STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

As our department the Center for Online Learning & Teaching Technology continues to grow and support more users, we must come up with better approaches to not only train our staff, but end users in the various technologies we support. It is for that reason I am writing this paper. I will be giving a brief overview of student-centered learning, theoretical foundations, advantages, and disadvantages, as well as what student-centered learning means in the workplace.

STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

Unlike a teacher centered approach, student-centered learning turns the tables and gives students more control over their learning. We now live in a social media world where media, information and technology are so easily available, it is also shifting how students want to learn. We as educators need to adopt these newer methods of teaching styles. How can we do this you might ask? Student-Centered learning. Student-centered learning is defined as an approach to learning in which learners choose not only what to study but also how and why that topic might of interest (Rogers, 1983). Give students control of what they want to learn, when they want to learn it, and how. Student-centered learning allows all of that and more.   It allows us to have students collaborate amongst themselves, share ideas, and participate in learning activities that they themselves can develop. It encourages creative thinking and in doing that makes them interested, so interested the knowledge is retained far better than a teacher-centered approach.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

When it comes to theories of student-centered learning there are plenty of them that focus on student-centered learning. For this paper I will focus on the constructivism learning theory. The constructivism theory is 'an approach to learning that holds that people actively construct or make their own knowledge and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner' (Elliott et al., 2000, p. 256). I will use our student employees as an example. When we hire a student employee at the Center for Online Learning & Teaching Technology, they have already taken courses that use the very technology they will be supporting as our student workers. When they go through our training, they can use that past knowledge to build upon and learn new skills by taking that past knowledge further.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES OF STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

When it comes to the advantages of student-centered learning, one of the biggest advantages is it puts confidence back into the learner and allows them to be a little more independent. Instead of the student having to be so dependent on the instructor, they now can have a sense of control in their learning i.e., how, and what they learn. Another advantage is the collaboration and social skills they gain working with their peers, whether it be through discussions or learning activities. It prepares them for the real world, where they may have to work in teams, design lessons, material, etc.

While there are not many disadvantages to student-centered learning, one disadvantage is more on the instructor side rather than for the student. Instructors may find that they must open their mind to more creative ideas for a student-centered approach. Now, they must think outside the box, designing activities, projects, collaborative discussions. Aside from that, look at new technologies to incorporate into these new learning activities.

WHAT DOES STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING MEAN IN THE WORKPLACE?

Working at the Center for Online Learning & Teaching Technology we are constantly hiring student employees who need to be trained in the applications and services we provide. We need to develop ways to train them effectively and quickly.

My first recommendation would be to sit down with my staff and have a good discussion on what do we want our employees to gain out of our trainings. Create a baseline if you will of what needs to be covered and learned. My second recommendation would be to convert all our training material into easy-to-read digital documents. This will allow us to have access to any of the material we need in one location readily available to deliver. My third recommendation would be to come up with the activities that promote student-centered learning. Start with group discussions and collaboration. Then move on to some learning activities and projects that the students themselves create. What I like to do for my student workers onboarding training is create them a blackboard shell and give them access to all the addons and building blocks. Then I tell them to design a course how they feel courses should be organized and taught.

SUMMARY

So, what have we gained from all this? We have learned that student-centered learning is nothing new. It has been around for a very long time only it was not widely used in education until recently.   What has helped bring student-centered learning to the forefront is the wide array of tools available in education. We now have LMS's, collaboration tools, activity tools, at the instructors' fingertips. What I am recommending for our department is to have blueprinting discussions on what a student-centered learning module will look like and what will be learned. In addition to that, we will need to convert all training documentation to digital formats and create courses in blackboard for the learners to collaborate and design course materials on their own.

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