



LEARNER CENTERED TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION USING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract:

In this modern era of 21st century, the infusion of technology into teaching and learning has a remarkable influence on the instructional strategies of the educational institutions. The traditional teacher-centric method which has been going on for decades has now been modified and enhanced, owing to technology. In contrast to the traditional methods, the modern learning environments, students play an active role in their learning process and determine how to reach their desired learning outcomes on their own. There is a huge contrast in teacher-centered college teaching and student-centered college teaching. College teachers are seeking to move towards more learner-centered classrooms by making use of the advancements in the field of information technology. It has been observed that instructor-centered teaching works against students becoming successful, mature learners. Many instructors recognize this and try to make changes in the direction of more student-centeredness, even though their level of awareness of the problem varies from those who know what the specific problem areas are to those who simply have a sense that all is not right in the educational process. Learner-centric teaching makes the process of teaching-learning more constructive. The use of information technology makes the process more appealing and enthusiastic. This paper highlights the innovations used by teachers in higher education across the academic and professional spectrum by making use of information technology.

Index Terms: Learner-Centric Teaching, Information Technology & Teacher-Centered Learning

Introduction:

This paper presents some classroom innovations carried out by various college instructors. The objective is to show how the principles discussed in Stephen Brookfield's *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (1995) can be applied in actual classroom settings. Weimer's working thesis is that classrooms at the college/university level are extremely instructor-centered and that this situation works against students becoming successful, mature learners. Many instructors recognize this and try to make changes in the direction of more student-centeredness, even though their level of awareness of the problem varies from those who know what the specific problem areas are to those who simply have a sense that all is not right in the educational process. Five areas are identified where the teacher-centeredness of the classroom is clearly seen: the balance of power, the function of content, the role of the teacher, the responsibility of learning, and the purpose and processes of evaluation. There is growing interest in student-centered learning in higher education, and many universities provide on-line resources for their professors at their websites. Learner-centered teaching will lead to greater success for students and increased job satisfaction for teachers is supported in the pedagogical literature: there is recognition that the affective and cognitive domains interact to determine classroom effectiveness. That several college teachers are moving in the direction of learner-centered teaching is evidenced.

The Balance of Power:

Generally, the most part decisions about the course are made by the instructor and that this is exactly what students want and expect. The students in

today's colleges and universities as anxious and tentative rather than empowered, confident and self-motivated, and she recommends that professors begin sharing power with students from the start by, for example, providing them with a list of assignments from which they choose a specified number that they will do. The experience of teaching a media literacy class aptly illustrates the shifting of the decision-making in a class to empower the students. It was determined that they would be actively involved in the creation of the course, even as he carried out his responsibilities to the university as course manager and evaluator of student achievement. Their first assignment was to return the next class prepared to share ideas on how the class would proceed. At the following class meeting he presented three options, and after discussion one was voted for adoption. The ideas can originate with the instructor, and it he would identified an external resource person, but by inviting their input he involved them in deciding how the course would be conducted: projects which would encapsulate the course content and fulfill the course objectives, the format and timetable for course activities, an electronic delivery medium for sharing work and communicating with each other, and the assessment activities and evaluation criteria.

The Function of Content:

The need to “cover” the content of the course has led, to a neglect of ensuring that the course objectives are being met. It has also led to erroneously equating a good course with a rigorous course, rather than a course in which students learn. In consequence, when faced with an unmanageable amount of course content, students resort to memorization rather than conceptualization, using a “binge and purge” approach to examinations. In such an environment the successful student is the one who has mastered the ability to reproduce information required by the teacher, too often at the lower levels of knowledge. The college instructors have to “use” course content, not just as an end in itself, but as a means of helping students learn how to learn. The skills to be developed include study skills, time management, the ability to express oneself orally and in writing, and computational skills. The guidance of the professor is needed to help students use the course concepts to acquire skills of critical thinking and problem-solving. The slower pace required for active-learning strategies will allow for constructive interaction with the subject matter, producing students who are more mature and self-regulating learners with sophisticated learning skills. The result will be classrooms filled with enthusiastic students and teaching faculty who experience a high degree of job satisfaction. In a course which delivered content both face-to-face and on-line, it was found that student-centered learning was facilitated by flexibility in content delivery and study strategies, and individual student learning needs were accommodated. Teachers who wish to incorporate some web-based learning activities into their courses have access to several commercial course management systems. The goal of all these innovations is to produce “self-sufficient, independent, creative thinkers who appreciate and value the subject”.

The Role of the Teacher:

Students are the center of the educational enterprise, and their cognitive and affective learning experiences should guide all decisions as to what is done and how. Most of the learning activities for the class are traditionally carried out by the instructor: choosing and organizing the content, interpreting and applying the concepts, and evaluating student learning, while the students' efforts are focused on recording the information. Weimer (2002) makes the point that in the student-centered

classroom the roles of teacher and student of necessity change, so that the teacher changes from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side” who views the students not as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge but as seekers to be guided along their intellectual developmental journey. Other metaphors she adopts describe the teacher as midwife, coach, and maestro. Working against this shift in role are the expectations of the students, who rely on the teacher to make all the decisions, as well as the pedagogical literature which, she says, is preoccupied with teaching over learning, almost exclusively focusing attention on what the teacher should do. Usually, students learn by doing, and so involving them in the learning activities promotes learning. For example, students become part of the presentation and learn from each other when they respond to instructor invitation to give examples, applications, and summaries, and they experience learning when they take part in problem-solving sessions. In-class activities which involve students provide faculty with opportunities to help guide them in clarifying their understanding and in assimilating the subject matter in meaningful ways. Baxter and Gray (2001) concur that for effective learning it is desirable to move toward a model in which students are actively engaged in the learning process. No longer is the student expected to be a passive absorber of information; instead, the teacher acts as a facilitator and does not need to be an expert in the particular content. Remedial students were more successful in developing mathematical skills when taught by cooperative methods which involved peer interaction and relating the principles with other disciplines rather than by traditional teaching methods. Student learning and conceptual understanding were significantly greater when a large upper-division biology class was made more interactive by introducing student participation and cooperative problem-solving into the lectures. The universities should be a guide in redesigning their course to give students and instructors new roles in which students would be more actively engaged and not just be lectured to by the instructors. In planning classroom activities, the focus was on identifying the tasks students needed to do in order to learn the material rather than on the tasks teachers needed to do in order to prepare the class presentation. The students engaged in dialogue, which had the potential to challenge beliefs and produce conceptual changes. Such a learner-centered approach was found to be especially effective when multicultural issues were examined since the students were able to benefit from the wide variety of perspectives present. These approaches transformed the classrooms from teacher-centered to learner-centered.

The Responsibility for Learning:

The responsibility for learning naturally shifts to the student in a learner-centered setting. Neither students nor teachers are adept at making this shift. However, the onus is on the faculty to redesign and conduct the course in a way that requires students to hold up their end of the educational contract. Faculty should follow through on consequences instead of making adjustments to accommodate students' failure to accomplish agreed-upon expectations of the course. Today's students as “unable to function without structure and imposed control” and having “little or no commitment to learning.” Their concern is, overridingly, to get a good grade, and when this does not occur the blame is placed with the teacher. Accompanying this has been an increase in incivility toward both teacher and peers. Learner-centered methods of content delivery allow students the opportunity to control their learning since they require students to take responsibility for their learning by being actively involved in the learning process rather than simply

passively receiving information from a lecture. After participation in a debate, positive rating of the experience as an instructional strategy increased. In some cases, student-centered methods are incorporated into traditional delivery formats, for example concept checks which require chemistry students to prepare in advance and then get concept clarification in class.

The Purpose and Processes of Evaluation:

A central concern of learner-centered teaching is learning, and so evaluation in the student-centered classroom is not just to generate grades but, more importantly, to promote learning. This means that the processes used will also change. Course objectives and learning goals will be clearly stated, and students will be taught to assess their own work and that of their peers by asking critical questions in a constructive manner. They will be given many opportunities to practice the theoretical and practical skills they are expected to learn and perform. Strategies like these, will diminish test anxiety and reduce the temptation to cheat. It is an accepted pedagogical premise that the evaluation methods are determined by the objectives and practices employed, and the extent to which the course objectives are fulfilled should also be evaluated.

Conclusion

A positive response to student concerns can result in a classroom that is even more student-centered. The preceding review of the pedagogical literature indicates that many college teachers believe that a learner-centered classroom provides a more effective learning environment and are making efforts toward this end. In these reports students tended to respond positively to the changes introduced, and the teachers considered themselves successful in their quest to create more learner-centered classrooms while achieving their course objectives. It is also acknowledged that making such a transition will meet with resistance from students, teachers, and administrators, and she includes a chapter on "Responding to Resistance." It is the aim of this paper is to inspire more college teachers to become learner-centered in their teaching methods, and teachers who wish to put into practice the ideas will find that the pedagogical literature is a rich body of helpful and practical resources.

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