanistic approach is so relevant in today's education, we must first look at the belief behind the way we intrinsically implement the theory. Maslow's theory didn't necessarily relate to education but more so to society. In 1943 he published the book *A Theory of Human Motivation* which outlined one of his most recognised theories. He theorised a hierarchy of need, believing that until you had met your lower-level needs, the higher level couldn't be achieved (Allen and Gordon, 2016). An example of this could be if a child was hungry, they would be unable to concentrate fully in the classroom. Teaching assistants regularly check whether we are meeting the needs of the children holistically to ensure we are meeting the child's full potential. Rogers expanded on Maslow's theories and in 1951 published his book *Client-Centred Therapy*. Rogers went on to transfer his ideas from therapy to education believing that the emotions of the child should be considered when in education (Allen and Gordon, 2016). Rogers believed 'that learning was facilitated when instructors employed empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, et al., 2013). In the classroom, teaching assistants adopt a child centred or child led style of teaching. A focus is put on the child holistically, looking at whether the child's basic needs are met before education can take place. We adapt our style of teaching, once again to the needs of the child ensuring that the subject matter is taught on a level that the child can understand. There are several legislations that must be met globally that underpin a child's needs. Article 28 from the United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child relates primarily to education and how the child's rights should be met. Section D states, 'make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children' (United Nations, 1989). Numbers 2-6 of The Global Goals also highlight the necessity to meet the child's needs, stating that everybody is entitled to zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education and gender equality (The World's Largest Lesson, N.D.). These ensure we are putting the child's requirements and needs at the heart of every school and ensuring that we are inclusive of all children, meeting their needs to provide their legal entitlement to education.

To conclude, teaching assistants are the very backbone of education. They work on the frontline providing many essential interventions to ensure the children's needs are met on all levels. The relevance of Maslow and Roger's work is key to ensuring that the children's most basic of needs are met before the process of learning can begin. Teaching assistants are the people most likely to know the children they work with best, thus making them pinnacle in the child's learning. From the meeting basic needs such as ensuring a child has eaten

breakfast before starting the day to wellbeing check-ins. Running interventions to reassurance, the teaching assistant practices the child-centred practice daily. It's essential to show empathy, genuineness and positive regard to children to have a connection with the child, as without a connection you can never fully meet the needs of the child. In essence, setting aside legislations and policies, Rogers and Maslow's humanistic theories are based on the very things that make us human. Showing compassion and empathy to create connections throughout life are the very things we strive to impart on younger generations. When the connection is made between the educator and the child, learning can begin.

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