

## BUILDING THE GULF BETWEEN A CONVENTIONAL INSTRUCTOR AND A CONTEMPORARY LEARNER

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### Abstract

Have we ever enquired our parents' how did they learn language at a school or a college? May be if we ask our parents and grandparents, the experiences of their learning would be certainly unrelated. What about the present day learners? The resources for learning are unlimited but the time is limited. Today the learners concern is more on observing rather than absorbing the contents. Practical learning has laid a strong path making its way more flexible and feasible. How does the real learning take place? What makes the students more restless? What is the real role of the teacher in modern education system? One cannot easily answer to such questions. The past teaches, the present expresses and the future follows. May be this is what happens to every individual. So, naturally the knowledge and the values of yester years are the strong pillars for today. Following the predecessors, the successors have moved from teacher centered to learner centered approaches. The present article is going to focus on the simple paradigms of these approaches in acquiring the global language. This paper will also address the issues related to the teacher centered and learner centered learning. Key Words: Teacher-centered, learner-centered, activity- based and so on

### Following the Genesis:

Can we imagine a day without communication? Highly impossible! Though we are separated from people, we talk to ourselves, which is termed as intrapersonal communication. Whatever name we may give to communication, call it as interpersonal, extra personal or mass communication, it is essential for every individual on this earth. How can language be acquired? When it comes to a vernacular language, the child learns it from his parents and surroundings. Though one cannot be a polyglot, he cannot even confine himself to his native language. To be a part of the global world, one should concentrate on learning a foreign language. How can this language be taught? Though the question seems to be simple, the answer is miles away.

The elders always complaint about the present generations that their language is just functional in usage but not grammatically accepted. How did the teachers of those days teach the students? We have to agree that the resources of learning were not much accessible as compared to the present days. But still the students were at ease. The teachers of

those days used to follow only the prescribed texts. Neither the students had the opportunity of listening to different types of accents across the world nor had they the chance to learn from Internet sources. When we meet the students of those days, they still remind the difficulties they had in learning grammar rules especially Tenses, but they are happy that it helped them to be a successful employee in the corporate world.

We still remember our English classes, where the teacher used to recite Keats, Wordsworth or Frost's poetry. She was the only source for learning the vocabulary. The expression in her words and the melody in her voice made us to imagine the beauty hidden in the lines. May be many of us still remember the dramas and the narratives. The chances for learning were confined only to the classroom sessions that too, much in a language class. The Prose helped to understand the humour and sense hidden in the content, while trying to focus on the meanings of the difficult words. The teacher's role was more crucial in making the students familiar to an unknown language. So, the teacher-centered training made the teachers to be more conscious,

approachable and accountable and the students more receptive and responsive.

#### **Stepping Forward:**

The age-old methods have slowly transformed to suit to the needs of the modern learners. The trainers have tried different methods of conducting different activities to make the students more comfortable with the language. Though the tradition of continuing with the text books continued, the form of the textual content has a changed a lot. The syllabus is designed in such a way that the teaching is no more carried monotonously but involves practical methods to implement the course material. The role of the teacher is just facilitating the students rather than imposing them with his/her own ideology.

Though the teachers' still recite the verses of Whitman and Lawrence, the students have ample sources to go through them in internet and feel the intensity of the poet. They no longer depend on their teachers for learning vocabulary as they have online dictionaries to help them. The modern English classrooms are connected to super computers with good internet. They can listen to an American accent or a British accent. Learning grammar is also a fun activity which makes them to feel better. Many activities are introduced to facilitate the learners.

#### **Pros and cons:**

In the teacher-centered learning, the students were more organized, disciplined and cooperative. They knew that the only way they can learn a language is through a class room instruction. But there were many chances for the learners to miss their independent learning. When it comes to learner-centered approach, the student becomes an independent learner. Undoubtedly, the question of discipline arises, as activity based class-rooms are unmanageable because they try individually and also they work in groups which later promote their team-building spirits. But one should never forget the role of the teacher as she is an effective model in assessing the students in the targeted language.

To teach grammar in teacher-centered approach, the teacher has to use more resources either from references or other grammar related texts. In

learner-centered approach, though in the beginning she introduces the topic using her own methods, later she can plan for an activity. For example if she gives the rules related to Tenses, the students can gather the structure and usage of tenses from various magazines, newspapers and so on. They can also listen to various talks and identify the tense they are using according to the context. They can also use the tenses to explain their activities of the day before, the present day and the next day. In the teacher centered approach, the roots are firm, and in the learner centered the branches are widely spread.

To become a good communicator in an alien language, the teacher helps them through the facilities and sources available to her. In learner-centered it is planned in such a way that the role-plays, debates, discussions, seminars and projects help them to individually understand and focus on improving their strengths. Creating short stories, narrating real incidents from their surroundings also helps them to improve their communication. Though much of the work is done by the student in the learner-centered approach, one should not deny the fact that it is the teacher who judges whether his learning is on the right way or not. Just imagine a third standard student who has finished learning Prepositions in an English class. Soon after the class he comes out and he is so anxious to practically apply the usage of the Prepositions. He sits under a tree, on the bench and observes the people cooking in the kitchen. He rushes to his teacher to tell the same. The teacher feels happy because she knows that the boy would continue to observe the things around him for the rest of the day. If he goes wrong, she can help him.

#### **Conclusion**

We should never forget as Maley has pointed out 'We are not 'professionals' in quite the same sense as medics or lawyers. To take a military analogy, we are not an army of career soldiers, all equally well-trained, battle-hardened, well-equipped and committed. We are more like one of those marauding armies in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe with a core of highly trained and motivated cavalry, surrounded by foot soldiers of sometimes dubious reliability and

a host of camp-followers bringing up the rear' (Maley 1992:99). Whether it is teacher-centered or learner-centered approach, success is important. Many of the classrooms with heterogeneous groups may follow both the methods depending on the need of the learners. Whatever may be the approaches, one thing is crystal clear, a teacher's role and the learners' style are redefined. So, the instructors as well the students should adapt the new changes. Never forget 'Old is gold', everything starts from past.

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