STUDENT – CENTRED LEARNING: A TEACHER – STUDENT CHOICE MODEL OF LEARNING

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Abstract:
　　Students today face an increasingly complex set of social and economic realities (Christensen, 2008; National Academies of Science 2007) which are always in state of dynamic flux. In response to these ever evolving educational needs, educators and researchers have to develop new approaches to the systematic devolution of knowledge. The term student–centered learning (SCL) is widely used in the teaching and learning literature. A student-centered approach recognizes that learning is best accomplished when intrinsically directed and when new information is made available in ways that reflect the unique experiences, backgrounds, and learning styles of each student. One of the issues with student–centered learning is the fact that 'many institutions or educators claim to be putting student– centered learning into practice, but in reality they are not. This paper provides an overview of the various ways student– centered learning is described in literature and suggests ways that student–centered learning can be used as the organizing principle of teaching and evolve curriculum. It also tries to explore the effectiveness of student–centered learning. There is both research-based and evidence-based support for student-centered learning. The evidence of the benefits to learning in construction of learning, collaborative learning, metacognition, teacher/student partnership in learning, and meaningful assessment in real-world contexts are that children in learner-centered environments achieved more and at higher levels while being more engaged. The theoretical model describes the level of choice between the teacher and students and finds that a participative or consultative strategy brings out the best from both the teacher and the learner. Teachers often fear the change associated with adopting a student-centered approach (Prensky, 2008). Student–centred learning it has been seen to be a positive experience, Placing learners at the heart of the learning process and meeting their needs, is a progressive step in which students are able to learn what is relevant for them in ways that are appropriate. The paper is divided in to five sections Introduction, Student-Centered Learning a background review of literature, A Student- Teacher choice model of student centric learning, Implications of the model on curriculum development, Effectiveness and criticism of the Student –Centered learning models.

Index Terms: Student-Centric Learning, Curriculum & Knowledge

1. Introduction:

　　Students today face an increasingly complex set of social and economic realities (Christensen, 2008; National Academies of Science 2007) which are always in state of dynamic flux. In response to these ever evolving educational needs, educators and researchers have to develop new approaches to the systematic devolution of knowledge. Studies have tried to identify approaches which are individual directed where learner involvement in high: an approach wherein the teachers are facilitators. One of the more popular term used to describe this approach is student-centered learning. The term student–centered learning (SCL) is widely used in the teaching and learning literature. Student–centered learning, have been defined as flexible learning (Taylor 2000), experiential learning (Burnard 1999), and self-directed learning hence the term ˍstudent–centered learning'can mean different things to different people. A student centric learning approach recognizes the need for the learning desire and objectives to be intrinsic to the learner and the information available reflects the

uniqueness of each learner in terms of his experiences, background and capacity to assimilate information.

Many scholars like Piaget and more recently Malcolm Knowles (Burnard 1999) all have been linked to work on student-centered learning. Rogers (1983a:25), in his book Freedom to Learn for the 80s',has described how the traditional methods have made teaching a chore where learning is robotic and the results achieved are not at all motivating forcing a shift to the learner driven classrooms. The work of Froebel showed that teachers should be passive agents of transformation to make learning experiences better. Simon (1999) stressed that passive teacher and active student combination will make learning student directed where in learning will take place at a pace determined by the student. The paradigm shift away from teaching as the focal point to an emphasis on the learner's need has transferred power to the student (Barr and Tagg 1995). The teacher–focused/transmission of knowledge, such as classroom teaching, have been widely criticized leading to a shift towards the use of student–centered learning' as an alternative approach. However, despite widespread use of the term, Lea et al. (2003) describes the existence of the huge gap between intentions and executions. They found that many institutions claim to focus on student – centric learning without actually practicing the same..

This paper aims to provide an overview of the various ways student–centered learning is described in literature and suggest some ways that student–centered learning can be used as the organizing principle of teaching and assessment practices. It also tries to explore the effectiveness of student–centered learning. The paper is divided in to five sections Introduction, Student-Centered Learning a background review of literature, A Student- Teacher choice model of student centric learning, Implications of the model on curriculum development, Effectiveness and criticism of the Student –Centered learning models.

2. Student-Centered Learning a Background Review of Literature:

Many researchers have been carried out to identify the exact attributes that make an effective student-centered learning environment. Froyd and Simpson (2008) refer to a study by the National Research Council (2000) that constructed a learning environment around four major pillars namely, knowledge, learner, assessment, and community. McCombs and Miller (2006) provide a description that sufficiently summarizes that a modern student-centered learning system should first profile the learners in terms of who they are, identify the learning objectives and support the learners with the right information and practices in the classrooms. The LCM puts the person domain the learners at the heart of a system dedicated to learning and leading.

It reorients the educational system and establishes equilibrium between the learners, teachers and the living systems (McCombs & Miller, 2006). The student centric approach at its heart looks at the social, psychological, economical and intellectual factors which determine the learning needs and capacities of the learner. Johnston (2004) stressed that learning cannot be done by passive attendance rather we need a hands on approach and involvement where the joys of creation and discovery are experienced by the learners. Johnston believes that students should be able to learn by discovering and organizing knowledge by themselves as it leads to real learning. He believes student-centered classrooms can achieve then a mechanism to show the evidence of learning in terms of desired outcomes should be evolved. The focus shifts from learning to know to learning to do. In other words student centered learning is about guiding the students to the —Eureka‖ moment when they realize the what, why, how and when of any matter in focus. To that extend student centric learning is as much

about acquisition of new knowledge as it is about a journey of self discovery. Some of the important attributes of a student-centered classroom identified in literature are:

- ✓ Construction of learning
- ✓ Collaborative learning
- ✓ Metacognition
- ✓ Educator/student partnerships
- ✓ Authentic assessment

Constructivism or constructive learning as explained by Brooks and Brooks (1993) is that deeper understanding develops due to inferences and experiences drawn out by our construction of events around us. In a student-centered framework, the teacher deliberately designs activities which are directed that solving the students'problems without having to be direct about it. The student is encouraged and guided to look for the most optimal solutions.

Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) is an example of such a framework (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004). A CORI teacher leads the students to a particular conceptual goal by encouraging them to ask questions and slowly the answers and the subsequent questions lead the learners to the real concept. The questions asked by the learners helps to identify the knowledge level of the students relevant to that concept and students evolve and answer the questions by the various methods of knowledge acquisition and practice.

Rallis (1995) argues student centric learning requires that the students are allowed to evolve and find their own comfort levels rather than judging them against pre set standards and classifications. Research on constructivism is prevalent. Marlowe and Page (2005) concluded that research on active constructivist learning is both extensive and consistently supportive. While psychologists are very clear on the ability of the brain to construct knowledge actively those from the education community have their own apprehensions. For the critics the process of constructing knowledge puts too much emphasis on the learner and it often leads to the learner becoming a misfit in the larger scheme of things. One of the common criticism is that constructivism prevent teachers participation in the learning process which is according to Branford et al. a misconception as the teacher has to be an active trigger in directing the learners towards the desired outcomes. Constructivism assumes that learning is a continuous process in which new knowledge is built on previous knowledge irrespective of the source of the previous learning.

Previous knowledge or background knowledge serves different purposes in CORI. The teacher uses questions aimed at eliciting the current knowledge of the students so that the content can be evolved to deliver new skills and knowledge without creating any drastic disruptions.

Collaborative Learning:

Collaborative learning is a philosophy of interaction and learning where individuals are confident and comfortable with them and enhance learning through a process of exchange of ideas with their peers (Panitz, 1999). It is to a large extent more teachers structured and is a group activity which triggers and develops group norms directed at achieving the common learning and behavioral objectives. Vygotsky (1978) views learning as a social process that contributes to the development of once intellectual capacity. Collaboration is very effective in drawing out the students as they are active participants (Guthrie, 2004). The process of evaluation of each other's work and learning to value the opinion of others all help in evolving a better learning environment (Guthrie, 2004).

Meta Cognition:

Metacognition is fundamental to the ability of individuals to learn at all ages and involves three aspects: control or self-regulation; knowledge of one's own thought processes; beliefs and intuitions (Schoenfeld, 1992, in Holton & Clarke, 2006, p. 132). In other words, met cognition is the ability to valuate one's present level of knowledge and determine its adequacy. If there is a difference then the learner needs to go out and seek new approaches to enhance his understanding. The approach aims to make the students understand that there are different paths to the same goal and guiding the student to view the problem in a different angel and utilizing his skills in new ways, the teacher acts as an external _brain to provide the consciousness and control that the student would have exercised had he been aware (Holton & Clarke, 2006, p. 141). Researchers and practitioners alike have become interested in the degree to which metacognitive thinking can affect student performance. Thomas (2006) describes how the range of interest in and evidence for metacognitive thinking has grown over the past three decades.

Educator Student Partnership:

The relationships teachers and students develop during the learning process aligns with a greater recognition of individual student differences. As with collaboration between students, a more equal relationship between teachers and students may facilitate differentiated instruction Jones (2007) defined the student-centered classroom as a place where needs of students are considered and students are encouraged to participate in the learning process at all times. It is not a place where students make random decisions about what they want to learn. The teacher becomes a member of the team as a participant in the learning process and functions as a facilitator, who guides, manages activities, and directs. Goodlad (1984, 1994), among others, concluded that teaching must be collaborative, interactive, and relationship-based.

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) determined teachers need to understand child development, motivation and management in their role as a facilitator. By taking into account student development and understanding key concepts, teachers can plan instruction according to their student_s needs. Classroom management is strengthened through learning communities, which give children a chance to work together. By using developmental interests as a motivator, students become more engaged in their learning.
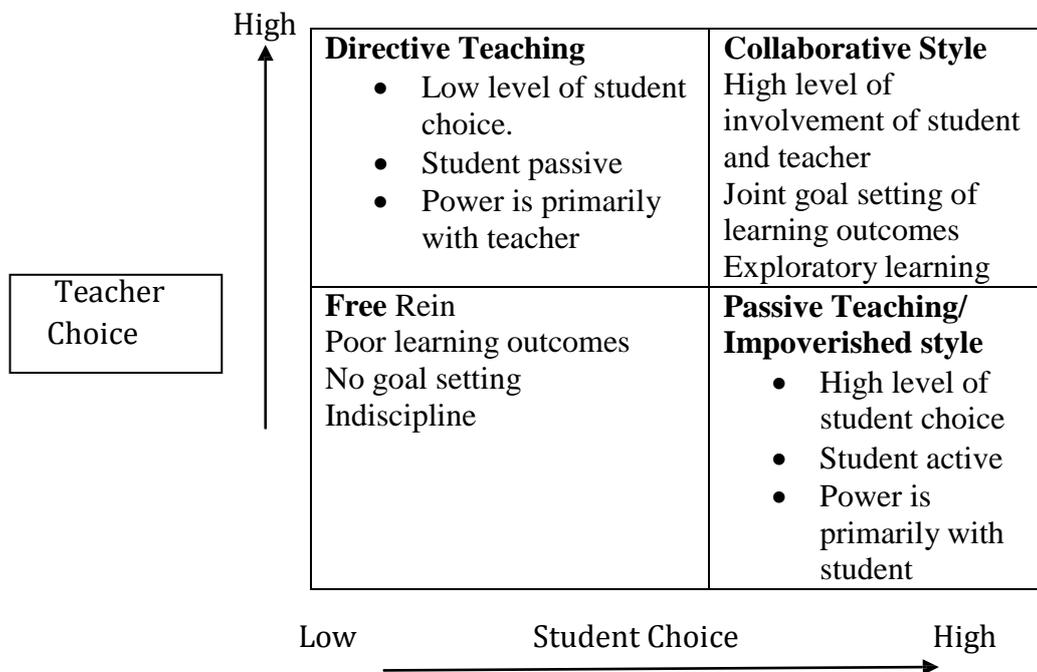
3. A Student- Teacher Choice Model of Student Centric Learning:

Learning is often viewed as _either this or that' situation wherein either student–centered learning or teacher–centered learning is possible positions. In other words the two are considered as mutually exclusive events. In the reality of practice the situation is less black and white. Here we propose a model based on the level of involvement of the teacher and students to try and explain the student/teacher centric learning. In examining how to implement it, it is worth thinking how much freedom is available to move within the contextual barriers in each teaching situation. There are many factors which could decide on the style of learning adopted.

4. Implications for Curriculum Design:

In relation to curriculum design, student- centric learning stands on the concept that students have choice in what to study, how to study. However, the issues involved cannot be as simple as it involves involvement of two sets of individuals who will have a natural tendency to take some amount of control. In the above model as can been seen too strong an interference from the teacher leads to passivity on the student side and if

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too much concentration on the choices of the students could mean a very passive teaching style. In both cases the need is for the teacher or the student to be highly motivated if they lose focus then the learning experience falls in to free rein learning where there is nobody who owns the learning outcomes and only leads to indiscipline and non-focused learning. Effective teaching particularly in the Indian context will ideally require high level of involvement of student and teacher which leads to joint goal setting of learning outcomes. The need is as Edwards argues to overcome the perils of individuality in the concept of the learner and how this could sometimes lead to disempowerment (2001). One effective approach will be where the student will have the choice of the broad areas of skill sets he/she is interested in and then the teacher takes over in identifying the present level of skill set competence of the students and then they work out a commonly agreed course for plugging the gaps in the skill set. It involves determining the joint course goals to be achieved by students and how it will be acquired by the student rather than how it will be taught to him/her. Toohey (2000) found that this approach to curriculum design has wide support in literature; for example, the systems–based approach, resource–based learning, and experiential/ personal relevance approach (Toohey 2000).

High	**Directive Teaching** • Low level of student choice. • Student passive • Power is primarily with teacher	**Collaborative Style** High level of involvement of student and teacher Joint goal setting of learning outcomes Exploratory learning
Teacher Choice	**Free** Rein Poor learning outcomes No goal setting Indiscipline	**Passive Teaching/ Impoverished style** • High level of student choice • Student active • Power is primarily with student
	Low Student Choice High	

5. The Effectiveness and Critiques of Student–Centered Learning:

The use of student–centered learning appears to be reflective of today's society where freedom of choice is critical in narrative, however is it an effective approach to learning? Lea et al. (2003) in their reviews found that overall it was indeed an effective approach. The student-centered learning in which the student is able to set up clear learning goals and the teachers guide the students to their objective leads to better relation between the learner and the teacher. It enhances the self worth of the students and also the teachers find it much easier to be with a group of learners who motivated and focused. Some of the challenges in this process are in overcoming the mindset of the learner and the teacher who have very preconceived notions of their roles in the learning eco-system. The need to sensitize the teacher who might view greater learner focus as a loss of power and similarly the learners should be able to evolve their goals without diluting the quality of skills acquired.

The concept of being an independent learner choosing his/her own route of learning, may in fact drive some of the sociability out of the learning process if care is not taken to emphasize the importance of peers. In relation to this individuality, Lea et al.'s study on psychology students highlighted their concern over being abandoned or isolated from other supports in a student– centered learning approach (2003). O'Sullivan (2003) described student–centered learning as a Western approach to learning and may not necessarily transfer to the developing countries, where there is a different learning culture. It can be equally hard at times to see how the approach can be economical in the large classes associated with many current University undergraduate courses. Another concern regarding student centered learning is the belief that students hold in relation to their learning. Students who value or have experienced more teacher– focused approaches, may reject the student–centered approach as frightening or indeed not within their remit. Prosser and Trigwell's work in higher education emphasizes the different belief systems held by staff and students (2002). They found that lecturers with a teacher–centered approach to teaching held views that students should accommodate information rather than developing and changing their conceptions and understanding. The reverse was true for those with more student–centered approaches to their teaching. Perry's work on the development of University students highlights how students move from a dualistic view that knowledge is right or wrong to a relativist view that all answers are equally valid (Perry 1970). This study highlights that even during the University years, students can change their view on learning and as they move through the years so to may their views on student–centered learning change.

6. Summary:

The ultimate goal for student-centered learning is for students to gain independent minds and the capacity to make decisions about their life-long learning (Brown, 2008). ―What makes learner- centered education transformative is that meaning is co-constructed and that self-regulation occurs through interdependence, with a focus on being and becoming fully functioning (McCombs, 2009, p. 7). There is both research-based and evidence-based support for student- centered learning. The evidence of the benefits to learning in construction of learning, collaborative learning, metacognition, teacher/student partnership in learning, and meaningful assessment in real-world contexts are that children in learner-centered environments achieved more and at higher levels while being more engaged.

Teachers often fear the change associated with adopting a student-centered approach (Prensky, 2008). Student–centered learning is not without some criticism but in general it has been seen to be a positive experience, for example, Edwards (2001) emphasizes the value of student–centered learning: ‗Placing learners at the heart of the learning process and meeting their needs, is taken to be a progressive step in that s are able to learn what is relevant for them in ways that are suitable to them.

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