Parallel session on Student–centered learning

Monday 7 March, 5 pm.
Introduction by: Luciën Bollaert, international Quality Assurance expert and former board member of the NVAO (Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization)

Implementation Report

In the implementation report 2012-2015 the concept of student-centered learning has defined some elements. The report concludes that the perception of the importance of the elements of student-centered learning differ sharply between the forty countries in which the steering documents mention the concept of student-centered learning and the group of eight countries in which the steering documents do not mention the concept of student-centered learning.

First group (1: highest importance, 8 lowest importance):

1. Learning outcomes
2. Assessment based on learning outcomes
3. Student assessment of teaching
4. Training in teaching for staff
5. Independent learning
6. Recognition of prior learning
7. Student/staff ratio
8. Learning in small groups

Second group (1: highest importance, 8 lowest importance):

1. Learning in small groups
2. Student/staff ratio
3. Recognition of prior learning
4. Training in teaching of staff
5. Assessment based on learning outcomes
6. Learning outcomes
7. Independent learning
8. Student assessment of teaching

European standards and guidelines

ESG 1.3: Standard: Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Guidelines: Student-centered learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This means careful consideration of the design and delivery of study programmes and the assessment of outcomes.

The implementation of student-centered learning and teaching

 • respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;

• considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;

• flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;

• regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods;

• encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;

• promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship;

• has appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.

Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, quality assurance processes for assessment take into account the following:

• Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field;

• The criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance;

• The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process;

 • Where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;

• The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;

• Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;

• A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.

ESU – Research Study: overview of student-centred learning in higher education in Europe

The research study has defined **9 principles**:

1. SCL requires an on-going reflexive process;

2. SCL does not have a 'one-size-fits-all' solution;
3. Students have different learning styles;
4. Students have different needs and interests;
5. Choice is central to effective learning in SCL;
6. Students have different experiences and background knowledge;
7. Students should have control over their learning;
8. SCL is about enabling not telling;
9. Learning needs cooperation between students and staff.

Survey of the students perspective:

1. Student awareness of SCL: familiarity and understanding among students: huge difference btw general student population and student representatives;
2. Progress in practical implementation of SCL: medium to low progress;
3. Teaching methods: broad range of teaching methods used, difference btw BA and MA level;
4. Teacher development: teacher training programmes focusing on innovative teaching methods;
5. Are teacher evaluation procedures set up by students? How often are evaluations conducted? Are students satisfied with how the results of the evaluations are used?
6. Students in decision-making process: are students consulted with regard to curricula developments? Which stakeholders consult students in curricula design?
7. Flexible learning paths: percentage of subjects freely chosen by students;
8. Learning outcomes: are the results of study programmes defined and measured in terms of learning otucomes? Are students properly informed and consulted with regard to outcomes of programmes and teaching and learning methods that are used?

Some questions and remarks:

- How to avoid that Student-centered learning becomes a trendy descriptor in higher education? With the widespread use of such trendy new concepts comes a certain definitional looseness.
- How to avoid the development of a gap between the language used in EHEA circles and the professional and academic practice in the classrooms, in curriculum design and delivery?
- Organizing a learning environment may include also other foci next to the student-centered focus such as knowledge centered focus, an assessment-centered focus, a community-centered focus. There is a gap between the way the concept of Student-centered learning is operationalized in the BFUG context and the literature on student-centered learning.
- Why do we called it student-centered learning and not student-centered teaching or learner-centered teaching? What about student engagement?
- Remembering the implementation stair case how does the definition(s) of student-centered learning as mentioned in the implementation report or in the ESG match(es) with the professional practices? What are the different responsibilities at the different levels?

- What are the implementation issues with regard to student-centered learning at stake?
- How to avoid that the tool is used in a bureaucratic or superficial way?

The way we have approached and we are approaching the concept of SCL may lead to the fact that a notion of SCL may take root that is technical, instrumental, formal and consumer oriented. Instead we should develop a Student Engagement strategy that allows that all students could play a role as active partners in co-producing and co-creating knowledge.

Annexes: some bits in the literature:

Of course there are many other approaches to learner-centered learning and teaching.
One example: Five Characteristics of Learner-Centered Teaching
By: Maryellen Weimer, PhD

In May I finished a second edition of my L*earner-Centered Teaching* book. Revising it gave me the chance to revisit my thinking about the topic and look at work done since publication of the first edition ten years ago. It is a subject about which there is still considerable interest. The learner-centered label now gets attached to teaching strategies, teachers, classes, programs, departments and institutions. Like many trendy descriptors in higher education, with widespread use comes a certain definitional looseness. Active learning, student engagement and other strategies that involve students and mention learning are called learner-centered. And although learner-centered teaching and efforts to involve students have a kind of bread and butter relationship, they are not the same thing. In the interest of more definitional precision, I'd like to propose five characteristics of teaching that make it learner-centered.

1. Learner-centered teaching engages students in the hard, messy work of learning.
I believe teachers are doing too many learning tasks for students. We ask the questions, we call on students, we add detail to their answers. We offer the examples. We organize the content. We do the preview and the review. On any given day, in most classes teachers are working much harder than students. I'm not suggesting we never do these tasks, but I don't think students develop sophisticated learning skills without the chance to practice and in most classrooms the teacher gets far more practice than the students.

2. Learner-centered teaching includes explicit skill instruction.
Learner-centered teachers teach students how to think, solve problems, evaluate evidence, analyze arguments, generate hypotheses—all those learning skills essential to mastering material in the discipline. They do not assume that students pick up these skills on their own, automatically. A few students do, but they tend to be the students most like us and most students aren't that way. Research consistently confirms that learning skills develop faster if they are taught explicitly along with the content.

3. Learner-centered teaching encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning it. Learner-centered teachers talk about learning. In casual conversations, they ask students what they are learning. In class they may talk about their own learning. They challenge student assumptions about learning and encourage them to accept responsibility for decisions they make about learning; like how they study for exams, when they do assigned reading, whether they revise their writing or check their answers. Learner-centered teachers include assignment components in which students reflect, analyze and critique what they are learning and how they are learning it. The goal is to make students aware of themselves as learners and to make learning skills something students want to develop.

4. Learner-centered teaching motivates students by giving them some control over learning processes.

I believe that teachers make too many of the decisions about learning for students. Teachers decide what students should learn, how they learn it, the pace at which they learn, the conditions under which they learn and then teachers determine whether students have learned. Students aren't in a position to decide what content should be included in the course or which textbook is best, but when teachers make all the decisions, the motivation to learn decreases and learners become dependent. Learner-centered teachers search out ethically responsible ways to share power with students. They might give students some choice about which assignments they complete. They might make classroom policies something students can discuss. They might let students set assignment deadlines within a given time window. They might ask students to help create assessment criteria.

5. Learner-centered teaching encourages collaboration.
It sees classrooms (online or face-to-face) as communities of learners. Learner-centered teachers recognize, and research consistently confirms, that students can learn from and with each other. Certainly the teacher has the expertise and an obligation to share it, but teachers can learn from students as well. Learner-centered teachers work to develop structures that promote shared commitments to learning. They see learning individually and collectively as the most important goal of any educational experience.

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What is meant by Student-centered Learning (SCL)?
A variety of phrases have been coined to describe a critical shift in mission and purpose of higher education. Barr and Tagg (1995) expressed the change as a move from an —Instruction Paradigm‖ in which universities delivered instruction to —transfer knowledge from faculty to students‖ to a —Learning Paradigm‖ in which universities produce learning through —student discovery and construction of knowledge.‖ Huba and Freed (2000) used the phrase —learning-centered assessment‖ to emphasize transition in the focus of instruction and assessment from teaching to learning. The following description of student-centered instruction provides another starting point for conversations about student-centered learning:

Student-centered instruction [SCI] is an instructional approach in which students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. This learning model places the student (learner) in the center of the learning process. The instructor provides students with opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches them in the skills they need to do so effectively. The SCI approach includes such techniques as substituting active learning experiences for lectures, assigning open-ended problems and problems requiring critical or creative thinking that cannot be solved by following text examples, involving students in simulations and role plays, and using self-paced and/or cooperative (team-based) learning. Properly implemented SCI can lead to increased motivation to learn, greater retention of knowledge, deeper understanding, and more positive attitudes towards the subject being taught (Collins & O'Brien, 2003).

Student-centered learning can also be viewed from the perspective of an influential report from the National Research Council (1999) that synthesized research on learning and recommended organizing learning environments around four foci: knowledge-centered, learner-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered. Knowledge-centered learning approaches grow out of the research on novices and experts that has revealed that experts have organized their knowledge very differently than novices. So knowledge-centered learning stresses learners developing their knowledge to facilitate transfer of their learning to new contexts and application of their learning to open-ended challenges such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and design. In a learner-centered learning environment, McCombs and Whistler (1997) state that —learners are treated as co-creators in the learning process, as individuals with ideas and issues that deserve

attention and consideration.‖ Learner-centered learning environments recognize that the prior knowledge of learners powerfully influences future learning and thus attempt to build on prior knowledge. Assessment-centered learning environments provide opportunities for feedback and improvement throughout the learning process leading to evaluation and judgment at the end of the learning process. Assessment for feedback and improvement is referred to as formative assessment while assessment for conclusive evaluation and judgment is referred to as summative assessment. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) indicate that formative assessment can promote the development of capacities and attitudes used in lifelong learning. Assessment-centered learning environments also emphasize congruence between learning goals and what is assessed (National Research Council, 1999). Finally, community-centered environments recognize that individual learners take many cues and insights from learners around them, so that community-centered learning environments facilitate purposeful interactions among learners to promote and sustain learning. For the purposes of this essay, learning environments are student-centered to the degree to which they are concurrently knowledge-centered, learner-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered. Many different faculty members have developed and used approaches to teaching that fit the criteria for student-centered learning. Many of these developers have created original names for their approaches. As a result, there is a broad spectrum of named approaches, which include:

· Active Learning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991)
· Collaborative Learning (Bruffee, 1984)
· Inquiry-based Learning
· Cooperative Learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991)
· Problem-based Learning
· Peer Led Team Learning (Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2001)
· Team-based Learning (Michaelson, Knight, & Fink, 2004)
· Peer Instruction (Mazur, 1997)
· Inquiry Guided Learning
· Just-in-Time Teaching
· Small Group Learning
· Project-based Learning
· Question-directed Instruction

(From Jeffrey Froyd and Nancy Simpson Student-centred learning Addressing Faculty Questions about student-centered learning)

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 Yet another well elaborated approach is the HEA framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education:
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/hea_framework_for_partnership_in_learning_and_teaching.pdf