



# An Holistic, Humanistic Perspective on Music Therapy: Integrating Carl Rogers' Person-Centred Approach

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## Introduction

This poster considers a humanistic perspective on music therapy and the potential of Carl Rogers' 'necessary and sufficient conditions' as a foundation for this approach (Rogers, 1959, cited in Wood, 2008). The person-centred approach emphasises that **if clients are "responded to in fundamentally positive, respectful and empathic ways... Rogers observed that individuals grew in a positive, prosocial direction"** (Bohart, 2013, p. 94). Informed by a non-normative, social model of disability (Gross, 2018; Pickard, In Press), parallels are considered between the necessary and sufficient conditions and music therapy practice, to demonstrate the potential of the client as the authority and agent for change – engaging the body and soul, heart and brain in a holistic music therapy practice.

## Carl Rogers' Person-Centred Approach

Rogers developed his work in 1959, in response to behaviourist and psychodynamic traditions of the time, and asserted that the following *necessary and sufficient conditions* would facilitate psychological growth:

1. Two persons are in **psychological contact**.
2. The first, whom we shall term **the client**, is in a state of **incongruence**.
3. The second person, whom we shall term **the therapist**, is **congruent**.
4. The therapist experiences **unconditional positive regard** for the client.
5. The therapist experiences an **empathic understanding** of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavours to communicate this experience to the client.
6. The **communication** to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a *minimal degree* achieved.



Person-Centred Music Therapy session where the music therapist maintains unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding of the client's experience

Rogers believed in "the innate capacity of each person to reach towards full potential if given a **safe, person-centred environment for growth**" (Rogers 2013, p. 240). This sentiment strongly echoes a social model of disability perspective (Goodley, 2017), which looks not to impose change through therapy in light of perceived deficits or deficiencies, but rather to recognise the individual's capacity and potential for growth, given a conducive climate and therapeutic relationship.

## Person-Centred Music Therapy

Music therapy, as a non-verbal medium, provides an optimum opportunity for a therapeutic relationship and 'environment for growth' (Rogers, 2013) to be nurtured. Psychological contact can be established through a range of non-verbal methods, including communicative musicality (Malloch and Trevarthen, 2010) and vitality affects (Stern, 2010). If the client is not ready to engage in psychological contact, Prouty's method of pre-therapy and contact reflections can be readily translated into music therapy techniques, as summarised by Pickard (In Press). Unconditional positive regard can be maintained in the improvised and responsive nature of music making, with acceptance and suspension of judgement for the client's musical choices. Communication to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard can be achieved through verbal, affective or musical dialogues, moving away from the hierarchy of verbal language. This brief discussion is a simplistic introduction to this approach and it should be emphasised that the necessary and sufficient conditions should be understood and applied as a fundamental attitude, "a way of being... a set of principles for living rather than a set of professional practices" (Sanders, 2006, p. 11).

## Conclusion

While Rogers' approach was developed for a verbal medium, he openly recognised its relevance to any relationship, not solely that of verbal counsellor and client. While some therapeutic frameworks aim to ameliorate, change or adapt behaviour or experience, **a humanistic lens for music therapy practice enables alignment with a social model perspective, providing opportunity to be "humbled before the mystery of others... wishing only to acknowledge and respect them... an almost aesthetic appreciation of the uniqueness and otherness of the client"** (Grant, 1990, p. 83). It is hoped that this discussion gives some substance to the use of the term 'person-centred' and provides food for thought about the climate we provide for our clients in music therapy.

## References

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