

# HUMANIZING IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW

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**Abstract:** This study makes an attempt to capture humanistic approaches in curriculum development by referring first to the philosophy of teaching as well as learning (for example, Constructivism) being the rudimentary determining factor in the process. Not failing to consider the learners intellect, it also requires some understanding of the relationship among students' feelings, physical reactions, and motivation, which, if well-substantiated, leads to designing syllabi mostly left to the learners' own decision known as negotiated or process syllabi. Also by referring to concepts closely linked to humanistic approaches such as discovery learning, experiential learning and the like, the study posits that a humanistic coursebook is the one which treats learner primarily as a human being rather than merely a language learner. Finally, enumerating some potential features of technology, the study hopes to see the upcoming development and evaluation of technology-driven materials enjoying the humanistic element as well.

**Key Words:** course book, curriculum development, humanistic approach, negotiated/process syllabus, syllabus design,

## 1. Introduction

It is not unrealistic to believe that in any setting or situation *syllabus design* and *curriculum development* depend virtually on the *philosophy of teaching and learning*. As Ur (2012) puts, how teachers use the syllabus varies greatly between different countries and institutions, and this depends on *financial resources* as well as on *teaching approach* being based on a certain pedagogic *philosophy*. She asserts that, for example, "in the affluent settings, there may be a policy of allowing teachers complete freedom in designing their teaching program. In these cases the syllabus may be non-existent or ignored, and teachers may develop new, independent programs, based mainly on their preferences and students' needs" (p. 192).

## 2. Philosophy of Humanism

To have a glance at the philosophy of humanism, we need to at least refer to Lamont (1997) who in his elaborated and influential discussion of the subject stipulates passionately that it is within our power to create peace on earth. He points out the need for human solutions, reminding that Humanists should address this critical issue for the hope of resolving many of the human problems. Lamont, primarily known as a strong champion of the equality of sexes, has been valued by many researchers for the gender-free version of his book *The Philosophy of Humanism*. He believed that humans must first be liberated from many fears:

the fears inherited with the dark sanctions of the priests—hell and its lake of fire; the fear of nuclear holocaust; the loss of identity in the sheer bigness of a confused humanity. Later, perhaps, ecstasy and jubilation will return to human living in a setting more honest, more dependable, more enduring than that offered in the revelation imagined by theologians who lacked the discipline of scientific method and the faith of human beings in themselves. (Lamont, 1997, p. 97)

Here it is important to note that three *philosophical traditions* have been identified for curriculum development (see for example, Finney, 2002). These are *Classical Humanism*, *Reconstructionism*, and *Progressivism*. Again it is crucial to point out that the Classical Humanism, by no means having any connection to discussion of educational humanism, relates to the structural grammar/systems approach. As Finney asserts, the central focus of the curriculum in the Classical Humanist tradition is the *content* of what is to be learned by, or transmitted to, the learner. In this model, the content is knowledge, or a valued cultural heritage, which has been identified and agreed to be universal, unchanging and absolute. No attention is exercised to the learners' wants and needs and the whole syllabus is determined by those who believe in certain epistemology in education. This model has been the dominant philosophy of the western educational system for centuries, derived from theories of knowledge attributed to Aristotle and Plato. The Grammar-Translation Method is an expression of Classical Humanism.

However as Kelly (1988, cited in Finney, 2002) contends, as the basis for curriculum development, this model is inadequate because of being unable to cope with a discussion of the wider purpose of education, and does not take into account the abilities or problems of the individual learner or the complexities of the learning process itself. In the field of English language teaching, this model underpins the grammar-based curriculum syllabus which is concerned with the grammar and vocabulary of the language. This model, although, has a place *in content for syllabus design*, as a basis for curriculum development, fails to be the primary factor.

Johnson (2008) referring to some of the methods and courses in which the syllabi focus on the *learning question* in general and not on L1 learning, capitalizes on a set of principles associated with the concept of *humanism*. He identifies various roots for humanism. As he further explains, "one central one is the *discovery learning* movement, particularly associated with the work of the educational psychologist Jerome Bruner in the 1960's. Discovery learning emphasizes the learner's own activity and inquiry rather than the transmission of information by the teacher" (p. 179; see also Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006). Nunan (1999) too, refers to the notion of *experiential learning* which grew out of the process of self-discovery in which the learners are at the center of the learning process:

In experiential learning, the learner's immediate personal experiences are taken as the point of departure for deciding how to organize the learning process....Experiential learning has diverse origins being derived from John Dewey's progressive philosophy of education, Lewin's social psychology, Piaget's model of developmental psychology, Kelly's cognitive theory of education, and the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rodgers in the field of humanistic psychology. What draws these diverse philosophical and academic positions together is the construct of humanism. (Nunan, 1999, p. 5)

Brown (2000) maintains that Rogers's humanistic psychology has more of an affective focus than a cognitive one, and so it may be said to fall into the perspective of a *constructivist* view of learning. Certainly, Rogers and Vygotsky (1978) share some views in common in their highlighting of the social and interactive nature of learning.

To Eyring (2001), experiential learning is a concept as old as Socrates, Confucius, and the Garden of Eden once more emerged in the educational system in the 1960s and 1970s. Eyring (2001) further underscores the democratically organized classrooms of the time and their reliance on *negotiation* in the learning process. For the reason that in the negotiated syllabi, the emphasis is put on the processes involved in learning and not in reaching a predetermined goal, it is not inappropriate to believe in a virtual connection between *negotiated or process syllabi and humanism*. To enumerate some of the premises involved in the negotiated syllabi, White (1988) refers to "professional autonomy of teachers and the exercise of their judgment on the spot" (p. 34). It is here important to add that, as White contends, a negotiated syllabus cannot be without

aims or direction. In the first place:

general principles are defined, and it is these overall, looser aims which provide direction to the curriculum. Implicit in this is a view of education being concerned with intrinsically valuable content, the development of understanding rather than the acquisition of knowledge, and the promotion of individual autonomy and a capacity for continuing learning. (p. 34)

This individual autonomy which White here refers to is undoubtedly one of the basic premises of humanism both in language teaching and curriculum development. Among scores of premises which underlie 'humanistic' education, Moskowitz (1978, cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1998, p.159) enumerates the following:

- 1) A principal purpose of education is to provide learning and an environment that facilitate the achievement of the full potential of students.
- 2) Personal growth as well as cognitive growth is a responsibility of the school. Therefore education should deal with both dimensions of humans: the cognitive or intellectual, and the affective or emotional.
- 3) For learning to be significant, feelings must be recognized and put to use.
- 4) Significant learning is discovered for oneself.
- 5) Human beings want to actualize their potential.
- 6) Having healthy relationships with other classmates is more conducive to learning.
- 7) Learning about oneself is a motivating factor in learning.
- 8) Increasing one's self-esteem is a motivating factor in learning.

Moskowitz (1978) further adds that for classroom activities, there are a number of principles which must be addressed by the instructors:

- 1) Emphasize the positive and avoid a negative focus.
- 2) Low-risk, i.e. non-personally threatening activities, should be used.

Furthermore, in language teaching, humanistic approach, as Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 242) have point out, is a term which may underlie methods in which the following principles are considered as important:

- a) the development of human values,
- b) growth in self-awareness and in the understanding of others,
- c) sensitivity to human feelings and emotions,
- d) active student involvement in learning and in the way learning takes place

(for this last reason such methods are also said to be *student-centered*).

If, for example, instructors consider their learners as whole persons, not only paying attention to their intellect but also having some understanding of the relationship among students' feelings, physical reactions, and desire to learn, determining syllabus is mostly left to the learners' own decision. A case in point is the *community language learning*, considered as an example of humanistic approach in which it is suggested that "students learn best when they have a choice in what they practice" (Larsen-freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 93).

Also according to Johnson and Johnson (1998):

the meaning of *humanistic* as used in the literature of language teaching, especially in the United States, is only tenuously connected with the usual understandings of that word. Indeed, the terms *humanism*, *humanist* and *humanistic* are applied subjectively in the literature, but those employing them convey by *humanism* and *humanistic approaches* language teaching respecting the integrity of learners, allowing for personal growth and responsibility, taking psychological and affective factors into account and representing 'whole-person learning'. (pp. 158-159)

Also in Crystal's (1992) words, "humanistic approaches to foreign language teaching emphasize the need for the student to develop self-awareness, sensitivity to the feelings of others, and a sense of human values. Such approaches require students to be actively involved in understanding the process of learning, as they work with a foreign language" (p. 175). In

the presence of students' overly negative feelings, such as anxiety, fear, stress, anger, depression and the like, their optimal learning potential may be affected. Stevick (1976, cited in Harmer, 2007) "has termed these negative feelings 'alienation' and suggests that to counter these states, humanist approaches are called for" (p. 58). Hadley (2003) surely concurs this perspective when he claims for the beneficial value of *comprehensible input* which is dependent on students being relaxed, unthreatened, and feeling positive. To Hadley (2003) humanistic approaches accentuate that "learning should be aimed at the deeper levels of understanding and personal meaningfulness to be maximally effective" (p. 86). Also Johnson (2001), asserts "the integrity of learners, allowing for personal growth and responsibility, taking psychological and affective factors into account, and representing 'whole person learning' in humanistic orientations" (p. 188).

Also as Richards (2001) explains, the process of humanizing approach begins with identifying the situation, context and students of a particular institution. The needs of the students who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the curriculum will be identified and analyzed as well as other needs to be addressed such as societal needs and specific requirements of the subject. Secondly, the goals will be formulated. The next steps determine the course content, sequences and structure; design course units and modules; and construct the lesson plans. From the formulation of goals and construction of lesson plans, the materials and resources are considered in the context of the institution. The profile of the teachers in terms of training, experience, teaching styles, personality and second language proficiency are crucial factors in designing the modules, constructing the lesson plans and the actual implementation which is teaching. The teaching component includes the implicit formative assessment of students and the course. Then, the succeeding step is assessment. The assessment covers the areas such as students, teacher and the program. The results of the evaluation will serve as the basis in the revision of the curriculum for continuous development. Finally, the steps in curriculum development are an unending process. The development of a curriculum does not end at evaluation and revision but the process can lead back to any components depending on the concerns that need to be addressed.

Also as Nation and Macalister (2010, p. 149) state, a *process syllabus* or *negotiated syllabus* involves the teacher and the learners working together to make decisions at many of the parts of the curriculum design process. It is a way of giving high priority to the recognition of learner needs within a course and to the need to continually adjust courses in the process to suit changing needs and circumstances. The word *process* in the term *process syllabus* indicates that the important feature of this type of syllabus is that it focuses on *how* to make the syllabus rather than *what* to be included in it. Nation and Macalister (2010, p. 149) further state that Clarke (1991) sees the interest in process (negotiated) syllabi arising from humanistic methodologies like community language learning which are very learner-centered, from needs analysis which focuses on learners' needs, from work in individualization and learner autonomy, and from learner strategy research which sees the learner playing a central role in determining how the language is learned. These are clearly strong reasons for having a negotiated syllabus.

Breen and Littlejohn (2000) list situations where a negotiated syllabus is almost unavoidable:

- 1) Where the teacher and students have different backgrounds.
- 2) Where time is short and the most useful choices must be made.
- 3) Where there is a very diverse group of students and there is a need to find a common ground.
- 4) Where initial needs analysis is not possible.
- 5) Where there is no course book.
- 6) Where the students' past experiences must be part of the course.
- 7) Where the course is open-ended and exploratory.

An exciting development which has been proposed by a number of materials development experts, cited by Masuhara and Tomlinson, (2010), has been the production of humanistic course books which are developed to be resources rather than scripts and to be flexible enough to encourage personalization and localization. A humanistic course book is one which treats the learner primarily as a human being rather than just a language learner and which caters for human needs and

wants as well as linguistic needs and wants. Such a course book would be designed to be flexible so as to provide the learners with choices of routes, learning styles and activities and would encourage learners to personalize and localize its texts and activities.

### 3. Technology and Humanism

Masuhara and Tomlinson (2010) assert that undoubtedly new technologies do have the potential to make language learning easier, more convenient and more effective. Their potential advantages could include:

- the motivational and experiential benefits of multi-modal representation of the language,
- opportunities for listening to and observing proficient language users

communicating,

- opportunities for interacting with other learners and with proficient users of the language,
- opportunities for revisiting language activities and experiences,
- opportunities for personalized feed,
- opportunities for personalization of the course by the learners,
- a match with the expectations of new generations of language learners, and
- ease and cheapness of availability.

However, based on Masuhara and Tomlinson (2010), it is also argued that many materials which use new technologies:

- cost too much,
- simply repeat the activities of textbooks in less effective ways,
- *de-humanize* language learning by reducing human interaction, and
- are driven by the possibilities of the technology rather than by principles of pedagogy.

Masuhara and Tomlinson (2010) further add that many publishers are currently producing courses which they claim offer learners the advantages of blended learning. In theory this means that the course is delivered through a variety of paper and electronic media (e.g. course book, CD Rom, web links, chat and blogs) and therefore offers a variety of ways of experiencing and using the target language and caters for a variety of preferred learning styles (e.g. analytical, experiential, visual, auditory).

### 4. Concluding Remarks

Nunan and Lamb (2001) assert that the philosophy of learner-centeredness has strong links with experiential learning, humanistic psychology and task-based language teaching. Their sentiment is echoed in this way:

A learner--centered curriculum contains similar elements to those contained in traditional curriculum development, that is, planning (including needs analysis, goal and objective setting), implementation (including methodology and materials development) and evaluation. However, the key difference between learner-centered and traditional curriculum development is that in the former the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and the way it is taught. This change in orientation has major practical implications for the entire curriculum program, since a negotiated curriculum cannot be introduced and managed in the same way as one which is prescribed by the teacher or teaching institutions. (p. 40)

Nunan and Lamb (2001) have also tried to make clear that “teachers who claim it is not their job to take these phenomena into account may miss out on some of the most essential ingredients in the management of successful learning” (P. 45). In this paper, the first and the second researchers with respectively 25 and 12 years of experience in teaching English in the Iranian universities and the third with an educational background of teaching English in the Iranian high schools for more than two decades, all to date have come up with the unfortunate fact that in the academic educational system of this country, one by no means can find a well-motivated classroom underpinned by a humanistic approach which is characterized by self-initiated meaningful learning. Part of this ominous atmosphere can surely be ascribed to the beliefs of the au-

thorities in charge. The problem even aggravates when some teachers may be cognizant of this fact, but because their role is enhanced in a humanistic approach and skills demanded of them will show to increase as well, they would more often than not prefer to seal their lips lest be forced to shoulder the responsibility that they most likely fail to take over. In fact, a humanistic academic environment places the burden for all aspects of curriculum development on the teachers (Nunan, 1999). We hope that the issue concerns the authorities working in this atmosphere and thus try their best to approach this stale problem without any hesitation for the hope of cultivating this crucial approach in the educational system and thus reaping its benefits.

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