Overview

The term “learner-centered instruction” is used frequently to describe efforts to “move away from instructional methods that rely on mass transmission of knowledge” (Paris & Combs, 2006, p. 571) toward a more constructivist, inquiry-based approach. Although various definitions and descriptions of learner-centered instruction are used in the field, the approach generally implies a focus on individual learners (and all that they bring to the learning situation), combined with an emphasis on effective teaching practices. Principles consistent with learner-centered instruction include:

1) The student is the starting point for curriculum design;
2) Teachers and students are co-participants in the learning process; and
3) Teachers promote intense student engagement with the curriculum.

Proponents of learner-centered instruction have challenged didactic methods of teaching, citing that the exclusive use of lectures and assigned reading material promote rote learning of facts instead of critical analysis and problem-solving skills. Learner-centered instruction reportedly benefits students’ acquisition, retention, and transfer of knowledge, self-awareness, critical thinking, and motivation (Malone, 2008).

Implications for Teaching

A variety of teaching methods are used within a learner-centered approach, including:

- Case method instruction
- Team-based learning
- Project-based instruction, including the Personal Learning Plan method
- Observation
- Dialogue and reflection

Additional Resources


