

Humanism

About humanism

Humanism as an approach to education and [learning paradigm](#) was being developed since the **1960s** as a contrast to [cognitivism](#) and [behaviorism](#) and the perception of a human being as an object in scientific inquiry. Humanism starts from the belief in **inherent human goodness** and contrasts [Sigmund Freud's](#) and biological approaches, which claim human behavior and cognition are determined by experience and prior events. Most important humanist authors that shaped this theory were [Carl Rogers](#) and [Abraham Maslow](#) whose works were mostly orientated on understanding of personality.

Humanists emphasize:

- importance of **responsibility** for individuals actions, and **present moment**,
- **worth of every individual**, and
- **happiness through self-achievement** as the ultimate living goal.

Humanist perspectives on learning suggest:

- learning is a **natural desire**, a mean of **self-actualization** and development of **personal potentials**
- importance of learning lies in the **process**, not outcome,
- learners should have **more control** over the learning process, which should be based on **observing** and **exploring**
- the teacher should be a **role-model** encouraging the learner and provide him with reasons and motivation for every new part of the learning process.

One of Maslow's contributions widely accepted even far beyond borders of humanism is the [hierarchy of needs](#) in which he tried to formulate the **human motivation framework**. Hierarchy of needs approaches human motivation in terms of different kind of needs that have to be satisfied in order to move to the higher level of needs. Those levels include **physiological, safety, society, esteem** and **self-actualization needs** and need to be **satisfied in the mentioned order**.

Since humanism is more concerned with personal development which can be fostered by learning, more than with dealing with the results of knowledge acquisition or underlying physical and mental processes, it is not always considered to be a learning paradigm. Yet it was exactly these characteristics that enabled humanism to avoid some criticisms common for all other learning paradigms. All the other paradigms, when observed in framework of educational practice attempt to quantify learning and knowledge by breaking it up into **measurable but often meaningless pieces** often out of any context. They associate learning with the classroom and a number of hours, classes, courses, number of textbooks and lectures and finally tests and grades, but very few real life experiences fit into this concept, especially since they aren't measured by grades. This also implies that someone knows¹⁾:

- **what** should be learned by people (which is completely dependent on time, place and culture),
- **when** it should be learned (which is decided by educational programs and inability to follow them results in diagnose of learning disability),
- **how** it should be taught (as if there is a best way to teach something without any regard to the

student), and

- **by whom** it should be taught.

Humanism on the other hand associates learning with their own needs in order to achieve self-actualization.

Learning theories:

- [Experiential Learning - David Kolb \(1939 - \)](#)
- [Transformatve Learning Theory - Jack Mezirow](#)

Instructional design theories and learning models:

- [Facilitation Theory - Carl Rogers \(1902 - 1987\)](#)
- [Invitational Learning - William Purkey \(1929 - \)](#)

Other important contributors:

- [John Holt](#), [Malcolm Knowles](#), [Paulo Freire](#)

Criticisms

Common criticisms of humanism suggest:

- humanist approach has a **reduced capacity for experimental research**,
- lack of methods for treating of different mental health problems, and
- **disagreement on the basic humanist assumption of inherent human goodness.**

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