

20th-Century Humanism and 21st-Century Technology: A Match Made in Cyberspace

Learning a foreign language is a challenging task—and teaching a foreign language can be just as daunting. Though as teachers we may experience only minimal changes in our curricula from year to year, we are constantly looking for new and creative ways to motivate our students to learn. Once upon a time, back in the days of peace, love, revolution, and bell-bottomed blue jeans (that is, the 1960s), a philosophy gained popularity among educators in a variety of disciplines and was adopted by teachers of foreign languages. That method was based on the premise that if our students feel better about themselves, they will achieve greater results as learners. Additionally, the philosophy said, the more inclined students are to share their feelings, interests, values, hopes, and dreams, the stronger and more self-confident they will be. That philosophy appealed to foreign language teachers because it also meant that our students would have the con-

fidence to speak more in the target language and move closer to full linguistic competence. This innovation in teaching was known as the humanistic approach to education, and exercises developed for the classroom were referred to as humanistic activities.

Now, almost fifty years later, we are experiencing another revolution in education: a social media revolution in which people communicate in cyberspace through aural, visual, and written discourse. Via Facebook, YouTube, a blog, or other venues, one can reveal interests, innermost feelings, core values, and straightforward opinions. Furthermore, it's possible to reveal the “real you” to hundreds of people who can become your newest friends at the click of a mouse. Having so many “friends” can certainly provide a boost for one's ego—and according to humanistic theory, the more that 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, including foreign language learning.

In certain respects, then, twentieth-century humanism and twenty-first-century social media are a logical match; the more you interact with others in cyberspace, the more self-assured you can become, and with the increasing availability of social media, nowadays you can reach out to a vast number of people online. This article will explore the background and principles of humanism, then present ideas for humanistic activities updated for the twenty-first century.

Origins of humanistic methodology in education

Sixty years ago, the United States was emerging from a period during which the country's population had suffered economic hardship in the Great Depression and sacrificed lives and wealth during World War II. A time of peace and prosperity in the 1950s resulted in a spike in the nation's birthrate, producing a generation of youngsters who came to be known as the Baby Boomers. Upheaval in the nation's economic, political, and social structures occurred during the middle of the twentieth century, and education was not immune from the changes. During this period, the theories of psychologists Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers influenced educators who recognized the value of introducing humanism in the classroom. By the late 1960s, the Baby Boomers were college students and were calling for greater reform in education and society, their demands expressed in lyrics to songs such as "Aquarius" (Rado, Ragni, and MacDermot 1969), which proclaimed it was a time for "harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding . . ." Educators realized that more attention needed to be paid to students' emotional needs, and that also had to be reflected in the way teachers performed their duties.

One result was that greater attention was paid to the personal as compared with the intellectual dimension of the student. Gertrude Moskowitz, a guru for those who tuned in and turned on to humanism in education, describes the mood of the period: "There seems to be a shift in our society's focus from one of academic achievement to one of self-actualization. Developing fulfilling relationships, recognizing interdependence, expressing one's feelings,

achieving one's potential, sharing oneself, and giving and receiving support are all parts of this new area of emphasis" (Moskowitz 1978, 10). Simon, Howe, and Kirschenbaum (1972) also wrote of the estrangement of students who were put off by the status quo in education: "So often, what goes on in the classroom is irrelevant and remote from the real things that are going on in students' lives—their daily encounters with friends, with strangers, with peers, with authority figures" (13).

In this environment of alienation and rebellion, attention to humanism and self-actualization—achieving one's full potential—gained momentum in society and in the classroom. According to Moskowitz (1978, 13), "Such an approach will help increase the esteem and understanding students have for themselves and others, thus facilitating growth in the direction of being more *self-actualized*" (italics added). In other words, learners will be more confident not only in their ability to learn English—but to succeed at almost any task.

Critics of this shift of emphasis from the cognitive to the personal insist that the goal of education is to teach academic content according to the requirements of the curriculum, and that by devoting time to activities that address the feelings of students, we are simply creating a distraction from the main task at hand. Gadd (1998) argues that some teachers substitute affective learning for more formal learning, to the detriment of the student's academic progress. In a rebuttal, Arnold (1998) makes the point that the vast majority of foreign-language teachers use these exercises to supplement what students are expected to learn in class. She cites Moskowitz as someone who recommended "not total abandonment of what teachers are expected to teach, but supplementing these materials where appropriate" (Moskowitz 1978, 1). In Arnold's words, "Humanistic language teachers see that they can teach English at least as effectively as those who take another approach, and at the same time provide their students with added benefits" (Arnold 1998, 237).

If we consider the basic principles that provide a justification for humanism in education, its benefits become clear. Referring to those principles, Moskowitz has written,

Suppose the target language is taught so that students develop more positive feelings about them-

selves and their classmates and find out more about what they are really like. Such an approach will help increase the esteem and understanding students have for themselves and others They will then become more motivated to learn to use the foreign language and, as a result, will be more likely to learn. (Moskowitz 1978, 13)

Today, with the increasing popularity of social media, students have new forums where they can share their feelings with others. This is an important development for English-language teachers and learners; if we apply the principles of humanism to social media, it means that as the number of English-language-speaking peers in one's social media network grows, it will be easier for a student to move along the path to self-actualization and that student will have greater potential for success in learning the target language.

Humanistic activities

Traditionally, humanistic activities designed for the classroom have not been dependent on advanced technology, so they serve as realistic possibilities for teachers in nearly every context. But because an increasing number of teachers and students have access to the Internet, the exercises described in this article are also Internet-adaptable, and they include instructions for using web platforms such as chat rooms (also known as message boards or online forums) or more recent innovations such as the web-cam chat and a social network. Additionally, the activities presented here are relatively easy to carry out in the classroom. The first is based on the well-known icebreaker *Find Someone Who* . . . , while the others focus on self-expression, intellect, and perception.

Some of the activities featured in this article are inspired by ones that appeared in Moskowitz (1978) and by her enthusiasm for using humanistic techniques to teach foreign languages. She offers three important pieces of advice. The first is to always accentuate the positive. Humanism is all about feeling good about yourself, so tell your students that whenever they are tempted to say something negative about someone, they shouldn't do it! The second piece of advice is to give your students the option to not participate in any

activity; feeling overly pressured to participate can discourage any language learner. Third, bear in mind that these activities are meant to supplement what you are required to cover with your students according to your syllabus and curriculum.

The activities presented here have been adapted to social media platforms in order to increase their appeal as well as their effectiveness.

Four humanistic activities

1. Find Someone Who ...

Many teachers have had experience with Find Someone Who . . . , but in a humanistic exercise, the questions that students usually ask each other about hobbies, experiences, and skills can be supplemented with others that address a student's feelings, values, and personal qualities.

Establishing a level of rapport with your students at the beginning of a course can help facilitate a humanistic adaptation of Find Someone Who One strategy is to share personal information, as suggested by Mole (2011): "Something that I think helps establish a rapport is to tell the class a few details about yourself, your family, and your background So I talk about various members of my family and some of my friends as well as drawing on my experiences in other countries." Such an approach, if you feel comfortable with it, can help put students at ease and at the same time provide them with an example of the type of information you would like them to share with their classmates. By engaging the students, you may also discover which topics are of interest to them. That will help you draft your own prompts for the activity.

Some teachers use this activity during the first week of class, depending on their students' level. Tell your students that by participating, many of them will discover they have common interests, share values, or have had similar experiences. The procedures for this activity are fairly well known. Each student is given a series of prompts—or copies the prompts from the blackboard—that begin with "Find someone who" Students move around the classroom and ask their classmates questions based on those prompts. For example, if told to "Find someone who . . . has a younger brother," the student

must turn the prompt into a question and ask a classmate, “Do you have a younger brother?” If the response is “No,” the student moves to another classmate and repeats the question. If the response is “Yes,” the student asks for the respondent’s name and writes it after the prompt. Ideally, the student will write a different student’s name for each of the prompts.

The activity gives students practice with forming questions using “Do you ...,” “Are you ...,” and “Can you ...,” along with other structures, if you expand the prompts to include tenses besides present simple. The activity also allows for practice using vocabulary related to things students do, think, and feel, inside and outside the classroom.

As such, the activity offers an excellent opportunity to incorporate prompts with a humanistic orientation and the qualities associated with it. Following are examples of prompts (and a quality that each relates to):

Find someone who ...

- is a volunteer. (civic responsibility)
- can tell funny jokes. (humor)
- can keep a secret. (trust)
- thinks it is better to give a gift than receive one. (generosity)
- is a member of a club. (sociability)
- cleans his or her room every day. (neatness/self-discipline)
- is always on time for school. (punctuality/self-discipline)
- likes helping other people with tasks. (consideration of others)
- would offer his or her seat to an elderly person. (consideration of others)
- always follows rules. (obedience)
- helps with chores at home. (cooperation)
- is saving money to buy something. (thrift)
- wants to read a new book. (curiosity/self-improvement/personal growth)
- wants to learn a new language. (curiosity/self-improvement/personal growth)
- exercises every day. (health and fitness)
- eats healthful foods. (health and fitness)
- has a part-time job. (industriousness)
- likes to work with others. (cooperation/teamwork)
- wants to be a leader. (leadership)

Give students enough time to find people who say “Yes” to most or all of the prompts.

The classroom usually becomes quieter as students near completion of the task. Have the students sit down again and then ask if anyone has written the name of a student for each item. Or you can ask students to talk about some of the interesting things they’ve learned about their classmates. Use follow-up questions to elicit more details during the discussion phase.

Using a chat room for Find Someone Who ...

An Internet connection can make it possible for a class to participate in chat rooms. Such platforms make it possible for students or instructors to post messages that others can read and respond to almost instantaneously. Find Someone Who ... can be adapted to an online chat room format, but instead of the teacher providing the prompts, the students anonymously post their own sentences. Then, in class, these sentences become the prompts that students turn into questions as they try to discover who wrote them in the chat room. Here are a few examples of online postings, followed by the in-class questions they would prompt:

1. Post: I volunteer to tutor students who study English at my school.
Question: Do you volunteer to tutor students who study English at our school?
2. Post: Many of my friends tell me their secrets.
Question: Do many of your friends tell you their secrets?
3. Post: I taught my brother how to swim last weekend.
Question: Did you teach your brother how to swim (last weekend)?

Give a deadline for posting statements, and on the day of the activity, print the page containing all of them or write the statements on the board. The students mingle as they search for the authors, and when they find one, they write his or her name on the printout or another sheet of paper. Students should be encouraged to give extended answers and not limit their responses to a simple “Yes” or “No.” For example, a student might answer the question, “Do you volunteer to help other students?” by saying, “No. I don’t have any free time to volunteer because I am studying for my entrance examinations.” That answer tells

the questioner something important about the student. You can ask students if they were able to identify the authors of all the postings and conclude with a discussion about the interesting things they learned about their classmates.

Find Someone Who ... can be adapted to a humanistic context. It will give students a forum, either in the classroom or online, where they can share information about their values, feelings, and personal qualities. As they do, stronger bonds will be formed, confidence to speak in the target language will increase, and they will make progress toward reaching their full potential as language learners and human beings.

2. Self-Collage

Collage is an art form that offers students an excellent venue for self-expression. Even students who do not consider themselves accomplished artists can derive pleasure from creating their own collage. In this exercise, each student combines meaningful images with words in the target language to create a collage about himself or herself. Many examples of collages can be found on the Internet; you can find images of some by doing a search for “self-collage” under the www.google.com Images tab. A typical self-collage includes pictures of people, places, and other items that are important to the creator of the piece. Those images may be cut from magazines or newspapers, or students can draw their own sketches. Because this is a language project, English should be prominently featured in the collage. Words and phrases in the target language that describe personal qualities, interests, hobbies, and emotions are interspersed among the images.

When you introduce the assignment, tell students not to put their names or pictures of themselves on the collage in order to ensure anonymity, an important element of the project. This is an assignment that should be completed at home and will require one to two weeks for preparation. On the due date, students hand in their collages, and you can hang them on the walls of the classroom. A sheet of lined paper should be attached to the bottom of each collage where other students can post their comments. Encourage your students to write extended comments rather than snippets like “It’s good” or “I like it”—urge them to try to figure out and explain *why* it’s good or

why they like it. You can also encourage the following:

- positive remarks about the collage
- comments about what the viewer learned about the interests of the creator of the collage
- reflections on personal qualities and interests shared by the creator and the student who is commenting

Some examples of thoughtful comments: “You and I have visited the same waterfall.” “I can tell that you are a generous person.” “It’s great that you like to exercise so much. You must be very healthy.” The activity can conclude with each student presenting his or her collage to the class and reflecting on the comments made by classmates.

Using a Ning for the self-collage

This project can also be carried out on the online platform called a Ning (www.ning.com). A Ning is an online social network with membership limited to individuals who are invited to join and participate. Members create blogs, upload photos, participate in forums, and do much more. Students can upload photographs of their collages, and comments can be posted by other members of the Ning—that is, other students in the class. Each student will be able to read how the collage is perceived by classmates, and creators can compare those perceptions with how they perceive themselves. Their own reactions to comments can also be posted on their Ning blog.

One goal of the collage project is to promote friendship and trust, and you should emphasize that goal when you introduce the assignment. Remind students of the importance of making positive comments on their classmates’ collages: such comments can help students feel better about themselves and about their classmates. In addition, being positive about an aspect of a collage that may be different from their own also helps students appreciate individual differences in taste, interests, and experiences.

Expressing how students perceive themselves in a collage hung on a classroom wall is a great way for them to communicate with peers, but posting the collage on a Ning can give students access to a wider audience. A project that a teacher assigns to several groups who belong to the same Ning will allow more students to view the artwork and offer feedback. Applying

basic principles of humanism to social media suggests that the more a student's social media network expands, the better the student will feel about himself or herself.

3. Express Yourself with Art

During this activity, students listen to a musical arrangement and—using pencils, markers, watercolors, or whatever sketching tools are available—draw images that capture their emotions. The selection they listen to should allow enough time for students to complete their drawings; ten to fifteen minutes should be sufficient. An instrumental piece such as a symphony, a jazz composition, or a selection from an indigenous or traditional musical genre would be suitable. I've always done this activity or seen other teachers do it with an instrumental piece; lyrics might become a distraction, or the students might sketch according to words they hear in the song. After the students have put the finishing touches on their artwork, have each one stand up and present it to a small group or to the entire class. It should be held high enough so that everyone can see the image as students describe what they've drawn and how they were affected by the music.

If you want to be explicit about the language your students practice, instruct them to use a structure being targeted or vocabulary being reviewed. Examples might be "This is a picture of a sunset" (demonstratives) or "The music made me feel _____" (adjectives that describe emotions). The activity can become more interactive if other students ask the artists about their artwork ("What is the small blue object in the corner?") and compare drawings among themselves. In a humanistic context, questions could address the following:

- motivation (e.g., "What did the music make you think of?")
- emotion (e.g., "How did you feel when you were drawing the picture?")
- reflection (e.g., "What do you like best about your picture?")

As most teachers know, using a visual aid can help elicit feedback. Images are interpreted in different ways, and interpretations can be compared in a lively discussion. To one student, the drawing might look like a shimmering stream flowing through a tropical jungle, while to another it may appear to be an alien from a distant world.

You can also use a graphic organizer to illustrate how the same image can affect different people in many ways. To do this, attach the picture to the center of the blackboard and draw lines that connect it to ovals containing words or phrases you elicit from your students. As with any graphic organizer, the first set of ovals can radiate to others containing related words and phrases. The choice of prompts you use is up to you; here are three suggestions:

- What do you see in this picture?
- How does this picture make you feel?
- What similarities do you see in this picture and your own picture?

Artwork and social media

Photographs of the artwork can be uploaded to a Ning, and members can use their blogs to post comments that describe how they were influenced by the recordings; classmates can also post impressions and interpretations of the artwork created by others. The presentation of artwork can be fun and, regardless of the level of sophistication, a source of pride and achievement. That pride can be channeled in a direction that will give your students more confidence to communicate through speech and writing in the target language.

Additionally, groups of students in more than one location can take part in a web chat, where students use a video connection to present their artwork to students in a classroom in another school, city, or even country. The students who are viewing the artwork post their feedback as *chat*—text that appears in a "chat box" on the same screen. There are several websites where this application can be downloaded, but currently Skype (www.skype.com) is the most popular; it's free if the users communicate computer-to-computer. The students who are presenting can also respond to the comments of others on camera or with text.

According to humanistic principles, the more people you can communicate and share with, either verbally or nonverbally, the more confidence you can develop in your own skills. Moreover, the opportunity to converse with students in other places will stimulate your students' motivation to learn the target language. While many students would like to participate in exchange programs, few get the chance. Web chats are currently the next best thing to actually being there. And exchanging opinions

about music and art with learners from places your students would like to visit will also give them a feeling of satisfaction at having been able to make themselves understood through both art and language.

4. Jeopardy!

For years, teachers of all subjects have debated the value of playing games in the classroom; many teachers and even some students consider such activities frivolous. On the other side of the argument are teachers like Adam John Simpson, who writes, “Despite my many years of trepidation, there has always been pedagogic evidence out there to endorse the use of games in the language classroom” (Simpson 2011). He cites Lengeling and Malarcher (1997), who point out that games offer affective and cognitive benefits, strengthen classroom dynamics, and foster adaptability.

In a humanistic context, games will help language learners develop greater confidence as they perform tasks that give an indication of their level of knowledge in a specific area of language or culture. In games that are played by teams, learners build teamworking skills, and when students perform well, not only do their teammates benefit, but all of their classmates observe their accomplishments. The affective benefits identified by Lengeling and Malarcher (1997)—e.g., lowering the affective filter, encouraging the creative and spontaneous use of language, and promoting communicative competence—are well known to those of us who use humanistic techniques. When a student performs successfully in front of a group or in front of the class, those affective benefits are multiplied.

How has the Internet affected the quality and availability of games we can use in the classroom? Games for teaching English as a foreign language can be found on many websites, but a more important decision for the teacher is which game to choose. Television may provide us with an answer.

One of the most popular American television game shows of all time, *Jeopardy!*, tests a contestant’s knowledge on a variety of topics. There are various commercial websites where templates for games such as *Jeopardy!* can be downloaded for a fee. However, it’s not difficult for your students to create their own *Jeopardy!* game board. The board has categories across the top, with the rest of the board made

up of cells where answers can be deposited. (See Figure 1 for an example, but you can play the game with fewer categories or fewer items in each category.) Use stiff poster-sized paper and make pouches for each cell.

Note that each cell contains the *answer* to a question about an item in the category. To play the game, a contestant must choose a cell (e.g., “Cities for 10 points”), and a moderator—you or a student who is not in the game—reads the answer in the cell. The contestant must then *ask a question* that would produce that answer. For example, the “Cities for 10 points” cell might have the answer, “Washington, D.C.” The contestant is expected to provide a question such as, “What is the capital of the United States?” On the other hand, the cell worth 50 points should contain an answer to a more challenging question. If the answer “Mother Teresa” appears in a cell under “Famous People,” a correct question would be, “Who helped poor people living in Kolkata, India?”

The *Jeopardy!* game is played by teams of students (teams of three work well), with one student representing each team in each round. If necessary, the player is allowed to ask his or her teammates for help. Players have the right to choose answers from any of the cells, but most begin with ones that have lower values (easier items) and then move on to more challenging, higher-value cells. If a student produces the correct question, he or she is awarded the corresponding number of points. If the student is incorrect, the points are subtracted from the team’s total, and the other team is allowed to try. After an equal number of students from each team has played the game, scores are totaled and the winning team is announced.

Jeopardy! also provides the opportunity for collaboration during at least two stages. First, students working in groups of three can collaborate to create “answers” for games that will be played by other groups. Students have a sense of the kinds of categories their classmates may be interested in as well as the specific questions that are easy or difficult to answer. Students can derive as much satisfaction and sense of achievement from creating a game that is fair and fun for their classmates to play as they might from playing a game themselves.

A second opportunity for collaboration comes during the playing of the game. Instead of having an individual student represent his or

her team, allow the team members to consult one another about which category they want to try and then again about what their question will be. And, of course, they can also collaborate to determine the correct form of the question they would like to ask.

There is almost no limit to the categories that can be used in this game—choices will depend on your students’ background knowledge and topics they are currently studying. Humanistic qualities can be worked into the answers and questions. For example, a broad category called “Vocabulary” might incorporate humanistic values with answers like these (possible correct questions are in parentheses):

- 10 points: The opposite of *war* (What is *peace*?)
- 20 points: A group of people who work together to accomplish a goal (What is a *team*?)
- 30 points: A person who offers to do work without receiving payment (What is a *volunteer*?)
- 40 points: A person who gives money to help other people (What is a *donor*?)
- 50 points: A word describing a person who is always on time (What is *punctual*?)

Humanistic values could also be incorporated in categories that focus on, for example, “Nobel Peace Prize Winners” (e.g., Barack Obama; Mother Teresa; Martin Luther King, Jr.; Kofi Annan; Aung San Suu Kyi). A pre-game assignment might involve students doing research on individuals or topics that will be used, with the game serving as a tool to

reinforce students’ knowledge. You could also follow up with a post-game focus on people or qualities that were used in the game.

When I observed *Jeopardy!* played among three groups of students in the city of Taraz, Kazakhstan, the game produced the heightened level of interest, enthusiasm, and excitement that teachers aim for in a foreign-language classroom. The students had been enrolled in a beginners’ level group for slightly less than a semester. Yet the progress they had made in that brief period was impressive. The affection the teachers had for the students was palpable, and the camaraderie displayed among students was also clearly evident. The *Jeopardy!* game was an indication of what had been taking place in the program for the entire semester. The combination of effective instruction, appropriate materials and activities, and sincere caring produced the kind of results teachers strive for: happy, confident students whose progress exceeded expectations due at least in part to the humanistic approach implemented by the teaching staff. My observations—and the work of those teachers—support the belief of Arnold (1998): “Basic humanism—not a set of techniques nor a specific method, but rather an approach to life reflected in one’s attitudes towards all of one’s activities—has much to offer to English language teaching” (241).

Adapting *Jeopardy!* for social media

Teachers have both structured or nonstructured options for using the *Jeopardy!* concept of providing an answer and having students write a corresponding question. In a structured

History	Novels	Cities	Famous People	Landmarks
10 points	10 points	10 points	10 points	10 points
20 points	20 points	20 points	20 points	20 points
30 points	30 points	30 points	30 points	30 points
40 points	40 points	40 points	40 points	40 points
50 points	50 points	50 points	50 points	50 points

Figure 1. Example of a *Jeopardy!* game board

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approach, you can provide an answer on the class blog and assign students to write questions that would produce that answer. The answers should be people or things that students are already familiar with, such as the name of the school, a nearby landmark, or—in keeping with the humanistic approach—the name of a well-known person who has demonstrated humanistic values. You might want to assign students to come up with more than one question, both to give practice in forming different question types and to provide opportunities for students to think about the answer in a variety of ways. (It also prevents students from asking only the most obvious question, such as “What is the name of our school?”)

Nonstructured options include asking students to come up with their own answers, then sending or posting the answer by whatever means they prefer—email, text, Facebook, etc.—to one or more classmates, who provide a question for that answer—and then send back a new answer of their own. In this way, a back-and-forth series of answers and questions could develop, with students using their imaginations to come up with challenging answers and creative questions.

There could also be competitions to see which student or group of students could come up with the most questions for a given answer in a given time period. In any case, no matter how you incorporate the *Jeopardy!* concept, from a humanistic viewpoint the keys are that all students would be participating, using English in a nonthreatening situation, and likely having fun doing so.

Conclusion

The humanistic approach in education first attracted attention a half century ago. Much more recent developments in social media and information technology are taking foreign-language education in new directions. This article has featured humanistic exercises that have been adapted for this new era in global communication. These exercises are examples of ways that humanistic teaching can add to our classrooms what Arnold (1998) calls “a further dimension: the capacity to use our thinking in a positive and useful manner” (240).

Whether we teach English in the classroom or in cyberspace, we must continually encourage our students to use the language they learn with enthusiasm and in a meaningful way. According to proponents of humanism in education, as students travel along the path toward self-actualization, they will become better language learners if they possess the right amount of self-esteem and have the confidence to speak up and speak out when given the opportunity to do so. As Simon (1993) writes, “From knowing yourself, your behaviors and your patterns—a new confidence, an internal security, and a sense of potency will emerge that is life-giving” (101–102). The confidence and security that emerge from allowing others to know them as well as they know themselves will make your students more effective learners of any foreign language, including English.

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