Towards Humanizing ELT: A Pedagogical Look

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Abstract

At the heart of humanism, a kind of freedom in talk—a democratic talk— is observed. The writers 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. 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 humanizing ELT. As an ancillary aim, the paper is an attempt toward operationalizing humanism in language teaching.

Key words: Humanizer; Humanization; Autonomy; Democracy

I. Introduction

The term humanism, as a reaction to behaviorism (Kerr, 2007), was earlier used by a German philosopher Niethammer (Khatib & Ahmadi, 2012, p. 54). Humanism, according to Lamont (1997) is defined as "a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science and democracy" (p. 13). Moskowitz (1997, cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001) also defines humanism as blending of "what the learner feels, thinks and knows with what he is learning in the target language" (p. 90).

To be human is to exist with and for others (Latini, 2009). Put another way, the basic form of humanity, according to Barth (1960, cited in Latini, 2009), is "being-in-encounter" (p. 22). This encounter consists of mutual seeing, hearing, speaking, and assisting one another with gladness. As Freire (1970) goes on to hold that 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. Put differently, for an encounter to be created, a sophisticated degree of empathy must be built; otherwise, detachment replaces attachment and humanized teaching blocks. The purpose of the paper is to investigate how a teacher can step toward ELT humanization, and henceforth how he/she can exploit the techniques available to humanize ELT.

II. Literature Review

The desire on the part of students and teachers to be the object of primacy in the world of meaningful action is plausible. Stevick (1980) recommends that teachers take a serious attention to what goes on inside and between their students. Along the same line,

Arnold (1998) goes on to hold that humanistic language teaching does not mean to substitute the cognitive for the affective, but rather to add the affective. Stevick (1980) also criticizes 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 classroom. In this regard, we humanize ourselves, as Freire (1970) 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 (1985, cited in Monchinski, 2008) 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 and Hyslop-Margison (2010) 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 (1970) 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. Still, 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. Put specifically, how can the teacher humanize his/her students?

The philosophy behind humanistic education has been emanated from diverse perspectives. In this regard, Gadd (1998) 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 (Gadd, 1998). 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, in contrast, 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" (Gadd, 1998, 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 also holds that rather than being encouraged to express their feeling, students are taught a variety of language skills 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, and so forth.

To further appreciate the philosophical foundations of humanistic education, Aloni (2002, cited in Veugelers, 2011) 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 also shows that giving space to personal interest can make learning meaningful to the learner. The *existential tradition* 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 possibility for learning is not equally distributed in the world. In this regard, Grundy (2004, cited in Hall, 2011) claims the shift towards humanistic (and more humane) teaching emerged partly not only 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. (cited in Hall, 2011, pp. 89-90)

In order for teachers to have an educative effect on their students, Aloni (2011) by drawing on the work of Buber (1971), 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)

A. Towards humanizing ELT

Pedagogically, the issue of humanization in the field of English language teaching has been rooted in Freire's (1970) 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 (1994), teachers can also humanize instruction by permitting learners to speak from their vantage points and acting as cultural mentors. Permitting learners to speak from their vantage points involves creating learning context in which learners can empower themselves throughout the strategic learning process. Along the same line, Fines (2008) contends that establishing 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 (Bartolome, 1994). In fact, as Fines (2008) 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 (1994) outlines two approaches in humanizing ELT:

1. *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.

2. *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).

Along the same line, Gomes de Matos (1996) characterizes the mission of "humanizers" as that of providing language learners with *dignifying* and *edifying* learning experiences. Elsewhere, in Gomes de Matos's (2008) approach to having a peaceful communication, four principles are outlined: (1) love your communicative neighbor (i.e., forming an empathy while communicating with others), (2) dignify your daily dialogue (i.e.,

the inherent dignity of all persons should be considered in our communicative acts), (3) prioritize positivizers in your language use (i.e., using peace-enhancing types of words that transfer amicability, and (4) be a communicator humanizer (i.e., language users to communicate in a humanizing way that is inspired by the ideals of dignity).

In this regard, Bartolome (1994) considers having political clarity as a necessity on the part of teachers towards humanizing instruction. Along the same vein, about four decades ago, Freir (1970) asserted that 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. In respect with this type of clarity, Bartolome (1994) continues that 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, are 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 (Bartelome, 1994). For democracy to be present in classes, the lateralization of power must be absent; put differently, power must be shared between teacher and students. Bartelome also 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 (2007) 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.

B. Humanism and autonomy

For Holec (1981) and Little (1991), 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. The second processes consist of acquiring the knowledge and know-how needed in order to assume responsibility for learning. As Holec maintains it is through the

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

Autonomy cannot be created in isolation. In fact, as Veugelers (2011) claims autonomy without social involvement would imply an extremely individualistic position. Social involvement without autonomy would merely imply adaptation. Thus, none of these can be developed without the other. 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 (Veugelers, 2011). 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 (Freire, 1985).

C. Democracy and humanism

Said's (2004) 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. Niebuhur (1994, cited in Lamont, 1997) contends, "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to unjustice makes democracy necessary" (p. 286). Humanization and democracy are foundational elements in Freire's (1970) 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 to Dale and Hyslop-Margison (2010), argue 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 (Lamont, 1997).

III. Conclusion

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. In fact, in humanism, language and peace are integrated as two juxtaposed concepts (Gomes de Matos, 2006). In this regard, 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, strive to establish rapport to facilitate learning, but this kind of relationship might prevent spontaneous conflict in the classroom. Along the same vein, Gomes de Matos insists teachers should teach communicative peace as an element of communicative competence, and also that education programs should provide training to support this approach. As Kearney and Plax (1992) 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 (Kearney & Plax, 1992). 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 (Feldman, 1989).

Another factor that exerts positive impact on the humanization of ELT is the kind of language employed by teachers. The peace-promoting vocabulary employed by teacher will inevitably enhance learning. In other words, the sort of language that a teacher makes use of while describing a situation would make an everlasting impact on the psyche of a child. To give a specific example of peace-promoting vocabulary (i.e., positivizers), imagine a person who is praised by the employment of the prefabricated pattern: *that is fine, excellent, very good, I like it, etc*. How effective that person's performance will be in the rest of the process of learning. The emotion reflected by students, though contagious, is a simple, common-sense statement. However, its very simplicity tempts us to overlook its profound implications for education. What calls a necessity to delve into is that 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 with students, to more deeply understand a given object of study. To educate, in Freirean sense, is to foster reflection and action on both word and world. This entails the rigorous interrogation of texts and contexts, through structured, purposeful dialogue coupled with practical involvement in the struggles of everyday life. 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.

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