Introduction

In recent years, research has begun to shed light upon the relationship between L2 reading and anxiety. Although speaking and listening activities have been linked to higher levels of anxiety than reading or writing, some researchers have begun to question whether this may just be a bias based on the fact that reading occurs privately, outside the classroom and out of the teacher's range of observation. In the native-language, letter and word recognition are automatic processes requiring minimal processing capacity. However, it is apparent that L2 reading is far more complicated and stressful. Students of L2 reading classes often find themselves trying to comprehend long passages of an unfamiliar language in isolation. This lack of outlet results in raised anxiety levels.

Placing an emphasis on humanistic approach, a method emphasizing humanism as the most significant element of the teaching process, this essay introduces student-centered tasks that seek to make L2 reading a more enjoyable, valuable, and successful learning-experience.
Affective Factors in L2 Reading

Language is an expression of one’s identity or inner world. Although self-expression in the native language can be performed naturally and freely, expressing oneself in front of a crowd in a foreign language can be very stressful. Negative emotions such as worry or anxiety intrude the learner’s mind and slow the learning process down. This proves the close relation between language learning and affect. The vulnerability involved in the language-learning process makes it evident that instructors need to create a comfortable and motivating learning-environment that enforces positive messages. Arnold (1999) explains that belief about one’s ability strongly influences performance. Consequently, enhancing students’ self-esteem is a crucial goal that language teachers must strive to achieve.

Although anxiety is associated more often to speaking and listening activities, it undeniably affects L2 reading. In fact, it is suggested that heightened levels of anxiety have the following affects on the language-learner (Lee, 1999):

1) Anxiety may direct attentional capacity away from reading processes.
2) Anxiety may slow down and complicate the application of reading processes such as letter and word recognition.
3) Anxiety may influence a reader’s decision-making processes (decisions about meaning and strategy use).

Lee (1999) concludes that anxiety or worry wastes energy that should be used for memory and processing, and that this reduction of processing capacity prevents reading from taking place automatically or efficiently. Therefore, to increase effectiveness of L2 reading, teachers must supplement the some-
what tedious and lonely performance of reading with classroom activities that raise motivation.

Another important factor language instructors must keep in mind is that foreign language classes are often mandatory in schools and in certain lines of work. Students who attend such required language classes often believe that they have no choice but to engage in the painful, and perhaps unnecessary, experience. Language teachers who face such apathetic learners must make extra efforts to understand the students' characters, lifestyles, and interests. With deeper, more personal knowledge of students instructors will be able to create more relevant lessons and materials.

**What is Humanistic Approach**

The father of Soka Education, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, declared that “the purpose of education is each individual student’s realization of happiness” (Ikeda, 2001, p. xi). This defines the process of education as one that does not only supply knowledge, but one that respects and develops each individual character, directing them towards a life of contentment. This principle of creating value in one’s own life is the core philosophy of Soka Education and Humanistic Education.

Ikeda (2001) further refers to Makiguchi’s words to emphasize the significance of an education promoting the individual’s effort to create value out of his or her reality:

[Education] is not the piecemeal merchandising of information; it is the provision of keys that allow people to unlock the vault of knowledge on their own. It does not consist in pilfering the intellectual property amassed by others through no additional effort of one’s own; it would rather place
people on their own path of discovery and invention. (p. 13–14)

As if to follow Makiguchi’s educational ideals, more language teachers are stepping away from traditional teaching styles that solely aim to convey content information or reach certain language goals, and are now turning to humanistic approach. In fact, more researchers are now implementing "humanistic learner-centered models which show the necessity of focusing more on language learners and their experience rather than simply on the narrower field of non-learner related linguistic corpora" (Arnold, 1999, p. 6) when designing a language curriculum. Arnold (1999) goes on to insist that there is an increasing need for humanistic language teachers who produce and utilize tasks that aim to foster both masters of languages, and also responsible, content members of society.

What exactly is humanistic approach? Humanistic approach is a student-centered education that proposes ways to work around learning-conflicts that arise due to affective factors. In the foreign language classroom, it is an educational method that aims to enrich the learning process by incorporating the learner’s thoughts, feelings, and emotions into language-teaching. In other words, it requires the bringing together of the learner’s heart and mind. Arnold (1999) notes that the goal of the humanistic teacher is to stimulate positive emotional factors such as self-esteem, empathy, or motivation. The humanistic language teacher does not see language as a “subject” but a way to express one’s “identity” or “self.” In other words, language is a vehicle used to express one’s emotions, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Due to this, it can be said that an effective language class can enhance respect for oneself and others. Thus, it is very important for instructors to create a language-learning atmosphere encouraging students to be confident with the words they vocalize and to also respect the voices of their peers.
Each student is different. To show respect for each contrasting character, humanistic teachers must be aware of what motivates students and be flexible when creating lessons and assessing students. For example, some students join language classes because they are mandatory, perhaps for their job or school. These extrinsically motivated students will be more goal-oriented and will expect to test their skills with tests and exams. On the other hand, other students may be learning a language just for the sake of it. These students are intrinsically motivated, and will find satisfaction in solving problems. By understanding the language-learning goals of the students, teachers will be able to promote a positive learning-attitude leading to effective learning.

Wang (2005) explains that in the 1970s, three prominent methodologies of humanistic approach were developed—The Silent Way, Suggestopaedia, and Community Language Learning. The Silent Way is a methodology originated by Gattengo in which the teacher remains silent and plays the role of a facilitator. The aim of Suggestopaedia, suggested by Lozanov, is to free students’ mind of anxiety. Community Language Learning, which Curran introduced in 1972, refers to a method in which students are given the opportunity to sit and work together in a circle and decide what they want to say. All three student-centered methods and are based on humanistic approach and place significance on learners’ emotions and cognition.

Although humanistic approach is based on the study of affective factors and aims to alleviate learner-anxiety, we must note that a firm grasp of language learning theories is an absolute requisite for instructors. Humanistic teachers must have knowledge of various methods, and must also have the flexibility to apply appropriate theories to each situation and student. Arnold (1999) quotes the theorists of the Confluent Education movement, George Isaac Brown and Gloria Castillo who state that the role of the humanistic teacher is to “unite the cognitive and affective domains in order to educate
the whole person” (p. 5). In other words, the aim of humanistic language
teaching is not to replace second language teaching with other activities, but
rather to create a more effective language-learning environment where cogni-
tion and emotion co-exist.

To summarize, Wang (2005) characterizes the humanistic approach in lan-
guage teaching as a teaching-style that promotes:

- Development of human values
- Growth in self-awareness and in the understanding of others
- Sensitivity to human feelings and emotions
- Active student involvement in learning

Humanistic Language Teaching Tasks in the L2 Reading Classroom

Reading tasks are most often performed in solitary settings. Even if read-
ers have difficulty comprehending the L2 text, they usually have no outlets
for their questions or confusion. This lack the opportunity to communicate
with others raises learners’ anxiety-level, directing attentional capacity away
from the reading process. To make L2 reading more efficient, instructors
should offer students a variety of supplementary language-learning opportu-
nities. In this section, tasks from a first-year college reading program are
introduced. The assigned reading, “Number the Stars” by Lois Lowry (1990),
was a novel about the Holocaust and the Resistance in Denmark in 1943.

Pre-reading activities

It is true that not all teachers have the luxury of choosing their own read-
ing materials. However, in an ideal humanistic L2 reading classroom, the top-
ics being studied should trigger student interest. As Chomsky stated, “The
truth of the matter is that about 99 percent of teaching is making the students feel interested in the material" (Arnold, 1999, p. 13). “Number the Stars” was chosen since the students, having been taught the importance of peace by their school founder, demonstrated an interest in gaining knowledge about war and the world. Also, the story was told from the perspective of a pure and innocent ten-year-old girl, who had to undergo the process of becoming an adult who could face harsh realities in order to protect her Jewish best friend. Although the students in the reading class were a little older than the main character, they could relate to her since they were also “growing up” and were struggling to understand the true ways of society. Similarly, the novel’s focus on friendship called out to their hearts since it was also a central theme in their own lives. For these reasons, “Number the Stars” proved to be an appropriate novel for the target group.

Upon choosing a topic that learners find significant, Lee (1999) claims that the teacher should activate appropriate background knowledge in readers by engaging them in pre-reading activities. In a humanistic classroom, we must be reminded that the focus is placed more on the knowledge of the subject or topic and not on the text or words. The reason for this being that when the goal is directed towards getting the message of the text, learners can take a step away from the stressful task of concentrating on the comprehension of each word or sentence and of reaching the final word. In fact, at the start of the “Number the Stars” reading program, some students insisted that they lacked the proficiency to complete a whole novel in the L2, while others expressed concerns about their lack of familiarity with the historical setting of World War II and the Holocaust. However, after engaging in pre-reading activities, the students grew more positive. Some even began to show excitement by saying, “I can’t wait to read the next chapter!”

Some examples of pre-reading activities used in the “Number the Stars”
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program were as follows:

1) Web-based research and group discussions on World War II, the Holocaust, and Nazis
2) Map-study (studying the map of Europe and coloring in the countries involved in the war)

This is an example of the chorus section of the cloze activity (the words in the parentheses are the answers):

*But I see your true colors

____________ (shining) through
I see your true colors
And that’s why I love you
So don’t be ___ (afraid) to let them show
Your true colors
True colors are beautiful,
Like a ___________ (rainbow)

After completing the cloze activity and listening to the song one more time, it was used to engage students in the following ways:

• students communicate with one another about a fun topic (e.g. what “color” represents themselves and their group members)
• promote respect for themselves and others by discussing how everyone is a different color but that each color is beautiful in its own unique way
4) A "Holocaust Experience"

1) Hand out cards:

2) Students write their name and three things that either represent their identity or are important to them.

3) Students share their card with the teacher. The teacher silently takes a quick look at the card and crosses out all three things with a black permanent marker.

4) Give students time to sit and process what they have just experienced.

5) Students show their card to the teacher again. The teacher crosses out each student's name and replaces it with a random number.

6) After all the students have sat back down, ask them to share their responses. Explain how this experience was aimed to make students understand the shock and pain the Holocaust victims experienced as they were robbed of their identity and hope for the future.
Reading units

When creating a L2 reading syllabus, teachers should address the learners’ limited attentional capacity and divide the reading into small units. To make appropriate breaks, instructors can refer to headings or subtitles, or they can separate the text into thematic groupings. Through this, learners are encouraged to realize the importance of discovering the messages and themes of the story and adopt a style of reading that builds a whole picture rather than focus simply on vocabulary or grammatical structures.

In the reading program, “Number the Stars” was split up into two-chapter units which were approximately 10–20 pages in length. After each section, the students were required to write a brief summary and response. Lee (1999) proposed that such activities reorient the reader’s goal from reaching the last word of the text to organizing the events in order to gain a more clear understanding of the “heart” of the reading. Also, the task of writing personal responses enables readers to relate to the text on a deeper, more personal level, which then increases motivation.

Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning refers to a student-centered learning-environment where active participation in class and group-work is expected. Crandall (1999) concludes that this is an effective study-method since it requires learners to listen to their classmates and contribute to the development of a product that represents the group’s effort, knowledge, and ideas. Not only are the students responsible for their own learning, but they also affect their group members’ performance. This drives students to take actions and cooperate with one another. In contrast to traditional language-teaching methods, learners who take part in cooperative group activities can “acquire or refine metacognitive and socio-affective strategies of monitoring, learning from oth-
ers, and sharing ideas and turns” (Crandall, 1999, p. 229). In cooperative learning, students can experience an increased range of speech acts and language functions such as directing, clarifying, reminding, suggesting, or encouraging. However, the benefits are not limited to these. Crandall’s (1999) findings show that cooperative learning also provides learners with time to think, rehearse the language, and receive support and feedback from their peers before they present their thoughts to the entire class. This reduces anxiety and creates a positive atmosphere where an increase in student-participation and language-learning can be expected.

The question now is how we can incorporate this method into the L2 reading classroom. Although most reading tasks are assigned as “homework” and are performed in private, it can still be constructed as a social act with follow-up collaborative classroom activities. Group-oriented tasks heighten student-motivation and deepen student-interest. Below are three examples of collaborative tasks that were used in the “Number the Stars” reading program:

**Task 1: Reading groups (communities)**

At the start of class, “reading groups” were made. The groups consisted of no more than five students, and participation was strongly encouraged. The students were given approximately thirty minutes to share the following:

1) A brief summary of the section
2) A personal response to the reading
3) Questions about the reading (any clarifications they wanted to make)
4) Answers to the comprehension questions (about five questions per section)

This “community” work gave students time to try out their ideas and make
necessary modifications to their language. This preparation eased anxieties and made it easier for students to volunteer their thoughts to the class as a whole. Also, this group activity provided students with an outlet for any negative feelings or concerns they had while reading. Letting out frustrations by voicing them in their “reading groups” helped to lessen stress. In addition, the support and encouragement they received from their peers built up confidence and self-esteem, leading to more effective learning. Through offering and listening to each other’s thoughts and opinions, students could gain a better understanding of the novel. Along with content-comprehension, students could also develop their interest and involvement in the book and its characters.

**Task 2: Our definition of “pride”**

One of the central themes of the novel was “pride.” “Number the Stars” portrayed a picture of the proud Danish people, who sincerely respected their king and united to protect their precious country and Jewish friends. The story also emphasized the strength and pride of the Jewish Danes as they strove to survive and escape from Nazi terror.

In order to paint a more vivid picture of the term, “pride,” The students first listened to a song about pride, and exercised cognitive linguistic ability by engaging in a cloze activity. The following is an example of the chorus section of the song, “The world’s greatest” (Kelly, 2002):

> I’m that _____________ (star) up in the sky,
> I’m that mountain peak up high
> Hey I _____________ (made) it
> I’m the world’s greatest
> And I’m that little bit of _____________ (hope)
When my back's against the ropes
I can ______________ (feel) it
I'm the world's greatest

After the listening portion of the activity, the students were given the opportunity to think critically. They were placed in groups of five and were asked to discuss their opinions based on the following questions:

1) What is pride? What are you proud about?
2) On page 93, Annemarie mentions how the word, “pride” was an odd word to use in a situation where everyone was wearing old, shabby clothes. However, on the next page, it says, “But their shoulders were straight as they had been in the past: in the classroom, on the stage, at the Sabbath table. So there were other sources, too, of pride, and they had not left everything behind” (Lowry, page 94). What are “the other sources of pride” Annemarie is talking about?

Task 3: Final “Kamishibai” Group Project

After all the reading assignments and discussions were completed, students were asked to close the unit with group “kamishibai” presentations. A “kamishibai” is a “paper drama” or form of storytelling that originated in Japan. The stories are usually based on moral lessons and aim to entertain children through using animated voices that bring simple pictures to life. Below are the directions for the project:

1) Discuss and decide what message your group wants to teach the audience.
2) Choose important scenes from the book (about 8-10 scenes), and draw simple pictures of them.
3) Write a script and be ready to act out the scenes with your voices.
4) Prepare a narrator who provides additional, important information about the scenes.
5) Practice the performance until everyone feels comfortable and confident with their lines.
6) Entertain the audience and enjoy!

This task was targeted towards making students realize that reading is not a linear process, and that reaching the last word of the text is not the “goal” but that the process of organizing what they read is. The project required students to go back to the text to organize the content and choose significant scenes. By challenging to organize, synthesize and assimilate information, students were pushed to focus on their own responses to the story and comprehend the “heart” or message of the story.

Finally, humanistic teachers must be reminded to maintain a flexible attitude and respect the various characters, learning-styles, and goals of students. Although some students will be satisfied with open-ended classroom tasks such as group discussions or art projects, others may be dissatisfied with what they believe is a lack of “concrete goals.” To serve the needs of such extrinsically motivated learners, comprehension questions were assigned and vocabulary tests were administered regularly within the two-month “Number the Stars” reading program. Like this, providing a variety of learning activities enable both the extrinsically and intrinsically motivated students to find significance in the lessons being conducted.
Conclusion

Research on the relationship between L2 reading and anxiety is still very scarce. Yet, it is clear that a reader’s affective state influences the reading process, and that L2 reading entails a great amount of stress. Learner’s are required to challenge the complicated task of deciphering the meaning of foreign terms and sentences. They are also isolated from one another and have very few available channels to express their concerns or questions while performing the task. These factors slow down the reading process, resulting in an increased level of anxiety and inefficiency in performance. Thus, to help learners break free from this cycle in which low comprehension and anxiety reinforce one another, it is crucial for language-teachers to provide students with a variety of activities that help them comprehend and relate to reading materials.

As stated by Wang (1999), “What to learn and how to learn are influenced by cognitive motivation, yet cognitive motivation is determined by individuals’ affect” (p. 5). To restate, a successful language-teaching environment is one that is student-centered or “humanistic.” As more teachers concentrate on creating materials and lessons that consider and respect each student’s thoughts, feelings, and goals, the language-teaching will become more efficient. Humanistic approach in language-teaching enables instructors to create a learning-environment where students successfully acquire linguistic skills and also meet the emotional needs of the students in order to help develop the strength of their mind and character. Thus, it is a language education that takes on valuable meaning and encourages each individual learner to create value and realize happiness in their lives.
References


