

Humanistic Approach in EFL Classes

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Seo Eun-mi. 2000. **Humanistic Approach in EFL Classes.** *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Korea*, 8(3), 109-122. Humanistic education comes from humanistic psychology which emphasizes the inner nature of person. Humanistic approach is learner-centered since learners' feelings and emotions are considered important. In the humanistic classroom, students like to work in pairs and groups to share their experiences and memories in a very comfortable atmosphere. In this paper, I researched the effects of humanistic education and how teachers can use various activities to motivate shy Korean students. It is highly recommended to use this method in the EFL classroom. **(Howon University)**

I. Introduction

According to Stevick (1980), "success in language learning depends on what goes on inside and between people in the classroom." This means that the classroom atmosphere is crucial in learning a foreign language. It is necessary to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere for the students. The relationship between teachers and students plays an important role in the humanistic classroom. Teachers should treat students with love. Without the teacher's concern and affection, we cannot expect the best performance of our students.

How can we teach English effectively to our students? This is the fundamental question that most English teachers have. There are lots of teaching methods we can use in our classes. However, we cannot say that there is a single best method in the world. Teachers should try to use different methods and techniques as much as possible to find out which methods work well for the students. The humanistic approach is one of the innovative methods which we can apply in English as a

Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Students will be motivated and they will reduce their affective filter in the humanistic classroom. Most Korean students are intimidated by the teacher-dominated atmosphere in the traditional classroom. Students have studied English taught by drill sergeant through the grammar translation method and audio-lingual method. Students had to memorize a lot of rules to get high score in their college entrance examination. Even though some students got high score in their written English examinations, they could not speak English fluently. The humanistic approach is a learner centered way because the classes will be centered on learners' interests. Through group work and collaborative work, students learn English in a very comfortable atmosphere. Group work is a good way to break the isolation which some students feel.

The humanistic approach is related to the whole language approach. The individual student is important as a whole person in the humanistic classroom. Talking about students' own growth and development, sharing what is important to them and participating personally are valued areas of communication. Human feelings and emotions are considered important in the humanistic approach. When students talk about interesting experiences or memories, they are motivated to talk even though they sometimes make grammatical mistakes.

2. Humanistic Education

What is the humanistic education? What are the effects of using humanistic approach to the EFL students? Humanistic psychology and education are the underlying theory of the humanistic approach. It is necessary to explore the concept of humanistic education to apply this theory in the foreign language classroom.

Humanistic education comes from humanistic psychology which emphasizes the inner nature of a person and personal experiences. When the teachers treat students with love and make them comfortable, the

students' affective filter is lower and they are not afraid of talking. This is the basic concept of humanistic education.

According to Rowan (1988), "confluent education" and "the open classroom" are sometimes used to describe humanistic education. It is described as affective, confluent, psychological, emotional or humanistic education. The aim of humanistic education is combining the subject matter to be learned with the feelings, emotions, acceptance and lives of the learners (Moskowitz, 1978). The concept of a learning community also come out of the humanistic viewpoint. It is psychology of self-discovery and awareness. In the humanistic education, the following is considered important:

- (1) Choice or control: We encourage students to exercise more control over the choices concerning the course of their education- both their education goals and their day-to-day activities
- (2) Felt concern: As education becomes more humanistic, the curriculum tends to focus more and more on the felt concerns and interests of the students.
- (3) The whole person: We pay attention to feeling, choosing, communicating and acting with students about their dreams as well as their thoughts and actions.
- (4) Self-evaluation: Learners more and more are encouraged to evaluate their own learning progress, occasionally choosing to take tests or asking for others' feedback or gathering data about themselves.

Humanistic education requires various teacher's roles for the benefit of the students. When students work together for the cooperative project in the humanistic classroom, teachers become inquirer, creator, observer, and facilitator.

McDonell (1992) elaborates about the teacher's role in the cooperative classroom. Teachers are considered as inquirer, creator, observer, and

facilitator. Fullan (1982) sees teacher as change agent. According to Fullan, the degree of change at the teacher level is strongly related to the extent teachers interact with one another (Fullan, 1982). Success at the school level relies on the collegiality among teachers. Sufficient trust and openness needs to be present so that teachers will be able to share ideas, ask one another for help, come to value collegial support and interdependence and be willing to learn and develop on the job. (Mcdonell, 1992a)

3. The Humanistic Approach in Teaching Languages

How can we apply the humanistic approach in teaching foreign languages? Humanistic education emphasizes the importance of the learner as a whole person. The teacher's job is to help students to see the positive aspects of themselves. Teachers should treat students equally in the classroom. The teachers' warm personality influences foreign students, especially when they are at the beginning level. If a teacher encourages students to speak, they will try even though they may not make complete and correct utterances.

As long as students have positive thinking about their learning, they can be successful foreign language learners. Students should not be disappointed with their language performance even though they do not progress well. Students need to realize that learning a foreign language is a great adventure and helps their brain development.

In the humanistic classroom, different types of group works are used. Teachers can formulate group work depending on the number of the students. In most cases, Korean students are not used to group work. Students can learn a lot from their peers while they are working together. Everybody will try to contribute something relevant for their topic to make good teamwork. In the group work, especially, in the beginning level of the students, there should be a leader who is a better performing student.

There are a few types of collaborative groups suggested by Peregoy

and Boyle (1993, p.69) which teachers can use in the humanistic classroom. The following techniques in the table are used for second language students. However, teachers can modify the techniques to use in the EFL classroom.

Table 1. A Few Types of Collaborative Groups (Boyle, 1993)

Type	Procedure	Purpose
Buddy system	Pair students; one more capable is paired with less proficient in English. The buddy helps the student in and out of the class until the second language learner becomes proficient and knowledgeable about class and school routines.	Helps new second language learner become a member of the classroom society. Helps student become comfortable in the school.
Writing response groups	Students share that writing with one another, concentrate on what is good in the paper, and help one another improve their writing. The teacher begins by modeling good response partners and giving students specific strategies for improving their papers.	Writing response groups have several purposes, making students independent, helping students improve their writing and giving students an audience for their writing and immediate response to their writing.
Literature response groups	Teacher first models response to literature, emphasizing the variety of acceptable responses. Students learn to value individual feelings first and later on structure and form of literature.	To help students use their own background knowledge to respond to literature. To value students' individual responses and to help them become independent readers of literature.
Cooperative groups	Students are given specific roles and responsibilities for group work. Students become responsible for the success of one another and they teach and learn from one another, creating success for all members of the group.	Build individual and group responsibility for learning. Build success for all members of the group. Develop creative, active learners.

These activities can be used in the humanistic language classroom.

Students can learn about the foreign language by working together with their peers. For example, with the buddy system, better performing students can help less able students. Students may feel more comfortable getting help from their peers than asking help from the teacher. In the cooperative project, students learn how to contribute their ideas to a complete group task.

There are some advantages of group work in the foreign language classrooms. Cooperative group work helps students a lot in a positive way. Teachers in traditional classroom do most of the talking which is typical in the Korean classrooms. Olsen and Kagan (1992) suggest that the benefits of cooperative group work in language classroom.

“Increased quantities of communication offered through cooperative group work can be important for the limited proficiency English proficient students because more communication is available for intake.

- (1) Increased active communication
- (2) Increased complexity of communication
- (3) Increased communication
- (4) Social language development

Learners become more proficient at language as a result of group work because they have more comprehensible input through peer interaction. They have better listening skills as a result of responding and acting on what has been said. They receive immediate response to their participation. They build on the talk of others through elaboration and restatement. They have longer conversational turns than in the whole-class teaching situation. They consult with each other to seek opinions and information. They exchange information about ideas, feelings, and needs (McDonell, 1992b)”

Through group work, students can develop social and affective strategy which are helpful for language learning. Social and affective strategy involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over a learning activity. Learners should work with peers to solve a problem, pool information, check notes, or get feedback on a

learning activity (O'Mally & Chamot, 1993). When students work together, they can learn from each other.

4. Activities using humanistic approaches

Various methods can be used in the humanistic classroom. The following activities will help teachers to motivate shy Korean students in a comfortable atmosphere. Students will relax while they are doing the following activities because making mistakes is accepted as long as they are not critical. The students will be doing the following activities in pairs and groups in a nonthreatening atmosphere. After these classes, students will learn how to respect their classmates and help each other.

I have used the different activities in my sophomore "Practical English class" and students liked doing the activities to break the ices.

4.1 Greetings

Remembering students' name is most important as for teacher. When teacher remembers students' name, students will feel closer and belonged in the class as a member. Especially, if foreign teachers call Korean students' name correctly and clearly, students will appreciate for it. How do teachers remember student's name in a large class? Howon University have new system from the fall semester, 2000. We put the student's picture in the class record book to help teachers recognize students' face.

According to Wong (1998), "significant people use significant words and actions to increase positive behaviors." How can teachers help students to create positive behaviors? Teachers need to use "please" and smile. The teacher's warm attitude toward students will lower students' affective filter. Wong (1998) also says, " a smile is like that extra garnish on the dinner plate, the extra pat on the back when a job has been done well or an extra hug." With their teachers' bright smile,

students may start their English classes in a comfortable atmosphere. It will not be great effort for teachers to smile.

4.2 Using Quotes

A good way to begin class is with quotes. It is one way of using authentic materials from real life situations. Using quotes in the classroom is the good way to motivate students. Teachers can use various quotes from sources such as movie scripts, novels, magazines or songs. Students think about the meaning of the quotes and learn important expressions. Students can practice substitution drills using quotes. Many students like to memorize interesting quotes and it helps them to be interested in English.

4.3 Cocktail party

Teachers can have a cocktail party regarding the subject or content which students are studying. It is possible to have a cocktail party if there are less than 20 students. Teachers can make questions about the content they have studied in the previous hours. Using stop watch will help students talk with different partners. After three or five minutes, teacher can give signal to change partners. In this way, students can share their ideas with different partners as many as possible.

During the cocktail party, students will share their ideas about certain topics with as many classmates as possible. If teacher plays quiet music, there will be real cocktail party atmosphere. Korean students are not used to sharing their ideas freely with their classmates. In this way, they will learn how to share their ideas in a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere. Examples of questions are:

- (1) What is your name and what is the meaning of your first name?
(Most Korean students have meanings in their first name because Koreans use Chinese character in names. It is interesting to find

out the meaning of students' first name in English. For example, "Eun" means 'silver' and "Mi" means 'beauty.')

- (2) How do you describe yourself with four adjectives? (Students can describe themselves such as passionate, energetic, sweet and patient.)
- (3) How do you like to spend your free time?
(I like to spend my free time with the people who think positively.)
- (4) What can you do very well? What is your strong point?
(I can do well in budget traveling.)

With these topics, students as many their ideas as possible with their classmates.

4.4 Mood thermometer

Moskowitz (1978) introduces using a mood thermometer in the humanistic classroom. It helps teachers to find out students' mood on a particular day. Students will respect each classmate's feeling and learn how to respect each other. In the beginning, some students may not have good feelings because of various reasons. However, by using humanistic methods, their feelings can be changed. This is the purpose of using a mood thermometer in the classroom.

4.5 Favorite moments with music

Music makes us think a lot of things. Music has great impact in human lives. Teachers can play quiet music and ask students about their favorite moments. The teacher can share his/her favorite moments first to give students some ideas. Students like to hear about teacher's experience. Most of the students enjoy thinking about their favorite moments while quiet music is playing. Teachers can ask students to bring their favorite music to use in the classroom. They will love to

share their favorite music and they will feel more responsible for the classes.

Music can be used effectively to motivate students in different ways. Music can be used as a background music while students are working.

4.6 Stating "I can do it principles"

It is a good idea for students to remember some positive statements whenever they are disappointed with their academic ability. This method is used to encourage students' affective side of life which is very important in learning foreign languages. The following positive statements will encourage students. The statements are from Oxford (1990).

- " I can understand almost everything the teacher said today.
- * I didn't get paralyzed when I made an error today. I just kept right on going.
- * I took a risk in using a new expression today, and I am glad I did it.
- * It was hard for me to talk in English class today. I am glad I did it.
- * I held a very successful conversation in English today.
- * I am a good language learner.
- * I am confident and secure in language learning.
- * I am progressing well in my language learning.
- * It is OK if I take risks in language learning.
- * Everybody makes mistakes: I can learn from mine.
- * I don't have to understand everything all at once.
- * I can tolerate a bit of confusion.
- * My warm personality helps me in language learning.
- * I can get the general meaning without knowing every word.
- * I can tell my fluency is increasing."

In groups of four, each student will have four or five different statements written in a strip. They will have to memorize these statements and share their opinions and experiences with their

classmates in learning foreign languages. Many students like to recall their painful learning experiences with their classmates. Students will learn a lot from their classmates' mistakes and experiences. It can be very interesting activity.

5. Feedback

Underhill (1989) emphasizes the importance of feedback in the humanistic classroom.. Teachers should share during activities so the students get better acquainted with the teacher as a human being. It is better to use larger groups when students give one another positive feedback so they hear a greater variety of good things about themselves. Teachers should try to give more positive feedback to the students. If students get negative feedback from the teacher, they will be discouraged. If teachers want to correct students' mistakes, they have to give comments in a gentle way to not hurt students' feeling. Especially, shy students have very fragile language ego. They need more support and encouragement from the teacher. Teachers will give feedback in a non-threatening way based on the following questions.

- (1) Is the feedback deliberate?
- (2) Is it related to what the receiver is working on?
- (3) Is it given in a form that is readily understood and which does not distract the learners from what they are working on?
- (4) Is it given with the intention of helping the receivers to become more aware of what they are doing and of what they become more autonomous?
- (5) Is it neutral in that it is neither criticism nor congratulation, yet given supportively?
- (6) Is it not necessarily evaluative, yet encouraging self-evaluation?
- (7) Does it aim to be devoid of the teacher's personal projection?"

6. Implication

Significant improvement was found in the humanistic classes used by the teachers in several schools. I have also used humanistic approach in my classes. Students have changed their attitude toward learning the target language. They broke the thick language barrier which interrupts their performance. They accepted their classmates as friendship community. They liked to help each other to learn better. The most important thing was that they enjoyed using the target language to share their different memories and experiences. They learned how to use English to express their feelings. They realized that making mistakes were not hindrance to communicate with their classmates. Communication is more important than using correct grammar. Once students have self confidence, they can be successful language learner.

It is recommend to use different humanistic activities in the foreign language classrooms.

7. Conclusion

Foreign language teachers know very well that there is no panacea in learning and teaching foreign languages when we reflect the history of language teaching.

Teachers cannot use one single method in our classes. Teachers will have the main textbook they have to use. However, different methods and approaches will be used to supplement the main lesson. Using the humanistic method will be effective in the English classroom. Teachers can use it to cheer up students.

Humanistic education comes from humanistic psychology which emphasizes the inner nature of a person. When teachers treat students with love and make them comfortable, students' affective filters are lower and they are not afraid of talking. This is the basic concept of humanistic education. Prapphal (1993, p361) says that "students will be

teachers' partner in the long teaching journey. A humanistic approach encourages students' participation in English classroom. It also helps promote positive attitude toward English and peer teaching as well as teaching students to work together and developing their cognitive abilities."

Teaching English is very challenging job. We teachers have great responsibility to help our students. The more we teachers put into our efforts, the better results we can get from our students. Teaching and learning are endless journey in our life.

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