

Rogers' Three Conditions, Classroom Edition

Carl Rogers argued learning flourishes under three relational conditions. Here is what each looks like with thirty learners and a curriculum.

REGARD

Unconditional positive regard

The learner's worth is never the variable. Behaviour gets challenged; belonging never does.

In class: That choice broke our rules and there is a consequence. You being part of this class is not in question.

EMPATHY

Empathy

See the task from inside the learner's experience before responding to the surface behaviour.

In class: Before reacting to the unfinished homework: what would make a capable kid avoid this task?

GENUINE

Congruence

Be a person, not a role. Learners trust teachers whose words, tone and actions match.

In class: I marked these late because I overcommitted this week. Here is the new plan.

FRAME

Structure is not the enemy

Rogers' conditions describe the relationship, not the absence of routines. Warm AND organised beats either alone.

In class: Clear routines, consistently applied, delivered with warmth: the conditions live inside the structure.

Regard Under Pressure

The conditions are easy on a good day. These scripts are for the other days.

Worth vs behaviour

Separate the person from the choice, explicitly, every time.

Say: "I am not cross with you; I am dealing with what happened. Those are different things."

Empathy before correction

One sentence of understanding buys ten of cooperation.

Say: "This topic has been a wall for you all week, and you kept coming back. Let's fix the next step."

Genuine, not performed

Honest and boundaried beats scripted warmth.

Say: "I find this class hard after lunch too. Here is what will help us both."

Repair from the adult

When you get it wrong, model the apology you want to see.

Say: "I snapped earlier and that was not fair on you. We start again."

Owning My Learning

Rogers' bet: learners who evaluate their own work grow faster than learners who only receive evaluation. Weekly prompts for self-direction.

Where am I?

Judge your own work against the criteria before anyone else does.

In class: Against criterion two, my weakest section is the conclusion, because it repeats instead of deciding.

What helped?

Name what actually moved your learning this week, not what filled the time.

In class: Redoing the diagram from memory helped more than re-reading the page.

What next?

Choose your next step before asking for one.

In class: Next lesson I start with the two questions I got wrong, not the ones I like.

Who can I ask?

Knowing when and whom to ask is self-direction, not weakness.

In class: I need two minutes with the teacher on step three; Priya can help me check step one.

A Person-Centred Audit

Honest self-check, once per half-term. Conditions are habits under load, not values on a poster.

Regard

- Consequences this week separated the behaviour from the learner's worth, out loud.

- No learner was discussed in the staff room in terms I would not use to their face.

- The learners I find hardest got at least one positive, genuine interaction.

Empathy and congruence

- Before correcting a pattern, I asked what the behaviour was solving for the learner.

- I admitted at least one mistake or limit to a class, plainly.

- My praise this week was specific and true, not management by compliment.

Self-direction

- Learners self-assessed against criteria before receiving my marks.

- At least one piece of work offered a genuine choice of route or topic.

- A learner-led question changed part of a lesson this week.

Person-Centred Education: A 5-Minute Evidence Briefing

What the evidence supports, and where the humanistic claims outrun it.

■ The relationship effect is real and sizeable

Across 119 studies and 355,000 learners, learner-centred relationships correlate with outcomes at $r = .31$, above most educational innovations, strongest for engagement and participation.

■ Empathy and regard are the active variables

Within the person-centred bundle, teacher empathy and positive regard carry the strongest associations with learning, ahead of techniques like non-directivity.

■ Facilitation does not mean stepping back

The evidence favours warm relationships combined with clear structure and explicit teaching. Reading Rogers as a licence for unguided discovery imports a method his evidence base does not support.

■ The honest caveat

This literature is overwhelmingly correlational: strong relationships may partly result from achievement as well as cause it. Treat the conditions as professional ethics with empirical support, not as a teaching method.

Evidence base

Cornelius-White, J.H.D. (2007). Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: a meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*.

Emslander, V. et al. (2025). Teacher-student relationships and student outcomes: a systematic second-order meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*.

Rogers, C.R. (1969). *Freedom to Learn*. Merrill.