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THE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH:
Theoretical Framework

INTRODUCING THIS CHAPTER

In this chapter, I have tried to contextualise the person-centred approach in some kind of theoretical way. We will look briefly at key philosophical ideas which underpin the approach and which give it its distinct character and quality. I also include a personal perspective of the approach, especially in light of my work with children and young people. The chapter also looks beyond Carl Rogers to examine the influences of other theorists and practitioners who have helped shape or extend the person-centred approach. The chapter begins with a discussion of the place of theory in an approach which largely focuses on people and relationships as opposed to prescribed ideas and assumptions.

TO THE COUNSELLOR

If you have trained as a counsellor the ideas introduced in this chapter may well be familiar. However, as a counsellor I have always found it important to re-examine the basic principles of the person-centred approach, especially at a time when there are so many theoretical influences which seems tempting. It is hard to see how other approaches and theoretical orientations can work without some understanding of the person-centred approach, if indeed they necessitate the establishment of a therapeutic relationship. This for me remains a prerequisite.

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A return to the basic ideas of the person-centred approach can sometimes increase faith and belief in those ideas. To see them re-stated can help maintain confidence in the approach. Where we return to the original writings of Carl Rogers, we sense the power of the approach, put so eloquently by its finest exponent.

TO THE HELPER

You may already be a good listener and the kind of person who can strike up warm helping relationships with children and young people. Some awareness of theory may offer new insights and understandings, which will improve your work and enhance the quality of the helping relationships you try so hard to establish.

THE USE OF THEORY

The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes 'theory' as a 'system of ideas' explaining something. This chapter seeks to look at person–centred theory and in particular, how it might relate to children and young people. Janet Tolan (2007) argues that to work with another person therapeutically we need a set of assumptions and hypotheses. She writes:

> Person–centred theory is simple, elegant and universal. Just as an appreciation of atoms gives rise to an understanding of the whole of the physical world, so can an appreciation of person–centred theory give rise to an understanding of the complexity and richness of human experiencing. (2007: 1)

Rogers himself was quite wary about theory, identifying a danger that it might lead to the categorisation of people. Indeed, as Tudor et al. (2004: 4) suggest, any attempt to 'reify or concretise person–centred theory ... would be antithetical to its philosophy'.

WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MIND

Professionals who work with young people are often aware of how quickly judgements are made and of the tendency to 'identify' a child's problem – the danger being that we somehow manoeuvre the child to fit with our assumptions and understandings. In this way we are less likely to listen to the young person and enter into her world as she experiences it, and more likely to guide and advise or at the very least see things from a perspective, other than hers.

The paradox here is that in attempting to make sense of Rogers' work and ideas, especially those where he eschewed formal theory in favour of experience, we need to understand these ideas and place them into some kind of context. Returning to Tolen (2007), she tends to see this issue more pragmatically:

> Without theory, how can we have any confidence in our way of working? Unless we have a hypothesis about what is happening and why, we will tend to fall into our own insecurities when the going gets tough. Theory is the map that guides us through territory which is alien and which can feel dangerous. It helps us to stick to the path, however rocky, instead of panicking and running into the woods. (2007: 1)

Tolans' words somehow echo many of the fears and concerns that adults working therapeutically with young people express in supervision. Feelings which sometimes lead to self-doubt, uncertainty and anxiety.

SOME IMPORTANT IDEAS

TO THE HELPER

Where you are primarily using counselling skills and helping as an aspect of your work, philosophical ideas underpinning the person-centred approach may not seem overly relevant. However, an understanding of these origins and influences will help to place your work into some kind of context, whilst forming the basis for understanding person-centred approaches and practice.

The Humanistic approach, which is characterised by a constructive and hopeful view of human beings, draws many of its ideas from two very influential viewpoints found within the history of ideas. Firstly, 'existentialism' as a philosophy owes its development to key figures such as Søren Kierkegaard, Fredrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. This way of looking at things focuses on the subjective and unique experience of the individual. It is opposed to 'rationalist' and 'empiricist' ideas which suggest that the universe is intelligible to the person who wishes to observe and study it. It is not concerned with psychological constructs and theories about personality. 'Being' cannot be understood objectively, but only understood by the individual through a process of reflection. Counsellors who work existentially are concerned with the immediate moment as experienced by the client. They are interested in 'existence' and how people change throughout their lives. They are not interested in establishing a diagnosis or looking at the causes of certain behaviours.

Secondly, existentialism adopts a philosophical method called 'phenomenology' which is literally the study of 'phenomena' and which is to a large extent is the

invention of Edmund Husserl. In contrast to behaviourism, it seeks understanding through enquiry into the subjective world of the client; that is consciousness as expe-rienced from the first-person perspective. For the counsellor or helper this means working with the client's experience and rejecting any call to establish causation. As a way of working, it rejects the idea of the 'unconscious' and believes that we can learn about our client's world, not through a process of observation, but by looking at how the client perceives their own world.

TO THE COUNSELLOR

In essence, the person-centred counsellor is not concerned with trying to find out why the client feels or behaves in a certain way. Instead, they seek to work with the client's experience and to enter into their subjective world, without judgement.

WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MIND

Often, it is not easy when working with a young person, for sometimes our instincts are to act in a parental role; to protect and guide. Sometimes our young clients tell us things which are hard to relate to and which may seem fanciful, odd, dis-torted and possibly destructive. However, as adults working with children and young people, it is necessary to understand that this is how the child sees their world and this should be respected, in the belief that the child will find his own way, if we provide the right conditions for growth within a relationship which is authentic and real.

THE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Please permit me to indulge in some personal reminiscing. As I write, I am able to recall with some vivid colour, a very special moment in my own counselling train-ing. For weeks, we had been learning theory and integrating this newfound wisdom into our practice. Often, this took the form of part-sessions, where course colleagues would each take turns at being the client and counsellor. It is most likely that many of you reading this will be able to relate to the approach. This 'goldfish' approach also required other members of the group to observe and offer feedback as to what they had seen, what they liked and what they might have done differently themselves. It became clear to me at the time that even where people took on roles, very soon

aspects and dimensions of themselves became apparent that caused me to question whether role-play was ever just that: the playing of roles.

On this particular occasion, my 'client' was talking about his early years at home with his parents. From my perspective, the role-play was going well and I was assured of positive feedback from my client about their experiences of the session and the kind of comments from the observers I so dearly wanted to confirm my competence as a counsellor. In fact, I was finding the whole experience quite stressful, as I determinedly tried to display the right kind of body language and listening skills that would gain approval. Looking back, I am not sure how much I was actually hearing my client, perhaps I was listening more to his words, which I knew had to be reflected back with some accuracy. I began to struggle, with my own preoccupations getting in the way of me actually staying with my client. Panic-stricken, I lunged at making my client see that I was indeed, understanding. I was wide of the mark and further attempts only served to show how disconnected we were as two people.

At this point, I had to say to my client that I had not heard what he had been talking about and that I was lost. This was a seminal moment for me and re-engagement with my colleague was intensely liberating. Of course, I knew the theory about the importance of the relationship, the need to be myself and not play a role. Somehow now it all made sense and I felt a burden to perform lifted.

For me, working with children and young people is truly about the meeting together of two people. The counsellor or helper's greatest asset is himself or herself, as a person. Children and young people already have many relationships with parents and professionals, but the person-centred approach emphasises the therapeutic nature of human understanding. The person-centred approach offers just this, the person, not the role. There is something quite valuing and respectful in the adult offering of themselves and not merely a professional face, however accomplished.

As adults, we often attempt to guide behaviour in children and young people, and in non-therapeutic contexts, this is wholly right. When we offer therapeutic help however, the person-centred approach asks that we avoid initiating direction and we avoid quantifying, assessing or judging what the young person brings. This can be very difficult, involving shedding many years of our own socialisation and conditioning. However, again, when we show deep acceptance of the child or young person as a person, we show profound respect for them as an individual.

When we are young people we sometimes believe we know everything, when we are adults, we *know* we know everything. We may be more accomplished at mathematical calculations than the young child, we know more history and are more aware of how the natural world works. In some cases, although not always, we can draw and paint with greater accuracy and realism. The one thing we can never know better is the young client's world, as they see it. Empathy, the ability to enter the child's world and see it as they do, is probably the most difficult of all to achieve. I see empathy as when the child or young person has the trust to take us, metaphorically, by the hand and show us their world. As we walk alongside, we are more likely to see what they see. Not what we think we see, want to see or what we want our young client to see.

The person-centred approach with children and young people requires a tremendous suspension of normal beliefs about young people. That is, that they cannot

decide what is best for them. However, if we provide the right kind of environment and non-judgemental relationship and we are ourselves, I believe, confirmed by experience, that young people will find their own way forward and their own solutions to problems. In many ways, young people already know what is right for them and the person-centred therapeutic relationship offers the child or young person an opportunity to further experience this internally or express it in words. Sometimes we have to understand that there may not be immediate opportunities for structural change in aspects of young people's lives, but there can be personal growth. Adults and peers shape children and young people, almost from the moment of birth and these judgements, both overt and hidden, will often determine how the young person sees themselves in relationship to others.

The person-centred counselling room or helping relationship may be the only time when these judgements and self-perceptions can be challenged by the child or young person. Where they are, the young client is freer to become who they want to become: more resilient; more fulfilled; more confident and more inclined to be all that they possibly can be.

The concepts, which we now explore, are easily expressed in both writing and the spoken word, but their profound nature is often obscured. They have the power to change the lives of both adult and child. Words like self-actualisation, empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence are easy to say, but harder to 'be'. They represent some of the most complex and sophisticated skills and qualities; possibly forming the essence of being human.

WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MIND

Whist many of the ideas and concepts presented here were developed in relation to work with adults, I have found them equally valuable in working with younger clients, of whatever age. Their impact may be even more evident with children and young people because the approach, which emphasises respect, acceptance, realness and empathy, stands in contrast to young people's sense of having little control or autonomy over their lives and where they are constantly guided, and indeed controlled by the adults around them, at home and at school. The person-centred approach offers them something very different and is most often received with appreciation.

THE ACTUALISING TENDENCY

Carl Rogers believed that humans are driven by an underlying 'actualising tendency'. This represented a positive view of human nature. Such ideas were in contrast to the psychoanalytic model which focused on unconscious drives and instincts, often sexual

in nature and the behaviourist schools of psychology which saw people acting upon learned behaviours. The actualising tendency was thought to be inherent in all living organisms. Rogers believed that people were motivated to become all that they were capable of becoming. In his writings, he drew on a number of sources, including Abraham Maslow (1968) who like Rogers was a key figure in the establishment of the Humanistic approach. Maslow first used the term 'the Third Force' to emphasise the departure from previous schools of psychology. He developed the idea of a 'hier-archy of needs', a basic concept which influenced Rogers' thinking. This was a the-ory which related to human motivation and self-actualisation. It suggested that we are motivated by needs which are there at birth and which have evolved over many thousands of years. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that we have a range of needs, each of which must be satisfied. The most basic of these needs is of course survival. Only when these physical needs have been met does a person become concerned with 'higher order' needs which are concerned with a sense of belonging, esteem and ultimately, self-actualisation.

To explain the concept of the actualising tendency, Rogers often drew examples from the natural world. In *Carl Rogers on Personal Power* (1978), he described in sen-timental detail the survival of seaweed pounded by waves on the shore, only to sur-vive and thrive. He continued:

> It seemed incredible that it was able to take this incessant pounding hour after hour, day and night, week after week, perhaps year after year, and all the time nour-ishing itself, in short, maintaining and enhancing itself in this process which, in our shorthand, we call growth. Here in this palmlike seaweed was the tenacity of life, the forward thrust of life, the ability to push into an incredibly hostile environment and not only to hold its own but to adapt, develop, become itself. (1978: 237–8)

In our work with young people, we find similar resilience in the face of adversity.

Case study: Daleer

Daleer (aged 13) described his home as very unhappy and without love. Here he is alone, exposed, at best, to coldness between his parents and, at worst, to outbursts of anger, which sometimes spill over into the physical. He described his mother as having a 'mental health problem', but for which he has no name. He just knew that she wasn't 'right'. His father works long hours managing a newly formed business which remains fragile. Of central importance in Daleer's life had been his grand-mother who died only a few months ago. However, nobody had spoken about this loss at home. Daleer was also close to his older sister but she recently married and has moved away from the family home.

As if all of this was not enough to bear, Daleer was knocked over by a car whilst being chased by bullies after school. Whilst his injuries were not serious, he was kept off school for a month. When he returned to school, things had moved on and friendship groups had changed and he found himself isolated.

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Daleer has been seeing a counsellor at school for around four weeks. His story had saddened his counsellor Julie, who wondered how he was coping when just about everything in his life had gone wrong. Somehow he remained strong and sometimes even cheerful with an eye to the future. Julie wondered whether she would have the same resilience to bounce back from such adversity.

WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MIND

The person-centred counsellor believes that all young people have a tendency towards self-actualisation. It is the role of the counsellor to believe and trust in this process and by creating the right therapeutic conditions, they facilitate this growth and help the young person find their own solutions to their problems.

THE ORGANISMIC VALUING PROCESS

Rogers told us that generally organisms know what is good for them and this is referred to as the 'organismic valuing process'. A neat description of this concept can be found in Merry (1955)

Although the term itself is rather ungainly, the idea is quite simple. As infants, we start out in the world knowing what is good and not good for us. The yardstick we use to judge when to value something either positively or negatively is whether or not it contributes to maintaining or enhancing our development. This valuing process operates quite spontaneously; we do not put much thought into it. For example, when we are hungry we positively value being fed, and when we are no longer hungry we negatively value being fed. Positively valued experiences include being comfortable, being able to play and being able to express our curiosity about the world that surrounds us. (pp. 23–4)

In this sense, the organism in its drive towards being complete chooses how to respond to influences from the environment and other people. The person is also able to obtain feedback from experiences and learn from these. Mearns and Thorne (1988) explain it this way:

The human organism, it is argued, can essentially be relied upon to provide the individual with trustworthy messages, and this is discernable in the physiological processes of the entire body and through the process of growth by which an individual's potentialities and capacities are brought to realisation. (p. 8)

The adult supporting the young person has to have confidence and belief in this process, recognising it when it shows itself, however briefly, in the counselling room or other setting.

A baby is driven by his actualising tendency and trusts in his organismic valuing process in a way that determines his thought, feelings and behaviour. The young child defines himself through his interactions with others and this becomes his self-concept. However, as the child develops, significant others, most notably the parents, show value in the child which is conditional. These influences continue as the baby grows into the child and the adolescent into the adult. Almost inevitably, the child introjects these influences, often critical and judgemental, and the young person acquires 'conditions of worth'. In its need to retain the love, respect and approval of parents and other important people in its life, the child learns to comply with these conditions of worth in order to shape and maintain his self-concept. This may be seen as acceptance 'only if'. In this way the self-concept becomes based upon these standards of value rather than the natural organismic valuing process described above. We desire our parents' love and affection so much that we are prepared to behave in externally validated ways. Let us look briefly at a few examples.

Case study: Sarah

Sarah is a quiet eight-year-old child. Her mother and father often tell her how proud they are of her because she is not like the 'naughty' children who live and play near her home. Sarah tries hard to be well behaved and quiet all of the time.

Case study: Mohammed

Mohammed aged 11 years lost his mother through an illness around 18 months ago and is desperately sad. Dad has been struggling to come to terms with the loss of his wife. Mohammed's loss is never spoken about at home. Dad says that Mohammed has been a 'courageous' young man and he is pleased with how he is getting on with his life. Mohammed has to put a 'brave face' on his grief.

Case study: Tina

Tina is a very angry 12-year-old. She has every reason to be angry. Just over a year ago she told her mother that her older brother had been touching her in 'private places' for about two years. Mum dismissed these complaints out of hand. Things are OK at home as long as she doesn't say anything. Tina learned early on that her mother becomes angry and defensive when she mentions what happened to her. Tina hasn't mentioned anything at school because she is afraid that they will tell her mum and she will be taken into care.

Case study: Dawn

Dawn is 10 years-old and doing well at school; teachers have said that she is 'gifted and talented'. From an early age she has had to 'perform'. She remembers when as a toddler, the whole family sat round watching her name all the plastic animals in a box. She can remember their delight when she could even name an 'aardvark'. Dawn has to work hard at school; anything less than top of the class would be regarded as 'failure'.

In these examples, each child has learned to behave in an acceptable way to avoid certain unwanted behaviours. They do this to win their parent's love and approval or avoid this affection being taken away from them. Each complies with conditions of worth and their self-image is adversely affected.

From the concept of organismic valuing, Rogers conceived of the idea of 'positive regard'. Where love, approval and affection are 'on condition' Rogers used the phrase 'conditional positive regard'. It follows that a young person may develop a 'conditional positive self regard' which is where the child comes to like himself and develop a stronger sense of self-worth and esteem by submitting to the expectations and standards set by society and significant others.

The 'real self', which is defined by the actualising tendency and organismic valuing, often stands in contrast to the 'ideal self', i.e. that which develops in response to the positive regard of others. It is a state, which by definition, is not real and therefore cannot be achieved. This discrepancy between self and experience is referred to by Rogers as 'incongruence' and is well described by Boeree (2006) in his discussion of Carl Rogers' theory of personality:

> This gap between the real self and the ideal self, the 'I am' and the 'I should' is called incongruity. The more incongruity, the more the suffering. In fact incongruity is essentially what Rogers means by neurosis. Being out of synch with your own self. (Internet article)

Brian Thorne (1992) explains further:

> This incongruence leads to a psychological vulnerability which will often render the person anxious and confused whenever an experience is perceived, or in some way anticipated, as being incongruent with the structure of the self and the current self-concept. The outcome of psychological vulnerability of this kind is a defensive response to experiences that in some way threaten the person's concept of self. The defensive behaviour can take a number of forms but, for Rogers, the responses of distortion or denial are perhaps the most common. (p. 31)

We shall return to this subject in a later chapter when we look at why people become unhappy.

THE CORE CONDITIONS

The work of the professional working with children and young people in a person-centred way is to provide a special kind of relationship which enables the young person to identify within herself the capacity to use that relationship for change and growth. Carl Rogers identified and described six 'conditions' which he felt were both necessary and sufficient for therapeutic growth. By this he meant that each had to be present within the helping relationship and that they alone would bring about change and growth, i.e. that they were 'sufficient'.

The significance of these principles set out by Rogers cannot be underestimated as Wyatt (2001) points out:

> It has been suggested by many writers that Rogers' theoretical statement of 1957 'The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change' was the most critical event in the development of client-centred therapy – and perhaps for psychotherapy as a whole. (p. ii)

Rogers described the six conditions as:

1 Two people are in psychological contact.
2 The first person, the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious.
3 The second person, the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship.
4 The therapist demonstrates unconditional positive regard (UPR) for the client.
5 The therapist demonstrates an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavours to communicate this to the client.
6 The communication to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard (UPR) is achieved.

With regard to these, Tudor et al. (2004) suggest that Rogers did not place a great deal of significance on 'psychological contact' saying that he was not describing a close relationship or even 'the client and counsellor recognising each other as human beings' or, necessarily, the relationship as having an 'emotional or affective content'. In this sense, psychological contact occurs when two people are 'simultaneously aware of each other'.

Whatever Carl Rogers meant, it is clear to those working with children and young people how important it is for the adult to connect with the young person as a pre-requisite to working together. This perspective on working with young people is emphasised by Bryant-Jefferies (2004) who drew upon research by Everall and Paulson (2002). This research identified issues for young people where the counsellor took on an authoritarian role, emphasising power differentials characteristic of the young person's normal experiences of talking with adults. Bryant-Jefferies expands upon this point:

> The fact that the young people saw the counselling relationship as 'special' and the therapist as 'a special friend', offers valuable insight into the inner world of the young clients. They indicated how important this was, and what a contrast it was to their usual experience of being in a relationship with adults.

He concludes from this that: 'For the effective counselling of young people there needs to be an adaptation in style, a readiness and willingness by the counsellor to be open, to really want to be psychologically alongside the young person' (Bryant-Jeffries, 2004: 7).

Rogers highlighted three 'core conditions' which he felt were especially important in the therapeutic relationship. It is not intended that these be explored in depth at this point since we shall return to look in more detail at these important personal qualities or attributes of the counsellor later in this book. However, it seems important for balance to introduce them at this time.

The first of the core conditions is referred to as 'congruence'. This suggests that the adult needs to be real, genuine, open, integrated and authentic with the young person before them. Rogers (1967) writes:

> It is found that personal change is facilitated when the psychotherapist is what he is, when in the relationship with his client he is genuine and without 'front' or facade, openly being and feeling the attitudes which at that moment are flowing within him. We have coined the term 'congruence' to try to describe this condition. By this we mean that the feelings the therapist is experiencing are available to him, available to his awareness, and he is able to live these feelings, be them and able to communicate them if appropriate. (p. 61)

Here, Rogers was stating the importance of being yourself and not putting on a false front. Anyone working with children and young people will know how perceptive they are and how easily they can detect falseness or an adult in an apparent 'caring' role.

The second condition is known as 'unconditional positive regard' (UPR). This refers to the acceptance of the client or what Rogers referred to as 'prizing'. He also mentions a non-possessive warmth. For Rogers, UPR:

> involves an acceptance of and a caring for the client as a 'separate' person, with permission for him to have his own feelings and experiences, and to find his own meanings in them. To the degree that the therapist can provide this safety-creating climate of unconditional positive regard, significant learning is likely to take place. (1967: 283–4)

An adult supporting a child or young person in a person-centred way may find such unconditional acceptance difficult, for we bring with us a set of values and beliefs which have become part of us over many years. To suspend judgement and accept the young person as they are is a truly wonderful ability and so powerfully received by the young person who is used to coercion, encouragement to conform, labelling, criticism and advice.

The third facilitative dimension of the therapeutic relationship is 'empathic understanding'. Rogers saw this as seeing the world 'from the inside'. In 1967, he described empathy as an attempt to: 'see the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the 'as if' quality – this is empathy, and this seems essential to therapy'. He continues: 'To sense the client's anger, fear, or confusion, as if it were

your own, yet without your own anger, fear, or confusion getting bound up in it, is the condition we are endeavouring to describe' (1967: 284)

All of us at times are exposed to caring friends and family who offer us sympathy and concern. When we experience real empathy, we know the difference. The young person also feels this difference but may be unable to express what it is. This most powerful aspect of the therapeutic relationship is crucial to work with young people and along with congruence and UPR distinguishes it from the child's normal experience of helping.

THE FULLY FUNCTIONING PERSON

In *On Becoming a Person* (1967), Rogers explored the concept of 'The Fully Functioning Person' which was described as an attempt to look at the person who would emerge from therapy if the 'therapy were maximally successful'. The characteristic qualities of the process towards actualisation were described as:

- An increasing openness to experience. He writes:

  This phrase has come to have more and more meaning for me. It is the polar opposite of defensiveness. Defensiveness I have described in the past as being the organism's response to experiences which are perceived or anticipated as threatening, as incongruent with the individual's existing picture of himself in relationship to the world. (Rogers, 1967: 115)

- Increasingly existential living which is described as an 'increasing tendency to live fully in each moment'; and; finally,
- An increasing trust in his organism which meant people:

  who are able to trust their total organismic reaction to a new situation because they discover to an ever-increasing degree that if they are open to their experience, doing what 'feels right' proves to be a competent and trustworthy guide to behaviour which is truly satisfying. (1967: 189)

OTHER INFLUENTIAL THEORISTS

Up until this point this book has adopted a rather purist position, largely building ideas around the life and work of Carl Rogers. However, this is not the intention and I would like to close this chapter with a very brief look at related theorists and practitioners who have contributed to the humanistic and existential approach and which may have real relevance to those adults who want to understand their work with children and young people in more depth. Only brief reference can be made here and the reader is encouraged to follow up with their own research, where interest dictates.

Martin Buber (1878–1965) was an influential Jewish thinker whose most famous work *I and Thou* was first published in German in 1923 and focused on what constituted an authentic relationship. He described the 'I–It' relationship as that which is akin to how we view objects and people as roles. This may be understood in this way:

> Rather than truly making ourselves completely available to [people] understanding them, sharing totally with them, really talking with them, we observe them or keep part of ourselves outside the moment of the relationship. We do so either to protect our vulnerabilities or to get them to respond in some preconceived way. (Jewish Virtual Library, 2008)

Conversely the 'I–Thou' relationship enables us to: 'place ourselves completely into a relationship, to truly understand and "be there" with another person, without masks, pretences, even without words' (Jewish Virtual Library, 2008).

The comparisons with Rogers are not hard to see and the relevance to the adult working with children and young people is marked.

Victor Frankl (1905–1997) was born and educated in Vienna. He survived a number of concentration camp experiences, including Auschwitz. Amongst his most important writings is *Man's Search for Meaning* (first published in German in 1946 and later in translation in 1959). It was through these harrowing experiences that Frankl realised the importance of finding 'meaning' in life which he saw as the essence of being human. Those who have worked with young people's sense of hopelessness and meaninglessness might like to read more of Frankl's work.

I have to admit that one of my favourite writers has to be Haim Ginott (1922–1973). His work as a clinical psychologist, parent educator and writer has had a profound influence on how we think about relationships between adults and children. His books include *Between Parent and Child* (1965), *Between Parent and Teenager* (1969) and *Teacher and Child* (1972) and stressed the importance of empathy, listening and respect for children's feelings. These books were of course also about setting boundaries, but their respect for young people has something to say about working with young people in a supportive or therapeutic role. Ginott's ideas have since been developed by his students Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish (1980) and John Gottman (1997).

Rollo May (1909–1994) is regarded as one of the best known and respected existential psychologists. He introduced a number of new existential concepts but is particularly noted for his identification of a number of 'stages' of development, although not in a strict Freudian sense. These were: innocence, rebellion, decision, ordinary and the creative. May was very much concerned with the problems of 'being' in contrast with 'problem-solving'.

Fritz Perls (1893–1970) is an important figure in the history of psychology and is known as the father of Gestalt therapy. 'Gestalt' is a term used to describe the 'whole' which cannot be understood by the examination of the parts which make up this whole. Perls believed that people separate from thoughts and emotions that cause discomfort. This results in a fragmented personality. The aim of therapy is to help people form a meaningful configuration of awareness thereby helping them to

develop a healthy gestalt or wholeness. I believe this resonates with our attempts to work with the 'whole child' rather than with aspects of their experience.

William Glasser's most noted books include *Reality Therapy* (1965), *Schools Without Failure* (1969) and *The Quality School* (1990). In contrast to psychodynamic approaches, Glasser focused more on personal choice and personal responsibility. He is particularly noted for this 'control theory' later known as 'choice theory' which states that many of our behaviours are chosen and that we are driven by basic needs such as, survival, love, belonging, power, freedom and fun. Whilst these are all of great significance to those practitioners trying to make sense of and work with young people, undoubtedly the need for love and belonging are perhaps the strongest. Many of Glasser's ideas were extended into educational settings. He concluded that many behaviour problems in the classroom experienced by teachers are where young people are attempting to fulfil their need for power. The experience of young people at home and in school is that of feeling powerless. Glasser helps us to understand why young people behave in ways that may cause distress in others.

The reader may also like to consider the contributions made by psychologists such as Eric Fromm (1900–1980) and Clark Moustakas (b. 1923) who considered questions such as what it means to be 'human'.

In recent years, we have seen considerable development in the world of the person-centred approach and indeed we have seen significant collaboration internationally by those who want to challenge, extend and evolve the approach. This is evidenced by the establishment of The World Association for Person-centred and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counselling and its influential journal *Person-centred and Experiential Psychotherapies*. Key modern writers in the field of the person-centred approach include Michael Behr, working in Germany, Peter Schmid and Margaret Warner. Other writers and practitioners in the field include Mick Cooper, Sheila Haugh, Suzanne Keys and Brian Levitt. A full list of contemporary contributors to developments in the person-centred approach can be found on the PCCS Books website (see useful organisations).

Having immersed ourselves in ideas, this book now turns its attention to more practical issues surrounding supporting and counselling children and young people.

EXERCISES

1. Think back to your childhood. What were some of your 'conditions of worth'? Share these with another person in your group.
2. How real or congruent are you able to be? Does this change with the nature of your relationships? What does it feel like to be incongruent?
3. What does it feel like to be judged by another person who is listening to you? How might you feel? Role-play this with a another group member.
4. Talk about a time when you have felt really empathic. How did this affect how you related to the other person. What was happening to you?