

APPLYING MOSKOWITZ'S SOURCEBOOK ON HUMANISTIC TECHNIQUES

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In *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class*,¹ the author addresses this question to language teachers: "What can you look forward to from using these awareness exercises?"² She answers it: "A cooperative spirit develops in the class as communication that is not superficial is exchanged. And the materials help satisfy the demands students make for relevance and more personalized contact in their learning."³ Moskowitz cautions, however: "Don't expect instant miracles. Do expect pleasant, rewarding results as your students feel an added warmth towards themselves, towards each other, and towards the foreign language class."⁴ This answer is a realistic promise which this paper will seek to prove valid for English classes taught at one junior college in Japan. Before going into the application of her book, though, a short introduction to this type of instruction would be beneficial.

What is humanistic education? It is a philosophy of instruction which is concerned with the whole person whose emotional as well as intellectual needs are taken into account. It, therefore, has its basis in "psychology rather than from the other disciplines such as linguistics"⁵ In this field of psychology, the name of Abraham Maslow stands out: "[He] has done more to change our view of human nature and human possibilities than has any other American psychologist of the past fifty years."⁶ Maslow's phrase, self-actualization, implies that each individual has the tendency to reach his full potential once his basic deficiency needs are satisfied; therefore the main purpose of education is to do just that.⁷ It is to focus attention first on the student—his feelings, needs, interests—and on content second:

During most of my years in language teaching, I have focused my attention on the linguistic material—the sounds, the words and the structures—that my students were learning. Their emotional reactions, the relationships between what they were experiencing and how it made them feel, were at the periphery of my thinking. I was conscious of those matters only when a student showed gross and overt signs of being upset. Recently, however, I have tried to reverse my priorities. Student attitudes now take chronological priority. This means that I no longer care how much of the language they learn during the first week. Although I do not tell them so, the linguistic material presented during

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that time is only a vehicle for getting acquainted and for finding and reducing anxieties. Even during the remainder of the course, the first question is "How are they learning?" and the second is "What have they learned?" It is now content, and not morale, that I tend to ignore unless it threatens to cause trouble. Needless to say, I still give much attention to content; what has changed is the focus.⁸

This type of thinking is easy to accept; very few would take difference with it. Putting it into practice in a classroom full of varied personalities is a tremendous undertaking. Even when adhered to, this theory raises in teachers the added question of how prepared are they to deal with these needs of students. Needless to say, teachers are not psychologists in therapy session with their students nor should they strive to be: "...probing too readily into the personal feelings of the learner becomes impertinent. The teacher-student relationship is unavoidably asymmetrical. However kindly, well-meaning, and democratic the teacher, the learner has less liberty to reject overtures than the teacher has, and the teacher should not presume upon the relationship: learners must be free to decide how deeply to participate."⁹

This does not mean, though, that classrooms cannot have a more relaxed atmosphere, a friendlier spirit, an almost family type of spirit if that is possible. As teachers, we should be concerned that our students can reach their full potential in society. They should not be regarded as mere products off the assembly line that will go into the economic world ready themselves to mass produce. As Bethel has pointed out:

There are several factors involved in the inadequacy of contemporary education. Most important is the fact that contemporary education has its roots in the industrial society. It is a product of industrial society. The educational systems we have today developed to serve the needs and promote the goals and values of industrial society ... Within the context of industrial systems there is concern with persons only as those persons can contribute to the mass production, mass consumption, maximum-profit lifestyle. The emotional and intellectual needs of persons are overlooked or given low priority.¹⁰

Priorities must necessarily change if education is to prepare students for life. But incorporating humanistic techniques into methodologies does not mean teachers are equipped to handle all the psychological needs of students. It does mean, however, that by being conscious of these needs they can, through the medium of instruction, guide students to be aware of their own feelings and the needs and feelings of their classmates for a better acceptance of self and of each other.

With this cautionary thought in mind, let us examine Moskowitz's excellent sourcebook for putting humanistic techniques into practice. There is a wealth of material here—120 exercises in

all-grouped under the following headings:¹¹

1. Relating to Others
2. Discovering Myself
3. My Strengths
4. My Self-Image
5. Expressing My Feelings
6. My Memories
7. Sharing Myself
8. My Values
9. The Arts and Me
10. Me and My Fantasies

As each exercise is presented, the following information is given:

1. The affective purposes
2. The linguistic purposes
3. The level(s) of the language class with which the activity can be used
4. The suggested size of groups to use in carrying out the exercise
5. Materials needed
6. Procedures for conducting the exercise
7. Variations to the exercise (in some cases)
8. Comments that may be helpful to know about (where appropriate)

The following exercise, "The Shape I'm In", comes under the heading, Discovering Myself.

It will serve to illustrate the general format of the other activities.

THE SHAPE I'M IN

Purposes:

Affective——

- To encourage students to think introspectively
- To learn about oneself by association
- To note how identical symbols evoke different responses in people

Linguistic——

- To practice the vocabulary of shapes
- To practice the vocabulary which relates to describing shapes
- To practice the use of adjectives

Levels: All levels

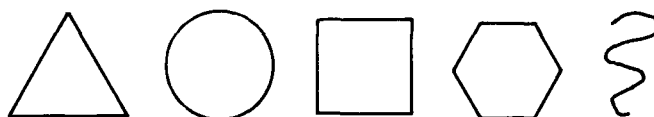
Size of groups: About six

Procedures: Announce to the students that they are going to find out some things about

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themselves by making a choice from a number of shapes. Tell them that upon seeing the shapes they should quickly decide which one they like best. Then reveal the shapes on an overhead projector or on the blackboard. All of the shapes should be seen at the same time. If they are on the blackboard, have them already drawn and covered by a screen or map, which you pull up to reveal them.

As they view the figures, remind them to decide which one appeals to them most. The shapes are a triangle, a circle, a square, a hexagon, and a zigzag line. They should be about the same size and can be depicted like this:



Ask the students to draw on a slip of paper the one that they like best.

Then in groups of six, each student should relate to the figure he has chosen by telling how he sees himself in it:

"I like the hexagon best. I am like a hexagon because I am neat and orderly and I have many interesting sides to me. I am well-balanced. I am also different. There are not many hexagons in the world."

When the groups are finished, have the students get up and mill around the room holding the sketch of the figure they chose in front of them for others to see. The students are to stop and ask a number of others how the figure they chose is like them. After they have the opportunity to speak with about six students, tell the students to form a group with all others who chose the same figure they did. It may be necessary to limit the number in the most popular groups. During this round, the students will get a chance to hear how others chose the same symbol as they, but for similar or different reasons. Have a couple of students from each group tell the total class why they chose their symbols.

This activity illustrates how many different perceptions can be seen in the identical thing. At the same time, the students learn more about themselves by means of association.

When this was done with second-year junior college students, it took a full ninety-minute period to complete. The students were put in groups of about three or four, told what to do and given a basic sentence to finish: [Name] is like a (name of the shape) because a (name of the shape) is _____ and (name) is _____. They were to choose a shape for each member of the group as well as for themselves and the teacher. This was done silently with much serious observation of each other. During this time, I would go around the room helping with grammar or correcting unnatural expressions. When finished, the

group would exchange their comments either orally or on the blackboard; the size of the class (one had twenty-four students and the other twenty; the class was an elective) would determine how the exchanges were made and this was done in different ways for different activities.

This was one exercise where, when choosing a shape for themselves, a few students tended to be slightly negative although previously told otherwise. Some of their comments follow:

I am like a hexagon because I am ill-natured and have many thorns.

I am like a hexagon because I transform myself in obedience to the place.

I'm like a circle because when I am troubled about something, I recover myself at once and I become cheerful.

I'm like a zigzag because it is rough and I have just started.

About others, they wrote:

—— is like a triangle because its base is stable and she is reliable.

—— is like a hexagon because it has six sides and she has many faces which I don't know yet.

—— is like a circle because it is slippery and she is intangible.

—— is like a zigzag because a zigzag is like a flash of lightning and she excels in good ideas.

About the teacher, they wrote:

Mrs. S is like a triangle because it has a base and she has a hard core in her character.

Mrs. S is like a zigzag because her looks go here and there but she gets settled in one direction after all.

As can be seen, much thought went into this comparison of people to shapes and the insight gained in relation to self and how others see us is significant. This type of activity gives a meaningful reason for expressing an idea in another language and then communicating that thought to someone else who, in turn, realizes a great deal of time has been spent thinking about him. Stevick expresses it this way:

What keeps people alive, according to Berne—what 'keeps their spinal cords from shriveling up'—is 'stroking,' which means being recognized and responded to by other human beings. This is the basis of the need for 'acceptance'. In Berne's sense, to say that one person 'accepts' another is not to say that he approves of him or likes him; it is only to say that he is willing to spend more time with him, and this implies continued 'stroking' of one kind or another. To feel 'accepted' is therefore to feel that someone else is willing to continue noticing me and responding to me. This is Maslow's 'need for belonging', which is prior to his 'need for esteem' and approval.¹²

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Moskowitz firmly believes that this recognition of self and others should always be positive:

...of key importance in using humanistic exercises is focusing on the positive aspect. Activities which emphasize identifying our strengths and those of others, developing a more positive self-image, giving and receiving positive feedback, and learning to understand ourselves and others better all contribute to this end. Such exercises act to enhance our self-concept and the ways we relate to others. They help develop powerful interpersonal skills which are often lacking in our communication but which can be learned. Building on the positive strengthens growth and can help students overcome some of their shortcomings.¹³

After about doing twenty activities, positiveness, better understanding and general good will were definitely evident in the last exercise at the close of the semester in September. This exercise was modeled after the one entitled "Fortune Cookies".¹⁴

However, instead of just working in a small group, the students wrote a fortune for every member of the class. Each student wrote her name on an envelope and her fortunes were placed in it. During the last class, the envelopes were distributed, the fortunes discussed, and the three each most wanted to come true were chosen and a reason written to explain why. A sampling follows:

"You will become a good statesman."

I want this fortune to come true because actually I think the present statesmen act badly in the political world. So I want to make it more comfortable to live in Japan.

"You will become a writer as popular as Soseki Natsume."

I want this fortune to come true because I can give dreams and imagination to children from my books.

"You will be a famous poet."

I want this fortune to come true because I hope that many people will know my thoughts.

"You will be loved by everyone."

I want this fortune to come true because I am apt to do everything for myself. But man cannot live by himself. I want to trust myself to others.

Perhaps that last reason sums up the trusting feeling felt by many during the hours spent together in class. In order to ascertain what result doing humanistic exercises had on the students, a questionnaire was distributed in both classes and the students answered it in Japanese in groups of three. There were a total of thirteen statements to be completed; the students remained anonymous. A compilation of statements and answers follows:

1. I liked doing English this way because:

—enjoyable

- time flies so quickly
 - no tests
 - no textbook
 - one can use own ideas because no one answer is required
 - various kinds of materials are used
 - can attend class without worrying
 - can think and do things together
 - appreciate talking to people I otherwise would not
 - not a nuisance to use the dictionary
2. I did not like doing English this way because:
- too many assignments
 - too much writing and not enough conversation
 - no daily conversation
 - one could never guess what the next class would be like
 - activities were too similar
 - got a bit scared because didn't know what's next
 - it's tiring to use one's imagination
 - not practical
 - did not enjoy analyzing one's character
 - had to think too much
3. Working together in groups is_____because:
- easier because we can cooperate
 - good because as a group our ideas are better
 - efficient because if one member can't understand, as a group we can get the point
 - enjoyable because we can help each other and befriend people
 - enjoyable because we can express ourselves frankly
 - a nuisance because it's better to learn alone than in a group
 - helpful because we can learn and enjoy and finish quicker
 - difficult because we don't know each other very well and it's so difficult to formalize our varied opinions
 - helpful because we can learn from each other; it's meaningful and we have to discuss seriously

Questions 4 and 5 asked which activity was the best and which was the worst. One class as a whole ail chose "Secret Message" as the worst one as did many in the other class. This activity involved taking the letters of one's first or last name and using each letter as the beginning of each consecutive word to form a message which says something about them. This proved much too difficult an assignment and it points out that what might appeal to the teacher does not always appeal to the students. Many exercises were given as the favorite one done but the

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reasons for liking each are significant:

- enjoyed thinking about self
- I saw unexpected sides of people whom I do not know well
- it reminded me of my childhood
- enjoyed seeing classmates as children
- personifying one's hands was very interesting

6. Next semester I (do, do not) want to do English this way because:

- a. three groups said 'do not' because they wanted more practical, everyday English practice
- b. fourteen groups said 'do' because:
 - I can learn as well as enjoy
 - the unexpectedness and creativity make this interesting
 - the class is free and I can relax
 - I enjoy being kept in suspense and look forward to what comes next
 - everyone can participate in it

7. Doing English this way is helpful because:

- by working in a group we can understand other members better
- we have come to like English
- it trains systematic thinking
- contributes to one's vocabulary
- by writing I have learned
- I have acquired listening ability

8. Doing English this way is not helpful because:

- few opportunities to speak English
- it is difficult to express myself
- one doesn't learn everyday conversation
- it's fragmentary and monotonous

Question # 9 asked them to check whether or not they wanted a textbook next semester.

Three groups answered affirmatively; fourteen answered negatively; one abstained.

10. By doing English this way, I learned:

- how to write compositions because we learned to use words in context
- everyday conversation without being troubled by grammar
- a foreigner's way of thinking
- how many different words there are in English
- creativity
- I have acquired a better listening ability
- how small a vocabulary I have
- cooperation and adaptability

- that it is difficult to express one's self in English
- 11. By doing English this way I have not learned:
 - about American society
 - grammar
 - everyday oral English
 - how to speak because it is all writing

That last reason and previous ones mentioning writing need to be explained further. When these activities were first begun, it was hoped that the students could be put into groups, given the assignment and carry it out orally. However this was not the case. It soon became evident that if any exchange was to take place, a great deal of thinking and writing had to be done first if the students were to express themselves in English. Therefore each student had a notebook in which was kept all the exercises which were subsequently corrected and remarked upon. (In my marking book, I did give each student a grade for each of the activities done this grade was not shown to them.) Since the activity usually involved writing about a few things, there was always some idea that could be pointed out as being good, or interesting or unusual. The students, though, did feel there was too much writing. When I used Moskowitz's book this previous semester, I did not use a text and therefore concentrated almost wholly on the activities. Other semesters I had only used it as supplementary material to go along with a text and could not incorporate as many exercises into the term. I believe, though, that having or not having a text largely depends on the particular class. Since I taught these students the year before, I felt they could work well without a text and for the most part, I think they did.

Question #12 asked what they would like to do next semester in this English class. With the exception of two answers which requested "the same thing", all the other papers wanted more conversational English but to keep the relaxed, enjoyable way of doing the lessons.

Because I really wanted to see if using humanistic techniques really made any difference in a class, question #13 stated:

This class is different from my other English classes because:

- I can play with words and create my own thoughts
- it is not formal
- it is freer and requires my active participation
- I must express myself completely in English
- we cooperate as a group
- it is versatile and imaginative
- not much difference
- in other classes, I always read; in this class, I think a lot
- we can all enjoy it
- it has a family atmosphere

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These foregoing observations were made, I feel, very openly and truthfully and fulfill the same expectations which Moskowitz promised in the opening paragraph of this paper. The class *was* warmer and working in different groups contributed to this feeling of helpfulness. Learning *was* enjoyable and, since the teacher is only a guide, the student's initial ease and delight in any subject matter will take him far in mastering it. Humanistic techniques foster a spirit of learning not only about self and others, but also about the content and, in this case, make a foreign language more a part of the student's experience.

Notes:

- 1 Gertrude Moskowitz, *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class* (Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1978).
- 2 Ibid., p. 2.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Rick Bhanot, "Humanistic Approaches: An Empirical View". ELT Journal 37:361.
- 6 George Leonard, "Abraham Maslow and the New Self". Esquire, Dec. 83:326
- 7 Grittner, "Barbarians, Bandwagons and Foreign Language Scholarship". MLJ, Sept-Oct, 73:241.
- 8 Earl W. Stevick, *Memory, Meaning & Method* (Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1976).
- 9 Christopher Brumfit, "Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class: a review". ELT Journal 36/1:64.
- 10 Dayle M. Bethel, "Educating Children Today for New World Order Tomorrow". The Japan Times. April 15, 1984.
- 11 Moskowitz, p. 40-41.
- 12 Stevick, p. 83
- 13 Moskowitz, p. 25.
- 14 Ibid., p. 56.