

## **Are You A Humanizer?**

In the April 1996 issue (No. 36) of FIPLV WORLD News<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Gomes de Matos made a plea for “humanization” as a new approach to language education based on such values as human rights, justice, peace, dignity, and intercultural understanding. He found that humanization, especially Communicative Humanization/ Communicative Peace was nearly invisible in many social settings, especially in language education, and he was determined to probe it.

Dr. Gomes de Matos coined the term “Humanizer” signifying a person imbued with the principles/ ideals/ values of human rights, justice, peace, dignity, and solidarity and who apply them in their personal and professional life. He characterized the mission of “humanizers” as that of providing language learners with *dignifying* and *edifying* learning experiences.

By humanizing vocabulary and language, Dr. Gomes de Matos encourages students to use and self-monitor, words that contribute to building, enhancing, promoting, sustaining, and maximizing peace both between and among persons, groups, communities and nations.<sup>2</sup> To this end, a key question is: *How can vocabulary and communication skills contribute to strengthening the learners’ sense of self-respect and respect for others?*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.humiliationstudies.org/news/archives/000155.html>

<sup>2</sup> Teaching Vocabulary for Peace Education, Gomes de Matos, F. ESL Magazine, July/ August 2002, Vol.5, No.4, pp.22-23.

Below is an excerpt from Dr. Gomes de Matos' article that includes a checklist for teachers and teacher educators to ask themselves, *To what extent and how deeply can I consider myself a veritable "humanizer"?* Dr. Gomes de Matos has used this Checklist with teachers-to-be at an undergraduate level, students at a pre-graduate level called Curso de Especialização in the Brazilian education system, MA and PhD students at the Federal University of Pernambuco, and the local police force for the Program in Community Policing of Federal University of Pernambuco. It is hoped that this checklist will be a useful guide to learning and teaching in a humanistic way.

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**Age Range:** This lesson was drafted for language teachers, however the underlying philosophy is applicable to all ages. The checklist below could easily be adapted for students and the text could be paraphrased so as to be communicatively appropriate to different age groups, from elementary to secondary school students.

**Subject:** Language Arts, Literature, Social Studies, Foreign Language Courses

**Materials:** Blackboard or a large piece of paper, pens or pencils and paper.

**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Learning Objectives:**

- To encourage meaningful use of vocabulary and language
- To foster good relationships in general and the teaching relationship, in particular
- To introduce the humanizing force of communication
- To use words that help develop a positive learning environment
- Practice modeling the values embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as well as the values embedded in the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (UDLR)
- Utilize the UDHR and UDLR as a guiding principle for teaching

**Procedure:** Self-Reflection and Group Reflection

*Step One:* Students participating in the workshop are first challenged to discuss the word “human” and its word family i.e., human, human being, humanize, humanization, human rights, etc. If no one suggests “humanizer,” then the concept-term is mentioned.

However, the group is challenged to characterize the term as best they can. When and if students mention humanizer as one of the members of the human family, *what do they mean?* Only then is it recommended that the teacher share the characterization of “humanizer.”

*Step Two:* Ask teachers and teacher educators to work in dyads or in small groups of 4-6 to review and respond to the Checklist below. Points of view should be shared as a group after some time for reflection.

**I am a humanizer when I ....**

1. perceive and treat my students as persons having rights and responsibilities.
2. approach language education/ teaching as a system for helping learners grow personally, socially, intra-culturally, and inter-culturally.
3. view and implement assessment of learners' performance as a positive, "humanizing" *system* which emphasizes the strengths employed by students in their language learning.<sup>3</sup>
4. apply human communicative rights in the classroom and assure learners of their right to hear (what is being said by other members of the classroom community) and the right to be heard and see to it that students fulfill their corresponding communicative responsibilities.
5. adapt/ change portions of teaching materials which do not contribute to personal or group humanization. In such cases, the key-question would be: *What needs to*

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<sup>3</sup> For information on the strategic relevance of using psychological knowledge positively, see Handbook of Positive Psychology, edited by C.R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, Oxford University Press, 2002.

*be changed in such and such lesson so that language learning can become a deeply humanizing experience? How can this be done? What needs to be considered i.e., steps and research?*

6. adopt and maintain a positive view of the language and culture which are being experienced in the classroom and motivate students to share different, constructive lingua-cultural perceptions.
7. create humanizing, peace-building, peace-enhancing, peace-promoting activities so that learners build up their competence as caring and compassionate language users.
8. probe language resources, especially vocabulary, as a tool with which students can both humanize themselves and others with which they interact.

*Step Three:* Each teacher and student can probe, revamp, refine and/ or expand the above Checklist. It is meant to provoke thought and interaction.

The Checklist can be presented with blanks to be filled in by students. Students fill it in and justify their ideas. In addition, they are asked to paraphrase and prioritize each statement in the Checklist which serves to transform it and make their own.

**Going Further:** This lesson is adaptable for students where the class collaborates on their own Humanizer Checklist in order to support positive interactions with fellow students, friends and family members. Students can then use this checklist to analyze interactions (dialogue, personal narratives) between or among characters found in literature. Furthermore, testing the humanizing effects of language in literary texts should consider historical, cultural and social contexts and implications.

Students can reference various documents related to the protection of human rights (see resources below) in order to see how practicing the points on their checklist might help respect human rights and meet basic human needs. In addition, students could take on the task of “humanizing” their use of the internet by designing a chat room to create e-friends. In creating a chat room, students can demonstrate their commitment to the use of positive language and exchange ideas about how to constructively change the climate of their classrooms, communities and world into caring places.

**Suggested Resources:**

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights:  
<http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>
- The World Conference on Linguistic Rights Barcelona Declaration  
<http://www.linguistic-declaration.org/livre-gb.htm>
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child: <http://www.unicef.org/crc/fulltext.htm>
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security:  
[http://www.un.org/events/res\\_1325e.pdf](http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf)

- Compilation of Resources on Women's Human Rights:

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/auoe.htm>

**Connection:** See *The Power of Words in Transforming Conflict* in Stand Three on Prevention, Resolution and Transformation of Conflict.