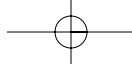




GUERRAND-HERMÈS FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

HUMAN-CENTRED EDUCATION

By Scherto Gill & Garrett Thomson



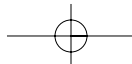
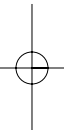
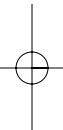
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Human-Centred Education is a vision that places the human being at the centre of all educative processes.

Three Key Principles of Human-Centred Education

Human-Centred Education is a vision that places the human being at the centre of all educative processes. It involves three basic principles:

- Education ought to respect individuals fully as persons, and not treat them instrumentally, that is: merely as a means to an end. For example, adolescence is not solely a time of preparation for one's working life as an adult.
- The main aim of education ought to be the flourishing of the individual as a human being, such as the development of his/her autonomy, self-awareness and self-direction, as well as the capacity to care for values beyond him/herself. In other words, let's put the development of the person first, rather than academic and social goals.
- Education ought to be directed towards the person as a whole, nurturing his/her personal qualities and virtues, as well as their inner integrity and harmony. For instance, emotional and motivational education is part of the whole-person development, not simply a way for students to perform better academically.

Human-Centred Education proposes that the development of the individual is paramount over other general educational aims such as social transformation, economic growth, and academic achievement. Human flourishing ought to take

priority over the needs of social institutions and of educational standards. However, this does not mean that the development of the individual always precedes other aims in all circumstances. Wherever conflicts exist between these aims, the development of the person should take a leading role in balancing the requirements and recommendations of the other objectives.

The three principles of Human-Centred Education have influence on understanding the nature of learning, and have practical implications in curriculum, assessment and pedagogy, as well as having ramifications for the culture of schools as learning communities.

This paper is a summary of the book entitled 'Human-Centred Education' to be published by the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation's Centre for Research in Human Development. It encapsulates the educational thinking that the Foundation has developed originally to identify practical new options for state (secondary) schooling in countries such as the UK. These ideas include some of the best from both mainstream and alternative approaches to education.

The first part of the paper has general principles that can be applied to education in most contexts. The second part, which is the practical implications of these principles, can be read in light of schooling in general, but is more relevant to secondary schooling.

...learning as the cultivation of qualities and virtues must be an individually tailored process... the 'one-size-fits-all' model of education can only provide something superficial.

Human-Centred Approach to the nature of learning

Human-Centred Education implies a particular approach to the nature of learning. Broadly speaking, this consists of two elements:

First, a human-centred focus highlights the errors of treating the individual as an object, a perennial tendency when formulating educational goals. There is also an allied predisposition to treat the mind as a vessel. In this mistaken perspective, learning is seen as the acquisition of mental objects, and thus education becomes a question of putting the mental objects, such as pieces of information, facts, beliefs, ideas, etc. into the appropriate part of the mind-vessel.

This misconception is behind the formulation of the current state educational goals in the UK. In order to move away from it, it is necessary to re-instate the person as the subject or the active initiator of actions, thoughts and feelings. A human-centred approach involves this shift. It puts emphasis in education on the quality of the learning process from the point of view of the subject.

Second, a human-centred approach is concerned with the development of the whole person. This implies a view of learning that rests on a broadly quality or virtue-based epistemology. In other words, learning is about nurturing the desirable person qualities that human beings need for their lives. These qualities and non-moral virtues are more than knowledge and

skills because they involve an attitude of caring in relevant ways. Such qualities and virtues are integral to academic and professional training but tend to get ignored because they cannot be easily measured.

A human-centred approach to learning recognises that the relevant qualities and virtues may differ between individuals because people have varied temperaments and characters, and also between cultures and societies, as well as depending on the nature of the subject studied. However, this does not mean that they are purely subjective or merely a matter of opinion, but it does imply that learning as the cultivation of qualities and virtues must be an individually tailored process. It suggests that the 'one-size-fits-all' model of education can only provide something superficial.

This understanding of learning further points out that a human-centred approach also includes the idea that education should enable a person to find meaning, and enable the individual to lead a fuller human life within contemporary society.

In summary, the vision of human-centred education should make the quality-based learning at the core of the curriculum development, which is linked to the strategies of pedagogy, and serves as a central consideration when formulating ways of learning feedback. It should also guide the planning, designing and creation of learning communities.

A curriculum that focuses on the qualities and virtues of the whole person can offer a compelling learning experience.

Practical implications of Human-Centred Education

Quality-based curriculum

From the human-centred point of view, a curriculum ought to indicate the kind of processes that teachers will facilitate, without always specifying fixed end-products. A curriculum should not be rigid, but rather open-ended and guided by a number of principles. These can be summarised as follows:

The curriculum ought to:

- A. be designed to respect the individual as a person by taking into account their needs as human beings.
- B. provide space for the development of the person as a whole rather than just the academic and vocational aspects, and even these should be directed towards the development of the whole person.
- C. be constructed in terms of the development of relevant qualities, not only of skills and knowledge. The human-centred approach takes into account more directly the unique nature and talents of the person as a focus of the learning process. At a general level, the desirable qualities to be promoted include, amongst others, the capacity for critical and independent thinking, self-expression, imagination, curiosity, creativity and perseverance. Learners should also be encouraged to listen to others, to be appreciative and perceptive and, above all, to be caring towards and connected

to things of value beyond themselves.

- D. enable the individual to recognise and act in accordance with the idea that they are primarily responsible for their own development. It provides the opportunity for learners to find fields or activities that they are passionate about and that contribute significantly to their overall development.
- E. encourage the proactive aspects of a person's nature, and enable the individual to identify their own goals as well as involving them in the construction of their learning plans in order to achieve these goals.
- F. be constructed in such a way that will not be pre-occupied with assessment.

Thus, a curriculum that focuses on the qualities and virtues of the whole person can offer a compelling learning experience in which individuals are actively engaged with what they have chosen to do and to learn. They are therefore more likely to become self-motivated, resourceful and responsible learners.

From the perspective of human-centred approach, a curriculum ought to be co-constructed by the learners and the teacher and/or mentor. Through the guidance of a caring teacher, the learner can identify their directions for learning and life. This involves a dialogic process and exchange of ideas, and

When grades become the dominant goals, they prevent the individual from connecting to the value or interesting features of what is being learned. In this case, the measurement destroys what it is supposed to measure.

can help the learner to move towards linking the young person's interests with the available resources and the considerations proposed by the teacher/mentor. In such a situation, the following questions are important:

- What are the important qualities to be developed and nurtured in the child or the young person at this moment?
- In what ways can these goods be linked to the child or the young person's overall needs, interests and desires?
- How does the current learning experience contribute to the child or young person's future goals and direction?

With such considerations and a good knowledge of the student, the teacher can then work with him or her and with the group in order to co-construct programmes for both. With the teacher's support, the learner can be encouraged to develop unique their learning strategies and find independently solutions to problems.

Learning Feedback (not assessment)

Enriching educational processes can easily become reduced to preparation for exams and tests. It is easy to slip into viewing the educative process largely as a means to achieving better grades, especially since the advent of performance-linked league tables and perform-

ance targets. There is increased pressure on students to view their time at school in this manner too, and teachers and schools reinforce that view.

Ultimately, this is deeply self-defeating. When grades become the dominant goals, they prevent the individual from connecting to the value or interesting features of what is being learned. In this case, the measurement destroys what it is supposed to measure. Furthermore, students often understand grades in personal and judgmental terms, and use them to label themselves as failures.

For these reasons, it is paramount to separate the purposes of evaluating a young person's learning. Such assessment usually serves three purposes:

1. Meeting the learning needs of students;
2. Satisfying the informational needs of employers and other institutions; and
3. Fulfilling the need for public accountability.

These needs are distinct in nature, and should be addressed through separate means, rather than as one grand process called 'assessment' that attempts to serve all three purposes at once. Lumping learning feedback together with assessment in the format of exams fails to

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respect the person because it involves testing the learners for the sake of ends that are not theirs and in a way that may harm their learning.

Therefore the learner's feedback needs should not be regarded as 'assessment'. According to a human-centred view, feedback from teachers and peers offers valuable opportunities for the individual to understand their progress with regard to their own goals as well as in accordance with external standards, and how these standards relate to more basic epistemological values. At the same time, a human-centred approach encourages more active self-evaluation in terms of the individual's own past (ipsative feedback). This approach has four very important features to recommend:

1. It requires understanding the relevant standards well.
2. It embodies the idea that individuals are responsible for their own learning and promotes more proactive motivation.
3. It requires critical self-reflection
4. It encourages the learner to improve relative to his/her own past rather than by being better than someone else.

Once the individual feels motivated and connected with what they are doing, they are

more likely to take responsibility for their own learning. To be motivated intrinsically, the student needs to understand the value of what they are doing (in school) and to be involved more directly in identifying her own trajectories in learning. Ongoing feedback enables the student to reflect on their experience and use reflection to guide further learning.

An example of a human-centred approach to feedback in practice could be the use of 'learning portfolios', which, when well integrated in the learning process, can help the learner to see their own progress over time, to understand their talents, strengths and needs, and to identify meaningful work.

Pedagogy of caring

A human-centred vision of education suggests that teaching be concerned with helping the student develop the qualities and virtues necessary for human flourishing and fulfilment. Teaching also serves as a channel which connects the need for greater autonomy with the need for agency.

The teacher helps the students make links between the curriculum, personal interests and the 'bigger picture' of their life. The teacher also helps the student to further develop their existing qualities, and to nurture curiosity, caring attitudes, ownership and love of learning. The teacher is at the same time a role model, friend, guide, mentor, coach, authority, facilitator and more. These

One of the most important qualities of a teacher is the capacity to develop caring relationships with the students.

functions shift in accordance with the changing needs of the students and those of the teachers themselves.

One of the most important qualities of a teacher is the capacity to develop caring relationships with the students. A constructive relationship with a mentor or teacher in turn can enable the student to recognise their own talent and to be receptive to support and direction. Such a relationship is central to a student's self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence.

A human-centred approach to pedagogy combines respect for individual choice with the recognition of the need for guidance and the strengthening the individuals' capacity to choose. Children and adolescents are not always best at judging their needs and possibilities and therefore, for the young person, choice requires an authentic caring relationship with a teacher or mentor who is well trained and experienced.

Although a teacher may not always be an expert in a particular field, he or she needs to understand the principles and processes of inquiry and core epistemological values because this is crucial to the art of nurturing the student's attitudes to intellectual pursuits.

Teachers play an important role in providing clear moral boundaries for young people, and

guiding them through uncertainty with the teacher's authority. Therefore nurturing the teacher's own development and sense of well-being becomes paramount for their own growth, which can also have a big impact on the students' emotions and learning.

Schools and institutions should take the teachers' personal and professional development seriously. It is important to help teachers become secure in their sense of self, and of their own humanity by providing them with space for reflection. In this way, teachers will come to truly lead and guide their students.

Human-centred learning community

A human-centred view of learning institutions creates an opportunity for a fundamental shift from the dehumanising mechanism of schooling to a human-centred learning community. This is imperative for a caring culture in which individuals relate to each other in a human way and in which teachers are not merely information providers. Very often, in a human-centred learning community, it is the closeness between people and the respect for oneself and each other that fosters the growth of the individual.

A human-centred learning community is characterised by commitment to a way of being and flourishing together. It is driven by a search for betterment and for the meaningfulness of

In a human-centred learning community, it is the closeness between people and the respect for oneself and each other that fosters the growth of the individual.

experience. A human-centred learning community ought to:

- be underpinned by a culture of care in which people treat each other as persons, not role occupants¹. The concept of the learner as a person rejects coercion and passivity, even though the voice of the teacher plays a guiding role in the student's learning. Such voices of authority are integral to the idea of empowering the student to drive their own learning process. With the support of caring adults, the learner can begin to live with a fuller sense of their opportunities and the confidence to be in the driving seat of their life and learning.
- be a home away from home for a child and a young person. It is itself part of real life learning and collective self-reflection, which is regarded as 'lived citizenship'². Such active citizenship encourages students to be involved in the planning of their education and in this process, they develop a greater capacity to be responsible for their own learning.
- encourage the student to play an active part in constructing their own learning experience, and provide them with opportunities for broader experience and encounters. Such experience may include initiating and participating in community-based projects, for example.

- be an informal space, which creates a sense of community where the young person is not labelled as a student, but as a person who plays a real part in the communal life within the learning environments.

- include a close partnership with parents. Conventional schooling offers little opportunity for parents to be directly involved in school life. A human-centred learning community encourages the parents' sense of belonging and values parents' input as of crucial importance. In the meantime, parents also learn and grow as they participate in the learning and life of the school community, and they help extend a culture of caring and learning to a much wider area of communal life.

Through articulating the characteristics of human-centred learning community, we are also able to revisit a number of core questions explored earlier, especially how the learners should be nurtured as citizens and human beings of the 21st Century. In contrast to schools where young people are locked inside and are coerced to do things that they don't wish to do, a human-centred learning community indicates a trust in the individual's ability to make decisions about their own learning.

1. Fielding, M. (2000) The Person Centred School, Forum, 42, 2, 51-54.

2. Fielding, M. (2005). Alex Bloom, Pioneer of Radical State Education, FORUM: for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education, 47(2)

The work of the Foundation is underpinned by the belief that peace can only be a reality when individuals throughout the world are in touch with their own humanity.

About the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation

The Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP) is a think-tank and research institute. The work of the Foundation is underpinned by the belief that peace can only be a reality when individuals throughout the world are in touch with their own humanity.

The GHFP explores fundamental questions that affect the future of humanity. We try to develop questions that open up new spaces in understanding that can generate insights important for positive change in the human condition and for the peaceful co-existence of communities. Currently, the Foundation focuses on questions within three inter-connected research themes:

Intercultural and inter-religious dialogue

What are the characteristics of the methodologies and practices for dialogue that can enhance mutual understanding and respect amongst persons from different cultural and religious backgrounds? How can human beings live together with humility and hope in an increasingly globalised world?

Education for human flourishing

How can education contribute to individual flourishing? What are the educational values, principles and practices that are necessary in order to nurture the individual's growth so they become dignified human beings who are able to care for and respect one another and the world around them?

Human livelihood

What are the new approaches to development that are needed for human wellbeing? What are the differences between, and common ground shared by, international development agencies, multinational companies and international aid agencies? In what ways do cultural factors hinder or enhance communities' capacities for sustainable livelihoods?

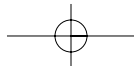
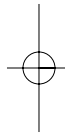
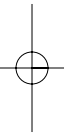
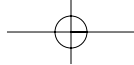
In collaboration with other institutions, the GHFP inquires into these questions and seeks new solutions to the more pressing issues that humanity is confronting. Our own researchers and visiting research fellows are from diverse fields.

Work with us

The Foundation is open to collaborating with other organisations and individuals who share our goals and objectives.

Ways to work with us include:

- sponsoring and participating in our research
- supporting our conferences
- providing financial sponsorship to our projects





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