

Humanistic Traditions and its Relevance in Modern System of Education

Mehraj Din Dar*

**Mehraj Din Dar is Assistant Professor (Education) in Government Degree College Ganderbal. (India)*

ABSTRACT

The humanistic approach places a great deal of emphasis on students' choice and control over the course of their education. Students are encouraged to make choices that range from day to day activities to periodically setting future life goals. This allows for students to focus on a specific subject of interest for any amount of time they choose, within reason. Humanistic teachers believe it is important for students to be motivated and engaged in the material they are learning, and this happens when topic is something the students need and wants to know. In the present paper an attempt is made to highlight the importance of humanistic traditions and their relevance in modern world and how educators can adopt a practical approach in creating mechanisms supporting the sacredness of life and dignity of humans. We will try to find out how educators, academicians and intellectuals organise themselves in service of society and undertake to develop immunization to protect its young citizens from hegemonic establishments that consider and treat people unusable and abusable tools for achieving greater wealth and domination.

Key Words: *Autonomy, Equality, Humanism, Humanistic Education and Educators and Significant Learning.*

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a world in which tragedy is universal. There is a startling relaxing of traditions of restraint and of established law and order.¹ Today there is only one problem worth talking about the problem of peace. Though its solution may be difficult to find, its urgency is impossible to escape, what is the use of talking about anything else? There will simply be nothing left to talk². The one problem which is now demanding all our attention and all effort is how to make the world safe for peace and humanity. The growing distress, the deepening economic misery and wars on an unprecedented scale, the divided counsels in high place and the inertia of those in power and authority, who wish to preserve the collapsing order and save the crippled civilization at any cost. In place of scattered conflicts of the part we are facing concentrated struggles that involve directly or indirectly the whole world, thus the problem being complex, the solution to attain peace has also become strenuous and doubtful. The basic aim of humanistic education is to develop autonomy, rationality, creativity, empowerment, affection and concern for whole humanity. Humanistic traditions in education aim to develop among our learners the qualities like argumentation and reflective thinking. At the heart of this approach is to make a person responsible by making him to realize human potential and not merely on the

account of insight provided by God³. Humanistic approach posits the refinement of basic human values like equality, equity and dignity as the ultimate end of all human thoughts and actions. There exists consensus regarding the pedagogical and ethical aims of humanistic approach which is the commitment to protect the learners from any sort of intellectual oppression, physical punishment and dishonour.⁴ Humanistic approach is based on the concept of broad education and open mindedness leading an individual to autonomous and critical thinking. It is the perspective characterized by attributing equal human worth to others striving for justice, peace, respect and fair consideration for others. Education is facing challenges and to overcome these challenges we need to find whether mankind is showing any progress or are we just destroying our planet thus leaving our earth to those few living things which can withstand the atomic destruction and radioactivity. These challenges or crises are represented by few questions and arguments by Rogers:

Can education deal effectively and responsibly with the increasing irrational nationalism and international tension and help us to prevent nuclear destruction?

1. Can education deal effectively with increasing racial tensions and prevent civil wars among the world races?
2. Can education free itself from the past and past goals and prepare individuals groups to live in a world of accelerating change, if it is possible for human beings to do so?
3. Can educators and educational institutions satisfy the revolt and objections by youth against the imposed curriculum and impersonality of secondary and higher education or will learning move out of our institutions of learning, leaving them to indoctrinate conformity?
4. Can the conservative, traditional, bureaucratic and rigid educational system break out of the shackles of pressures for social conformity and deal with the real problems of modern life?
5. Will education be taken over by business, with more innovation and responsiveness but with the motive of profit-making and emphasis upon producing profitable hardware?⁵

To resolve these crises question and to assure human survival, the goal of education must be the facilitation of change and learning. According to Roger, "The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security. Change reliance on process rather than upon static knowledge, is the only thing that makes any sense as a goal for education in the modern world".⁶

The reason for inculcating the humanistic virtues lies in the realization that it would be naive to expect that our children are having natural propensity for these humanistic virtues. Humanistic traditions motivate us in realizing the potentials and leading a sovereign life. Traits like selfishness, ethnocentrism or even racism offend the humanity and deny the human rights of others. Humanistic education leads us to the universal application of basic norms of human dignity and equality. Humanistic traditions of education oppose egocentric and ethnocentric tendencies with such teachings as: "Steer away from falsehood and slay not one who is just and righteous....and take no bribe and oppose no stranger".⁷ Humanistic educators strongly believe that there are two aspects of education: one aspect deals with getting 'knowledge' and another aspect is concerned with the 'feelings' of the learners. In other words humanistic traditions do not separate the cognitive and affective

domains. Humanistic educators are committed to open ended approach to solve social problems that is an approach which allows testing for new alternatives. Humanism in totality can be said is philosophy-love for life. As we all know that Racism and discrimination has been used as powerful weapons encouraging fear and hatred of others. Racism is more than just words and actions. It also includes the invisible barriers big and small that can prevent people from doing as well in life as others simply because of their cultural background. People are being butchered because they are following different religion; they are from different racial group or class. Hundreds of examples can be quoted from Italy, Australia, Africa, USA, Malaysia, India, Myanmar etc. Almost whole world is witnessing this nuisance. Now can we hope that education will effectively take humanity out of this pain, the answer is 'Yes'. We can stop this bloodshed by inoculating the educational system with humanistic perspective and in this entire process teachers are the key participants. Role of the teachers should not only be the transmission of information but that of the traditional mentors.⁸ Recently various countries have supported humanistic principles and the same is clear from the empirical studies conducted by UN's HDI (Human Development Index) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD's PISA) on quality of life that clearly indicates that those countries which uphold Humanistic virtues are actually offering their citizens the highest quality of life. Scandinavian countries for example (Norway=No.1) have been in the lead for many years both in educational services, health and public welfare and in standards of individual liberties, social equity, gender equality and political integrity.⁹

The humanism has brought great effect in various fields of education: the aims, the curriculum, the methods of teaching, the outlook towards the child, the teacher, the discipline and the system of education all were given new blood. Humanism in education dragged the education from the old traditions, idealism and the high and low tides of the real surface. In Humanistic learning the students are free to judge what is good for them and what is bad for them to learn. A way must be found to develop a climate in the system in which the focus is not upon teaching but on the facilitation of self directed learning. When a facilitator creates even to a modest degree a classroom climate characterized by all that he can achieve of realness, prizing and empathy, when he trusts the constructive tendency of the individual and the group; then he discovers that he has inaugurated an educational revolution. Learning of a different quality proceeding at a different pace with a greater degree of pervasiveness occurs feelings-positive, negative and confused become a part of the classroom experience. The student is on his way, sometimes excitedly, sometimes reluctantly to become a learning changing being. The facilitation of learning does not rest upon the teaching skills of the leader, not upon the curricular planning, not upon his audio-visual aids, not upon the programmed learning he utilises, not upon his lectures and presentations, not upon his abundance of books though each of these might at time or another be utilized as an important resource. The facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learning.¹⁰

Humanistic approach emphasises the importance of the inner world of the learner and places the individual's thoughts, emotions and feelings at the forefront of all human development. According to humanistic stance which says that people's unique dignity remains in their creative imagination, critical reasoning, moral sensitivity, autonomous will and unique personality. It is crucial for humanistic education to prioritize the value

of human dignity over any other economic, religious, nationalistic or ideological set of values. Realness is the facilitator of learning:

Learning is facilitated when the teacher is not playing a role prescribed by the educational system but rather is himself or herself, genuine, authentic and honest. Relationships with students are direct personal encounters; the teacher is a real person, with no professional facade. He does not feel one thing and say something else; he does not conceal his feelings, either positive or negative. But in expressing his feelings he accepts them as his own, without projecting blame for his negative feelings on to the students. If he is irritated, he says “i feel irritated” not “you irritate me”. He can be bored as well as enthusiastic. He can like or dislike a student product without implying that it is objectively good or bad or that the student is good or bad. He is simply expressing a feeling for the product a feeling which exists within himself. Thus he is a person to his students, not a faceless embodiment of a curricular requirement or a sterile tube through which knowledge is passed from one generation to the next.¹¹

II. PRINCIPLES OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING

1. Humans are naturally curious to learn but significant learning is not without some pain. For example learning to walk involves bruises and bumps. Learning that others are better is also sometimes painful but learning to develop one’s potentials is usually greater than the pain and learning proceeds.
2. When the learners perceive their subject matter is having relevance for them, significant learning takes place. Two equally able students may learn quite different things and their pace may also vary depending upon how they perceive the material is relating to their needs and purpose.
3. Learning which tends to challenge one’s self that is values, beliefs and basic attitude that learning tends to be resisted by the learner.
4. Ridicule, shaming and pressures increase resistance to learning. Similarly understanding and accepting environment decreases and removes the fear and threat which results in the increase of significant learning.
5. Learning can effectively proceed when threat to the self or self concept is low. Any learning experience is assisted by its (threat) lack and inhibited if threat is present. Threat leads to disorganisation and distortion of thinking and perception. Freedom from the threat in any situation increases significant learning.
6. Significant learning takes place through activities. Involving students in practical and problem situations promotes significant learning.
7. Significant learning is maximized when objectives and directions are chosen by learners themselves. They discover their own resources formulate their problems and decide on and follow their own course of action. For them self directed learning is meaningful and relevant.
8. Significant learning is not something external or accepted on authority but it is always self initiated involving learner’s feelings as well as intellect, thus more lasting and pervasive as for as learning is concerned.

9. Self evaluation facilitates independence, creativity and self reliance as compared to evaluation by others. Creativity needs freedom, freedom to try something unusual and new, to take chance, to make mistakes without being evaluated or judged a failure.
10. The most socially useful learning in the modern world is the learning of the process of learning, a continuous openness to experience and incorporation into oneself of the process of change. Change is the central fact of current life and learning must be continuous.¹²

We know that the facilitation of such learning does not depend upon the teaching skills of the leader, not upon his curricular planning, not upon his use of audio visual aids, not upon the programmed learning he utilizes, not upon his lectures and presentations, not upon an abundance of books, though each of these might at one time or another be utilized as an important resource. Actually the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner.¹³

Despite all the positive points of humanistic education some teachers resist applying its principles in their classrooms. They think that in humanistic approach the role of the teacher is in turn lessens their power to manage and control the class. Such teachers think that a good teacher is merely a very knowledgeable, high prestige, and powerful one having all students afraid of him. However, humanistic education does not need teachers who are nearly good academic ones rather it prefers to take advantage of those teachers who not only know the academic topic and methods well, but also recognized and respected a psychological and emotional status of their students.¹⁴

III. CONCLUSION

Over a period of 2500 years, the humanistic traditions have been offering various models of humanity at its best. In the classical discourses of the west as well as of the east, this ideal comprised the central virtues of wisdom, justice, humanness, peace and harmony. More specifically we find in these traditions the qualities of broad minded education, reflective thinking, noble character, good taste, amiability, benevolence and social responsibility. In view of Aristotle's well known observation that the most significant test of practical wisdom – in ethics, politics and pedagogy is not in its formal understanding but in its practical realization. The principal challenge facing educators today is to translate the above mentioned theoretical consensus about objective sand means into practical models of humanistic education. As we know now Humanism has its roots in ancient traditions in both east and west. It is unfortunate that these basic virtues have failed to take practical shape in our educational practices and school characteristics.

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