MAKING THE SHIFT: MOVING FROM A TEACHER CENTRED CLASSROOM TO A STUDENT CENTRED CLASSROOM

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In the past, classrooms were often all about the teacher. This "sage on the stage" was there to offer what he or she knew, and it was up to the student to make the most of it. These days, though, we know that student cantered classrooms make a better and more effective learning environment for students. Sometimes knowing just how to change the focus from the teacher to the student is, well, hard. It is easy to stand up front and talk for an hour but not as easy to create an environment where your students take the centre stage. Student centred classrooms focus on the students' desire and ability to acquire knowledge.

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Student-centred classrooms make the learning environment for students more efficient and effective. Changing the focus from the teacher to the student may be hard. In student-centred classrooms, students are directly involved in revealing their own knowledge. Due to the cooperation and collaboration with other students, the learners participate in experiential learning, which is an authentic, holistic and complex task. Students use their prior knowledge to build new learning. By developing metacognitive process, students reflect on their thinking. They focus on performance in real conditions. As a partner in the learning process, teachers deliberately create experience and cohesion so as to help students make connections with key concepts. Promoting student-centred class is a key element of effective teaching. Student-centred classes are associated with Piaget, John Dewey, and the Russian developmental psychologist L. Vygotsky. According to Rallis [1, p. 225], Piaget examined the process by which people build their knowledge about the world, and Dewey emphasized the student interaction with the physical environment. Vygotsky developed the role of social interaction as a dimension of learning.

In a teacher centred classroom, the goal is for the teacher to transfer his or her knowledge to the student. As a teacher, I have something important that my students should know, and I am going to give them that information. Moreover, although it is true that the teacher possesses more knowledge on the subject than his or her students do, this outlook on learning is more about the teacher than the student. Student centred classrooms focus on the students' desire and ability to acquire knowledge. I want to know something, and my teacher is here to help me figure or find it out. Teachers should ask their students what they want to know when possible, and let them play a part in determining what they learn in class.

It may seem obvious, but a teacher centred classroom is focused on the teacher. He or she stands at the front of the room, and all eyes are on them. A student centred classroom focuses on the student. Teachers move around the classroom and check in with students' progress and productivity. Students do more of the talking, and class is designed to meet their needs rather than the material the teacher hopes to cover. Avoiding traditional lectures should be a prior concern of student-focused teacher. Such a teacher should make sure that students do more

talking than teachers do each day, and let students know that they are there as a resource for them.

Classrooms need some type of structure, but a teacher centred classroom puts more value on the plan than it does on the participants. There is an agenda or curriculum, and the material must be covered. Student centred classrooms, on the other hand, are more fluid and flexible. Sometimes the best lesson for the day is the unplanned lesson but the one that meets the needs of the students.

There are subtle differences between the objectives of the teacher centred and the student centred classrooms. The former focus on teaching objectives. We must cover the material set out in the plans and do it in such a way to meet the teaching objectives. The latter classroom, however, focuses on the learning outcomes of the students. What will it take for the members of the class to learn particular points? That is what determines what is covered in class and how it is covered. A student-focused teacher thinks about what he or she wants their students to learn or what they have said they want to learn] and then designs a path to get them to that knowledge.

In the teacher centred classroom, the teacher's goal is to provide answers to his or her students. Again, it is a matter of the teacher having knowledge that he or she wants to impart to his students. The student centred classroom, however, focuses more on students asking questions. When students ask questions, they engage with the material and have a personal investment in the answers that are coming. Students and their interests influence what material their classes contain. A student-focused teacher encourages the students to ask questions and makes sure they are meeting the needs of their students and not just the requirements of the curriculum.

Follow the leader might be an accurate description of the teacher centred classroom. I have material I am going to cover, and I want you to track with me. When a classroom is student centred, however, the teacher is more of a guide than a leader. The teacher points out important points on the students' educational journey. They help students move in the right direction as they explore and motivate their own learning. Students should be given a chance to discover knowledge or figure things out on their own. It may take longer to get to the final goal, but the students will gain more along the journey.

In the teacher centred classroom, students are passive. They are there to take in what the teacher presents. In the student centred classroom, on the other hand, students are actively engaged in class. They influence so much of what happens in class, and they are actively participating. Teachers should encourage students' inquisitiveness and curiosity and show them they value their questions and their input.

Qualities of a student-centred classroom can be traced back to the early 1900s. Constructivism states that students learn more by experiences and active involvement than by observing [2, 1993]. Brooks and Brooks describe the value of allowing student responses to steer lessons and create instructional strategies. Asking questions and leading students to solutions nurtures students' natural curiosity and is recommended over simply giving answers [3, 2008]. There are some common attributes linking student-centred classrooms to student engagement and success. In a student-centred classroom, students are very much a part of constructing their own learning in a holistic environment that capitalizes on student interests. The students are encouraged to reflect on their own learning, share their insights with their peers, and apply new learning to real-life, authentic experiences. When learners are the focus, they become fully engaged in the process [4, 2007]. Julie Brown describes student-centred classrooms in the article "Student-Centred Instruction: Involving Students in Their Own Education", where she writes, "Put simply, student-centred instruction is when the planning, teaching, and assessment revolve around the needs and abilities of the students" [3, p. 1]. The major characteristics of the student-centred classroom include the following:

- Construction of learning
- Metacognition
- Educator/student partnership in learning

- Collaborative learning
- Meaningful assessment in real-world contexts.

Armed with the knowledge of students' previous understanding of concepts, student-centred teachers create situations that allow students to make connections to new ideas. These connections can then be developed into entirely new concepts that continue to grow throughout a student's experiences. A deep understanding occurs when new information offered through higher order thinking activities prompts the learner to rethink and reshape prior ideas. A classroom teacher must be prepared to offer a variety of learning opportunities to meet the needs of all students as each of us constructs our own meaning about issues, problems and topics. Metacognition is thinking about your thinking. In order for students to be metacognitive, they must know how and know the need to think about their thinking. In a student-centred classroom, teachers facilitate opportunities for students to be metacognitive. Teachers in learner-centred schools understand learning to be a self-regulated, ongoing process of making sense of the world through concrete experience, collaborative discourse, and reflection. Teachers can assist students to acquire a set of strategies, define goals, and monitor their progress. Providing opportunities for students to reflect on what and how they learn creates an environment where students take responsibility for their learning and become more of a partner with their teacher in engaging in meaningful learning experiences. The classroom teacher must possess a deep understanding of the developmental characteristics of their students as well as how students learn to be an effective partner in the learning process. A student-centred teacher will design learning experiences that explicitly link essential concepts and skills to students' current understanding and natural curiosity about the topic in order to scaffold additional or deeper understandings. Students are engaged in decision making in the classroom and have the opportunity to more fully explore topics. We are most effective as teachers when we help our students discover the power of their own minds to work in their own ways to achieve success. "Few students develop a sense of academic, self-efficacy by becoming mired in what they cannot do" [5, p.19]. Teachers who rely exclusively on lecture are missing an important brain-based principle: people are social and the brain grows in a social environment. New meaning comes through social interaction, so the connection between students is important. Cooperative learning and collaboration should be encouraged. The student-centred teacher recognizes this principle of learning and actively infuses collaborative opportunities into each lesson. Collaboration provides students opportunities to learn from their peers and to gain skills that will be beneficial throughout their lives. When students are engaged in activities that result in authentic and challenging applications, they are more highly motivated to learn. A combination of real-world assessment and the attributes of assessment for learning provide student-centred classroom teachers with the challenge of moving away from paper and pencil exams. As teachers begin—and continue—to search for ways to provide meaningful assessment for their students, their instructional activities will begin to fold into and overlap with intended assessment. Students and teachers alike will begin to monitor their teaching and learning and to make necessary adjustments to their actions. A true learning culture will result. Creating a student-centred classroom is not considered an easy task. One of the most complex factors in a student-centred classroom is that of maintaining balance. Each of the five above-mentioned attributes is quite an involved concept and may call for extensive learning and practice on the part of the teacher. A true student-centred classroom offers a balance of each of these attributes. A balance of these attributes will empower students to take control of their learning and create classroom teachers who are true facilitators of learning. There are myths about the concept of student-centred classrooms, too. It is important to develop an understanding of what a student-centred classroom is but also of what a student-centred classroom is not. A student-centred classroom is not a student-controlled classroom. Student-centred teachers can expect the same, if not better, classroom behaviour from students who are actively engaged in their learning. The partnership between teacher and students contributes to the collaborative learning culture. A student-centred classroom does not ignore guiding standards of content or cognition. Aligning learning activities to essential concepts and

skills is a key attribute of student-centred classrooms. Using student's prior knowledge in combination with essential concepts and skills provides for instruction that is both more motivating and engaging. Student-centred classrooms are not factory-model education with one size fits all instructional approaches or passive sitting, listening, and note-taking without recursive discourse. Educators who believe in identifying what works for different students under different conditions and delivering it to them may find student-centred learning appealing. Student-centred learning is not minimally guided and does not exclude direct instruction techniques. In fact, student-centred learning actively utilizes direct instruction on a just-in-time basis. Direct instruction and other learning techniques are employed at the times that they work best within a student-centred learning experience. Each student has their own wealth of background knowledge and experiences and each student has their own preferred learning style. Teachers in a student-centred classroom will create opportunities for learning that take each of those student traits into consideration. Students will be expected to learn and grow in their understandings enough to develop new understandings. As schools become more familiar with this characteristic of effective instruction, they will begin to realize that the benefits are many and varied. Brown [3, p. 2] states that "through student-centred learning, students become self-sufficient, creative thinkers, and people who appreciate and value the subject being taught."

Student-centred classrooms are a planned process. Problems can be structured around big ideas to provide a framework with which to gather information and build knowledge. If students are introduced to topics that interest them, they are more likely to be motivated [6, p. 13]. Student-centred classroom teachers plan with an emphasis on the knowledge of who their learners are both individually and collectively and are armed with the best available knowledge about learning and about the best teaching practice [4, 2007]. Student-centred instruction revolves around the needs and abilities of the students. A student-centred school offers each child many opportunities to learn. Teachers experiment with different approaches to learning to enable each learner's different learning style [2, 1993]. Teachers facilitate a variety of learning opportunities: experiential, holistic, authentic, and challenging in a student-centred classroom. Learner-centred teachers admit that knowledge construction is not entirely an individual process. The teachers question and probe to help children make meaning. They listen carefully, encouraging reflection and stimulating new connections and interpretations [Rallis, p. 226]. The teacher's role is more that of a facilitator than instructor; the students are active participants in the learning process. The teacher helps to guide the students, manage their activities, and direct their learning. Being a teacher means helping people to learn; and, in a student-centred class, the teacher is a member of the class as a participant in the learning process [6, p. 2]. Student-centred assessment is authentic. The primary goal of student-centred classrooms is to help students become independent. By keeping students at the centre of one's classroom, a teacher can encourage and inspire students to seek out knowledge and to strive for understanding at a deeper level. Through this process, students see a greater relevance for and a stronger connection to the subject at hand. Through student-centred instruction, our students can achieve independent minds and the capacity to make educational decisions and value judgments [3, p. 5]. Facilitating the tenets of the student-centred classroom will be an essential ingredient in implementing the characteristics of effective instruction. Ultimately, only teachers can decide what the best way to run their classroom is, but the more we can focus on students and their needs the better language learners they will become.

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