

# Student Centered Trends and The Teacher's Role

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## I . Introduction

In recent years teaching, particularly in EFL/ESL has been re-assessed as “the management of learning.” I see this so-called student-centered trends has gotten implications from Rogers’ humanistic psychology initially and then motivated by the resurgence of individualized instruction and the findings in the second language(L<sub>2</sub>) research. In order to understand the nature of the current trends it would be better and more appropriate to trace the initiators and motivators through the literature of the field rather than to describe any particular way or approach currently in fashion. This paper is designed for this purpose with the opening section of common characteristics of student-centered trends. The concluding section is allotted to the teacher’s role to keep the art of language teaching/learning in balance. So, the following will be discussed in order:

1. Common characteristics of student-centered trends
2. Rogers’ humanistic psychology
3. Resurgence of individualized instruction
4. Major findings in L<sub>2</sub> research
5. Conclusion : the teacher’s role

## II . Common characteristics of student-centered trends.

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Wilga Rivers(1983:80—85) takes us to a three-classroom visit, all devoted to the *learning* of a language. The three ways of approaching the language-learning task are so-called Gattegno's Silent way, Curran's Community Language Learning and Lozanov's Suggestopedia. Arguing that all fit into the new mood of greater emphasis on the individual and on personal learning strategies she discusses the common characteristics of the three ways/approaches as follows:

- (1) They try to *give the student room and time to learn with as little intrusion of the teacher into the learning process as possible*. They throw the learning upon the student themselves, and they envision the teacher's role as indirect.
- (2) They all endeavor to involve the *whole person* of the student. They are all concerned with the emotional and interactional facets of communicating in a second language.
- (3) All view *the learning of a second language as quite different from the learning of the first*.
- (4) All three are *inductive in the initial encounter of the student with the language*. All three provide explanation at a later point in the learning as students require it. Initially, however, all three present material and let the students do what they can with it.
- (5) All three approaches are *noncorrective and give the students time*. They aim to reduce the anxiety and tension of language learning. Corrections when supplied are done so in a supportive way, as information rather than reproof, and as the students show a need or desire for them.
- (6) They encourage *active use of the language in communicative situations from the beginning*.
- (7) Finally, they try to *create a community feeling* of "all pulling together," which decreases inhibitions against expressing oneself in front of others in a language of which one still knows very little.

In conclusion, she agrees that each of these six factors can be reproduced in other approaches in the usual classroom situation.

### III. Rogers' humanistic psychology<sup>1)</sup>

Carl Rogers is not traditionally thought of as a "learning" psychologist, yet he and his colleagues and followers have had a significant impact on our present understanding of learning in an educational or pedagogical context.

Rogers has devoted most of his professional life to clinical work in an attempt to be of therapeutic help to individuals. In his classical work *Client-centered Therapy*(1951), Rogers carefully analyzed human behavior in general by means of the presentation of 19 formal principles of human behavior. He studied the "Whole person" as a physical and cognitive but primarily emotional being. His formal principles focused on the development of an individual's self-concept and of his or her personal sense of reality, those internal forces which cause a person to act. Rogers felt that inherent in principles of behavior is the ability of human beings to adapt and to grow in the direction that enhances their existence. Given a nonthreatening environment a person will form a picture of reality that is indeed congruent with reality, and will grow and learn.

Rogers' position has important implications for education. The focus is away from "teaching" and toward "learning". The goal of education is the facilitation of change and learning. Our present system of education, in prescribing curricular goals and dictating what shall be learned, denies persons both freedom and dignity. What is needed according to Rogers is real facilitators of learning, and one can only facilitate by establishing an interpersonal relationship with the learner.

Though Rogers' theory is not without its flaws, his emphasis on student-centered teaching has contributed significantly to a redefinition of the educational process. In adapting Rogers' ideas to language teaching and learning, we need to see to it that learners understand themselves and communicate with others freely and nondefensively. Teachers as facilitators must therefore provide the nurturing context for learning and not see their

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1) This section is a summary of H. D. Brown(1987:70-72).

mission as one of rather programmatically feeding students quantities of knowledge. And classroom activities and materials in language learning should therefore utilize meaningful contexts of genuine communication with persons together engaged in the process of becoming persons.

#### IV. Resurgence of individualized instruction<sup>2)</sup>

Individualization of instruction is not a new concept. Individualized approaches achieved worldwide recognition in the twenties(W.Rivers 1983: 65). W. Rivers(1983:66-67) mentions the the essential philosophy of individualized instruction in this late twentieth century. According to her, (i)Our students have their own inner needs they come with *an individual perception of what is meaningful and valuable*; (ii) *They are maturing(developing) at an individual rate*; (iii) They have individual goals and expectations, and therefore *their motivation is intensely personal but purposeful*; (iv) They learn through active experience, particularly as they interact with others. Therefore *the individual's inner world is "lived out" in human relationships*; (v) *There are no nonlearners in the human family.*

W.Rivers prescribes that it is an age of anonymity and depersonalization. She also points out that this is a world that has dedicated its efforts to universal education, frequently referred to as "mass education", which clearly indicates that we are talking of instruction, not education. So now more than ever we need to educate, rather than instruct. Much of what we taught in an earlier period our students already know from informal sources : television, magazines, personal experience through travel, and extended contacts.

What we think to teach is not necessarily what our students learn. What is learned in the long run is determined by the personal perception of the situation by each student. We should, therefore, be much more sensitive to the learning environment we create and the qualities of the relationship within it, rather

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2) This section is a brief summary of Rivers(1983 : Chapter 5, pp.65-78).

than attribute to our organization of explicit teaching the major role in student learning.

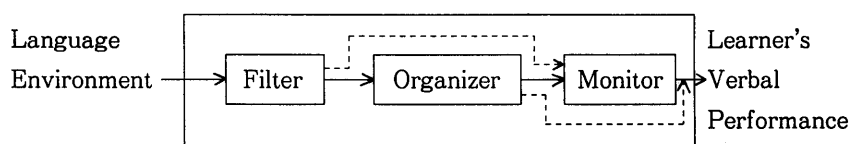
If we are convinced of the need to tailor opportunities for learning to the individual, *we must take seriously the individual's personal interests in learning a language*. Individualized instruction implies diversification of objectives and content. Individualization makes such diversity possible, as no previous system has done. We must work with our students in establishing what they are really seeking in learning the language, rather than imposing on them our view of their needs.

The term "individualized instruction" itself may be leading us astray with its connotations of separateness and segmentation and its seeming focus on receptive learning. For both language-related and educational reasons W. Rivers proposes we use the term "cooperative learning". One of the demands on modern education is to reestablish the values of cooperation in an increasingly depersonalized world. since language use, if it is to be developed with confidence, needs just such an accepting cooperative atmosphere, free of cross-comparisons, here is an area in which we can take the lead. *In cooperative learning, all can succeed because each has something unique to contribute to the enterprise. As students are given responsibility, they develop responsible attitudes. And the teacher becomes an adviser, guide, helper, supporter and partner in a cooperative venture.*

## V. Major findings in L<sub>2</sub> research

Another important factor that caused student-centered trends to become fashionable is the findings in L<sub>2</sub> acquisition and L<sub>2</sub> acquisition process. Dulay, Burt and Krashen(1982:45–46) suggest the following figure.

Figure 1. Internal Processors



Language learners do not take in everything they hear. Their motives, needs, attitudes and emotional states filter what they hear and therefore affect the rate and quality of language learning. We use the term filter to refer to these “affective” factors that screen out certain parts of learners’ language environments.

Krashen(1982:97–101) mentions that many(most) adults are thought to have a mental block, i.e. ‘affective filter’ that prevents them from achieving total competence in the second language. When the filter is ‘up’ input may be understood, but it may not reach those area of the brain that deal with language acquisition. And this filter is caused by (i) anxiety and nervousness ; (ii) overconcernedness ; (iii) negative feeling toward the speakers of the target language ; and (iv) lack of self-confidence. He also argues that traditional methods rarely provide much in the way of comprehensible input and do raise anxieties and thus the affective filter with them. Such classes raise the affective filter and go against the comprehensible input principle by insisting on early and fully accurate student talk by providing too little input, and that on boring subjects. Instead, newer methods attempt to capture students’ interest, encourage a relaxed atmesphere, provide a great deal of input, and do not insist on early speech in the second language.

Despite severe criticism of Krashen’s five hypotheses of L<sub>2</sub> acquisition, Gregg (1983:94) agrees with him that “... affective barriers can prevent successful acquisition of a L<sub>2</sub> and a teacher has the duty to try to lower those barriers wherever possible”.

#### IV. Conclusion ; the teacher’s role

Throughout the discussion of this paper the teacher’s role has been mentioned frequently. But as teachers we may feel some concern about teaching. Here I need to cite some concluding remarks which would give some comfort to the uneasy teachers.

Earl W. Stevick(1980 : 17) believes that “there is a way to define ‘control’

and 'initiative', not widely inconsistent with everyday usage, which will allow the teacher to keep nearly 100 percent of the 'control' while at the same time the learner is exercising nearly 100 percent of the 'initiative.'" The way is to become "humanistic". To keep humanistic relationship between the student and the teacher, Earl Stevick concludes that there are two essentials for the teacher, : *faith* that the student will in fact grow into that space, and *understanding* of where the student is in that space at any given moment (1980:33).

Peter Strevens argues that effective learning is a reciprocal effect with informed teaching, each shaping another(1988:51). 'Informed teachers' proceed not simply by the routine operation of technique-i.e. by methodology-but by using their constant awareness of the learner's progress to determine which technique will be most helpful at a given moment. In conclusion, he points out that this postulate that learning and teaching are reciprocal can be illuminated through a consideration of the other five postulates, stressing the reciprocal learning/teaching nature of the principal events in the shared experience of learner and teacher.

Lastly, I would like to cite C.Brumfit's eight points of the teacher's role in communicative teaching(1986:58).

- (1) Teachers should like their students, and if they do not, they should disguise it so well that no-one else realises ;
- (2) They should be as clear as possible about why their students are learning English ;
- (3) They should be clear to themselves about their beliefs on the nature of language learning and teaching ;
- (4) They should always be open and free in discussion and help their colleagues, senior and junior ;
- (5) They should be professionally well-informed ;
- (6) Their approach to teaching should be principled without being dogmatic, flexible without being merely fashionable ;
- (7) They should be constantly trying to improve ;

- (8) They should be humble, willing to recognise the merits of the past as well as the present, and the wisdom of the outside critic as well as the professional.

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