Diary of a Learner-Centered Teacher

Power, Peril, and Promise

AMATYC 2012
S187
Room: Grand 7

Penny Morris
Jim Rhodes
Polk State College
Lakeland, Florida
• Think about the worst class you ever had, and what made it that way.
• Now think about the best class you ever had, and what was different in that one that made it so good.
• What characteristics do you think students value in an instructor?
What characteristics are essential for effective teaching from the student perspective?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Face-to-Face</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Respectful</td>
<td>▶ Respectful</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Responsive</td>
<td>▶ Knowledgeable</td>
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<td>• Knowledgeable</td>
<td>▶ Approachable</td>
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<td>• Approachable</td>
<td>▶ Engaging</td>
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<td>• Communicative</td>
<td>▶ Communicative</td>
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<td>• Organized</td>
<td>▶ Organized</td>
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<td>• Engaging</td>
<td>▶ Responsive</td>
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<td>• Professional</td>
<td>▶ Professional</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Humorous</td>
<td>▶ Humorous</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What is Learner-Centered Teaching?

What does learner-centered teaching mean?
What is Learner-Centered Teaching?

- From Weimer, in *Learner-Centered Teaching*:
  - The Balance of Power
    - Where does the power lie and how is it distributed?
  - The Function of Content
    - Content as a means, not an end
  - The Role of the Teacher
    - Around the classroom, not in front of it
  - The Responsibility for Learning
    - Development of students as lifelong, autonomous learners
  - The Purpose and Process of Evaluation
    - Toward assessing deep learning, and development of self-assessment skills in students
What is Learner-Centered Teaching?

- **The Role of the Teacher**
  - Around the classroom, not in front of it

- **The Responsibility for Learning**
  - Development of students as lifelong, autonomous learners
What is the “power” in learner-centered teaching, and how can we achieve it in our classrooms?
Learner-centered teaching

- Intentionally and purposefully creates an environment that engages students as active partners in their own learning processes through meaningful interaction with course content, the professor, and each other.
- It presents opportunities for learners to take responsibility for their own learning with the goal of becoming self-directed, life-long learners.
Getting students to read and use the syllabus

- Scavenger hunt
- Refer back to the syllabus from time to time, asking students to follow along on their own syllabus. This helps students see the value of a syllabus. (Make this a positive experience rather than stating that if they had read their syllabus they would know or penalizing students who don’t have their syllabus.)
Example of a scavenger hunt

**Information Scavenger Hunt**

Using the syllabus, work with other members in your group to find the information below. For a couple of the questions, there may be more than one “answer.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The name of the textbook required for this course</th>
<th>The type of calculator needed for the course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The instructor’s name</td>
<td>The only Wednesday when there is not a class meeting between now and the end of the term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of tests administered in this course</td>
<td>This is done at the beginning of every class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is done at the end of every class</td>
<td>The number of projects assigned in this course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The best way to get in touch with the instructor</th>
<th>The withdrawal deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of points that the voting project is worth</td>
<td>The number of points needed for an A in this class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you are to do for the class from one week to the next</td>
<td>Two topics included in the content of this course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A project that will be turned in electronically using PAL</td>
<td>Two tips for success in this class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activities to Process Content

- We would like to see students processing and using content, not just copying down notes at a rapid pace and regurgitating information later.
- The Problem: Too much material and too little time!
The Tempting Solution: Speed Through the Material

- Speeding through the material so you can get it all covered doesn’t help students learn.
- Students have difficulty following it as fast as you can deliver it.
- If some students manage to follow it, there is not time to absorb one concept and place it into long-term memory before the next concept is launched.
- If students are taking notes, they are probably concentrating on copying down the steps rather than listening.
- When students get home, their notes probably don’t make sense anyway due to writing so fast.
A Better Solution: Activities to help process concepts

- Focus is on students doing the work, not just watching the instructor do problems
- Can be quick or lengthy
- Can be group or individual
- Discovering, reflecting, summarizing, connecting activities
- Formative assessments
Posing a Problem

Pose a problem at the beginning of class that draws the students in.

Before starting the lesson on order of operations: Put $5 + 7 \cdot 4$ on the board and let them do it. This will create a need for them to know the order to do operations. Individual, quick, gets students involved in the lesson.
Thoughtful Questions

In your textbook or lecture notes, write out a question that you intend to ask. Select the wording carefully and make sure you ask it so that students ponder it and have a chance to reflect.

After working with graphing equations of the form of $y = mx$, you could say and show on the screen, “Observe and compare the last three lines that we graphed. Think about (but don’t say right away) what is the same in each problem and why. Think about what is different and why.” Give time to think. Then, ask them to share their ideas with someone near them. Then ask people to volunteer what they figured out.
Thoughtful Questions – cont.

- Allows instructor to ask thought-provoking questions rather than surface questions
- Writing the question down ensures that you have phrased it in a thought-provoking way rather than just “Hey. What makes these last lines different?”
- Involves all students
- Increases the likelihood that more students will actually understand the concept
- You can ask students to write what they learned in their notes. Give them time to do this.
Instructional Games

Instructional games can help students reflect, discriminate between types of problems, connect ideas, practice skills, and learn from each other.
Activities to Add?
What perils might you face as you embark on this journey, and how can you overcome them?
Some Perils Along the Way…

- Student buy-in
- Faculty buy-in
- College-wide buy-in
- Time to prepare and execute (the activities, not the students)
- It’s hard to give up control
- Knowing when to step in and when to stay silent
- Dealing with what can appear to be chaos
What is the promise of Learner-Centered Teaching?
The Promise

- Responsible learners
- Lifelong learners
- A sense that we have prepared our students for more than just a test
- A sense of well-being
- World peace (or at least a start)
A Journey of a 1000 Miles...

...begins with a single step...