

# The humanist developmental theory essay sample

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



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The humanist approach to development puts the individual at the centre as the focal point. Humanistic theories focus on the person's experiences, needs, desires, preferences, and motives in life. Humanist thinkers strongly claim that an individual person is moulded not by his external environment but by his strong inner will. This essay shall dwell on the salient details about the humanist theory and its implications on classroom teaching, especially in the elementary education levels K to Grade 8.

## **A Closer Look at Humanism**

Humanism thinking emerged in the field of psychology in the 1960s that became a move contradicting the then-dominant behaviourism paradigm. While behaviourism focuses on the influence of external environment on the learning of the person, humanism centres on the individual's free will as the powerful drive that leads him towards learning and development (Slater, Hocking & Loose, 2003). The main contributor to the humanist development theory is Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist who is well known for establishing the hierarchy of needs of an individual person. These needs that

every person has serve as the determinants of his behaviour. Maslow established four levels of human needs namely, physiological needs, safety and security, belongingness and love, and self-actualization (Huitt, 2007). These four identified needs are arranged in a hierarchy in such a way that the higher level cannot be achieved without satisfying first the lower level. Hence the reason for the physiological needs positioned at the base, the first human need to be satisfied. When the person's bodily needs are satisfied, the need to keep safe and avoid danger comes next. And when the person has established his security, there comes the search to belong, to love and to be accepted by other people. The highest need in the hierarchy is self-actualization, which encompasses the need to be self-competent, to be recognized for his achievements, and to be confident of his independence.

### **A Humanist Teacher in K-Grade 8 Classrooms**

A humanist thinking educator would consider learning as student-centred, rather than teacher-centred or environment-centred. Since humanism focuses on the experiences of the child that lead to the development of his self-concept, a humanist teacher moves towards ensuring that the child gathers experiences that make him feel good about himself. This statement may pose a lot of controversy and discussion. Teaching with the premise of making students feel good about themselves can go against some classroom discipline theorists who argue that learning is not just about oneself but about making group learning possible.

However, I believe that humanism can work to the advantage of elementary education teachers because children need to first know themselves,

understand their strengths and weaknesses, and establish the expectations accordingly. In dealing with young children, a crucial role of the teacher, as the facilitator of learning, is to help the child establish a positive self-concept and reduce levels of frustration.

Humanist teachers see learning as a process towards self-actualization, the peak in the hierarchy of needs. The teacher recognizes the child's needs for affection, the need to belong in a class and in a family, and the need to feel secured and safe even before he reaches the highest level of development.

Humanist teachers also recognize that their role is to instil in the children the need for self-motivation, rather than being driven by external rewards.

Teachers who choose the humanist approach would create opportunities for children to realize that a greater reward is their actually feeling good about themselves. This reward of "congratulating oneself" is training in self-actualization, the highest level in Maslow's hierarchy.

## **Humanism at Work**

A humanist teacher considers himself as a facilitator of learning, not the sole source of knowledge. Therefore, such a teacher would employ participatory and discovery teaching strategies, where the student becomes actively involved in the process of learning.

An elementary level classroom that is headed by a humanist teacher is characterised with movement, active learning, and dynamic interaction.

Children need to do things by themselves and for themselves so that they would get the reward of feeling good about their accomplishments.

Experiments, creative work, puzzle-solving, construction and re-construction

of things are some examples of activities that can bring about the incentive of self-reward to children. It is only through actively doing and discovering new things would children see for themselves their capability as a person. Discovering their potentials themselves is much stronger than simply being told that they have the potentials waiting to be actualized. Thus, a humanist teacher will hardly have any classroom where students are silently seated trying to absorb all the knowledge that is being poured into them.

## **Conclusion**

Humanism is a great development theory that can work at the advantage of both the teacher and the learner when applied correctly. Seeing students through the hierarchy of needs and leading them to reach the highest level is such a fulfilling accomplishment for the teacher, which in turn, leads him to his own self-actualization need.

## **References**

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