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**Humanistic Language Learning in the 21st Century Classroom:
A Brief Look at Practice and
Application**

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Humanistic Language Learning in the 21st Century Classroom: A Brief Look at Practice and Application

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Abstract

In this 21st century learning, language teachers face the challenge to have the most appropriate learning methods, techniques and activities to facilitate users of language who are able to exchange information, negotiate meanings and conduct meaningful, grammatically accurate and socially appropriate conversations with other users of the language. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges of language teachers remains the task to instruct their learners in the shortest time possible using the most efficient way to prepare language learners for their personal and professional life.

However, teaching language is just one part of the learning that we are expected to provide to our learners. Besides setting language goals, language teachers need to have a thorough grasp of both how student learn and what motivates them to learn that reflect the latest trends and needs of society in the 21st century. They need to change the old image of the teacher being the source of the knowledge and replace it with the teacher as facilitator. Thus, the roles of teachers and learners in 21st century classroom must be redefined. For that reason also, this paper wants to address the possibilities of language teacher and learner development by embracing ICT to create a more humanistic language learning environments for students, which are essential for a successful teaching and learning process. This paper also presents some solutions to help language teachers to effectively meet the needs to promote humanistic language learning in 21st century learning.

Keywords: Humanistic, language learning, classroom, 21st century, ICT

Introduction

“Today’s digital kids think of ICT as something akin to oxygen; they expect it, it’s what they breathe and it’s how they live.” Learning in a Digital Age, John Seely Brown

In this digital era, it becomes clear that the 21st century classroom is very different from the 20th century classroom. In the 21st century classroom, language teachers are facilitators of student language learning and creators of productive classroom settings in which students can develop the skills in the language learning process. In that case, one of today’s major principles in language learning is the focus on learning and the learner. Our classroom now is student centered, not teacher centered. Teachers no longer function as teachers but as facilitators of learning. The students are learning by doing, and the teacher acts as a coach, helping students as they work on projects. However, the real classroom, sometimes, by the use of technology, shows us that language learning process has actually been - to a certain extent - dehumanized.

As Krash stated (2009), “learning a language has multiple and unpredictable ramifications in how language learners perceive and conceptualize their subjectivities as a result of entering the world of bilingualism”. It means that learning a language is a significant, potentially life-changing event for both language teacher and learner.

Furthermore, it is an event that involves the whole human being, beyond just intellectual abilities. However, the experiences and emotions essential in the process of learning a language are removed by putting more emphasis placed on the communicative aspect of language usage, to such an extent that it seems natural to avoid any discussion of the humanistic values in the classroom and to emphasize the learning process in the classroom.

Learning language is about living, thinking, experiencing and feeling other people and the world around us. Our challenge as language teachers is to find a way to make language learning personally contextualized, socially engaged, and culturally embedded. Our ultimate goal is to humanize a structural learning system drawn from the world of administration. In other words, to make language learning about what *really* matters - the learners.

21st Century Classroom: Changes in the classroom

“The digital revolution is far more significant than the invention of writing or even of printing. It offers the potential for humans to learn new ways of thinking and organizing social structures.” Douglas Engelbard

At the same time as the classroom in 21st century is changing, the language teacher must adapt their new roles and responsibilities. Language teachers are not the only ones responsible for student language learning. Language teachers know that they must engage their students in learning and provide effective instruction using a variety of instructional methods as well as technology. To do this, teachers keep well-informed of what is happening in the field of technology. As lifelong learners, teachers are active participants in their own learning. They seek out professional development that helps them to improve both student learning and their own performance.

One of the strongest reasons and purpose for supporting humanistic language learning in 21st century classroom is that, when the methods are done effectively, students on the other hand learn language very effectively. The results also show that humanistic education is a valid educational approach that deserves serious attention and respect in learning as well as teaching language skills. The drive of humanism or humanistic approach treats that the ability of mutual understanding and co-operation.

Humanistic Language Learning: Interaction, Motivation, and Experience

“Tell me and I’ll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I’ll understand.” **Chinese Proverb**

Earl Stevick has characterised *feelings (H1)*, *social relations (H2)*, *responsibility (H3)*, *intellect (H4)*, and *self actualization (H5)* as the five emphases within humanism (Burden and Williams, 1997:37). The purpose is to develop emotional and aesthetic appreciation; discard antipathy, and enjoy aestheticism; create friendship & cooperation as it is a crucial part of social interaction; create acceptance of public scrutiny; acquire freedom of mind towards knowledge, reason, understanding, and testing intellectuality. These are the keys to creating awareness of learner’s uniqueness and ability towards the liberty of mind. Stevick prescribes these as the basic components or guideline to the *humanistic* teachers.

Another aspect of humanistic learning is its role in learner motivation. Motivation, including *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*, can be defined as the need or reason to

do something. Acquisition of any language involves motivation. In fact, motivation is considered as the first step in language learning. Humanistic approaches can influence the process in creating motivation in learners of language. Teachers can create stimulus environment to direct students' motivation. Thus, identified by these elements, humanistic approaches function significantly on creating learner's motivation towards learning a language.

In addition, Vygotsky and Feuerstein (Burden & Williams, 1997:40) believed that teacher can also help selecting and shaping learners' learning experience. Humanistic approach, then, is appropriate to be adapted in language learning. Earl Stevick believed so, and put significant contribution in advocating humanism in language learning. He believed in the concepts of humanism i.e., *whole person*, *emotive behavior*, *learner centeredness*, and rejected *alienation*, and learning apprehension. At the same time, Arnold (1998) is highly optimistic when she views *humanistic approaches* as a 'privilege' for language teachers.

Technology in language learning: Some proposed applications

“There can be infinite uses of the computer and of new age technology, but if teachers themselves are not able to bring it into the classroom and make it work, then it fails.”

[Nancy Kassebaum](#)

Kukulka-Hulme (2010) and Lee (2009) provide a list of several activities that can be used in a language classroom. These activities include social applications (e.g., Facebook) and blogging (e.g., Twitter); mobile Internet access (browsing websites and reading news) and user created content (making a film, creating a podcast) (Kukulka-Hulme, 2010). Those activities allow language learners to maximize the opportunity in meaningful and authentic learning contexts and audiences. In addition, these tools increase opportunities for students to communicate not only within the classroom walls, but also outside the classroom (Lee, 2009).

Thus, there are some proposed digital applications in the classroom that can help language teachers to effectively meet the needs to promote humanistic language learning in 21st century learning. The first application of technology in language classroom is the use of *Pecha Kucha* in speaking classes. *Pecha Kucha* is a simple presentation format where 20 images are shown, each for 20 seconds. The presentation format was created by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham in Tokyo Japan, in February 2003 (*Pecha Kucha*, 2013). The benefits of using *Pecha Kucha* presentation format as a means of developing students' presentations skills and encouragement of language learner autonomy are therefore clear; it contributes to student motivation and commitment.

The second application of technology in language classroom is the use of Schoology as a learning management system in a language classroom. Schoology is a social network-based tool that allows teachers to interact with students. The design of Schoology is parallel to that of Facebook in which conversations take place, messages are sent, statuses are updated, and information and other media are shared within a classroom network. The students can utilize Schoology as discussion forums to increase time and opportunities, and also to reflect upon their learning process. The benefit of using Schoology is clear; Schoology can facilitate the students to nurture their critical thinking. It creates a forum that prepares each of the students to relate the materials they got in the classroom by learning from each

other and showing to each other how they would learn in the classrooms.

The third application of technology in language classroom is the use of vlogs in speaking and listening classes. As defined by Wikipedia (2008), videoblogging, shortened as vlogging, is a form of blogging for which the medium is video. Vlog are made and often combine embedded video or a video link with supporting text and images. The benefit of using vlog is clear; vlogs can be used for students' personal expression and reflection. Vlogs can also be incorporated into e-portfolios and presentations.

Pecha-Kucha: A personal narrative digital story

“I know only one thing about the technologies that awaits us in the future: We will find ways to tell stories with them” Jason Ohler

Pecha Kucha is acknowledged to be an effective and efficient way oral presentation (Artyushina, et al., 2011). In *Pecha Kucha*, audiences are likely to be more engaged. Consequently, speakers need experience presenting their ideas in a short period of time and in a more creative, engaging way. The short presentation time results in the audience having plenty of time to ask questions and make comments about the presentation. *Pecha Kucha* presentations as used in the classroom are also a form of creative revision where each student helps other class members by giving a personal perspective, with researched data, on a selected topic.

In speaking classes, the opportunity to make an oral presentation in front of the classroom makes a number of students feel uneasy and insecure since they have to present a particular topic or recent issue. At the same time, they have already given talks in other topics, most notably language and literature topics. Thus, in preparing their *Pecha Kucha*, no detailed instructions will be given; instead, the students are encouraged to build on their experience and to treat presentations like any other presentation they have done before.

With *Pecha Kucha*, teacher is no longer a source of knowledge. Instead, teacher will function more as an organizer, a consultant, and a supporter. As an organizer, teacher will give guideline on how to make *Pecha Kucha*, provide the possible and potential topics for the students. As a consultant, teacher will give students feedback and comment during their preparation on *Pecha Kucha*, both the PPT file or even the presentation itself.

Pecha Kucha helps students to organize and make meaning of their experiences. The preparation and creation requires searching for and collecting materials to support their presentation and then combine and organize them in such a way that allows them to create the effect they want. The narrative allows students to voice their own story in their presentation. They are able to record and edit their stories as often as they want, being able to improve their work until it is to their liking. Length restrictions enhance new ways of thinking, creativity and imagination. *Pecha Kucha* allows the students to adjust to their own individual interests and learning styles, toward a more personalized learning context.

Pecha Kucha is also about listening, promoting learning community in the classroom, and trust among the students. It is thus empowering, motivating and engaging. *Pecha Kucha* is an integrated approach to learning which offers more than an opportunity to incorporate technology into the language learning classroom. It wraps up the essence of learning: personal development, social relational development, and technology.

Schoology: Where learning meets reflection

“By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.” Confucius

The use of learning management systems in the language classroom may enable the language teacher to enhance their tools for language learning process by the use of information and communication technologies (Lochner et al., 2015). One of the popular learning management systems gaining popularity nowadays is the *Schoology*. *Schoology*, a collaboration and learning tool, is a web based learning environment that will give students access to class materials and information via the internet (Queen & Lewis, 2011). *Schoology* is free and allows for teacher to teacher, teacher to student, and even student to student online collaboration in a user friendly and secure environment. It offers the possibilities of adopting this collaboration and learning tool to customize learning for each student. Students, by using *Schoology* as virtual language classrooms, can share opinions and express ideas by using a language they all understand. The students can utilize *Schoology* as discussion forums to increase time and opportunities, and also to reflect upon their learning process.

Language teacher can encourage critical reflection on the part of their students' learning process by using *Schoology*. During language learning process, the students in the class are expected to participate actively. The teacher sometimes made reflections and comments or posed questions in class meetings. The teacher also asked the students to pay attention to others students' writing styles. The teacher spent a little time giving comments on students' grammatical errors and basic writing structure. By so doing, the teacher believed their students could reflect not only what they learned but also practice basic writing skills through the course. They could see their learning process and perspectives on certain issues at different periods of time. Therefore, the *Schoology* was considered a great tool for these students to record their growth and changes as well as build a learning community.

Thus, it can be said that the *Schoology* prepares each of the students to relate the materials they got in the classroom by learning from each other and showing to each other how they would learn in the classrooms. *Schoology* is a platform for these students to voice their doubts, struggles, discomforts, and successful and unhappy learning experiences because the students shared very similar experiences of being language learners. Dewey (1993) claims that if we want to make our experience educative, it is critical to support ongoing growth in a process of continuing new inquiry. As Short, Burke, and Harste (1996) propose, ‘As we work through inquiry, we do not usually end with one answer or even a set of answers. As a result, students generated more understanding that would take their understanding better. The classroom discussion stage made it possible for the students to make sense out of the new knowledge and ponder its potential utilization in their learning contexts.

Vlogging: A promising digital diary

“Blogging and the Internet allow us to engage in a lot more real time conversations as opposed to a one-way dump of information or a message.” Indra Nooyi

Videoblogs (or vlogs) are video collections that serve both as an audiovisual life

documentary, and as a vehicle for communication and interaction on the Internet (Burgess and Green 2009). Vlogging (or videoblogging) offers rich experiences both to the teachers and students who want to communicate with sounds and images, reflect on what they teach, learn and think and share them with a community. Incorporating vlogging activities into classroom settings will create opportunities for language learners to build their knowledge onto their unique prior understandings and different learning styles.

The first way to incorporate vlogs into language classroom is by using vlogs as a tool for reflection on learning as well as a way to demonstrate understanding about variety of language concept. Students' language abilities can be enhanced with vlog reflections, in which they come to realize what they know, what they learned and what they can learn in the future. Vlogging can also be used as a way to express variety of subjects and concepts. Learning by design approach can be used with vlogging activities in which students create the meanings through the design processes of vlogs (Kahn & Ullah, 1996).

Another way is to consider vlogs as a tool for collaborative work, and at the same time creating learning communities. Hoem (2004) stresses the importance of the function of vlogging as wikis on the creation and production of group videos. During vlogs production stage, students may work together to design their documentaries and enhance that process by sharing their work on vlogging with other students, even the people outside of the language classroom. Their learning space can expand the borders of a classroom, creating new types interactions between them and those who are outside of the language classroom.

Conclusion

“Learners in the internet age don't need more information. They need to know how to efficiently use the massive amount of information available at their fingertips - to determine what's credible, what's relevant, and when its useful to reference.” - Anna Sabramowicz

The demands of 21st century language learning today are excessive. They create pressure and anxiety both for the students and the learners. Humanistic language learning in the classroom can offer a teaching and learning of a language that not only constructs students' knowledge but also gives them a self-realization of their own potentiality by the use of technology in the classroom. It is believed that it has so many challenges, especially in seeing and believing that the *whole person* is unique. Though the humanistic language learning practices with technology in the classroom are still relatively new in many language learning contexts, the goal of language learning itself is universal.

In exploring and learning about giving importance to learner potentiality by the use of technology in the language classroom nowadays, language teachers should come to a realization about their responsibility as a language teacher in the 21st century classroom. Language teachers have to be more careful, sensitive, thoughtful, and systematic with the use of the technology in language learning process so that in the process they withdraw the students from their right to true language learning. As a final point, humanistic language learning, with the help of technology, offers both teachers and students not bondage but freedom and choice to ponder over and construct language learning practice. It also gives language teachers a privilege to be

in the position where they can keep the mark of their experiences in enlightening students' life - to lead them towards his or her own path of learning.

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