

How A Student-Centered Classroom Will Affect My Student

Dear Learning Community Members:

As an educator of 20 years (and as a parent of 18 of those years), I have been a first-hand witness to the evolution of education and learning. In my own classroom, I have gradually begun to make a shift from the “traditional” style of teaching and learning to one that is now focused on using the students as a tool to not only grow their own education, but also enhance that of their peers – a student-centered classroom.

Why the Shift?

When I entered the classroom in 2003, it looked quite a bit different. My doors were closed both literally and figuratively to the rest of the world during those minutes I was given to educate my students. The Internet and its resources were relatively new, social media was in its infancy, and education looked very much like rows of desks that faced a teacher who lectured while students copied page after page of notes. Other careers at the time looked very similar. Employees in the workforce were asked to complete a job at their desk independently, and then produce a product that (hopefully) changed their industry or met a final goal.

Things now have shifted. Globally, we live in a world of technology and collaboration. Those two work together in ways we never dreamed possible 20 years ago. Employees are now expected to collaborate to achieve a common goal, and much of that is done digitally or in a “virtual” environment. Every industry, including education, is now expected to communicate in a plethora of ways that include small groups as well as one-on-one with peers or clients/customers. They are given more choice in how to achieve the goals set before them and more opportunities to critique each other to make their final product better than it was before. As a teacher, my own job has shifted. We are expected to effectively collaborate daily with other teachers in our content. We no longer “close our doors” to ideas and we critique each other and offer suggestions on ways to engage our students. We search for new ideas with different technological tools than we ever had and our practices are more effective because of this change.

Education and my classroom have made a similar shift. We recognize that the social-emotional needs of our students are different than they used to be and the opportunities for them to succeed have changed as well. Student engagement no longer looks like note-taking and attentive listening. Learners are now using new avenues to inquire about the things they are learning and helping design their pathway to understanding, giving them both ownership and authentic skills that will make them learners in a society that increasingly values self-paced revision for mastery. Student-centered learning is going to give them the skills necessary to be inspired to find answers, communicate effectively, work in a collaborative environment, and truly become life-long learners. We are no longer using an expired model where we try to teach material to “most” of the students, but instead, having EACH student’s needs met at their pace. These are life skills that will be necessary for success in any vocation they choose, whether they are college-bound or enter the workforce immediately after leaving my classroom.

What Will the Shift Look Like?

<i>Traditional/Factory Style Practice</i>	<i>Student-Centered Practice</i>	<i>Benefits</i>
Teacher moves on when “most” of the students have mastered a concept.	Opportunities to revise or resources to master a concept are provided, along with time build into the daily/weekly schedule to revisit those skills not mastered.	Students cannot build on a foundation that is not complete. They will each be able to master a skill before attempting to move onto the next one.
Assessments (quizzes, tests, etc.) are kept secret until the day of the assessment	Students are provided with assessment questions as material is learned.	Students will be able to identify weaknesses in skills so that they can use provided resources to master them before the assessment.
Grouping is random	Grouping of students is determined based on individual needs	Students can progress at an appropriate pace for the individual.
Project rubrics are created by the teacher and are provided on the day of assessment	Students and teachers work together to create a rubric	Students have a say and/or choice in the assessment, giving them ownership of their own learning. This also allows them to have the rubric available at all times to assess their own progress.
Classroom space is set up with desks individually spaced apart in rows	Classroom space is set up with desks in groups of 2-4	Students can actively collaborate on tasks and use frequent peer assessment and revision strategies.

Why I Am Choosing a Student-Centered Learning Model..

I am an educator, but I am also a parent. When I look at what value I want my own children to get out of their education, it is without a doubt the ability to function as a productive member of an ever-changing society. I want them to have authentic learning experiences, but I want them to be set up to experience learning on their own throughout their lifetime. Your student deserves the same. This shift in my own practices is going to get them closer to becoming a self-sufficient adult, and that is what we all know should be the end goal. I am dedicated to giving your student the education they deserve and I am eager to see what we can accomplish together this year.