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BENEFITS OF STUDENT CENTERED LEARNING

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Introduction

Student-centered learning has been defined most simply as an approach to learning in which learners choose not only what to study but also how and why that topic might be have interest. In other words, the learning environment has learner responsibility and activity at its heart, in contrast to the emphasis on instructor control and the coverage of academic content found in much conventional, didactic teaching. Additionally, learners find the learning process more meaningful when topics are relevant to their lives, needs, and interests, and when they are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge.

There has been increasing emphasis in recent years on moving away from traditional teaching toward student-centered learning. This paradigm shift has encouraged moving power from the instructor to the learner, treating the learner as a co-creator in the teaching and learning process. Instructors who deliver student-centered instruction include the learner in decisions about how and what they learn and how that learning is assessed, and they respect and accommodate individual differences in learners' backgrounds, interests, abilities, and experiences. The role of the instructor in student-centered classrooms is to encourage learners to do more discovery learning and to learn from each other; the instructor focuses on constructing authentic, real-life tasks that motivate learner involvement and participation.

Characteristics of Student-Centered Learning

The student-centered classroom facilitates learning by increasing motivation and effort. The student-centered model requires that instructors see each learner as distinct and unique. This means recognizing that learners in any classroom learn at different rates with different styles, they have different abilities and talents, their feelings of efficacy may vary, and they may be in different stages of development. In this model, learning is a constructive process that is relevant and meaningful to the learner and connected to the learner's prior knowledge and experience. The learning environment supports positive interactions among learners and provides a supportive space in which the leaner feels appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and validated. Rather than trying to "fix" the learner, the learner has the power to master his or her world through the natural process of learning.

The student-centered classroom involves changes in the roles and responsibilities of learners and instructors, in the delivery of instructional strategies, and in learning itself; these all differ from those in the traditional, teacher-center classroom. In the student- centered classroom, the learner requires individualization, interaction, and integration. Individualization ensures that learners are empowered to create their own activities and select their own authentic materials. Learners interact through team learning and by teaching each other. During the learning process, learners integrate what they have learned with prior learning and construct new meaning. Below are examples of the changed roles and responsibilities in the student-centered classroom.

Learners

- Are active participants in their own learning.
- Make decisions about what and how they will learn.
- Construct new knowledge and skills by building on current knowledge and skills.
- Understand expectations and are encouraged to use self-assessment measures.
- Monitor their own learning to develop strategies for learning.

- Work in collaboration with other learners.
- Produce work that demonstrates authentic learning.

Instructors

- Recognize and accommodate different learning modalities.
- Provide structure without being overly directive.
- Listen to and respect each learner's point of view.
- Encourage and facilitate learners' shared decision making.
- Help learners work through difficulties by asking open-ended questions to help them arrive at conclusions or solutions that are satisfactory to them.

Learning is

- An active search for meaning by the learner.
- Constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it shaping as well as being shaped by experiences.

Instructional strategies and methods are used to

- Manage time in flexible ways to match learner needs.
- Include learning activities that are personally relevant to learners.
- Give learners increasing responsibility for the learning process.
- Provide questions and tasks that stimulate learners' thinking beyond rote memorization.
- Help learners refine their understanding by using critical thinking skills.
- Support learners in developing and using effective learning strategies for each task.
- Include peer learning and peer teaching as part of the instructional method.

Benefits of Student-Centered Learning

Benefits of the student-centered model are often cited in the literature. Every learner benefits from effective instruction, no matter how diverse their learning needs. Learner motivation and actual learning increase when learners have a stake in their own learning and are treated as co-creators in the learning process. In addition, learners who meet with success in assuming new responsibilities gain self-confidence and feel good about themselves, and learners demonstrate higher achievement when they can attribute success to their own abilities and effort instead of luck.

Develops Thinking Skills

• Problem solving teaches students to consider multiple perspectives on a given situation or phenomenon.

• This develops flexibility in thinking and reasoning skills, as students compare and contrast various possibilities in order to draw their conclusions.

• Students tap into their prior knowledge and experience as they attempt to solve a problem. Thus, students continually integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge, thereby providing context and creating a personal "storage room" of resources that will be available for future problem-solving needs.

• Students also learn to make connections and associations by relating the subject matter to their own life experience.

• Students learn to support their conclusions with evidence and logical arguments.

• Students learn to synthesize several sources of information and references in order to draw conclusions and then evaluate these conclusions.

• Students learn to question ideas and knowledge through the process of comparing and contrasting alternative ideas and contexts.

• Students are encouraged to engage in individual reflection in order to organize and understand the world.

• Students experience insights as they think through a problem or inquiry activity, and draw inferences that allow them to go beyond the simple acquisition

of facts and information by learning how to see implications and apply them to other situations.

Develops Communication and social Skills

• Students must learn how to articulate their ideas as well as to collaborate on tasks effectively by sharing the burden of group projects. Students must therefore exchange ideas and so must learn to "negotiate" with others and to evaluate their contributions in a socially acceptable manner. This is essential to success in the real world, since they will always be exposed to a variety of experiences in which they will have to navigate among others' ideas.

• Students learn how to communicate their ideas and findings with others. This becomes a self-assessment activity, whereby the students gain more insight into how well or poorly they actually understand the concepts at hand.

Encourages Alternative Methods of Assessment

Traditional assessment is based on pen-and-paper tests whereby students demonstrate or reproduce knowledge in the form of short responses and multiple choice selection, which often inspire little personal engagement. Constructive assessment engages the students' initiative and personal investment through journals, research reports, physical models, and artistic representations. Engaging the creative instincts develops a student's ability to express knowledge through a variety of ways. The student is also more likely to retain and transfer the new knowledge to real life.

Helps students transfer skills to the real world

Students adapt learning to the real world, gaining problem solving skills and ability to do a critical analysis of a given set of data. These skills enable the student to adapt to a constantly changing real-world environment. Thus, classroom learning does not result in acquisition of a canon of absolute "truth"; it also results in a resource of personal knowledge.

Promotes intrinsic motivation to learn

Constructivism recognizes and validates the student's point of view, so that rather than being "wrong" or "right," the student revaluates and readjusts his knowledge and understanding. Such an emphasis generates confidence and self esteem, which, in turn, motivate the student to tackle more complex problems and themes.

Despite the benefits of student-centered learning, the challenge remains for instructors to be open to change and modify their teaching habits. Because relinquishing control of the classroom can be intimidating, it can be helpful for instructors to take small steps and practice new approaches incrementally; this can help assuage the anxiety that often results from abrupt changes. Instructors must remember that this is a learning process for all experience and continued practice will contribute to successful change.

Conclusion

Quality education is a prerequisite for national, regional and global development. For delivery of quality education, quality teachers who are committed to teaching and equipped with necessary knowledge, skills and competencies for effective teaching is needed. Teachers must give a thought of adopting student centered approach of teaching so as to bring about quality education in higher education.