**Lecture7**

**Dialogue nature of communication between teacher and students  
in a student-centered pedagogy**

Th e Bologna Process, initiated by 29 Ministers responsible for higher education in Bologna in

1999, has brought with it unprecedented reform across the European continent in terms of the huge efforts undertaken to make higher education programmes more transparent and comparable

and to make higher education students and staff more mobile across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This has been guided by an ethos of greater transparency within higher education, with a greater emphasis on the student, encouraging higher education institutions (HEIs) and academic staff to place students at the centre of their thinking and to help them manage their expectations and be able to consciously and constructively design their learning paths throughout their higher education experience. This has necessitated a shift from more organisational input-oriented curricular design, based on the description of course content,

to outcome-based higher education. This has therefore resulted in a re-thinking of higher education course content in terms of learning outcomes; making students more aware of what

skills, knowledge and competences they can expect to develop through their studies. While the ongoing shift towards learning outcomes in higher educational course organisation across Europe is undoubtedly the fruit of the Bologna Process, student-centred learning (SCL) is a learning approach, which started to be researched and analysed long before the first Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999 (Bologna Process, 1999) as one of the possible pedagogical approaches for higher education.

With student-centred learning, students are responsible for planning the curriculum or

at least they participate in the choosing the individual is 100 percent responsible for his own behaviour, participation and learning (Brandes et al, 1986, p.12).

Student-centred learning, as the term suggests, is a method of learning or teaching that puts the

learner at the centre (cf. MacHemer et al, 2007, p.9; Boyer, 1990). With the application of an SCL approach in higher education, there is necessarily a shift in focus from academic teaching staff to the learner. Th is approach has many implications for the design and flexibility of curriculum, course content, and interactivity of the learning process. The fact that conventional teaching predominantly places its focus on the design, organisation and follow-through of the perspective of the academic teacher has made it diffi cult to determine what students see as constituting SCL, because often they have never been asked.

Th e outcome is an entwined ongoing process, which builds towards the climate of good practice in which there is continuous monitoring of, and reflection upon, programme design, which can evolve over time in response to changes to society, technology, student needs and higher education (Kember, 2009, p.9).

**Collaboration between Teachers and Students**

In turn, the role of the student is tied to that of the teacher in student-centred learning. Abel et al (2009, p.6) show how, as learning becomes less-teacher centred, teachers take on a role which is more that of a ‘coach’ guiding the student through the learning process, with the aim of instilling a culture of collaboration and cooperation. As part of SCL, teachers take on the role of promoting learning by lecturing less, in the traditional manner, and being more around the classroom than in front of it, signifying a shift of power for the teacher to a shared teacher-student relationship, thus creating mutual ownership of the education process (ibid).Abel et al (ibid) contend that this cooperative relationship must ultimately be reflected in ‘an assessment process which promotes mutual learning’. They argue that since students’ primary learning comes from what they perceive that they will be evaluated on, sharing in the evaluation process will enhance students’ ownership of the whole learning process. This leads students to have a greater sense of control over their own

learning as they feel ‘fully appraised of the criteria upon which the evaluation will be based’ (ibid).

Within these new roles for both the teacher and the student, the key factor in implementing

a new approach to learning, as well as in maintaining it, is motivation, of both teachers

and students. Greater involvement with students by the teacher is central to student

motivation.

Diekelmann et al (2004) show how a nursing teacher increasingly included students in ‘co-creating compelling courses’ and was surprised ‘by the insights students shared regarding how to create compelling courses and their willingness to collaborate with her to improve teaching and learning experiences’ (Diekelmann et al, 2004, p.247).

Maclellan (2008) examines the issue of student motivation in depth as a psychological construct and finds that ‘the higher-level cognitive competencies that are implied by the term, student-centred-learning, must integrate motivational constructs such as goal orientation, volition, interest and att ributions into pedagogical practices (Maclellan, 2008, p.411).

Maclellan fi nds that ‘the teacher is involved in clarifying the subject matter, offering examples,

or suggesting arguments for or against a point of view may minimize the students’ need to think’

while, equally, ‘little engagement by the tutor, leaving students to determine both what and how

to learn without any criteria to judge their process, is unsatisfactory, ineffi cientand makes a nonsense of formal, higher education as a planned and designed system (Maclellan, 2008, p.418).

Maclellan fi nds that judicious balance of students engaging in tasks through the stimulation of tutors (who perhaps ask detailed questions, have students present arguments, require students

to analyse the cause of their problems) requires considerable sensitivity, strength of conviction to allow students regulate their motivation, and skills of negotiation since misperceptions may lead to scaff olding mismatch in instruction and negative perceptions of the interacting partners in certain learning situations (ibid).

Th is shows that the role of the teacher in SCL

is by no means a small one. It is an ongoing endeavour, requiring a redirection of the teachers’

efforts into - creating a trusting classroom culture

which promotes: (1) cooperative learning; (2) authentic learning; and (3) meaningful

assessment of the learning process (2009, p.6)

Th is a hefty task and oft en requires a shift in mentality and culture with respect to the teachers’

approach to student learning, particularly where the teacher-centred approach is ingrained into

the system of their HEI.

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# 5 Ways to Make Your Classroom Student-Centered

By Marcia Powell

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What interests you? Sports? Historical novels? Cars? Finding crafty ideas on Pinterest? For adults, making choices is the norm. We're motivated by stimuli that we value, by our passions. If ideas hold no personal interest for us, we often quit, unless a relationship or reward is involved.

Our students aren't so different. Expert teachers know how to give students choice and voice, finding ways to design learning experiences that tap into what students value. This isn't always easy, especially if our preparation experiences didn't frame learning this way. Here are five questions that can help us develop and refine the teacher strengths needed for creating a student-centered classroom.

**1. How does the classroom environment promote interaction among learners—and how do you operate in that environment?** Student-centered classrooms are big on collaboration, which means they don't usually have rows of desks facing a teacher lectern or desk. Instead, desks or tables are arranged so that it's easy for students to collaborate on projects or on analyzing readings (rather than listening to lectures). And whether teachers are leading lessons on protein synthesis or the issues leading up to a world conflict, we make the most of these possibilities.

***Teacher strength: giving up absolute control.*** The teacher becomes a participant and co-learner in discussion, asking questions and perhaps correcting misconceptions, but not telling learners what they need to know.

**2. What kind of assessments do you use?** Student-centered assessments ask open-ended questions that force learners to reflect and synthesize what they have learned. They demand that students access higher orders of thinking.

For example, traditionally, students might learn about velocity by reading (or listening to a lecture), completing worksheets, then answering multiple-choice questions. But if a student maps a local route and tracks the time for different legs of a journey, they can determine average velocities for each segment of a journey. The data will be individualized, as will the route and the calculations. Assessment can be a creative product and process that involves student choice.

***Teacher strength: valuing student engagement over convenience.*** Creating and completing meaningful assessments is hard (but worthwhile) work for both teacher and students.

**3. How do you respond to a lack of buy-in?** No matter how well-intentioned we may be about student engagement, we sometimes miss the mark.

“This past week, when studying sound waves, my 9th grade science students created instruments—flutes, pan pipes, wind chimes, and water bells, all tuned to specific frequencies. For the first time in years, kids didn't care for this assignment, but I noticed they loved using [Audacity](http://audacity.sourceforge.net/) to record their instruments. Even after completing the day's assignment, they kept looking at different tools in the program.

I thought about it on the way home and the next day I shifted gears. The original plan had been to continue our study of frequency, wavelength, and sound concepts by creating a class concert (as in years past). But instead, I decided to ask students to explore autotune and show choir mash-ups, studying the same concepts. Students still recorded songs using software, changed the sound characteristics, and played the resulting jams for one another.”

***Teacher strength: honoring student passion and interest.*** Both approaches would have taught my students what they needed to know about sound. But learning must matter to the learner; in this case, I realized my students were less interested in creating their own instruments than in understanding how technology can influence personal musical taste.

To activate this strength takes flexibility, resourcefulness, sensitivity to student needs, and a deep understanding of content—all of which require even the most experienced teacher to stay on his or her toes.

**4. Which is more important to you: compliance or knowledge?** Occasionally we come across learners who drive most of their teachers crazy. They text on the sly, don't hand in homework, read unrelated books during class time. Backing them into a corner is an understandable reaction: "Dude, you're in my class to do my work." It can be *almost* infuriating when this learner takes the test and aces it: He or she understands the content and is competent at what you have to offer.

What happens when you meet these learners? Does a yearlong power struggle begin ... or do you rethink your plans, looking to online resources?

***Teacher strength: admitting you do not have the market cornered on knowledge.*** The truth is that 21st-century learning is focused more on creation and critical thinking than on compliance. Most of us were formed in a teaching crucible that emphasized our wisdom and students' compliance. Shifting our perspective means that students take on more active roles as learners and that our roles change, too. We must decide whether to think and act as facilitators who empower (and learn from) our students—or as the people guarding the vault.

**5. If learners weren't required to come to your class, would they?** Ask yourself this difficult but honest question: Is there joy in the journey we are taking together? It's one of the most difficult tasks in teaching, because it asks us to consider the learner as a part of our community, rather than just a mind to fill. Asking this question—and responding to the answer—requires a combination of flexibility, humor, and the ability to try new things, fail, and laugh when things work out ... and when they don't.

***Teacher strength: developing healthy relationships with learners.*** You've heard all the warnings before: Don't let them see you smile, don't communicate with them via social media, don't let them know that you aren't the expert. But it just doesn't work that way in our own lives. If we sincerely believe in lifelong learning and commit to modeling it, we'll be honest with one another, cajoling, encouraging, and mentoring with challenging and appropriate dialogue.

Here's the great news. These strengths can be developed! Pick one that you aren't doing as well as you want and work on it for 2014. Ask a colleague to be an accountability partner. Grant yourself extra reflection time. And start with small changes. If you are in a leadership position, empower another to take a chance and build a better classroom for students. Inspiration, interest, and happy learners—isn't that a great resolution for the upcoming semester?

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