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Holistic Technique in English Language: A Humanistic Approach towards Learning and Teaching **VIBHA JUNEJA***

Abstract:

According to Humanistic theory, the more you are able to discover about yourself and are willing to share with others, the greater your sense of self-esteem and the more successful you will be in your endeavors. Language is the tool of expression and communication. Although English is taught as a second language in our country it is seen as a preferred academic language by both parents and students alike. Today, most schools are opting for English as a medium of instruction, as English is seen as a language for social ability, teaching of English has undergone a lot transitions and today there are numerous approaches to tackle the teaching of English. Teachers are trying to develop a support system that could help in transacting the English Curriculum with ease. Holistic teaching is the unique combination of language, Communication and human values it involves a learner intellectually, emotionally and physically. It is related to all round development of the better students which develops in a communicative situation where teachers and learners are involved in an interaction that leads to better understanding and a sense of wholeness. Holistic technique towards learning develops creative thinking. It is simply taking one subject matter and using it for reading, listening, writing and speaking in one subject class.

This paper is a practical framework of the various holistic techniques used by English language teacher to acquire and strengthen language learning through humanistic approach.

Keywords: Holistic Education, learning, Humanistic approach, Wholeness, Holistic techniques.

In the 21st century world which demands productivity and performance, communicative competence through proficiency in English language is crucial to the successful academic and professional lives of Indian students. For this purpose, right from early schooling, adequate grounding in English language is utmost necessary.

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Teaching and learning of English language needs to be reinforced on the basis of communicative competence and proficiency during schooling is almost mandatory. Any efforts towards teaching and learning of English language at undergraduate level will yield desired results only if due care is taken at the school level education.

Intermediate level proficiency in English at the undergraduate level depends, by and large on how students are taught English at schools. In order to facilitate students with adequate levels of proficiency in English language, the pedagogy and methodology for the same has witnessed and undergone tremendous changes that began early in the last quarter of the 20th century along with technological advancement in education. Ever since the advent of technology in the tenets of education, like other branches of knowledge, teaching and learning of English language has witnessed a series of innovative experimentations in pedagogy as well as methodology.

In the modern age, successful teaching and learning of English happens only when teachers and students actively participate sharing responsibilities mutually working out on the ratio of needs and responsibilities. An English teacher in India is also supposed to keep in mind learning needs of students that vary not only in numbers but also in heterogeneous individual profiles. At this point of discussion, it is imperative to take note of Abraham Maslow's extensive analysis of human needs. In a scholarly paper 'A Theory of Human Motivation' published in 1954, he chartered hierarchy of human needs depicted in a pyramid structure that consists of five levels of human needs.

The basic physiological needs of breathing, food, water, or sleep hold the base of the pyramid and lie at level one in the bottom. The higher needs remain at the top levels and comprise safety, love and esteem. This level involves human body, family, health, property and employment. At the third level, human needs of friendship, love and marriage are categorized. However for the purpose of education in general and language learning in particular, the fourth and the fifth levels are more significant than the first three. The fourth level has two levels: the lower one is associated with fame, respect and glory; whereas the higher one relates to confidence, competence and achievement. The line of demarcation rests

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on the fact that all other needs are based on dependence on other sources of people, whereas confidence, competence and achievement are independent of any dependency since the same can be achieved through efforts on one's own. The topmost level of Maslow's Hierarchy focuses self actualization that covers acceptance of facts, lack of prejudice, problem solving, creativity and morality. It is the qualities inherent in the zenith of Maslow's Pyramid that attract our attention as far as teaching and learning of English language with special reference to use of humanistic approach is concerned.

Humanistic Approach in Language

It has also been observed that humanistic psychology has had a significant role to play in approaches to language teaching like Suggestopedia, Silent Way and Community Language Learning. This is an area of methodology that is the latest and the most thought provoking. It has for its base, not linguistic theories or pedagogic facts, but something more basic-the human being. People outside the language teaching profession developed the methodologies discussed under humanistic approaches. They evolved because the persons were concerned about the individuals who were learning. The 'caring and sharing' attitudes of these persons have shaped these methodologies. The humanistic approaches have drawn on pedagogic and psychological insights into the nature of learning itself.

Earl Stevick in his book 'Humanism' specifies three things, which a humanistic course is not:

1. It is not a course, which is taught because of some tradition, or because it is a syllabus designed by an impersonal authority.
2. It is not a course in which a teacher remains 'in charge'.
3. It is not a course in which getting a good grade is the aim. The humanistic approach tends to see language learning as a process, which engages the whole person and not just the intellect. It takes into account the emotional and spiritual needs of the individuals too.

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There are three dimensions on which humanistic courses differ from traditional courses. 1. Attention to the purpose of the learner, what learners are interested in and why they used the language. The emphasis is on the centrality of the learner rather than the supremacy of the teacher or the subject matter. 2. There is shift in the balance of power in the classroom. The learner is no longer a passive or helpless entity. She is granted more autonomy, independence, responsibility and opportunities for being creative. 3. The assumptions about the process of learning differ. The focus is on learning about learning and awareness of awareness.

Technique – Theory and Practice

Anthony says, a technique is “implementation-that which actually takes place in the classroom. It is a particular trick, stratagem or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective” (Nagaraj 103).

Indeed, the term ‘strategy’ has become a catchword in the field of education since 1960. It was an outcome of developments in cognitive educational psychology. It marked a shift from teacher and teaching to learner and learning: from instructivism to constructivism: from teacher-centered to learner-centered approach in learning. While this shift has been gaining its popularity, more so with the advantage of multi-media in education, the other developments have prompted a need of taking a more balanced view of learning.

In general terms, ‘strategy’ is defined as a planned approach to any task. It hints at the consciously initiated mental activities like inferring, grouping, elaboration etc that trigger off the processes of learning. When applied to language, they are known as the ‘language learning strategies which: a) are either teacher or learner generated aimed at learning, b) enhance language learning as manifested in increased understanding, speaking, reading and writing skills, c) are embedded in learner-centered teaching methodologies and materials d) are either the learning process or refer to the characteristic features of successful language learners, e) may overt in form of certain behaviours or covert in form of mental processes, and, f) entail linguistic processing of information.

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It is important to maintain that the techniques which the teachers use in the classroom should not stop at skill-getting activities but must extend to skill-using activities too. Language learning is a different educational exercise. Through learning a language one can gain knowledge and also can absorb facts about the language. So, it is well said in order to learn language skillfully, skillful teaching is required. Listening skill and speaking skill are two sides of the same coin- in which both are closely inter-related as reading skill and writing skill. Learning requires the development of appropriate knowledge and strategy. Such learning typically builds upon existing capacities and the complexity of facets involved usually allows many specific learning routes. Learning a language means “learning the means by which a thought, an idea, an emotion, an experience, a fact or a piece of knowledge is conveyed or communicated” (Krishnaswamy and Lalitha 158).

All the four skills go obviously with understanding, without which no language can be used effectively. Thus, listening and reading skills are called as perceptive whereas speaking and writing skills are called as productive. Teaching and mastering English language has become a pre-requisite for every profession. The important role in teaching the four basic language skills like reading, writing, listening and speaking, in the language classroom, skills should never be taught in isolation but in an integrated way.

Holistic Education:

Holistic education is a relatively new movement in education that seeks to engage all aspects of the learner, including mind, body and spirit. It aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning, gives attention to experiential learning, and places significance on “relationships and primary human values within the learning environment. The term “holistic education” is most often used to refer to the more democratic and humanistic types of alternative education.

This is very interesting and mindful question. Most of the time people tend to focus on just one aspect of development, be it physical, mental, financial, career growth etc. But they fail to realize that this won't lead to ultimate happiness or satisfaction that they are looking for.

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Holistic Development comprises of physical, mental, emotional, family, social and financial and above all spiritual development.

Holistic Techniques used in the Classroom

Moskowitz defines humanistic techniques as those that:

Blend what the student feels, thinks and knows with what he is learning in the target language. Rather than self-denial being the acceptable way of life, self actualization and self-esteem are the ideals the exercises pursue. [The techniques] help build rapport, cohesiveness, and caring that far transcend what is already there... help students to be themselves, to accept themselves, and be proud of themselves... help foster a climate of caring and sharing in the foreign language class. (Moskowitz 2)

In sum, holistic techniques engage the whole person, including the emotions and feelings (the affective realm) as well as linguistic knowledge and behavioral skills. In line with Maslow's idea about basic human needs, the humanistic strategies applied were based on the assumption that a "supportive and co-operative group atmosphere" as suggested by (Hadfield 15), will enhance learning to bring out the best of the students. To help the students lower their anxiety and enhance their emotional well-being, there needs to be supportive atmosphere of "sharing and caring", where students give and receive supports.

The listed below are some of the holistic strategies that can be practiced in the classroom environment for enhancing communicative competence of the undergraduates. These strategies also encourage collaborative activities which keep the learner more active in the classroom with new material as they learn. Teachers on the other hand can use one or more multiple humanistic strategies to engage the students in the particular task and also make them use the language creatively.

1. Warming up -a de-stressor

When people have to work together in a group it is advisable that they get to know each other a little at the beginning. Once they have talked to each other in an introductory

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exercise, they will be less reluctant to cooperate in further activities. One of the prerequisites of cooperation is to know one another's names. A second one is having some idea of what individual members of the group are interested in. One important use of warming up exercises is with the new classes at the beginning of the academic year; if the teachers join in the activities and let the class know something about her, the learners are more likely to accept her as a person and not as a teacher. A second use of Warming up activities lies in getting learners into the right mood before starting on some new project or task.

We are going round and round in the journey of our life, missing what matters the most-playfulness. As I resumed my walk reluctantly, joining all the adults in their daily march around its pathway- no eye contact, earphones on, no smiles- the metaphorical poignancy of the situation hit me. As I trudged along, it struck me yet again that when we grow up, we believe we have to do away with all the silliness, and what we perceive as flakiness and get serious about life. But why? I

would strongly recommend that what we adults need more than anything else is just that more whacky, crazy fun. In our grown up- world, it does seem a little ridiculous to talk about playfulness. It sounds frivolous, juvenile and insane. (Sen15)

So, is the situation of the students while learning second language. As they are learning language apart from their mother tongue they are full of stress, anxiety. They become conscious while learning English. They feel that if they make mistakes they will be insulted and due to this reason they are not able to develop their communicative competence in English.

Many students complain that they feel bored doing something again and again from the beginning till the end of the class. As they do not feel interested in the class, they are not able to progress much in learning a language. Unfortunately, many teachers do not pay attention whether the students feel interested or motivated to work with the activities they provide in classes. So at this point of juncture, it seems important to find out how to keep students' interest in learning. Using warm up activities can be one way to bring variation in the class activity and to make the students curious, focus their attention, provide them purpose and motivation.

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In order, to overcome these psychological problems of the learners while learning a new language; warming up strategy is the best de-stressor for the learners. Most of the warming up exercises are suitable for the beginners because they do not demand more than simple questions and answers. It is good for their brain and it enhances their creativity.

2. Visual Lessons for Enhancing Creativity/Confidence

Use of visual representation of photographs, drawing, charts, professions, stories etc can be an innovation to introduce new concepts. This strategy is one of the most essential ingredients for creativity. Students respond best to visuals. Visual aids are designed to supplement written or spoken information so it can be understood more easily. It captures the student's attention and gets them interested in the concepts that will be taught. It is fascinating to see that many companies like Google encourage creativity through their adult play areas, with slides and poles, taking the employees from one floor to another. A dash of laughter, silliness, song, dance, fun element can make the monotonous day-to-day activities into a breeze.

3. Role Playing Method

“Role playing helps the students to examine thoughtfully different ways of resolving social and personal conflict. It equips students with skills to be more efficient and effective in their world. It has the function of identifying the real potential of students in an average classroom setting” (Njemanze 261). This is an important strategy used to engage the students in activity that enhances student involvement in a classroom setting which will bring out their intellectual potentials.

4. Discussion and Practice Method

Discussion and practice method or strategy help students to discuss analyze and criticize issues raised in the class. This strategy exposes students with deeper reasoning and makes them contribute effectively in the discussion. Through this strategy learning is shared.

Discussion and practice method should be used by the teacher to enhance the learners' performance. In this strategy every student in this group is maximally involved in active participation.

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5. Brainstorming

Brainstorming can be performed as a pair- task, or in groups. As the learners brainstorm, each learner in the group brings to the task his/her experience and this activity enriches their knowledge to think critically and reflectively. The writing process can begin with brainstorming sessions to get ideas. The writing process examines whether the ideas are relevant, clear, logical etc., Writing drafts is a good practice as many slips and errors get edited out in this process.

In the nutshell, Holistic teaching is the unique combination of Language, communication and human values which involves a learner intellectually, emotionally and physically such learning takes place in a communicative situation where teachers and learners are involved in an 'interactive environment'. Humanistic approach gives a platform to communicate openly and established good relationships between instructor and students, create engaging and concerted environments for our learners and facilitate Genuine Interaction especially for those who learn by "doing". It also creates consistency by providing the learners with a predictable pattern of learning. As holistic teaching is related to all round development of the better understanding and a sense of wholeness. Holistic technique towards learning develops creative thinking. It is simply taking one subject matter and using it for reading, listening, writing and speaking in one single class. If implemented skillfully in different areas of learning it will certainly bring out the miraculous result in the field of learning English language and effective communication skills.

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