

Learner-Centred Class: Problems and Solutions

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Abstract

Learner-centred class has eradicated rote learning or memorization and enhanced the thinking skills of learners. It gives an ample opportunity to the passive and dependent learners, who lack the skills to think critically and creatively to unfold their latent skills and talents. Learner-centered approach is implemented with the intention of producing competent, independent and life-long learners who can keep pace with global competition. However, due to several reasons, the implementation of this learner-centred approach leaves a number of teachers perplexed about their roles and about the teaching pedagogy. However, continuous use of the method proves this method to be a successful strategy. This article attempts to discuss the apprehensions and also examines several aspects pertinent to the approach.

Keywords: learner-centered, learner, knowledge, motivation, environment.

Introduction

The issue of learner-centred class has received great interest among the educators and school/college teachers in recent years. In fact, the term was not much recognized until the government made it the key concept in the reform of education. This new approach is hoped to maximize the potential of the students to cope with the increasing demands of the knowledge-based economy and the world of information and communication technology.

Apprehensions

However, there arises much confusion and mistrust of the pedagogical movement behind the new model. Some teachers view it as a threat to their long-time teacher-centred or teacher-front orientation, while some fear that the approach will lessen the significant role they play in class. Likewise, some students become sullen and hostile to this approach.

Despite the availability of a substantial body of literature on student-centred learning, many teachers are still skeptical of whether the approach can really enhance student learning quality. Perhaps, teachers are uncertain of how and what they should do to implement the approach. A number of questions regarding the feasibility, viability and applicability of this teaching model are raised widely in the teaching community. This paper attempts to clarify and analyze the principles and aspects of learner -centered class.

What is Learner-centred Class?

Learner-centered class is a model wherein students are placed at the core of the learning process. Here, students' needs, opinions, backgrounds and goals are acknowledged and incorporated within the learning environment. In this model, teachers are guided by what is best for the students when helping them to learn or make decisions.

The concept of learner -centered class derives from several models. It first evolves out of the constructivist learning theory which asserts that knowledge is constructed uniquely and individually in multiple ways (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Bush & Saye, 2000). It also derives from the experiential model in which teaching is seen as transformation of existing knowledge (Kohonen, 1992) and the active learning model which suggests that all learning activities involve some kind of experience or some kind of dialogue such as dialogue with self and dialogue with others (Fink, 2002).

What Are the Characteristics of Learner-centred Class?

On the basis of the modes from which it derives, learner -centeredness class entails these characteristics:

The focus is on active learning, using an integrated approach to connect new learning to prior learning, stimulating interest and relevance, providing learner's choice and control, adapting to individual developmental differences, and providing a caring and supportive learning environment (Bansberg, 2003).

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Knowledge is constructed through authentic learning. It is learnt in real context or the context in which it was first generated. In other words, it links school learning experiences to real world situations.

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Learners are active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients. They have opportunities and increased responsibilities to identify and self-direct their own learning needs, locate learning resources, and construct their own knowledge based on those needs.

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Class activities and project work are arranged differently to allow learners a variety of choices to select according to the needs of each student. This results from the notion that students have different capabilities and preferences for learning modes and strategies.

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The learning environment, where learning may take place anywhere, at any time, in many forms and by diverse means, is created. Such a learning environment enables students to be responsible for and involved in their education. As such, students are provided with substantive out-of-classroom activities that increase students' learning in a number of dimensions.

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Students are motivated more intrinsically (self-motivation) than extrinsically (external motivation). For example, they write or colour their assignment because they take pride in their work not because they want people to admire or approve of it.

What Difficulties can Arise in the Implementation of Student-centred Learning?

The difficulties that may arise from implementing this innovative model include:

Some teachers resist changing their old beliefs and usual teaching practices. Such resistance may occur from the deeply rooted “righteous guru” or “imparters of knowledge” image fixed in their head. These teachers view themselves as the authorities whose mission is to teach, direct, instruct, and control students. Therefore, they may fear doing things differently; they may see the change as a threat to their status and profession.

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A number of teachers are not willing to implement the approach, for they perceive that the way they teach is already the best and thus there is no need to change. Since these teachers opt to use only one way or method that they feel works best, they are not open to new ideas or other possibilities.

Some teachers are in a rush to implement the approach without a thorough understanding of the principles and a careful plan of teaching. These teachers are too eager to make changes and do not take into consideration the culture and realities of their classroom situation.

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Some teachers lack the knowledge and skills to incorporate technology into their own teaching. Unfortunately, many teachers know very little about computers and are not interested in learning; while others may try to seek new uses of technology in the classroom but do not have sufficient technical support. These teachers see the value of technology but they feel frustrated because they are not trained to use these resources in the classroom setting.

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It may be the case that while many teachers are personally committed to serving students’ needs, the structure of their organization and policies may not accommodate or, in some cases, hinder the desire to be more learners-centred.

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Some students reject the approach because they want evidence that they are being taught something. These students, like some teachers cling to the perception that knowledge must be transferred and thus wait for teachers to spoon-feed them.

Conclusion

Learner-centered class is a model in which students are the focus of the learning process. This model however, does not mean that teachers will step aside, letting students alone run everything. Rather, it means that teachers, when planning their teaching, must take into consideration the views and needs of students and run the classroom to the benefits of students. It also means that teachers would manage their teaching in the way that makes students feel included, value the educational process, and take control of their own learning.

Implementing a learner-centred class is a true challenge but it has proved to be successful in the contemporary era. The process of incorporating it into our education system has demanded hard work and effort from teachers and students alike. The key to the success of implementation requires, on the teacher's part, a careful study and a thorough comprehension of the model's principles, as well as a genuine recognition of its value. Through the new developments in the education, teachers have changed their old beliefs and practices; they have set the new goals and standards, and plan their teaching, taking into account what is best for students. In doing so, teachers have also worked on their self and professional development. On the learner's part, likewise, students who are guided by teachers have adopted a new conception of the learning process. They have now realized that if they are to keep pace with the rapidly changing world, and to compete in the global market place that has a growing demand for educated workers with skills in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making, they must change their long-time practice from passive to active learners. They have understood that they have to empower themselves, gain control over their learning, and become autonomous learners. Finally, it is apparent that teachers and students working in collaboration have gradually made the learning environment more productive and worthwhile. Thus, learner – centered class is not a myth but a concrete development in education.

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