

The Intentional ESL Teacher

by Joan E. Friedenbergl & Curtis H. Bradley

Almost anyone can look back and identify at least one teacher who made a significant impact on his or her life. Although a few individuals will remember the particular teacher's instruction, most will recall the personal interest which that teacher took in them.

The early investigations of Lippitt and White (1943), Whitall (1949), and Flanders (1951) reveal that teacher influence on the learner extends far beyond the learning of subject matter content. It is now commonly accepted that the teacher is more than a dispenser of knowledge. The teacher impacts on the mental health (Tolar, 1975), self-concept (Hamachek, 1975), social, emotional, psychomotor, moral, and intellectual development of students (Mosston, 1972). Teachers can obstruct or contribute to every facet of student development. This influence is *not* limited to cognitive achievement.

Despite these findings, evidence also indicates that teachers are generally unaware of the extent of their influence on learners (Amidon and Flanders, 1971). That is, few teachers realize that the very style of teaching they use can affect the *total human development* of their students.

Language Teaching: Methods and Styles

Language teaching in the U.S. has been influenced by both linguistics and psychology. During the 1940's and 1950's, based on structural linguistics and behavioral psychology, the audiolingual method of language teaching was developed. This method provided students with such activities as repetition and substitution drills and dialogue memorization. Structural linguistics provided ALM with the discrete-point units to plug into the substitution drills while behavioral psychology contributed the notion that language learning was merely the subconscious learning of a set of habits, hence the emphasis on repetition and memorization. Teachers were (and still are) at-

tracted to this method because it claimed to provide clear and foolproof methods and materials and it also sought to give students more of an opportunity to speak.

During the 1950's and 1960's, based on the "Chomskyan Revolution" (generative-transformational linguistics) and cognitive psychology, the cognitive code method was introduced. This method stressed the conscious cognitive awareness of phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules.

Since the 1970's, many linguists have been dissatisfied with Chomsky's syntax-based description of language, arguing that it lacks an adequate account of the semantic relationships in language. Generative semantics, case grammar, Schlesinger's systems of realization rules based directly on a speaker's intentions, and others were introduced as a result of this dissatisfaction. This interest in semantics, or meaning, coupled with a new interest in humanistic psychology has also had an impact on the language teaching profession, hence the recent emphasis on communication.

The reader should not believe from this brief history that foreign language classrooms, especially in the public schools, have followed the same trends at the same pace. This is not the case for several good reasons:

1. Many overworked language teachers have been unable to keep up with the latest developments in their profession.
2. Economic limitations prevent most schools from purchasing new materials each time a new method is introduced.
3. Some educators are resistant to change—especially those who were responsible for introducing the older methods and materials to an institution.
4. There is still disagreement over which methods and teaching styles are best.

In an effort to address the issue of behavioristic vs cognitive approaches to

language learning, Chastain (1972:56) states, "an effort must be made to provide as many different learning experiences as possible." He later suggests that this be done by deciding what aspect of language teaching each method can do best. For example, a behaviorist approach would be most suitable for teaching pronunciation while both approaches would be appropriate for teaching vocabulary and syntax.

In his discussion of manipulative vs communicative language learning activities, Prator (1972:142) regards the language teaching process as a, "prolonged and gradual shift from manipulation to communication, accomplished through progressive decontrol." He continues, "We determine the speed of transition by allowing the student the possibility of making certain errors only when we are reasonably sure that he (or she) will no longer be likely to make them."

It is clear that both Chastain and Prator recognize the importance of introducing a variety of teaching methods and styles into the language class. However, neither refers to the total human development of the student in his criteria for selecting a given method or style. While Chastain's criteria focus on the *aspect* of the language (i.e., phonology, vocabulary, or syntax), Prator relies on the learners' levels of linguistic skill (i.e., lack of errors) to determine whether a manipulative or communicative teaching style should be employed.

In an effort to take a closer look at the language learner, Oller and Richards (1973) edited a collection of readings entitled, *Focus on the Learner*. In the preface, the editors state, "The focus is on language learners—their capacities, attitudes, learning strategies, and, of course, what it is that they learn." While this volume *does* focus on the learner, it focuses on the learner only as a learner (actually, only as a language learner) and not on the learner as a total human being.

Although there is a dearth of research on the relationship between language learning and self-concept, studies by Gardner and Lambert (1972), Brodkey and Shore (1976), and Heyde (1979) suggest an important

relationship between self-concept and better performance in foreign language classes. Although, as Brown (1980) cautions, we do not know for sure whether self-esteem influences language success or whether language success influences high self-esteem, Heyde's study indicates that language teachers can influence both the linguistic performance and the total human development of the student. As Brown (1980:105) puts it, "Perhaps good teachers succeed because they give optimal attention to linguistic goals and to the personhood of their students."

Which Teaching Style is Best?

Mouska Mosston (1972) developed an "anatomy of style" which is used to classify teaching style based on the type of student and teacher involvement in the learning process. Mosston identified seven different teaching styles and used the anatomy to present the assets and liabilities of each of these styles. These styles progress along a continuum of student involvement from the "command style" (minimum student involvement) on to "individual program-student design" (maximum student involvement). The frequently used command style, where all decisions are made by the teacher, is shown to be the most comfortable style for both teachers and students—each knows exactly what is expected of them. However, this often used teaching style is also shown to be the *least* conducive to the total human development of the learners. Mosston's position regarding the command style of teaching is, of course, supported by numerous educational leaders. Flanders (1970), for example, classifies the command style as "direct" teaching behavior. He demonstrates that it restricts students' opportunity to participate and grow but nonetheless is widely used.

The point being made here is that the command style has certain inherent characteristics, not that it is "wrong" for teachers to use. There are certainly times when the command style or direct teaching behavior is appropriate; Mosston, Flanders and others cite numerous examples. Whether one uses "styles" or "directness/indirectness" or any other method of classification, there

are no inherently "right" or "wrong" methods of teaching. Every teaching method has inherent characteristics regarding the various facets of human development. The successful teacher is one able to select appropriate methods considering *all* of the objectives at a given moment in time. Indeed, it has been shown that the ability to adapt teaching behavior to the moment—teacher *flexibility*—or the lack of it, is more useful in predicting teacher success than the adoption of any particular style or method of teaching" (Flanders, 1970).

The successful teacher in terms of student performance on achievement tests, Flanders found, was the teacher who used a broader variety of teaching methods. This, by no small coincidence, was the teacher who also provided learners with the greatest opportunities for total human development. Not being restricted to one type of teaching behavior, the range of behaviors used by the successful (flexible) teacher provided more opportunity for student participation and growth than did the restricted behavior of the less successful and more direct (command style in Mosston's terms) teacher. Thus, the successful teacher is one with a wide range of alternative teaching behaviors whose ability to react to the moment with appropriate behaviors results in better student performance on achievement tests and, more importantly, more potential opportunity for the total development of the student as a human being.

It is important to note that the flexible teacher can be as direct (use the command style) as any other teacher in a given situation. However, the flexible teacher has a broad range of alternative teaching behaviors from which to choose in other teaching situations. Less successful teachers are not found to be capable of this flexibility. Teaching style (or method) serves a purpose and belongs in the repertoire of every teacher. The issue here is *when* to select a given teaching method or style.

The ESL Teacher's Dilemma

When skill development is the only goal of an ESL educator or program, manipulation and control can follow all too easily.

The educator (or program) determines which linguistic skills will be developed, how they will be developed, and what will be accepted as satisfactory evidence of their development. By far, the quickest and easiest route to student attainment of these skills is for the teacher to point the way, every step of the way. As Mosston has indicated, this is clearly the most comfortable method for both teacher and learner. Both know exactly what is expected of them—the teacher performs and the student responds as instructed—and there are no uncomfortable surprises for anyone. Regardless of how comfortably and quickly the language skills are learned, the emphasis in this situation is on external reinforcement—manipulating students in the right direction "for their own good." If the teacher is oriented exclusively towards skill development, there would appear to be no problem.

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However, to the ESL teacher oriented toward the total development of the learner, the question is immediately asked, "How much can the teacher help the learner develop the linguistic skills needed and yet have the learner move closer to becoming an independent learner and user of the new lan-

guage?" This is not an easy question to answer.

Teacher approval, mimicking modeled behaviors, or simply avoidance of failure are each strong, and frequently used, sources of external reward in many ESL programs, including most traditional programs. However, learning based exclusively on external rewards creates *dependent* learners. As Bruner (1961) warned, learning based on external rewards can all too easily cause learners to simply seek cues as to how to conform to what is expected of them. External reinforcement, in the extreme, can produce individuals capable of little more than reproducing behaviors and products deemed desirable by others. Even if this were an acceptable outcome of "education", one must wonder what is to happen to the learner when the teacher—the source of reward—is no longer available?

The competent ESL instructor understands the dangers as well as the benefits of external rewards. This instructor considers the consequences of her or his actions in terms of the objective of helping learners to develop to their fullest potential. It is understood that this objective cannot be reached by exclusive reliance on external rewards. On the other hand, varying quantities of external reward *are* needed and wanted by learners in various settings. A tremendous amount of support, encouragement, help, and approval appear to be essential to some learners. Each step the teacher takes with or for the learner is a move toward greater dependence of the learner on the teacher. Yet a number of factors, including the needs and wishes of the learner for external rewards, encourage the teacher to take steps that foster dependence and block movement toward the objective of helping learners develop toward their maximum potential. This paradox is the ESL teacher's dilemma.

Two Filters That Help

The objective of a competent educator should be to help each learner grow maximally toward achieving his or her fullest

potential. A method must be devised to determine how best to achieve this goal. How does one person help another grow toward achieving his or her own maximum potential? How does one determine which actions would be most helpful to another human being? Abraham Maslow and Douglas McGregor provide important filters through which any such decisions should be viewed.

Maslow (1968) described the greatest fulfillment of human potential as self-actualization. In his theory of growth motivation, Maslow places human needs in a hierarchy. Starting with physical needs at the bottom, an individual must satisfy each of the lower needs sequentially while moving upward toward higher needs. That is, physical needs must be satisfied before security needs. When both of these needs have been satisfied, that individual is then free to satisfy *social* needs. When social needs have been satisfied, he or she is then free to satisfy *self-fulfillment* (or self-actualization) needs. The first four needs (physiological, security, social and self-esteem) are identified as "D" or *deficiency* needs because these needs must be satisfied by other individuals. Satisfaction of needs by others can, of course, create dependency on others, and a dependent individual cannot satisfy the higher self-actualization or self-fulfillment needs. Yet dependency needs must be satisfied by others before the individual can become free to move toward self-actualization.

The competent and fully effective language educator understands that it is absolutely essential to help learners succeed and satisfy their basic security, social and self-esteem needs. This, at times, requires direct suggestions and reassuring and reinforcing behavior on the part of the teacher before the learner is able to reach toward higher levels of growth and development. However, if the activities of the learner are constantly directed and redirected through extrinsic reinforcement, the learner will never find the freedom to grow toward higher levels of growth and development. This seeming paradox is kept foremost in the mind of the competent and fully effective educator. McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y help

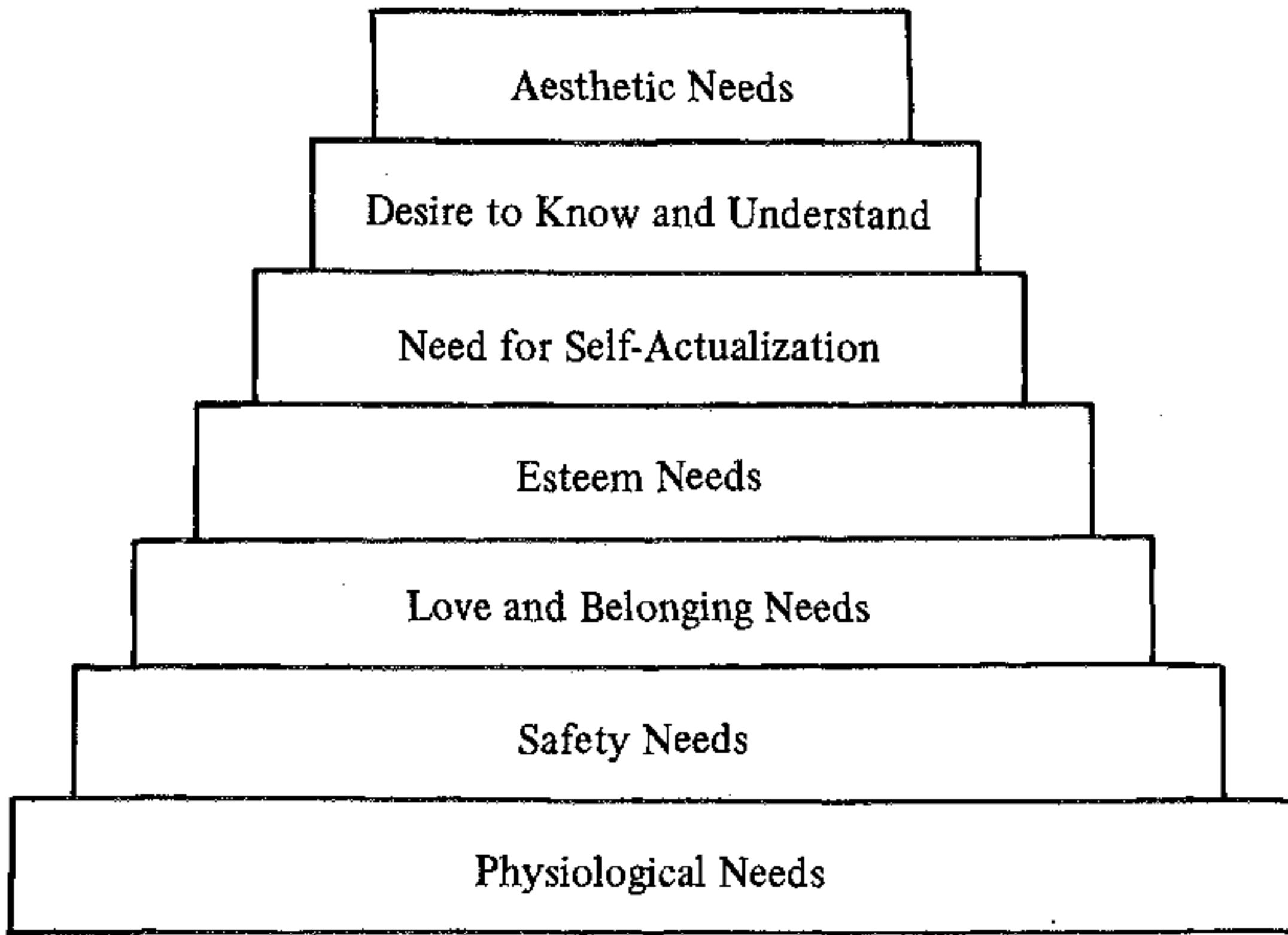


Figure 1

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

to make congruent decisions when faced with this paradox.

McGregor (1960) proposed Theory X and Theory Y as two diametrically opposed sets of assumptions about people. An individual accepting one of these theories would logically view human beings and their needs far differently than would a subscriber to the opposing theory. Exploration of these theories and their influence on leadership behavior is most helpful in assisting educators to consider the consequences of their own actions.

Theory X

1. Most people have an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if at all possible.
2. Because most people dislike work, they must be pushed, coerced or threatened with punishment to get them to work.

3. Most people are basically lazy, have little ambition, wish to avoid responsibility, and want security above all.

Theory Y

1. Most people find physical and mental effort as natural as play or rest and develop an attitude toward work related to their experiences with it.
2. People do not have to be threatened with punishment to be motivated to work. They will be somewhat self-directed when they are committed to the objectives.
3. Commitment to objectives is related to the rewards associated with their achievement.
4. Given facilitative conditions, the average person learns not only to accept, but to seek responsibility.

5. Most people have the potential to exercise imagination and creativity on the job.

The purpose of considering Theory X and Theory Y is not to select which is the "correct" theory, but rather to help educators clarify their own assumptions about human behavior and determine whether their own behavior is consistent with their assumptions and objectives. For those who accept Theory X, one-way communication with the educator handing down information, decisions and instructions to the learner makes sense. Theory Y suggests that two-way communication and the involvement of learners in decision making and goal setting is essential.

The filters provided by Maslow and McGregor can help the language teacher make appropriate instructional decisions. It is not at all unique for these two filters to help teachers in both traditional and innovative programs gain insight into their own teaching and supervising behavior. Many see a lack of congruence among their beliefs, objectives and behaviors. Once an educator realizes that incongruence exists, it is a relatively simple matter to select behaviors that are consistent with his or her own beliefs and objectives. The competent and fully effective educator is now able to help others in a manner appropriate to the everchanging growth needs of each individual. Such an educator is called *intentional* (Ivey, 1969).

The Intentional ESL Teacher

An intentional individual is one who acts spontaneously with an understanding of the power of her or his actions on her or him, her or his environment, and others (Ivey and Rollin, 1972).

The essential and distinguishing characteristic of an intentional teacher is that every behavior is generated for the express purpose of facilitating the development and movement toward self-actualization of the learners. The intentional educator is *aware* of the effect of those actions on others. It is the intentional teacher who helps learners

grow maximally toward self-fulfillment. The intentional teacher can be described as one who:

- a. Has a maximum number of ways to reach and teach others;
- b. Is committed to helping others grow toward self-fulfillment; and
- c. Views every teaching behavior in terms of its effect on the total development of learners.

Intentionality is simply a blending of behavioral alternatives aimed at helping others move toward becoming competent, self-actualizing individuals.

The intentional teacher is not committed to a single course of action. It must be re-emphasized that every possible teaching method, from the most direct to the most indirect, is an essential component of the intentional teacher's repertoire. To be able to generate these behavioral alternatives, one must have a wide background of teaching skills and knowledge from which to draw. The intentional teacher develops the ability to use and assess the effect of traditional as well as innovative teaching methods.

Moskowitz (1978) emphasizes the need for language classes which contribute to the positive self-concepts and self actualization of learners. She provides eight premises for a humanistic foreign language program.

1. A principal purpose of education is to provide learning and an environment that facilitate the achievement of the full potential of students.
2. Personal growth as well as cognitive growth is a responsibility of the school. Therefore education should deal with both dimensions of humans—the cognitive or intellectual and the affective or emotional.
3. For learning to be significant, feelings must be recognized and put to use.
4. Significant learning is discovered for oneself.

5. Human beings want to actualize their potential.
6. Having healthy relationships with other classmates is more conducive to learning.
7. Learning more about oneself is a motivating factor in learning.
8. Increasing one's self-esteem enhances learning.

Several language educators have recognized the importance of providing students with learning activities which enhance student's self-concepts (Moskowitz, 1978; Savignon, 1972; Friedenberg & Bradley, 1981; Horwitz & Horwitz, 1977; Puhl, 1975; and Brown & Dubin, 1975). These activities provide students with opportunities to express emotions, opinions, experiences, values, hopes, fantasies, feelings and memories. They also help students to become accepting of others. Humanistic language teachers recognize the importance of focusing on (at appropriate times) the student's message in the target language and not on the degree of grammatical perfection. That is, they have learned how to listen to *what* the learner is saying instead of *how* the learner is saying it.

The intentional language teacher, then, is one who knows when it is appropriate to use structured, highly controlled and manipulative techniques and when it is appropriate to allow students to use the target language for personal expression, based not on the students' level of linguistic competence, but on the students' needs as human beings. This teacher knows when to correct student errors and when to focus solely on their intended messages. She or he recognizes the importance of linguistic skill development as well as the importance of the students' total human development. Intentional language teachers have developed a repertoire of teaching methods, including recent innovations, which will increase their potential to reach others. Above all, intentional language teachers *care* about the total human development of their students and possess the *flexibility* needed to help students function to their fullest capacity.

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