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Understanding Student- Centered Learning and Philosophies of Teaching Practices

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Abstract
In the context of today's volatile, uncertain and complex business environment, the business schools have started to identify the need to be innovative and to produce responsible future leaders. Teaching within higher education has undergone a pedagogical shift in recent years, with new approaches to increase student engagements and thereby learnings. Over the years many theories have been developed to examine the processes involved in effective learning. Most learning theories concentrate on the significance for the way that learning is delivered. There are variety of ways for ensuring learning. The current paper is designed to give the readers an idea about the various philosophical approaches in teaching-learning and describe the "student Centered" pedagogy.

Key words: *Student-centred learning, active learning, teaching philosophies*

Introduction

In the context of today's volatile, uncertain and complex business environment,the business schools have started to identify the need to be innovative and to produce responsible future leaders. Teaching within higher education has undergone a pedagogical shift in recent years, with new approaches to increase student engagements and thereby learnings. Teachers and teaching have become an important focus of all national and local policy. All around the world, reforms and actions are focused to promote high-quality teaching in classrooms and increase professional collaboration at the school/college level.

When we talk about the teaching-learning approaches, we need to understand that there are various philosophies of learning and teaching which has undergone significant developments over last few decades such as Behaviourism, Constructivism, Socio-Constructivism etc. During my review of literature, I realized that all the theories actually focuses on learning. I discovered that Behaviorism is considered to be a 'teacher-centered' approach whereas Constructivism and socio-constructivism is said to be 'learner-centric' approaches of teaching-learning.

Focus of the Paper

Over the years many theories have been developed to examine the processes involved in effective learning. Most learning theories concentrate on the significance for the way that learning is delivered.There are variety of ways for ensuring learning.

Many researchers have talked about various aspects of effective learning. For example socio-constructivists theories and related empirical research (e.g. Brown, 1994; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Evensen and Hmelo, 2000;Lee and Songer, 2003; Scardamalia and Bereiter, 2006) suggest that student focused practices and cognitive activations are associated with the outcome i.e. student's conceptual understanding.

Some other research specifies that clear structuring of lessons and better class management is also very important factor in effective learning. OECD international TALIS 2008 talked about three dimensions of classroom teaching practices that reflect all of these aspects, e.g: structuring,

student orientation and enhanced activities. Another report by OECD in 2013 emphasized that Socio-constructivist ideas have also led to the development of new forms of teachers' professional learning. Professional learning communities involve teachers in a number of cooperative activities and in reflective inquiry, help teachers to develop a shared vision and to focus on student learning.

The current paper is designed to give the readers an idea about the various philosophical approaches in teaching-learning and describe the "student Centered" pedagogy.

Philosophical Underpinning

There are various philosophies of learning and teaching which has undergone significant developments over last few decades. Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Constructivism and recent Socio- Constructivism approach etc.

Teaching/Learning Philosophies[1]

Philosophies &Theorists	Major Concepts	Implications for Teaching/Learning	*Ideas for Teaching/Learning On-line*
Behaviorism (based on Behavioral Psychology) • Skinner • Watson • Bandura	• Learning takes the form of facts, drills and practice. • Learning is evidenced by a change in behavior. Behavior is observable. • Responses are rewarded. • Modeling is based on observational learning.	• Teacher presents facts and skills. • Teacher-centered Teacher has "The Answers." S/he is the "expert." • Absolute answers exist in all areas of knowledge. • Students use mastery patterns in their approaches to learning	• Lecture notes are put on-line. • Text activities are on-line. Teacher directed. • Text is significant to support content. • Computer -assisted instruction (CAI) focuses on repetition, sequencing, and reinforcement.
Cognitivism (based on Gestalt psychology) • Dewey • Piaget • Bruner	• Learning focuses on the unobservable behavior, the personal meaning making, generalizations, discovery learning, and coding. Choices we make determine who we are • Truth and knowledge are conceived as	• Teacher provides the structure for constructing individual knowledge. • Teacher and student share responsibility for active learning. • Audio and video tapes graphic organizers, flow charts work better in this philosophy.	• Content is directed by the teacher from a variety of sources based in part on the needs of the learner. Web Quests are good examples. • Email • Computer-directed instruction (CDI) such as timed PowerPoint slides.

[1] Permission to adapt with acknowledgment to the author: Dr. Joan D. McMahon, Human Resource Development, Towson University, Towson, MD 21252. . Please contact the author if the document is used/adapted. mcmahon@towson.edu

	personal and private. People "know" things subjectively. • The nature of the whole determines the meaning of the parts.		
Humanism • Maslow • Rogers	• Acquisition of knowledge is followed by individual personalization • Metacognition (learning to learn) is taught • Socialization is important. • Values are in harmony with a spiritual whole.	• Teacher provides an abundance of resources from which the student can choose. • Interpersonal skills are highly developed. • Students become invested in their learning. • They try to understand another person' perspective as a way to learn the content.	• Teacher and students can both provide resources on-line. • Learning is tailored to content needs of the learner. • Audio and video conferencing are useful if technically supported. • Computer-aided conferencing works for the interpersonal side. • Discussions are central.
Constructivism-based on Gestalt psychology and cognitivism • Vygotsky	• Knowledge is open to many interpretations and is in the context of a particular situation. Self discovery is a part of the learning. • Students must make decisions based on their own values and sense of identity. • Knowledge is the means to the end, not the end itself. It is based on a student's mental construct of a concept-that which they interpret themselves. • Truth is relative	• Students use prior and current experiences to derive knowledge. Education is life itself, not merely a preparation for it. Teachers have to take the learners where they are and move them forward in an experience they value at the time.Students require more time to construct a concept than to be told it. Hands-on activities work well here. Learn by doing is the axiom. Teachers design activities and assignments framed in problem-solving. Role of facilitator, They provide support to start and gradually reduce support as student competence and ability to assume responsibility increase (scaffholding)	• Problem-based learning works well on-line. • Use activities where synthesis of ideas lead to practical solutions relevant to student lives.

The above table talks about the various philosophies and their peculiarities in brief. From a behaviorist perspective, the transmission of information from teacher to learner is essentially the transmission of the response appropriate to a certain stimulus.

Behaviorism

This theory believes that behavior is shaped consciously by forces in the environment. This believes that Learning takes the form of facts, drills and practices and learning is evidenced by a change in behavior. This is basically teacher-centered pedagogy where teacher is the center and has all the answers. Exercise and repetition are seen as crucial to develop and maintain stimulus-response connections.Behaviorist teaching methods tend to rely on so-called "skill and drill" exercises to provide the consistent repetition necessary for effective reinforcement of response patterns.

Constructivism

Constructivism is basically a theory which says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. In any case, we are active creators of our own knowledge. To do this, we must ask questions, explore, and assess what we know. Constructivism within psychology and education has its roots in Piagetian developmental psychology.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997 in Kim 2001). The nature of the learner's social interaction with knowledgeable members of the society is important. Without the social interaction with more knowledgeable others, it is impossible to acquire social meaning of important symbol systems and learn how to use them. Young children develop their thinking abilities by interacting with adults. Social constructivists see as crucial both the context in which learning occurs and the social contexts that learners bring to their learning environment. Several practices have evolved from this approach; for example, "self-directed learning", "co-operative learning", "self-regulated learning", "guided discovery", "scaffolding", "cognitive apprenticeship", "teacher-mediated dialogue", "independent group discussion", "problem-based learning", "project-based learning", and "knowledge building" (e.g. Evensen and Hmelo, 2000; Lee and Songer, 2003; Scardamalia and Bereiter, 2006). Learning is a social process. It occurs when people are engaged in social activities.

Understanding Student-Centered approach

The term student–centred learning is widely used in teaching and learning literature. Many terms have been linked with student–centred learning, such as collaborative learning (Moore &Zyomont 2003), flexible learning (Taylor, 2000), experiential learning (Burnard, 1999), Learner-centered learning (Jones 2007) and self-directed learning.

Student-centred learning puts students' interests first, acknowledging student voice as central to the learning experience. This is in contrast to traditional education, also dubbed "teachercentered learning", which promote dependent learning and places the teacher as the primarily "active" role while students arepassive recipient of information. In contrast, student-

centered learning is a collaborative learning where teacher-student are actively engaged in the content and process of learning. (Moore &Zyomont, 2003). Several authors have pointed out that most faculty members use strategies that support teacher-centered learning as it is easy to deliver the prepared lecture where students sit and listen patiently. On the other hand, in student – centered pedagogy, the focus is on the needs, skills, and interests of the learner. Learner-centered is often accompanied by a problem-based approach, where the problems are picked so as to robust the interests and needs of the learners. (Jayalaxmi 2015)

Student-centred learning means flip-flopping the traditional teacher-centred understanding of the learning process and putting students at the centre of the learning process. In the teacher-centred classroom, teachers are the primary source for knowledge. On the other hand, in student-centred classrooms, active learning is strongly encouraged.

As communicated, Behaviorism is considered to be a 'teacher -centered' approach whereas Constructivism and socio-constructivism is said to be 'learner-centric' or 'student-centric' approaches of teaching-learning. Many institutes are trying to adopt appropriate pedagogical/andragocical model(s).

In a paper entitled "The Case and Context for Learner-Centered Pedagogy" author Joe Cuseo described about the teacher-centered teaching which can be illustrated by the uninterrupted one way lecture, in which the professor does all the talking and is the center of attention and control of the learning process. In contrast, learner-centered instruction involves less didactic discourse or "talk time" on the part of the instructor, and shifts more class time, control, and responsibility for learning to the students.

Further, the paper talked about that instead of instructors delivering information-loaded lectures for the sole purpose of transmitting knowledge, learner-centered instruction goes beyond the learning of content to include the learning of process—i.e., educating students in the process of learning how to learn and developing lifelong learning skills (e.g., critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills). And, all this requires learners to have the opportunity to think, reflect, share together, to discuss ideas, question, analyse and solve problems. So, now active learning and collaborative learning becomes the pillars of 'Learning-centered' approach. Team-teaching is basically drawn from this philosophy of learning-centered approach.

Scholars have suggested that active engagement of the student in quality dialogue is important to the development of critical thinking. Thus the next section of the paper details the 'Student-centered' approach which includes practices of teaching and learning that are project based, collaborative, foster knowledge building and require self-regulation and assessment. It talks about creation of ambiance where students contribute significantly and co-create value in the process of learning.Some scholars think that it is only possible to introduce student-centred learning in small classes while classes with 100 to 1000 and more students cannot use this. However, Exeter et al. (2010) discuss the teachers' perspectives in very large classes and show that teaching methods used in small classes can also be used in large ones.

Today, there is an increasing use of class discussion through cases and laboratory exercises, and in a few cases, by field studies. Student learning is primarily assessed through individual quizzes, tests, case study presentations and take-home assignment reports. Institutions are offering simulation-based courses like Capstone, mark stat etc. Apart from this, there are courses which are based on service-learning concept.

Audio-Visual aids, Community Outreach Activities, Panel/ case based group Discussion, Students Presentation on projects, makes the learning experience more fruitful, interesting and enriching. In student-centered approach, students are considered as an explorer and faculty facilitates them on every step. There are efforts being made by the teachers to engage students in learning process. Many institutions are using Teaching-mix- experiential methods, simulations, projects, exercises, games, use of multimedia etc. to promote/enhance learning. Regular feedback from students and interaction with industry people helps faculty to devise various ways to ensure learning.

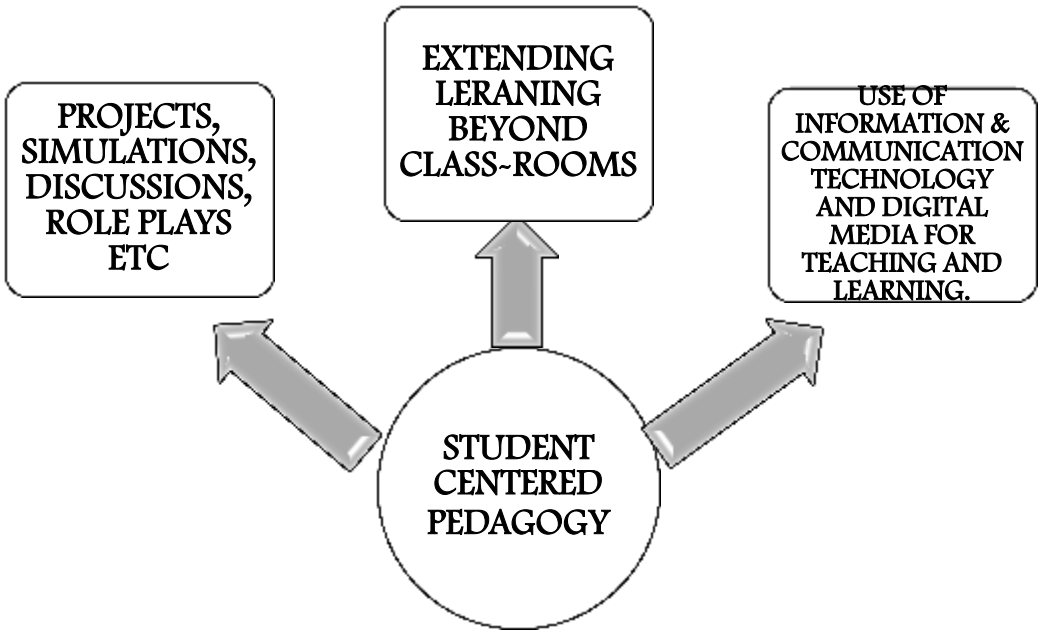

Fig1: Student Centered Pedagogy

**Based on definitions from the Innovative Teaching and Learning Research project: www.itlreserach.com*

Conclusion

The paper talks about various philosophical approaches of teaching and describes socio-constructivist approach as student-centred approach of teaching-learning. From above explanations, one can say that in a student-centered classroom, students aremore involved in the learning process, they work collaboratively and engage in many group activities during the class. The courses have out-of-class component and there is generally an increased use of technology in the course delivery. This results in effective learning.

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