CHALLENGES OF STUDENT- CENTRED LEARNING – A NOTE

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Introduction

Education enables individuals and societies to become all round thinkers by providing knowledge, ability, skill and attitude, thereby it strengthen their problem solving ability. In order to achieve this, learners should be taught in a way that enables them to really engage themselves in the process. In teacher-centred method, student put all their focus on the teacher. In the teacher-centred method during activities in classroom, the only participants are teachers. In teacher-centred method, the primary sources of responsibility for the learning path in the hands of students. Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves knowledge are teachers.

Student-centred method on the other hand, enables students to put all their focus on their knowledge. Student-centred method also known as learner-centred is a method of teaching in which the focus of instruction is shifted from the teacher to the students. In original usage, student-centred learning aims to develop learner autonomy and independence by putting

The concept of student–centred learning has been credited as early as 1905 to Hayward and in 1956 to Dewey's work 1. Carl Rogers, the father of client–centred counselling, is associated with expanding this approach into a general theory of education2. The term student–centred learning was also associated with the work of Piaget and with Malcolm Knowles3, He describes the shift in power from the expert teacher to the student learner, driven by a need for a change in the traditional environment where in this 'so-called educational atmosphere, students become passive, apathetic and bored'. In the School system, the concept of child–centred education has been derived, in particular, from the work of Froebel and the idea that the teacher should not 'interfere with this process of maturation, but act as a guide4.

Student–Centred Learning

Student-centred involves providing opportunities for students to meaningfully talk and listen, write, read, and reflect on the content, ideas, issues, and concerns of an academic subject. The student-centred learning approach is diametrically opposed, in its ethos, to the philosophy underlying the conventional method of learning. By its very nature, student-centred learning allows students to shape their own learning paths and places upon them the responsibility to actively participate in making their educational process a meaningful one. The student-centred learning experience is not a passive one, as it is based on the premise that "student passivity does not support or enhance….. Learning' and that it is precisely "active learning" which helps students to learn in dependently. Within student-centred learning, students are given options in shaping their courses and in choosing particular units within their study program. Some proponents of student-centred learning assert that rather than devoting so much effort to teaching students what to think, student-centred learning is based on the idea of teach them how to think'5. According to Weimer (2002) there are five practices that need to change to achieve learning teaching: (a) the functions of content, (b)the role of the teacher, (c)the responsibility for learning, (d) the processes and purposes of evaluation, and (e) the balance of power

Kember (1997) described two broad orientations in teaching: the teacher centred/content oriented conception and the student centred/learning oriented conceptions. In a very useful breakdown of

these orientations he supports many other authors views in relation to student–centred view including: that knowledge is constructed by students and that the lecturer is a facilitator of learning rather than a presenter of information. Choice in the area of the learning is emphasised by Burnard, as he interprets Rogers' ideas of student–centeredness as 'students might not only choose what to study, but how and why that topic might be an interesting one to study6. He also emphasises Rogers' belief that students' perceptions of the world were important, that they were relevant and appropriate. This definition therefore emphasises the concept off students having 'choice' in their learning.

Harden and Crosby (2000)7 describe teacher–centred learning strategies as the focus on the teacher transmitting knowledge, from the expert to the novice. In contrast, they describe student–centred learning as focusing on the students' learning and 'what students do to achieve this, rather than what the teacher does'. This definition emphasises the concept of the student 'doing'.

Other authors articulate broader, more comprehensive definitions. Lea et al. (2003)8 summarises some of the literature on student–centred learning to include the followings tenets:

1. 'the reliance on active rather than passive learning,

2. an emphasis on deep learning and understanding,

3. increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student,

4. an increased sense of autonomy in the learner

5. an interdependence between teacher and learner,

6. mutual respect within the learner teacher relationship,

7. and a reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process on the part of both teacher and learner.'

Gibbs (1995)9 draws on similar concepts when he describes student–centred courses as those that emphasise: learner activity rather than passivity;

students' experience on the course outside the institution and prior to the course; process and competence, rather than content; where the key decisions about learning are made by the student through negotiation with the teacher. According to Brandes and Ginnis (1986) 10 the main principles of student–centred learning are:

a) The learner has full responsibility for her/his learning

b) Involvement and participation are necessary for learning

c) The relationship between learners is more equal, promoting growth, development

d) The teacher becomes a facilitator and resource person

e) The learner experiences confluence in his education

f) The learner sees himself differently as a result of the learning experience.

Characteristics of Student-Centred Teaching

According to Weimer and Maryellen there are five characteristics of student-centred teaching.

1. student-centred teaching engages students in the hard, messy work of learning.

2. student-centred teaching includes explicit skill instruction.

3. student-centred teaching encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning it.

4. student-centred teaching motivates students by giving them some control over learning processes.

5. student-centred teaching encourages collaboration

One come across many challenges in the implementation of student-centred in in relation to the required standard they are expected to achieve. Based on the analysis of students and teachers response to questionnaire it was found that they face different problems while implementing student-centred method. The challenges were lack of interest and confidence, lack of teachers and

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students interest, class size, students feel discomfort when they work with others. In addition to this, from the analysis of teachers' interview, it was found that the students lack the skill of expressing their idea in English and students show a disciplinary problem when they are engaged in various techniques of student centred method. With the recent changes in educational laws and new classroom management opportunities, students are becoming more actively engaged in instruction. Student-centred classroom management is rare because it requires, "a willingness to give up some control and let students take some ownership, which requires guts as well as talent". Teachers have a tremendous impact on a child's life and their success starts in a student centred classroom.

School administrators need to support student-centred management and provide training and skills to their teachers because teachers and their students will have higher outcomes and success. Because classrooms are diverse and have students of all learning styles and learning needs, teachers need to implement individualized student-centred classroom management techniques to ensure all students will be successful. Teacher-centred classroom management, such as using classroom wide behavior management systems, or following scripted lessons are not effective ways to meet the needs of individual students.

Implications for curriculum design

In relation to curriculum design, student–centeredness includes the idea that students have choice in what to study, how to study. However, to what extent can this be carried out in the structures of today's Universities? Modularisation, which will be expected in all European undergraduate courses by 2006, provides a structure that allows students an element of choice in what modules they study. Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2005) in their chapter in this collection on 'Designing Modules for Learning' highlight the importance of attempting to focus on the needs of the students at the early stage of curriculum design. Choice in the curriculum is not without its difficulties and Edwards argues about the dangers of individuality in the concept of the social

learner and how this can in a seemingly contradictory way lead to disempowerment (2001).

One student–centred approach to curriculum design, Problem–Based Learning (PBL), allows for some choice within a programme of areas that students may study. It allows students to set some of their own learning objectives/outcomes, dependent on prior knowledge. ProblemBased Learning, through the use of problems/issues/triggers, encourages the students to develop their own learning goals, thereby filling in the gaps in their knowledge or understanding (Boud and Feletti 1997). This element of choice or control is referred to in many of the definitions of student–centred learning. This aspect of responsibility aligns with the Lea et al. (2003) view that student–centred learning involves 'increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student'. These approaches are more controlled by the teacher in their presentation and outcome (Davis and Harden 1999). However, they are useful in addressing the active learning aspect of student–centred learning. Other approaches to curriculum design also support the idea of student choice and activity in learning, for example, the systems–based approach, resource–based learning, and experiential/ personal relevance approach (Toohey 2000).

A growing practice in course design internationally is the writing of learning outcomes/objectives focusing on what the student will be able to do, rather than on the content being covered by the teacher (UCD Centre for Teaching and Learning 2005). This practice is an example of the move towards student–centred learning in the curriculum and helps to shift the emphasis on the learner as opposed to a coverage model by the teacher. Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2005) re-iterate the importance of this shift in emphasis. This is also reflected in Gibbs' (1995) definition, i.e. an emphasis on the process and competence, rather than content..

Implications for teaching/learning methods

The University of Glasgow (2004) identified four main strategies in a study on student–centred learning practices in their University. The first strategy was to make the student more active in

acquiring knowledge and skills and might include exercises in class, fieldwork, use of CAL (computer assisted learning) packages etc. The second strategy was to make the student more aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it. A third strategy is a focus on interaction, such as the use of tutorials and other discussion groups. The final strategy is the focus on transferable skills. This last strategy is not mentioned in other definitions of the student–centred learning but does look beyond the immediate course requirements to other benefits to the student in later employment.

The effectiveness and critiques of student–centred learning

The use of student–centred learning appears to be reflective of today's society where choice and democracy are important concepts. Lea et al. (2003) reviewed several studies on student–centred learning and found that overall it was an effective approach. A six-year study in Helsinki, which compared traditional and activating instruction, found that the activating group developed better study skills and understanding, but were slower in their study initially[11]. Equally, Hall and Saunders found that students had increased participation, motivation and grades in a first year information technology course (1997). In addition, 94% of the students would recommend it to others over the more conventional approach[12]. Students in a UK University elaborated on the impact of student–centred learning on them, i.e. they felt there was more respect for the student in this approach, that it was more interesting, exciting, and it boosted their confidence[13].

Student–centred learning, despite its popularity, is not without its critics. The main critique of student–centred learning is its focus on the individual learner. In addition, there are some difficulties in its implementation, i.e. the resources needed to implement it, the belief system of the students and staff, and students' lack of familiarity with the term.

Conclusion:

The changing demographics of the student population and the more consumer/client–centred culture in today's society have provided a climate where the use of student–centred learning is thriving. The interpretation of the term 'student–centred learning' appears to vary between authors as some equate it with 'active learning', while others take a more comprehensive definition including: active learning, choice in learning, and the shift of power in the teacher–student relationship. It is used very commonly in the literature and in University policy statements, but this has not necessarily transferred into practice.

Student–centred learning is not without some criticism but in general it has been seen to be a positive experience, for example, Edwards (2001) emphasises the value of student–centred learning: 'Placing learners at the heart of the learning process and meeting their needs, is taken to a progressive step in which learner–centred approaches mean that persons are able to learn what is relevant for them in ways that are appropriate. Waste in human and educational resources is reduced as it suggested learners no longer have to learn what they already know or can do, nor what they are uninterested[14].

Today, information and communications technology (ICTs) is increasingly being employed in classrooms across the globe. Owing to this, educators face growing challenges as they teach a very "different" and "wireless" generation of students who use technology which is evolving every day. With over 50 percent of India below 25 years of age, the need for a skill set that adds to their digital profile is of utmost importance.

Consequently, the need for active learners who have acquired the skills of problem-solving, independent thinking and autonomous learning, as well as the ability to work cooperatively has increased dramatically. Therefore, teaching methods, pedagogies and educational goals must be directed at producing individuals who have faith in their abilities and who will work at developing their capabilities throughout their lives.

It is important to note that in the 21st century, learning is not "one size fits all" approach. This era has become more about developing skills than just

absorbing information. The most important skills is self-development, which includes knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, and finding ways to mitigate gaps in personal development. This can be achieved by implementing student-centred learning practices, thereby letting students take charge of their learning. This method prepares individuals to take responsibilities and makes them independent. It helps develop the characteristics of lifelong learning – motivation, self-evaluation, time management and skills to access information. The 21st Century skills comprise the 4cs namely, (a)critical thinking, (b)creativity; (c) communication and (d)collaboration.

Student-centred learning is an approach in which students influence the content, activities, materials and pace of learning. This learning model places the students at the centre of the learning process. The instructor provides students with opportunities to learn independently, and from one another, and facilitates the development of skills that they need to do so effectively.

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