Towards Humanizing ELT

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Abstract: The term “humanizer” first coined by Dr. Gomes de Matos [1] signifying a person imbued with the values of human rights and who applies them in their personal and professional life. In the heart of humanism, a kind of freedom in talk-a democratic talk- is observed. The author claimed if this democratic talk is valued [humanized] so that students can be allowed to speak from their vantage points, learning can be facilitated. It lends to the support that we humanize ourselves through dialogue with others. Furthermore, the paper is an attempt to persuade teachers that having a politically clear stance in the class towards and with students is certainly a step forward.

Key words: Humanizer - Humanization - Autonomy - Democracy

INTRODUCTION

The desire on the part of students and teachers to be the object of primacy in the world of meaningful action is plausible. Stevick [2] recommends teachers to take a serious attention to what goes on inside and between their students. What he criticizes is that teachers should stop constant evaluating, praising and blaming students but should enable students to reconcile their performing self and their critical self to provide a harmony between them. This entails paving the ways for students to be engaged in the activities of the class.

To be human is to exist with and for others [3]. Put another way, the basic form of humanity, according to Barth [4] cited in Latini [3], is “being-in-encounter” (p. 22). This encounter consists of mutual seeing, hearing, speaking and assisting one another with gladness. As Freire employed the term, humanization is the desired relationship between students and teachers and ultimately between all persons; a relationship constructed on the basis of mutual trust and respect and the prevailing freedom to reason [5]. Put differently, for an encounter to be created, a sophisticated degree of empathy must be built; otherwise, detachment replaces attachment and humanized teaching blocks.

We humanize ourselves, as Freire [6] argues, to the extent that we engage in praxis. Praxis involves a give-and-take relationship between theory and practice-between theorizing practice and practicing theory. As Freir [7,8] warns “Cut-off from practice theory becomes a simple verbalism and separated from theory is nothing but blind activism” (p. 1-2). In Freire’s philosophy, praxis and dialogue are closely related: genuine dialogue represents a form of humanizing praxis. If praxis is to be humanizing, dialogical communication must involve a love of the world and of other human beings.

Undeniably, in order for students to be humanized, the teacher too must be humanized which is neither measurable nor quantifiable. Along the same line, Dale & Hyslop-Margison [5] analogizing humanization with love contends humanization is not a reproducible, quantifiable or measurable concept since respect for the reasoning capacity of others cannot be assessed in a systematic way consistent with positivist protocols. To better appreciate the concept of humanization, a counter argument is worth a moment. In Freire’s [6] view, dehumanization is reciprocal and existential. If a teacher dehumanizes students, then the teacher too is dehumanized. As Freire insists humans cannot be fully human while they dehumanize others. Yet, in critical pedagogy, Freire maintained that dehumanization’s resolution is not within the grasp of the oppressors but it resides in the hands of the oppressed. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors’ power to dominate and suppress, they restored to the oppressors...
the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. Thus, the paper is an attempt to see how this dehumanization is resolved. Better to say how they can teacher humanize his/her students?

**Literature Review:**

**The Philosophical Foundations of Humanistic Education:**

The philosophy behind humanistic education has been emanated from diverse perspectives. To better appreciate such a variety in attitudes, Gadd [9] makes a distinction between romantic, pragmatic and rhetorical views toward humanism. Romantic humanists often claim that by touching the students' emotions and invoking their inner selves, they will encourage more successful language learning. According to this view, people learn language better if they have a meaningful experience. What is ironical is that romantic humanist educators often claim to be concerned with the whole person, while systematically excluding so many aspects of human life [9]. This romantic tradition which is inspired by the work of Rousseau holds the essence of being human is to be a member of a community engaging in debate and action. Pragmatic humanism argues that, “for teachers to respond most effectively to their students’ needs they must understand their motivations, attitudes, reactions and cognitive strength and weaknesses-in short their psychology” (p. 233). Accordingly, Gadd claims, “this form of humanism can be a useful part of the teacher’s armoury” (p.233). This makes teachers to be sensitive to the great diversity of language (i.e. the worlds of factual knowledge, business, politics, etc) in the public sphere. Rhetorical views toward humanism holds that rather than being encouraged to express their feeling students are taught a variety of language skills and spoken/written genres for use in the public sphere with a detailed focusing on textual organization and grammars. These skills included how to argue a case make a speech, etc.

To further appreciate the philosophical foundations of humanistic education, Aloni [10] cited in Veugelers [11] distinguished four approaches: (1) the cultural-classical, (2) the naturalistic-romantic, (3) the existential and (4) the critical-radical approach. From the cultural-classical tradition, we can learn that developing rationality, autonomy and knowledge about human traditions can strengthen a persons’ agency and develop efficacy in learning and in the world as a whole. The naturalistic-romantic tradition shows that giving space to personal interest can make learning meaningful to the learner. The existential tradition also implies that a human being must be let develop his own meaning system and one has the moral obligation to take care of humanity. The critical-radical tradition shows that possibilities for learning are not equally distributed in the world.

Considering such a paradigm, according to Grundy [12] cited in Hall [12] shows a shift towards humanistic (and more humane) teaching emerged partly as a reaction to the de-humanizing ‘science’ of Audiolingualism, but also as part of the late 1960s and early 1970s social unrest and student protests in Europe and the USA. Accordingly, Grundy, further, outlined the key concerns of the humanistic approaches as:

- Respect for learners as people.
- Respect for the learners’ knowledge and independence
- Recognize the affective (i.e. emotional) as well as cognitive nature of the learning experience
- Recognize the role of self-discovery and of the individual learner’s autonomy and independence
- Teach in an enabling way, regarding teachers as enablers or facilitators who assist learners in their self-discovery rather than as instructors who ‘transmit’ knowledge to learners. [12] pp. 89-90.

In order for teachers to have an educative effect on their students, Aloni [10] by drawing on the work of Buber [13], outlined three traits of a teacher: interpersonal trust, cultural idealism and personality.

- Interpersonal trust connotes that winning students’ trust makes them feel that the teachers are in their side and truly concerned with their growth and well being. Without trust the teacher is assumed as an oppressive enemy who must be tolerated.
- Cultural idealism refers to the awareness, on the one hand, that for something precious it is worth an attempt to achieve and enjoy and that, on the other hand, other things are so base, ugly and vile that one should steer clear of them and under no circumstances come to terms with. There some passions are raised for students to achieve the higher standards. The problem is that such cultural idealism cannot be ‘triggered’ in the students by means of sober thought or scholarly lectures. In order to make it happen, the teachers must be present for their students as culture ‘freaks’: to share with them, in words and gestures. In brief, the teachers’ excited idealistic presence may trigger such a trait in their students.
Personality means, above all, the virtue of ‘practicing what you preach. Such an educator, says Buber, is most effective educationally when not trying to educate at all: he is simply ‘there’, as a sensitive, fair, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, balanced and controlled person. (pp. 38-39)

Towards Humanizing ELT: Pedagogically, the issue of humanization in the field of English language teaching has been rooted in Freire’s liberating education. What Freire proposed as an alternative to banking education is a liberating (questioning) education that involves a process of humanizing people who have been oppressed. Humanization is politically subversive because it empowers oppressed people to question their lives and their position in society. To Freire, the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. In order for the oppressed to become “more fully human” they will need to fight dehumanization. Along the same line, giving students space to talk from their standing point will certainly be a step toward humanizing English language teaching.

According to Bartolome, teachers can humanize instruction by permitting learners to speak from their vantage points and acting as cultural mentors. To permit learners to speak from their vantage points involves creating learning context in which learners can empower themselves throughout the strategic learning process. As Fines contends, creative positive, supportive learning environments—is the starting point in valuing students; however, we must do more than merely remove negatives if we are to place the highest priority on the humans we are educating. Acting as cultural mentors entails introducing learners not only to culture of the classroom, but to the subject and discourse styles. In fact, as Fines maintains, a teacher is a humanizer if he (1) treats students as persons having rights and personalities; (2) emphasizes the strength employed by students; and (3) helps students protect his/her identity. On the whole, Bartolome outlines two approaches in humanizing ELT:

- Culturally responsive instruction is an attempt to create instructional situations where the teacher uses teaching approaches and strategies that recognize and build on culturally different ways of learning, behaving and using in the classroom.
- Strategic teaching refers to explicit teaching students learning strategies that enable them consciously to monitor their own learning (e.g. teaching through graphic organizers: graphic organizers are visual maps that represent the structure and organization of texts).

Dr. Gomes de Matos characterized the mission of “humanizers” as that of providing language learners with dignifying and edifying learning experiences. Accordingly, in Gomes’s approach to having a peaceful communication, four principles are outlined: (1) love your communicative neighbor (implying that every human being, as use of language communicate caringly, compassionately, cordially); (2) dignify your daily dialogue; (3) prioritize positivizers in your language use (e.g. dignity is practiced by employing words that convey positive meanings); and (4) be a communicator humanizer (i.e. communicating in a humanized way that is inspired by the ideals of dignity, human rights, peace, justice and equality).

Political Clarity to Enhance Humanization: Freir says in addition to possessing content area knowledge, teachers must possess political clarity to be able to effectively create, adopt and modify teaching strategies that simultaneously respect and challenge learners from diverse cultural groups. To Bartolome, political awareness refers to the process by which individuals achieve a deepening awareness of the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives and their capacities to create them. It refers to the process by which individuals come to better understand possible linkages between macro-level political, economic and social variables and micro-level academic performance at classroom. Schools, for instance, is the manifestation of both positive and negative aspects of society. Thus, the unequal relationship between teachers and students must be verified. One way to increase the teacher’s political clarity is creating democratic learning environments where students become accustomed to being treated as competent and able individuals. For democracy to be present in classes the lateralization of power must be absent; on the other words, power must be shared between teacher and students. Elsewhere, Bartelome holds, “the students once accustomed to the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship in the classroom will come to expect respectful treatment and authentic estimation in other contexts” (p. 179).
Accordingly, Francisco [16] claims developing a sense of political clarity will allow teachers to view themselves as subject in the process of development and not objects without a voice. Having a political clarity on the part of teachers gives students a sense of trust and autonomy that take charge of their own earning. They act as a producer rather than a mere consumer in the class.

A teacher who lacks political clarity dehumanizes the nature of instruction. Furthermore, the strength of a method depends first and foremost, on the degree to which they embrace a humanized pedagogy that value students’ background knowledge, culture and life experience and culture which empower the learners to forge a cultural democracy so that they are treated with respects and dignity.

**Humanism and Autonomy:** For Holec [17] and Little [18], autonomy is an ability that has to be acquired and is separate from the learning that may take place when autonomy has been acquired. Such acquisition of autonomy brings two different processes into play. The first of these is a gradual deconditioning process which will cause the learner to break away from ideas such as: there is one ideal method; the teacher possess that method; knowledge of the mother tongue is of no use for learning a second language; experience gained as a learner of other subjects cannot be transferred; and he/she is incapable of making any valid assessment of performance. And the second consists of acquiring the knowledge and know-how needed in order to assume responsibility for learning. As Holec [17] holds:

It is through the parallel operation of these two processes that the learner will gradually precede from a position of dependence to one of independence, from a non-autonomous state to an autonomous one. (p.27)

Autonomy cannot be created without the other. In fact, as Veugelers [11] claims autonomy without social involvement would imply an extremely individualistic position. Social involvement without autonomy would merely imply adaptation. The tension between autonomy and social involvement is the core of humanism. In fact, education supports persons in their development. Put differently, at the heart of humanistic education, there is a tension between personal autonomy development and social change [11]. From a humanist point of view social change is not possible without strong and critical autonomous people. Autonomy development without an embedding in social change is glorifying the individual not humanity. In a nutshell, autonomy and social concern should be considered as interlinked. Autonomy development should be embedded in social change processes [7].

**Democracy and Humanism:** Said’s [19] definition of humanism is open and democratic. To him, the heart of humanism is critique, which is a form of democratic freedom and a continuous practice of questioning and accumulating knowledge that is open. Said, further, on claiming that damage was done to the study of humanism by structuralists and poststructuralists, holds that understanding the words of others for human mind takes time. He suggests the mind of a humanist demystifies and makes transparent the meaning and origin of words and the ideas that they carry; the humanist is a questioner, one who cultivates a sense of multiple worlds and complex traditions, embraces catholic inclusiveness rather than elitist exclusiveness. Democracy as way of living welcomes differences and disagreements and cherishes as a creative force in society. Humanization’s support of the democratic way is a matter of both idealism and realism. Niebuhr [20,21] contends, “Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary” (p. 286).

Humanization and democracy are foundational elements in Freire’s [6] pedagogy and are not simply reproducible technical concepts; they must be practiced in the classroom. Humanizing education requires creating a particular learning milieu that includes a broad-based respect for students, for their preexisting knowledge and for their agency. Critical teachers, as Dale and Hyslop-Margison [5] says that the teaching and learning environment affects outcomes and that means and ends in education are intrinsically connected. In fact, humanism envisions a republican society where humanists and everyone else can express unorthodox ideas on any subjects without risking persecution, prosecution or execution [21].

**CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

As teachers, we have enormous power in the classroom, but we must strive to use it to create a climate in which students neither are so intimidated that they never challenge us, nor become so infuriated that they revolt. The way the teacher designs his/her courses and interacts with students regulates this power relationship and determines the outcome. To increase classroom cohesion, most teachers in an attempt to provide a
positive classroom climate, strives to establish rapport to facilitate learning, but this kind of relationship might prevent spontaneous conflict in the classroom. As Kearney and Plax [22] claim students who feel alienated from other members of the class and distant from the interests or attention of the teacher are more likely to exhibit aggressive or provocative behavior in class [22]. However, studies show that the caring factor-rapport-has a strong influence on the outcome - if students think the instructor cares about them; they will be more positively-disposed to the course and the instructor [23].

Another factor that exerts positive impact on the humanization of ELT is the kind of language employed by teachers. The sort of language that a teacher makes use while describing a situation would make an everlasting impact on the psyche of a child. That emotions are contagious is a simple, common-sense statement, but its very simplicity tempts us to overlook its profound implications for education. Sensing what others feel captures the basis of human side of communication. Throwing a glance at the literature of humanizing ELT makes it clear for us that education is humanizing when it is critical, dialogical and praxical. Repudiating the notion that education can be neutral, Freire calls on teachers to disclose, but not impose their political views in seeking to practice. In Freire’s philosophy, praxis and dialogue are closely related: genuine dialogue represents a form of humanizing praxis. Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Naming the world is the process of change itself: the human quest to understand and transform the world, through communication with others. If it is to be humanizing, dialogical communication must involve a love of the world and of other human beings. Faith in the ability of others to name the world together with trust between participants and hope that dehumanization can be overcome are necessary. Thus, Freire stipulates that critical thinking is vital if dialogue is to become a humanizing praxis. When these conditions are satisfied and where two or more people communicate with one another in seeking to understand a common object of study, there is, as Freire argues, a true dialogue and an authentic, humanizing praxis.

REFERENCES
