

# *Humanistic Education-a Teaching Philosophical Perspective in Adult Education*

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**Abstract:** This essay aims to present the personal stance as an adult educator which is approval of humanistic education, and then will continue to analyse the philosophy of teaching and the learning in the perspective of humanistic education including the basic guiding principles. In the first section, the essay will describe an account of personal stance as a facilitator of learner-centred learning in humanistic adult education. The second section will present the significance of implementing humanistic education in China. The last section will state the employment of the teaching methods which can help to enhance the adult learners' participation, self-awareness, interactive skill and critical thinking skills in humanistic education.

## **1. Introduction**

According to Bowl (2017), adult education refers to the education which is a purposeful activity for the particular group of adults. With the burgeoning development of the economy in the past decades, adult education has become an integral part and a perpetual need for the education. The adult educator makes a significance to the adult individual developments (Bowl, 2017). The personal stance of an adult educator can make a profound influence on the adult education. In the past forty years, the fierce competition of the Chinese National College Entrance Examination has resulted in an exam-oriented and teacher-centred education system which can easily lead to the neglect of the personality building (Jiang, 2008). Humanistic education is a typical kind of philosophical perspective of education which pays close attention to the development of individual and the learners' self-actualization (Bowl, 2017). By implementing the humanistic education, the learners are encouraged to deeply understand themselves and transfer to an active and self-directed learning mode (Aloni, 2002). This essay aims to present the personal stance as an adult educator which is approval of the humanistic education, and then will continue to analyse the philosophy of teaching and the learning in the perspective of humanistic education including the basic guiding principles. In the first section, the essay will describe an account of personal stance as a facilitator of learner-centred learning in humanistic adult education. The second section will present the significance of implementing the humanistic education in China. The last section will state the

employment of the teaching methods which can help to enhance the adult learners' participation, self-awareness, interactive skill and critical thinking skills in humanistic education.

## 2. Personal Stance Statement

Teaching and learning are deeply intertwined. Facilitating learning is the aim of teaching, and all the educator's efforts for the sake of promoting learning are valuable (Heimlich and Norland, 2002). Gruber (2006) notes that throughout the educational process, the educator is not the representative of the privilege of authority, the authority shall be settled by the educators and learners' joint negotiation and reassessment to reach a consensus. Educator generally plays a role in enlightening, offering assistance and providing guidance for the learner to obtain knowledge through interaction (Giannoukos, et al., 2015). As an adult educator, being a facilitator of learner-centred humanistic education could be significant. In the 1919 report of the Ministry of Reconstruction, adult education was explicitly considered as a perpetual need and indivisible field of civil rights (Aspin, 2007). With the burgeoning development of the society, it has progressively revealed the higher demands of adult education. At the same time, the requirement of a qualified adult educator is constantly improving. Identifying educator's philosophy of teaching and learning is of great value. According to Tisdell and Taylor (1999), there is a strong linkage among educational philosophy, the practice and the conscious or unconscious behaviour. Humanistic education, as a typical kind of philosophical perspective of adult education, pays close attention to the development of individual and the actualization of learner's own potential (Bowl, 2017). In the humanistic education, the educator is responsible for facilitating learning and providing the source of information.

Recognizing and accepting the five principles of humanistic education enables the educators to enhance understanding about teaching and carry on practice in a deeper depth. Anderson (n. d.) has made a summary of the five principles: 1. Give the student sufficient autonomy in learning. Comparing with the school-age students, adult learners tend to be more experienced. Different background and previous information empower their learning to become more distinctive. The learning behaviour of an adult learner is not mandatory, it is driven by internal factors from their own (Rothes, Lemos and Goncalves, 2017). Two scholars of existential philosophy, Kierkegaard and Buber advocate that the autonomous decision of learning content is conducive for the learners to confirm greater determination and perseverance (Foley, 2004). Under this circumstance, adult learners are allowed to select their learning content, discipline and area depending on their own will which could help to boost their motivation. 2. Education aims to cultivate the learners' learning aspiration and help the learners to understand how to learn. Accordingly, the learners should take the initiative in learning and motivate themselves. McGuire and McGuire (2015) point out that developing the learner's capacity for "learning how to learn" brings benefits to improve their capability. 3. Self-evaluation plays an irreplaceable role as the only measuring criteria of performance. McClam and Sevier (2010) note that grades do not represent the performance of students and it could hardly proof the standard of teaching. Self-evaluation provides space for learners to plan forward and reflect back, be reflective about the process and bring positive effect (Lash, 2018). 4. Emotion and knowledge are essential and significant to humanistic education. Emotion and cognition interact with each other in the process of teaching and learning. The gradual recognition of emotional intelligence in education has also indicated the profound influence of emotion (Demetriou, 2018). Rogers (2001) considers affection and liking as an important component of people's life. For this reason, paying attention to the learners' emotion is of great importance to the educator. 5. A safe learning environment without threat contributes to a better learning performance. Greenberg (2016) notes that the learning environment has a considerable impact on the way of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the lack of security may lead to the

absence of perception of affiliation, esteem and self-fulfilling (Imanian, 2014). These underpinning principles and clues help the educators to better understand the educational stance associated with humanistic education.

However, different people hold different opinions. There still exists sceptical view towards humanistic education. For instance, Aloni (2002) mentions two typical crises against humanistic education: banality and nihilism. On the contrary, Combs (1979) indicates that there is some misunderstanding towards humanistic education and humanistic educator, considering humanistic education as a gentle form which is too weak to achieve a full and effective implementation. On the other hand, according to the humanistic educational perception, knowledge is originated from people's self-awareness of knowledge limitation. Focusing on developing people's self-awareness by humanistic education contributes to facilitating knowledge. As a prominent educator, concentrating on interaction and leading the learners to explore the unknown is far more feasible than giving the correct answer directly (Aloni, 2002). By means of advocating the learner-centred learning with self-autonomy and giving guidance instead of the force-feeding of knowledge, the learners acquire more opportunity for thinking and practising. Throughout the process of education, adult learners are the main body of adult learning (Hiller, 2002). Each learner is an individual human being with an individual personality. They are unique and independent. Meanwhile, they are also the basic unit of the community. They are connected and inseparable. Rodgers and Scott (2008) emphasize that it is important to focus on the learners' developmental diversity. Otherwise, both the educators and the learners will descend into a crisis of disengagement. The impact of humanistic movement and humanistic education will be enormous since it is a view of the essence of human beings and learning (Combs, 1979). Humanistic education thinks highly of the authentic personality, autonomy and critical thinking (Aloni, 2002). Therefore, the educational stance mentioned before is consistent with the establishment of a learner-centred learning in the form of humanistic education.

### **3. The Importance of Implementing the Humanistic Education as a Teaching Stance in Adult Education**

The importance of implementing the humanistic education is closely affiliated to the mixed influencing factors including the domestic educational situation in China and the Chinese one-child population policy. Like many other children in China, the school-age children tend to start the compulsory education at the age of six or seven. After a nine-years learning, they continue their study in high school for 3 years and attend the national college entrance examination which is the most competitive exam with the biggest amount of candidates in China. After a period of 12 years' learning, passing the college entrance examination becomes the earnest goal for millions of candidates. The fierce competition in the Chinese National College Entrance Examination results in an exam-oriented education system. The Chinese National College Entrance Examination was established in 1952, suffering from the abolishment in 1966 and being rebuilt since the year of 1977 (Liu and Liu, 2017). Official statistics indicate that there are over 9.4 million candidates participating in 2015, 2016 and 2017 National College Entrance Examination (Report of the College Entrance Examination, 2017). The score of the College Entrance Examination to a large extent determines the higher education admission. Furthermore, suffering from the unified and strict criteria of the Chinese College Entrance Examination system and the high dependency on the teacher-centred education, it is hard to avoid the emergence of excessive competitive educational culture which focusing on inspiring the accomplishment of the high marks instead of the learners' comprehensive development (Milligan, et al., 2011). The competitive competition of the Chinese College Entrance Examination system results in the dilemma of exam-oriented education and rote

learning (Jiang, 2008). Compared with the exam-oriented education, the humanistic education attaches great importance to the learner-directed learning.

On the other hand, the Chinese family planning policy was incorporated in the constitution in the year of 1978. For the sake of restricting the high-speed increase of population, the one-child policy is implemented in the late 1970s. This policy gives rise to disputes and it is replaced by the two-child policy in 2015 (Doherty, Norton and Veney, 2001). During the execution of the one-child policy over 30 years, plenty of people are born as the only child in their family. Recent research (Zhan, et al., 2017) compares the psychological condition of the students from the one-child family and non-one-child family. The statistics show that on the communicative withdrawal, reliance, self-inferiority and anxiety, the students from the one-child family had a notable difference. As an adult educator, this particular factor is also worthy to be considered. The humanistic education encourages the learners to deeply understand themselves and thinks highly of the self-directed interaction and communication (Aloni, 2002). The implementation of humanistic education may bring benefits to the learners who come from the one-child family (Zhan, et al., 2017).

In the past 40 years since the National College Entrance Examination is re-established and continues to make influence to the generations. Consequently, a considerable amount of learners with a comparable background of the exam-oriented education and seem to value diversity and self-autonomy less ((Liu and Liu, 2017). Meanwhile, due to the specific implementation of the one-child policy, there is a larger proportion of people come from the one-child family. Jamshidi, Afshar and Rastgaran (2013) note that people from the one-child family tend to face new challenges including isolation and less opportunity to communicate with siblings. According to Milligan (2011), education should be tailored to meet the requirement of the learners' cultural background and living circumstance. As an adult educator, noticing the specific living and educational background of the Chinese adult learners is significant. Adult learners are the core participants in the adult education. In fact, many of the Chinese adult learners are accustomed to the exam-oriented and teacher-centred education (Yu, 2017). As an adult educator, the target audience – the adult learners are more or less affected by the National College Entrance Examination system. To transfer this passive study under the traditional mode into an active and self-directed learning, the humanistic education is adopted to make a significant influence. In the humanistic education, one of the core principles is the advocate of the self-direction (Anderson, n. d.). The humanistic adult education could contribute more to a positive complementarity and fill the gap of the exam-oriented educational habituation. Furthermore, the humanistic education values the cultivation of critical thinking. According to Aloni (2002), the autonomy, critical thinking and the authentic personality are the ultimate principle objectives of humanistic education. Mastering the way of critical thinking enables people to distinguish the aspects of strong and weak, to enhance innovation and expand a wider field of vision (Judge, Jones and McCreery, 2009).

Reflecting on the contemporary modality of education in China, learning by rote and exam-domination is no longer to achieve a satisfactory effect. The exam-oriented education has a marginal or even a negative impact on developing the capacity for creativity and the comprehension of diversity (Milligan, et al., 2011). Shifting the habit of learning from the teacher-centred into learner-centred provides more opportunities for practising and brings benefits to cultivate the capability of discovery and independence. Humanistic education which emphasizes the authentic personality could help the learners to separate themselves from the educator and be more creative (Aloni, 2002). In the meantime, the principles of humanistic education give explicit guidelines for the educators to follow and arrange the organization of teaching. Promoting the learner-centred humanistic education in order to enhance the comprehensive development of the learners could bring significant benefits. Therefore, it is important to insist an educational stance which corresponds to the views of humanistic education.

#### 4. Blending Teaching Methods to Facilitate Humanistic Adult Learning

To facilitate learning in the implementation of humanistic, it requires the joint efforts of the educator and the learner. By using the different methods including games, debate, tutor-led lecturette, small group discussion, problem-solving, individual project, E-learning and visiting museums, galleries and organizations, the educator can facilitate the participation and equality and improve learners' learning experience.

First of all, it is important to create an equal and relaxing teaching and learning atmosphere. According to Rodgers and Scott (2008), the transformation of the identity is essential to becoming an educator. During the humanistic adult education, the adult educator plays the role as a facilitator, a guidance and a participant in order to build an equal and democratic relationship in education which means both the educator and the learner could learn from each other without barriers. Introducing oneself by playing a game is an effective method for encouraging interaction and participation. In the principles of humanistic education, the emotion of the learner is important (Anderson, n.d.). A game is an excellent form which could give chances to the learner to participate and acquire knowledge with less stress (Hillier, 2002). Introducing oneself by a throwing ball game or a game of draw lots both bring entertainment to the class. The random patterns of the game makes each of the learners have equal opportunity to participate and avoid isolation.

In a small-scale class, the method of debate would be highly recommended. According to Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (2012), a class with almost 15 participants is estimated to achieve the most desirable effect. A comparatively smaller class brings benefit to enhance the group interaction by face to face. In a small group context, the learners have more opportunities to take part in discussion and interaction. Darby (2007) notes that debate is a popular and effective teaching method with a philosophy of facilitating logical thinking and critical thinking. There are positive side and negative side in a debate. Critical thinking and the capacity of cooperation is fully utilized throughout a debate. Debate provides an opportunity for the learner to master the authority and encourages them to transcend the limitation and reduces the bias of the educator (Darby, 2007). To engage in a debate, the learners have to open their mouth, organize their arguments by critical thinking, develop constructive teamwork and persuade the competitor and audiences. Moreover, Hoover (1965) emphasises that the classroom debate enables the release of emotion, both the debaters and the audiences are engaged in interaction. Additionally, the design of debate topic must be related to the lives or the experience of the adult learner. The tight connection between the learners' experience and the class setting is conducive to strengthen the understanding of knowledge and boost the engagement (Johanson and Brookfield, 2010). A relational debate topic could largely raise the interest of the adult learners. It could also help to build a new connection between the learners' theoretical and practical knowledge. Hence, the method of debate could be a feasible way to enliven the class, enhance the participation and empower the learners with self-autonomy.

In a large-scale-class teaching, a combinatorial method of tutor-led lecturette, small group discussion and problem-solving as the instructional method would be recommended. The traditional lecture provides the teacher convenience to convey the substantial information to a large number of learners in the limit time. But at the same time, it is lack of interaction and active attraction (Hiller, 2002). A tutor-led lecturette combined with a small group discussion could effectively remedy this weakness. A tutor-led lecturette will introduce the essential content to the learners with a comparatively shorter duration (Northwest Center for Public Health Practice, 2012). After the lecturette, the educator will lead the learners to engage in the small group discussion which is helpful for narrowing down the gap between different learners. In a large-scale class, it is hard for an educator to guarantee enough individualized coaching to each learner. Therefore, breaking a large number of the audience into small cluster would be helpful. The adult learners will be

randomly assigned to several small groups and each group is composed of 6 learners. A U shaped seat arrangement facing the educator is beneficial for improving the eye contact, interaction and feedback acquirement (Hillier, 2002). Compared with the traditional education, the small group discussion enhances the participation of the learners (Annamalai, Manivel and Palanisamy, 2015). The problem-solving method empowers the learners to occupy the dominant status in learning and cultivates their ability to find the solution to the problem (Mokhtari-Hassanabad, Shahvarani and Behzadi, 2012). The combination of the tutor-led lecturette, problem-solving and small group discussion could help the learners to concentrate on the study issue and active their learning interaction in a large-scale class.

According to Hiller (2002), an individual project is a method which empowers learners to find things out for themselves. For the adult learners, most of them are familiar with the contract, setting a unique individual learning contract could help them to make a learning plan, at the same time, the educator could realize the demand of different learners to make a corresponding adjustment. Accord to Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998), a learning contract usually contains the learning need, learning objectives, learning strategy and learning evaluation which can help the learner to better understand his own requirement, set a learning goal and self-evaluate his progress and achievement. Specifying a clear objective could bring benefit to the learners in focusing on the key points (Northwest Center for Public Health Practice, 2012). In the humanistic education, self-evaluation is considered as the only valid form of evaluation (Anderson, n.d.). By carrying out the learning contrast, the learners can have a self-talk for judgment.

According to Hiller (2002), visiting museums, galleries and organizations is also a method of teaching which can provide the learners an opportunity to obtain knowledge vividly by observing the 'real' examples. The activities such as seeing an exhibit and visiting a museum could help people to have a more profound memory in their learning (Northwest Center for Public Health Practice, 2012). This method could provide the learners a new experience and enhance their passion for participating.

Furthermore, the method of E-learning provides the learners a more flexible and equal learning experience (Northwest Center for Public Health Practice, 2012). The material, learning videos, exercises, extra recommended reading of the class could be downloaded on the learning platform of the internet. This online learning platform is convenient for the learners (included those with disabilities) to preview and review the learning content at any time. An open discussion forum is provided to all the learners for interaction and group discussion. There is also an anonymous "blank questionnaire" survey established in the platform. Any of the learners could deliver any of their opinions or feedback to the educator by this form without threat. All of the feedback and voice will be taken into account by the educator for improving.

According to Aloni (2002), the general purpose of humanistic education is to help the learners to achieve self-fulfillment. By using blended teaching methods, the adult learners could better acquire comprehensive improvement, achieve the realization of self-value as well equality in the process of learning.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, adult education has become an integral part and a perpetual need for the education. An adult educator plays an important role in the process of adult education. According to the contemporary educational and living background in China, the deficiency of the traditional teacher-centred and exam-oriented education is gradually revealed. Implementing the learner-centred humanistic education is significant. Humanistic education emphasizes the learners' self-actualization, self-evaluation, autonomy, authentic personality and critical thinking. By the

implementation of humanistic education, the learners are encouraged to discover and explore their self-awareness and enhance their comprehensive development. To facilitate the educating and learning in humanistic education, making full use of the teaching methods would evidently bring benefits. Facilitating the adult learning in the perspective of humanistic education stance may not be an easy one to achieve in China, but education that is worth doing is often not easy.

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