Teacher Centered versus Student Centered Learning

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In student-centered learning, the students’ learning is the focus of the class. In teacher-

centered approaches, teaching practices are the focus of the session. In order for student-centered

learning to occur, instructional practice needs to change.

Maryellen Weimer explains in her book, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes*

*to Practice,*that “in order to be learner-centered, instructional practice needs to change in five

key areas:  the balance of power, the function of content, the role of the teacher, the

responsibility for learning, and the purpose and processes of evaluation” (Weimer, 2002).

There are many variables that come into play when we try to determine which teaching

style is the best for our students: discipline, class size, subject within the discipline, room layout,

environmental factors in the room (temperature, music played), teacher personality, classroom

dynamic (between students). (Weimer, 2002)

Students feel empowered and in charge of their education when student-centered

learning is implemented. Grades have been known to improve. An example of how the student-

centered approach can really work well is in Instructor Zee’s college class. After reading the

book by Weimer she/he offered a review on how the pedagogy works. In her Western Literature

course in the Spring of 2012 she raised the point levels and the students responded by working

even harder and still earning A’s. In her class the students have more control. They spend two

class periods at the beginning of the semester in discussion about participation. About 95% of the

students agree that professors always say that "participation counts" or "participation will be x%

of your grade," but they never explain exactly what participation is or how they're going to grade

it.

The students have created standards, which are strict and hard, believe it or not. When

asked to chime in, they are serious about their education and want a classroom that supports their

learning. Every single class, on their own has outlawed cell phones and texting. Instructor Zee

has given her students options to participate or not and normally they do participate, evidently.

(Zee, 2012)

At the end of the semesters, Instructor Zee asks students to assess this method of setting

up the course. The letters can be anonymous or not. Overwhelmingly, the students love this

approach. The line she gets the most is, "I wish other professors would try this."

In the article from the Library on [AIP Conference Proceedings](javascript:__doLinkPostBack('','mdb~~aph%7C%7Cjdb~~aphjnh%7C%7Css~~JN%20%22AIP%20Conference%20Proceedings%22%7C%7Csl~~jh','');) in January 2013, it is

examined what happens when instructors adopt the technology-rich student-centered classroom

but not the pedagogy that goes with it. The effect of using socio-technological spaces on

students' conceptual change is measured, and learning gains made in groups using different

pedagogies (active learning vs. conventional instruction) is compared. It was found that

technology-rich spaces are only effective when implemented with student-**centered** active

pedagogies. In their absence, the technology-rich classroom is not significantly different from

conventional teacher-**centered** classrooms.

It was also found in the article that **instructors**' self-reported perception of student-

centeredness accounts for a large fraction of the variance (r2 = 0.83) in their class' average

normalized gain. “Adopting student-**centered** pedagogies appears to be a necessary condition for

the effective use of technology-rich spaces. However, adopting a new pedagogy seems more

difficult than adopting new technology” (Lasry, et al. 2013).

In another article in the Library on [Journal of Transformative Education](javascript:__doLinkPostBack('','mdb~~bsh%7C%7Cjdb~~bshjnh%7C%7Css~~JN%20%22Journal%20of%20Transformative%20Education%22%7C%7Csl~~jh','');). January 2015, it

is explained how innovative and learner-**centered** approaches to teaching and **learning** are vital

for the applied field of leadership education, yet little research exists on such pedagogical

approaches within the field. “Using a phenomenological approach in analyzing 26 **students**’

reflective narratives, the authors explore **students’** experiences of and process of **learning** within

a **student-centered** and inquiry-focused leadership capstone course. The process of this

transformative **learning** experience is represented in five themes, which include the following:

1. challenging mental models of **learning,** 2. building trust, 3. finding freedom and

empowerment, 4. deepening commitment to **learning,** and 5. reframing **learning** and self.

Additionally, the **students’** approach to **learning** changed throughout the course, shifting from

dependence/independence toward interdependence” (Haber-Curran, P. 2015).

It is evident from the two articles, plus the experience of Instructor Zee that student-

centered learning is much more of an effective manner of teaching. When students have more

control over most things they have a sense of empowerment that matures them and when given

the option to opt in or out, most choose to participate and give 100%. The only benefit of

teacher-centered learning is that the teacher has more control over everything and dictates what,

where, when why, without much input from the students. There are students who need more

structure and would do better in the traditional way of teaching and learning, but it seems that the

majority prefer the student-centered approach.

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