

LEARNER CENTERED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

You're probably familiar with the traditional classroom. At the center of this instructional model, the teacher is the provider of education and students are the recipients. The limits of this 'teacher-centered' model are that it fails to address the unique needs and interests of each student, and, worse, it can make students dependent on teachers for learning. In today's complex and changing world, the earlier students learn to become independent, lifelong learners, the more successful they will be.

In a **learner-centered classroom**, students are the focus of education, while teachers facilitate learning and help students reflect and become responsible for their education. There are several strategies to ensure that a classroom environment is learner-centered. Let's look at how one teacher uses each of these strategies.

A large part of a learner-centered classroom is helping students become responsible for their own learning. To do this, engage students in activities that allow them to reflect on their learning and work, which helps them become more thoughtful about their education.

Five Characteristics of Learner-Centered Teaching:

1. **Learner-centered teaching engages students in the hard, messy work of learning.**
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.
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.
4. **Learner-centered teaching motivates students by giving them some control over learning processes.** 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.