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# The Evolution of a Humanistic Teacher

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THE EVOLUTION OF A  
HUMANISTIC TEACHER

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MAT XI  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the  
School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

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## ABSTRACT

This paper traces my growth in becoming a humanistic teacher. It is essentially an introspective study highlighting the teaching and learning experiences I have had over the last few years and how those experiences have affected my current teaching.

This paper is divided into six chapters: an Introduction, My Teaching History, The Evolution Intensifies, My Teaching Intensifies, a Conclusion, and lastly, an Addendum.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

"The Evolution of a Humanistic Teacher." That precisely is what has been happening to me throughout my years as a teacher. It began quietly a few years ago without my really understanding what was happening. It was not until this past year in the Master of Arts in Teaching Program that I have been able to perceive this as an evolution and have learned how to facilitate its further growth.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to introduce this paper and to explain the meaning of the terms "humanistic" and "evolution" for me.

To begin. I believe that insights into oneself help one grow as a teacher. Knowing how one learns in a learning situation can be transferred to better understanding the processes one's students go through as language learners. I am also hoping that perhaps my reflections will help other people grow in their teaching. Perhaps they may see similarities with my own past experiences. Perhaps some of my questions may be the same as theirs. And lastly, perhaps others may gain new insights into themselves which may be sparked by what I have written and experienced.

I have done many different kinds of teaching over the past seven years: teaching fifth grade in an "open classroom," teaching a combined fifth/sixth grade class, substituting in elementary, junior, and senior high schools, teaching English

as a foreign language (EFL), teaching English as a second language (ESL), teaching high school English, and now teaching ESL, again. I do not regard any of my past or present teaching experiences as being different from each other as far as my approach or philosophy of teaching is concerned; however, because I want to limit the scope of this paper to the type of teaching I will be doing from now on, I will only discuss my experiences as an EFL, ESL, and English teacher.

One of the words in the title of this paper is "humanistic." What do I mean by that term? For me, being humanistic means that the relationship between myself and my students involves sharing and mutual learning. I have come to realize this more and more during the course of my teaching and especially from learning experiences I have had this past year in the MAT program. I learn from my students while they learn from me. We are all engaged in the process of learning. Learning is a constant sharing for everyone involved. We all have something to learn from one another.

As a humanistic teacher I take insights into myself as a learner and apply them to my teaching. I continually examine how I act and react in a learning situation. These insights of myself as a learner are then transferred to my teaching. I am better able to understand the processes students go through in their own learning and, at the same time, can anticipate many of the problems that might arise.

As a humanistic teacher, I must also be aware that each individual has a different learning style. One student may learn better via oral use of the language, another via memorization,

Some students need to see a word before they can remember it; another student only needs to hear a word to remember it. As a teacher, I must continually be aware of this.

Flexibility is another quality necessary to humanistic teaching. My students' different learning styles require me to be flexible. As a teacher I must be flexible enough in my teaching to be able to change if I find it necessary. I may want to teach using a certain set of techniques from an approach I want to experiment with. But, if I notice that I am losing my class because they cannot or will not learn, I have to do something. I have to examine what happened or went wrong. I then have to examine why I chose to teach that way. Depending on what I find, I may or may not alter what I did. In other words, my overall approach or philosophy would not change; however, the ways in which it is manifested in the classroom may be altered so as to better facilitate my students' learning.

One of the most important qualities is staying in touch with my belief that affective factors influence learning; students are human and are not robots or computers programmed to respond to a given stimulus. If I perceive my students as robots, then I can expect to drill them accordingly. But, if I realize that they also have feelings and moods as I have, then I need to take that into account in my teaching. I must be sensitive to and aware of each individual's own self, as a learner and as a fellow human being. One day a student may be feeling very tired and, as a result, be in a grouchy mood. I must be detached enough to realize that there may be a reason for that mood other than dissatisfaction with the class and take that into account to under-



stand why and how he performed a certain way in class that day. I must feel this empathy toward my students both inside and outside the classroom.

Now we come to "evolution", by which I mean that I am slowly changing in my approach to teaching. I am changing with each new insight I have into myself as a teacher and as a learner.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines evolution as a "gradual process in which something changes, especially into a more complex form." My evolution has been a gradual process. It started subtly with my disgust with the audio-lingual method (ALM) as a result of my experiences in Palau, Micronesia and has continued throughout this past year in graduate school. Insights into myself as a learner and a teacher will continually affect me and cause me to become more and more of a humanistic teacher. It has already begun, as this paper will show.

I am not saying that I never felt I was humanistic in my past teaching experiences. What I am saying is that the way I taught in the past did not allow me to express all the qualities I believe a humanistic teacher should express. I wanted to be humanistic, but I did not know how. Further, I did know that I could use my own learning experiences to help me as a teacher. I was humanistic only to the extent that I cared for my students as people. My problem was in transforming my feelings into actions and preparing lessons that were humanistic in their basic tenents.

## CHAPTER 2

### My Teaching History

In this chapter I will explore how I taught and why. I will discuss the approaches I used and my feelings toward them. I will then conclude with my reasons for attending graduate school. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I will only be discussing my teaching experiences as an EFL, ESL, and an English teacher in Zaire, Palau, and Mexico.

#### PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER, 1979

The two places where I taught ESL or EFL prior to my coming to graduate school were in Zaire and Palau. For both of these experiences, the audio-lingual method (ALM) was my approach for teaching.

Zaire was a unique teaching experience for me because it was there that I first discovered EFL and, consequently, formulated many of the assumptions about teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) that I held securely until my arrival, in September, 1979, at the School for International Training.

Prior to my acceptance by Peace Corps/Zaire, I had never heard of EFL or ESL. It was during my fifteen weeks of training that I learned "all about" teaching EFL. "All about," I came to realize this past year, was not really "all." The Peace Corps/Zaire approach to teaching English was limited only to ALM. As a result, my teaching utilized ALM techniques exclusively.

During my Peace Corps training, we, volunteer trainees,

spent several weeks student teaching at a local boys' school. We were observed every day by at least two Peace Corps staff members. Emphasis was upon perfection of the ALM techniques that we had been learning. As a result, each observer had the most elaborate critique sheet that I have ever seen. We were marked on, for example, use of hand gestures, effective use of space on the blackboard, how many times we called on each student, how much attention we placed on one side of the room or on the other, or how the choral responses sounded. The staff members were quite demanding and had high expectations of us. It was a really frightening experience for me because I had already made plans for transferral to another country and my recommendation rested upon success in my student teaching.

As a result of this training, I resembled, in voice and bearing, a drill sergeant. I was the boss and all my students were my subjects. I was the supreme authoritarian! I was programmed to teach my students English solely via ALM, whether they liked it or not. In other words, I was programmed to program them!

I was ambivalent throughout this experience. I wanted to know my students as individuals and work together with them in a sharing relationship. I felt uneasy being in an authoritarian role because it went against all I felt a teacher should be. But, I wanted to succeed in my training, so I accepted the role expected of me. I conformed. I must have succeeded in conforming because I was allowed to transfer to Palau, Micronesia.

I was also given ALM training in Palau, but it was not quite

as extensive as that in Zaire. There was also a student teaching segment, but it was not as regimented as it had been in Zaire. There were no critique sheets; everything was informally discussed after class between the volunteer-trainee and the staff member observing the class.

Looking back upon my experience in Palau, knowing what I know now about many different approaches to teaching, I find it amusing that ALM was the only approach I was conscious of. The reason I find it amusing is that when we learned the Palauan language during training, it was through a modified version of the Silent Way: using rods, Palauan word charts, and "silence" on the part of the teacher. I did not realize then that I could transfer my experiences learning Palauan to teaching in my own classroom. I did not realize that I could adopt some of the techniques for my own use. I had been taught to teach English using ALM, so I did not consider the possibility of including other ideas in my teaching repertoire, and no connection was ever made between the two experiences for me. I thought the way I learned Palauan was invented by Palauans because no Americans were involved in our language training.

Reflecting upon those experiences, I suppose the reason we were given only ALM training was because that is the only way English is taught there. All the elementary schools use the same ALM-based oral English series published by the South Pacific Commission headquartered in the Cook Islands. Since we had to use that series, we were trained in ALM.

The ESL Section at the District Department of Education in Koror coordinates the curriculum for every school in Palau District.

They have a schedule written for each grade (1-8) stipulating which books should be used and in what order. There is no allowance for deviation from the curriculum. As a result, I had no choice but to follow the syllabus for my class.

Through this experience, my teaching became very mechanical and automatic. During my planning periods after school, I looked at the lessons to be covered the next day and planned according to the outline of the book. Ultimately, I never needed more than five minutes to plan my lesson. All the drills, dialogues, explanations for the class, etc., were included in the books we had to use. There was nothing for me to add. My only task was to select objects at home that might clarify a particular lesson, for example, objects to illustrate and clarify countable and non-countable nouns.

Soon after I began teaching, I came to realize that all the students hated the oral English part of the day. I could not blame them: learning English the same way for eight years in a row! I would have lost interest after only one month!

During my Peace Corps training, I had been taught that I should never let my students see me using the book because they would "tune me out" and not pay any attention. I was told to rewrite the entire lesson from the book onto a piece of paper instead. I did that, but very quickly found that it did not work. My yellow paper had the same effect as using the book because it, too, came to be associated with oral English time. Once I even tried memorizing the lesson, but found it impossible because of the number of drills involved.

I began to hate teaching oral English. I felt very frustrated

because my students were frustrated. I wanted them to enjoy speaking English, but I did not know how to make it more enjoyable. I felt hampered in not knowing more about teaching English as a second language. I found myself disliking Peace Corps because I felt we had not been taught enough. I felt a dire need for more techniques in order to more sufficiently cover a lesson with my class.

That first year was the low point in my teaching with regard to my feelings of inadequacy in using ALM. I felt I was not being humanistic in my teaching. I cared for my students as people, yet felt that I was somehow cheating them by the way I was teaching. My problem was that I did not know what to do about it.

During my second year in Palau, I began to think seriously about going back to school. Before going to Palau, I had never known that a person could get a degree in ESL, let alone a master's degree. I began to research graduate schools and programs and talked to a professor I met from the University of Hawaii. I made application to the School for International Training and was accepted in January of 1977. I was scheduled to begin that September.

The acceptance raised my spirits for the spring semester. I thought that when I came to graduate school I would learn how to really teach ALM effectively. I did not even dream that there could be other approaches to teaching.

Suddenly, in June, things changed. Peace Corps asked me to extend for a third year to work at the local radio station

to upgrade the news division. After a lot of thinking, I decided to stay and take a year off from teaching. I was curious to learn what it would be like not to teach because I had never had a job outside the teaching field. I notified the School for International Training that I wanted to postpone my enrollment for at least one more year.

I loved working at the radio station and being in charge of the news division. I was able to do a lot of traveling around Micronesia, supervisory work, and meeting interesting and important people. I felt so good, relaxed, and secure in my job that I began to wonder if I wanted to return to teaching and my ALM frustrations. I decided to spend a fourth year in Palau to find the answer to that question. So, I did not write back to the School for International Training and decided to forget about graduate school for awhile.

I was offered a job by the Trust Territory Government to teach English at Palau High School. I was not to be an ESL teacher, though. I was to be the equivalent of an English teacher in a high school in the United States. All the students were considered proficient enough in English because they had passed the high school entrance examination.

That year (1978-79) was an extremely frustrating one. I loved teaching and my students, but I felt frustrated with their lack of command of the English language; and they were supposedly the best students in Palau! I felt that ESL, even though I hated teaching it, should be a part of the high school curriculum. But, no one listened to me. I was rocking the boat. Throughout the

year I felt more of a need to be an ESL teacher rather than a high school English teacher. It was then that I decided to go ahead with work on a master's degree.

#### STUDENT TEACHING INTERNSHIP

The second quarter of the MAT Program requires everyone to do a minimum of sixty-four hours of student teaching during the months of January, February, and March. I chose to go to Mexico for ten weeks of regularly supervised teaching.

Mexico was a testing time for me. I had learned from my fall methodology class that ALM was not the only way to teach ESL. I was excited about the prospect of experimenting with what I had learned. Before leaving for Mexico, I vowed never to return to ALM. I had decided it was not humanistic enough for me. During the fall, I had become fascinated with the Silent Way and decided to use that approach during my internship.

My resolve faded the first day I walked into my class to find fifty students, with more arriving throughout the hour! To compound matters, the classroom was in a chemistry laboratory with all the students sitting on high stools at lab tables. All my great plans for using the Silent Way went out the window. Out of a need for security, I found myself resorting to the old, familiar ALM techniques. I brought rods to class the second day and found myself giving a rod lesson using ALM choral responses. I hated it and became quite depressed. It was not until I was able to reduce my class sizes that I began to relax and start experimenting.



I had brought the ESL sound-color chart (from Educational Solutions, Inc., 80 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10011) with me, but was afraid to use it at first. I agonized over whether to try it or not because I was afraid that I was not familiar enough with all the sounds on it. It was not until my supervisor advised me to decide once and for all yes or no, that I began experimenting. I soon discovered that if I broke it down into parts and learned it along with my students, I could overcome my fear. I also began to feel better about my classes because I had begun to experiment with the Silent Way. As I became less and less inhibited by the chart, so did my students and, as a result, learning became easier for all of us. My frustration was gone because I was able to experiment with what I had learned that fall. I reconfirmed my desire never to return to ALM and was on my way to becoming a humanistic teacher.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Evolution Intensifies

The past year working on my master's degree has broadened my whole outlook on teaching. In Chapter 1, I mentioned that my evolution began quietly a few years ago without my really understanding what was happening. It was not until this past year in the MAT Program that I have been able to understand this evolution and have been able to learn how to facilitate its further growth.

In this chapter and the next, I will detail how this evolution intensified. I will deal with insights I have gained into myself as a learner and as a teacher from various language learning experiences I have had this past school year.

Before explaining my insights, I want to outline very briefly what my language learning experiences were. They included:

1. A three day, nine hour Indonesian class which was part of my methodology course in September, 1979;
2. A three day, twenty-two hour weekend Spanish class at the Gattegno Language School, Educational Solutions, Inc., New York City, as part of my Independent Study in September, 1979;
3. A six week, thirty-six hour Spanish class for a teaching/learning project as part of my methodology course from September to November, 1979;
4. A four week, sixty hour semi-intensive language instruction in Spanish in November, 1979;

5. A three week, eighteen hour Spanish class in December, 1979;
6. A ten week immersion in learning Spanish language and culture by living with a host family during my student teaching internship in Mexico from January to March, 1980; and
7. A seven week, twenty-eight hour evening Spanish II class offered by the Foreign Language Office of the School for International Training from April to May, 1980.

The insights that I have had as a result of the above experiences can be grouped into two major categories: insights into myself as a learner and insights-become-generalizations about myself as a teacher. The remainder of this chapter will address those two categories.

#### INSIGHTS INTO MYSELF AS A LEARNER

This past year I have had many opportunities in which to examine myself as a learner. Learning Spanish was my vehicle for gaining almost all these insights.

It was during the fall methodology class that I began to realize that by examining how I behave in a language learning environment, I can learn how and why to transfer this knowledge to my teaching. This began during the first three days of class when we studied Indonesian via the Silent Way. That experience was quite useful to me because I began to learn quite a lot about myself.

One major insight was the realization that I am very self-conscious about myself and about what I say as a student and

especially so in a language learning situation. As a result, I impeded my learning during the Indonesian experience because I would not volunteer to practice a particular sound, word, or phrase aloud. I would not look the teacher straight in the eye for fear he might call on me. Instead, I repeated to myself the item being practiced so that only I could hear what was mumbled. I have since learned to be aware of that aspect of my personality and have worked at altering it.

There was one aspect of that experience, however, that conflicted with my fear of speaking out. As a learner, I have found that if I receive positive feedback from a teacher, I feel much better about myself and tend to strive to do well in that particular teacher's class. But, it was difficult to get that feedback if I withdrew from the learning situation. By never attempting to say anything in class, the teacher did not know what I knew and, therefore, was not able to provide the feedback I craved.

Another insight which was especially evident during the Spanish class I had from September until November, and relates to what I have already stated is that if I feel uncomfortable, frustrated, or left out of the class, I mentally remove myself from the lesson by spending my time feeling sorry for myself. Early in the first days of that class, I wrote the following in my journal:

Today was a very frustrating day. I just feel that I'm not a part of the class . . . . My learning was blocked today. I was present enough to take notes and listen to what people were saying, but I wasn't consciously assimilating any of the information. I spent more time wishing the teacher would call on me than listening to what others were saying . . . . I would just like class more if I felt a part of it. I guess you might say that I'm feeling jealous of a few people in class. I wish I were more outgoing . . . .

An important awareness I came to from both the Indonesian and Spanish classes was that if I allowed myself to relax and be with the language, rather than not, I found that I could learn more. I was not allowing myself to be distracted by thoughts of my personal well-being. I also found that when I relaxed, I opened up a little more and tried to practice what I was learning. As a result, I began to feel better towards myself as a language learner. I found myself wanting the teacher to call on me. I felt a sense of satisfaction in that I was able to learn.

An insight I gained from my Mexico internship exemplifies that idea. Frustration causes great blocks in my learning. Most of that frustration came from my Mexican homestay father because he equated learning with memorization. Every night he would give me a list of words in both Spanish and English to practice. He thought he was helping me when, in reality, he was not. I have found that I can learn better if I just relax and force myself to talk as much as I can, thereby putting into practice what I have learned. I need to see and use the language in context, not in isolated bits and pieces on a sheet of paper. Frustration often resulted when my "father" handed me the lists

because I was being asked to learn in a way that was incompatible with my learning style. As a result, I was not concentrating on the task of memorizing the vocabulary list, but rather was allowing myself to become distracted and tense.

I prevented myself from learning during two other experiences because I did not like the way the teacher taught. The first was during my fall Spanish class. Before I describe what happened, I need to give some background information. When I first returned from my intensive Spanish class at the Gattegno School last fall, I was amazed at the amount of Spanish I had gained with a small amount of effort. It was the most positive experience I had ever had with learning a foreign language. As a result, I was convinced Silent Way was the only way to learn. I then began to tell myself that I could only learn a language if I were taught through the Silent Way. In the ensuing fall Spanish class back on campus, I found myself sitting in class and wishing it were a Silent Way class. In other words, I was not focused upon what was there but upon what was not there. It was not until I was able to realize that I may never have a teacher who teaches just the way I want him to, that I was able to stop worrying and proceed with learning.

I had a similar experience in my spring Spanish class. The teacher used techniques without continuity or sequence and I felt that not enough time was allotted for each technique that was used. Five minutes for a rote lesson and then on to something else. As a result, we were forced to rely a great deal on memorization outside of class. I found myself becoming anti-pathetic towards everything she did. I refused to accept her

way of teaching and, as a result, did no work at all. I even found myself cutting classes on some evenings. During the entire seven weeks of class I never overcame that block, even though I was completely aware of it.

From both my Mexico experience and that spring Spanish class, I also found that learning through translation impedes my learning. Fluency in my speaking ability came only from working directly in Spanish as much as I could. I found it quite difficult to think in Spanish if I had to continually refer to English for a quick translation. At times I needed just that, but mostly I felt that I had to immerse myself in the language as much as I could and practice speaking with everyone I met. I found that I did not need to know what every little word meant. As long as I could understand what I or someone else was saying, it was okay.

I found that I learned a lot of Spanish from my homestay brother because he spoke virtually no English. It was impossible for him to provide me with Spanish translations of words I needed to know, and I found that if I could not be understood, I could resort to gestures, pictures, or descriptions of words to help him understand me. He would then provide me with the correct word. I found that I could learn more that way because I was thinking in the language without any distractions from English.

Last fall I became quite interested in the Silent Way and decided to devote more time to researching it through an independent study. Part of the study included a twenty-two hour Spanish

class at the Gattegno Language School. In the paper I wrote at the conclusion of the independent study I said:

To somehow conclude this paper, I suppose the most remarkable awareness I gained from this independent study was the amount of knowledge I can learn about myself if I just sit down and reflect upon every situation I am in . . . . This independent study has helped me to grow in my awarenesses of myself as a language learner and a learner in general which, in turn, will help me in my role, as a teacher. By being aware of myself I will be better aware of my students.

#### GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT LEARNING

In the preceding section I mentioned insights into my learning from various language learning experiences I have had. Through them, I have made some generalizations about learning which have important implications for my teaching.

Memorization is only a small part of learning. To me, learning means being able to use all that I have previously learned. I know I have learned when I can combine everything I know and manipulate the language so that it makes sense both to me and others who speak the language. All that takes much more than sheer memorization. Learning comes through use of the language.

When I learned Spanish at the Gattegno Language School, I was never given a list to memorize during the entire twenty-two hours. I copied nothing and took no notes. I did not study at night. I did learn Spanish. This was because the materials and the way that they were used by the teacher allowed me to work with the language. I was permitted to "play" with



the sounds and to combine them into words. I was then able to see those words on the word charts. Manipulation of the rods allowed me to experiment with combining the sounds into words. A picture was provided to further practice what I had learned, besides being a vehicle for experimenting further with words and sounds.

I was encouraged by the teacher to voice and practice saying the sounds and words I had learned. This was done through situations set up with the rods or through individuals doing certain activities with the pictures. While being encouraged to work with the language, I was never given negative reinforcement because of a mistake made. My mistakes were worked on between my teacher and myself. She never gave the correct answer. I had to work with myself to find it. The teacher made me focus my energy upon myself confident that I did indeed know the answer. I realized that the teacher did not need to give the answer because I already knew what the answer was. All I needed to do was verbalize it. The teacher was merely my guide and helper, not the answer giver. That was my job.

While the other students worked on their mistakes with the teacher, I also found myself working with them. By always actively participating in the lesson, either directly or indirectly, I was soon able to distinguish between correct and incorrect responses. Yet, I was not directly asked to memorize a thing, per se. Almost everything I learned came from the direct or indirect work with the language.

The major insight for me this past year, as a result of my

language learning experiences, was that as I know myself, I am better equipped to learn better. I am aware of what I need and can go about getting that need fulfilled. I must keep in touch with the learning process and continue examining myself throughout that time. Knowing myself will open up wide avenues of awarenesses which can then guide me in my teaching.

## CHAPTER 4

### My Teaching Intensifies

In my evolution as a humanistic teacher, awarenesses I gained into my learning, mentioned in the preceding chapter, have been transformed and have had an effect on my teaching this past year. I am now able to understand the behavior of some former students who I had just dismissed as "problem" children or students with a "learning disability." That may or may not have been the case, but I was not aware of nor could I relate to what they might have been going through as learners.

This chapter is entitled, "My Teaching Intensifies" because this is precisely what has happened as a result of two teaching experiences I have had since beginning work on my master's degree, which have affected my way of teaching as a result of my learning awarenesses. The experiences mentioned will be (1) my ten-week teaching internship in Mexico, and (2) my present job as a full-time ESL teacher at the American Language Academy (ALA) at Lyndon Institute, in Lyndon Center, Vermont.

There are many similarities with both of these teaching situations. They include:

1. In Mexico, the majority of my students were adolescents, as they were at ALA.
2. In Mexico, all my students were native Spanish speakers. At ALA, 99.9% of my students were Spanish speakers, from Venezuela, Mexico, and Guatemala.

3. With both groups, students demanded translation and refused to stop using Spanish.
4. In both situations, I was very conscious of all I had learned about myself as a learner. As a result, I was very conscious of what my students were going through as learners.
5. Both groups tended to make me feel very frustrated at times over their stubbornness to try something new, but at the same time I also felt challenged to find ways to show them that there are different ways to learn than they were used to. I realize that this last point may seem to contradict two of my qualities of a humanistic teacher - flexibility and awarenesses of different learning styles. I think, though, that in this chapter, the reader will discover that it really isn't a contradiction at all.

This last point will be the focus for this chapter, because I am finding many obstacles to becoming more humanistic in my teaching. Through this chapter, I will discuss what these obstacles have been and how I have learned to work with them and at times, overcome some of them.

Translation, at one point, was the most important obstacle to overcome. At both ALA and in Mexico, all my students had learned some English in their countries through grammar translation. So, on their first day of class when I announced that no Spanish would be tolerated, my students immediately became upset and confused. They wondered how they could learn English without translation, especially if their level of English proficiency was quite low. My challenge was to overcome their

resistance and show them that their learning was hindered by constantly thinking in their native language and not being with the English being learned. (They may not be able to be 100% with the English, but at least their attention towards the English being learned would be 100%). Now the obstacle forms with the students resisting to refrain from their usage of Spanish and their handy Spanish-English dictionaries. It ends up going around and around in a vicious circle. It is that circle that I am now working at breaking with my ALA students and was not really able to successfully break while in Mexico. First I will begin with what happened in Mexico and then with ALA.

On the first day, I told my students that we would not work with translations in class. I told them that for the hour we would be together, I did not want to hear or see any Spanish being used. I should have expected the reaction I received. No one believed that it was possible to learn without translation. Some of my students actually transferred out of my class to join that of a colleague who was fluent in Spanish and used it in his classes. I was prepared, however, to prove them all wrong. I wanted to completely eliminate the use of translation in order to show my classes that it would be possible to learn without it. I also wanted to prove to myself that I was right. I suppose I was really beginning to fantasize about the situation by thinking that I could make them all fluent English speakers once I "rid" them of their dictionaries.

My classes knew that I was learning Spanish, so a few tried

to convince me that it would be to my advantage if I used translation because I could learn Spanish while they learned English. However, I was determined to succeed without the use of Spanish. I knew that I was correct and I wanted to prove it to my class.

It was difficult and frustrating at first because someone would invariably call out the Spanish equivalent before I had had a chance to work with the student. Many times when the students were asked to write something, what they produced was a direct translation of their thoughts into English. Sometimes the English equivalent did not make any sense because a literal translation was not possible, as in the case of idiomatic expressions. When I found a student doing this translation, I asked him to explain, in his own words, what he wanted to say. When he did, it usually made more sense than what he had written. I then told him to write exactly what he had just told me and skip looking up all the words in his dictionary. I wanted to show them that if they learned to think in English instead of Spanish, it would be easier for them. Only a few believed me.

Another example that I will never forget was with a play that I used in two of my classes. I distributed copies of the play to one of the classes on a Friday with instructions to read it over the weekend. I thought that if they had problems with comprehension, they would merely make a notation and we would discuss it on Monday. What I had not thought would happen, happened. That Monday, everyone came to class with a completely translated script!

In my teaching this fall with ALA, I have again been fighting this battle, but in a slightly different way. In Mexico, my students translated all their work, but did not actually speak much conversational Spanish in class. However, with one group of students this fall, all of us, teachers and director, have been fighting a hard battle to stop the use of conversational Spanish in the classroom. The group I mention is a group of twelve Latin American students ranging in age from fourteen to twenty. Most of them are unmotivated to learn English and did not come to ALA of their own volition, but were sent by their parents. All of them are either in the elementary or intermediate level class.

These twelve do not want to speak English, either in class or out. During some classes, there is a constant "buzz" in Spanish. The students ask each other questions about work in Spanish, gossip amongst one another in Spanish and, in short, do not try to practice speaking English. Sometimes they even try to talk to me in Spanish! All of us, teachers and director, have been discussing the problem and trying different ways of combating the problem. We have tried, among other things, fining them, giving detentions, and discussing the problem with them. For two months, all twelve were together in one class, but we finally decided that if they were split into two levels the problem might be alleviated.

Halfway into the second six-week marking period, we finally went ahead and divided the twelve into two groups of six each, based upon their progress thus far in all their classes. I took

the intermediate six for grammar and writing and the elementary six for reading. The elementary listening/speaking group was team taught by three of us.

Dividing the group did not alleviate the Spanish problem entirely, but made it more manageable because there was not such a disparity of levels in one class. Everyone was now in a class better suited to his ability. As a result, students were not struggling or bored quite as much. Each student was personally more involved in the lesson due to the smaller numbers. It has meant much more work for us as it added extra classes to all of our teaching loads, even those of the director. I do not mind the extra work, however, because I find myself going to sleep at night with a happy exhaustion instead of a frustrated one.

The Spanish problem has also been extremely frustrating for me in my quest in becoming more of a humanistic teacher. I have become extremely flexible in my teaching this fall in order to challenge my students. I consented to the idea of adding classes, breaking up groups, and adding to my preparation load. I have used many different techniques in the classroom hoping that I might spark some interest. I have used an eclectic approach combining ALM, Silent Way, and CLL, thinking that not all students learn in the same way. But, I will not use Spanish in my class. I feel that it only encourages translation, and I have talked about the negative aspect of that in preceding chapters.

At times I feel that even though I have been doing all I can to become aware of each student's needs, that student did not



really care. I then try to reason with myself by remembering that as a teacher I must teach as I think best, even if the students do not really realize what I have been doing. Hopefully they will realize it someday soon.

Individual personalities come into play here and it is these personalities that have a lot to do with how people behave in a group or class. It is the extroverted students who seem to catch my eye and attention.

As a teacher in Mexico, I tried to give everyone equal attention by realizing that everyone had a different learning style. I took into account those who were more outgoing in their educational pursuits, but at the same time, worked with and spent time with those who were less outgoing and more quiet in their pursuits. I found myself being very conscious of the introverted students because I am an introverted learner myself and I wanted to make sure my students did not have the same previously mentioned anxieties that I had. The result was that everyone received my attention and I was very sensitive to and aware of their needs. My aim was to make them feel at ease in the class and to feel that they were all capable of learning, even though they learned at different rates and through different styles. I did not experience much difficulty with the Mexican students because they were all motivated to be in the class.

Here at ALA, though, I have found the opposite to be true. As previously mentioned, most of the students are unmotivated. I find many obstacles when I try to work with the students. When I try to spend time with the slower ones, the faster students become distracted and bored. When I work with the faster students,

the slower ones do not listen and start speaking Spanish. I have found that I cannot seem to discipline them to work without my hovering over them at all times. With the elementary group I sometimes feel that I am a substitute teacher in a first grade class.

Classroom atmosphere has a great effect on how a class learns. I have always strived to maintain an atmosphere that is relaxed and non-threatening. I have felt that through that kind of atmosphere, my students would be able to interact freely because no one would be afraid to speak, no matter what his English proficiency.

I feel that I succeeded in being that way more in Mexico than I have at ALA. While in Mexico, I tried not to pressure anyone by realizing that certain activities might favor one type of student over the other. For example, if we did an exercise favoring the more extroverted learners, I made sure that the next one would favor the introverted ones. I tried to be sure that the class hour contained exercises that touched upon all the different learning styles in the class. By doing so, the students felt relaxed in knowing that they could excel in something that we did that day. I felt very "tuned in" to my students and could sense when a student was having a problem. If the atmosphere began tensing from frustration, for example, because an activity that I planned was more difficult than I thought it would be, I did my best to relax the students before we tried again. Little phrases like, "take it a little slower," "stop, breathe deeply, and say it again," or doing a different

activity for awhile seemed to work wonders in clearing up the tension.

This fall at ALA I am finding that a similar approach sometimes works and other times does not. I have noticed that when many of my students tense up, they begin blocking themselves by saying they cannot do a particular activity. When I try to relax them, sometimes they do not even hear me because they are so wrapped up in themselves. I have found some students remove themselves from the situation by putting their heads down on their desks. I then begin to start feeling guilty by thinking that I had failed them. It is difficult for me to accept the fact that some of my students just do not care about learning English. When situations such as this happen, I feel that I am becoming unhumanistic in my teaching. It is then I who am blocking myself because instead of responding to the student, I am busy thinking of myself as a failure rather than wondering if my activity may not have been too difficult for my students. I would not have chosen it if I had thought it would be.

I feel that I still have much to learn in order to grow as a humanistic teacher. My teaching internship provided me with the first glimpse of what it takes to be humanistic, and teaching this fall has continued my desire to experiment with improving my teaching to achieve that goal.

I still have many frustrations, but I do not feel as overwhelmed by them as I did in Palau or Zaire. Through Mexico and ALA I have learned to identify them and eventually work to overcome them.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

How do I feel about myself at this point in my teaching?  
What have I learned about myself as a teacher?

To answer the first question, I feel excited and ready to forge ahead into the unknown because I no longer feel afraid of it. From this past fall with ALA and from my experience in Mexico, I have learned that I will not always do the right thing at the right time, but that is fine as long as I learn from them. I must remember that I am always learning and must never stop. In order to prevent myself from becoming static in my teaching I must stay in contact with my own learning processes as a teacher and as a student. I am the best tool from which to learn. What that means is that I must continue with my own learning, whether it be formally in a classroom or informally outside a classroom. My own learning does not need to be involved with language learning, but with anything--learning to ski this winter, for example. While being engaged in a learning activity, I must examine myself as I learn to see what I do to help or hinder my own learning. What do I do that is similar to what my own students do or do not do? How do I block myself? How do I unblock myself? What are my thoughts and reactions during the learning? With all these ideas in mind, I would then come back to the classroom and incorporate this knowledge of myself into my teaching and into refining my skill in keeping "in touch" with my students.

The main lesson that I have learned about teaching is that

factors that controlled my behavior during my own language learning have contributed greatly to how I behave as a language teacher. I always seem able to empathize with my students, even though I am the teacher. My own frustration while learning Spanish has played an important part in my teaching. As a teacher, I have learned that I need to be aware of when frustration confronts my students. They may become frustrated and create blocks just as I do. The difficulty will be to determine just why a particular student is frustrated. What are the reasons behind his frustration? To be able to do so, I need to continue examining myself whenever I get frustrated, either as a student or a teacher. I am amazed that after teaching for this many years I am only now realizing the degree to which frustration can impede learning. How many students have I turned off unintentionally because I was not attuned to their frustrations?

From my fall Spanish class, I became aware of the importance of being sensitive to the needs and feelings of students. Neither they nor I are machines and we all have feelings. I need to be constantly aware of the group dynamics in my class in order to help some students avoid being discontented or frustrated with me or with the class as a whole. I need to remember that I will always have a class consisting of both introverted and extroverted students and, therefore, should not always "gravitate" toward those students who are the loudest or more boisterous. I realize, though, that it could be difficult at times not to. As a teacher, I must treat everyone in the class as equals, no matter what his or her learning style might be.

During that fall class, I had many talks with my teacher. Her compassion, advice, and understanding typify the way I would want to act if I were ever confronted with having a student like me in my class. I knew that she was interested in me and wanted to help. In a paper I had to write following that experience, I said the following:

I know that Claire ( my Spanish teacher) is interested in me and wants to help me. A couple times since our talk she has approached me after class or during a break to ask if everything is all right with me because she had felt that I seemed to be a little more quiet than usual that day. If a little thing like that impresses me, I'm sure my students would feel the same way. I want to carry that concern on to them.

Just a little question like, "Is everything okay today?" does much to help me grow as a language learner. If I answer, "No, it's not okay," the act of talking about it helps me to realize what my problems are so I can work on them.

Talks with Claire have helped me to grow in learning about myself as a learner and also, most importantly, how to transfer my knowledge of myself as a learner to my own class when I observe my students as language learners.

This evolutionary process is a long and difficult one. At times it is frustrating, but most of the time it is extremely satisfying. I am looking forward to fostering its further continuation throughout my years of teaching.

June, 1981

## ADDENDUM

The body of this paper was originally written almost four years ago. Since then my teaching and the roles expected of me have changed quite radically. For the past two years, I have been a combination ESL teacher and administrator. Besides my teaching duties, I also work with admissions, computer-assisted instruction, academic placement, testing, and curriculum.

I have learned a lot about myself as a teacher over the past years and have found that my teaching has also changed from the way it was when I first came to ALA.

I realize from reading the previous chapters, that I was very idealistic in my expectations and was having a difficult time in reconciling with myself that in order to be humanistic, I may also have to be dictatorial. I hadn't thought that the two might go together. I better realize now that being humanistic means that I perceive and try to meet the needs of my students and that it does not mean that I have to do what the students want and teach in the way they want me to. Being dictatorial is also being humanistic if it is "being with" my students rather than with myself. Being dictatorial in class is humanistic if it provides for the students' needs, especially in structure and discipline.

I have learned that I need to take into account what kind of academic backgrounds my students come from. Most have come from strict oral translation ones and it takes time for them to adjust to being in a classroom where translation is not welcome. I have learned to be more patient and let each student realize

for himself that he can learn without translation. Adolescents do not want to be told; they must be guided as it is a scary experience to be told that their teachers at home must have been wrong. They need to realize that their teachers were not bad teachers, but that we just have different philosophies. Because our students are around the American high school students all day, I use the Spanish and French classes for my philosophical comparisons. Our students always remark about how poorly the American students speak Spanish or French. We then discuss how they had learned English in their countries. They learned the same way that the Lyndon students are learning to speak their language, through translation. They did not learn much themselves after nine years, for example, of English classes. We then talk about how ALA is different because they have to learn English faster so they can get on with their own schooling; hence, no translation is allowed. It takes time, but all of them eventually come to realize that what I am saying is really correct and that I would not intentionally misguide them.

I have also learned not to feel so insecure about my teaching ability if a class is confused about something we do. I am confident enough in my teaching to know that I have presented and explained the lesson to the best of my ability and now it is time for the students to do their job. Maybe today they are confused, but by tomorrow or the next day, the material will eventually get sorted out in their minds. I have learned to give them that time.

Essentially, the main lesson I have had confirmed many times is that my students need to know that I trust them and that I



care very much for them both as persons and members of my class.

Trust has been an important issue for me. Many of our students come from unstable school backgrounds. I do not let mistakes made at another school, at a different point in their lives, dictate how they will necessarily behave toward me or in my class. I refuse to prejudge or label any student. These people that I am working with are adolescents, and adolescence is a time for growing and learning. Some people have a harder time than others. Students can and do change if given the right atmosphere and stimuli.

Caring goes along with trust. I care for my students as people and as members of my class. At times I feel like a parent with many children, but then I know it is part of my job and an essential part of me. They do not have families to be with, so I as a teacher must take over that role along with the rest of the dormitory staff. One of our teachers once told a student that she did not care what that person did with their life. I almost died and thought to myself, why is she in teaching? Isn't that what a teacher is? I have always thought so.

The title of this paper is "The Evolution of a Humanistic Teacher". I am finding that I am evolving, not nearly as idealistic as I once was, but I now face things with a more realistic outlook.

April, 1984

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