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THE CONCEPT OF LEARNER-CENTERED PEDAGOGY (LCP)

The article is about Learner-Centered Pedagogy (LCP), which places the student in the center of the teaching learning process; and the teacher is considered the only source of knowledge. In a LCP perspective, teachers become facilitators and mentors in assessing students' progress, reinforcing them to take the responsibility for their own learning.

Key words: Learner-centered pedagogy, interactive pedagogy, child-centered pedagogy, constructivism, prior knowledge, learner-centered curriculum, learner autonomy, cooperative learning, learners' cultural capital.

An introduction to learner-centered theory of education.

The founder of Learner-Centered Theory of Education (LCTE) was a Swiss born French theorist Jean Jacque Rousseau (1712–1778) He was the first educator to introduce the concept LCTE. In his line of thinking, the main idea is that educators should not start an instruction by concentrating on a vast amount of information that they wish students to learn. Rousseau, underlined that teachers should begin an instruction by considering what the learner is capable of learning and what he is interested in to learn.

Both LCP and Learner-Centered Curriculum(LCC) go hand- in hand; and it is difficult to treat them in isolation, because both of them provide students an opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning enabling them and teachers power-sharing in the process of instruction, paving the way for an interactive and participatory classroom atmosphere.

In such an instruction, the teacher becomes a facilitator and an organizer, where as students become active participants for their own learning. The teacher works based on the students cultural capital (accumulated wealth of experience). And what students already know, what knowledge they can discover is well taken by the teacher. The teacher encourages students' participation, recognizes their strength and weak points and builds on the values and interests of the students, asks them to give their comments etc. In a LCP and Interactive Pedagogy(IP) classroom situation, the teacher plays the role of a mentor, modeling how to share knowledge, helping students to generate new ideas. Hence, learning becomes an individual-based as well as a collaborative experience.

It is also necessary to understand that if students are taught by rote memorization, some will remember what they have repeated once to many times, but most will forget it sooner or later. However, they will have learned that memorization for its own sake is meaningless. On the other hand, if students are taught in a way which builds-on what they already know; they can relate the new knowledge to the conditions around them, and will be able to learn that learning in school is meaningful. LCP and IP hold that students do not come empty- minded to a learning environment, rather they come with an accumulated experience (cultural kit) which is very important to the learning experience they are exposed to. Teaching, which ignores and does not build on the experiences of the student, will limit the student's thinking and the student will not be able see the connections to the world outside him, the school and what is taught and learned in schools.

Schools are only part of the total learning context of the student. In order to develop skills, students need to use their prior knowledge and lived- experience gained from outside and within the school, together with the new knowledge, which they acquire through different sources of information (with each other, with parents, the community at large, teachers, textbooks and other materials)

It is almost impossible to implement a Student- Centered Curriculum (SCC), LCP and IP in the absence of a supportive learning environment. A student-centered school will have to be democratic in its ethos and organizational culture; that students are trained for and given responsibility gradually as they are able to take it on. If students are trained in a student -centered way, they will be working hard, discipline problems will be minimal, because learning will be meaningful, relevant, challenging, and they will be able to develop personal and social skills.

Along this line of thinking, teachers still need to be thoroughly grounded in a SCP and /or IP. It will be necessary for students' support materials to guide teachers in student-centered methodology. One indicator, which seems to be an emerging trend on the introduction of SCP and/or IP, in different countries, is that teachers are becoming familiar with the term student-centered approach, but tend to understand it rather superficially in terms of classroom methodology. As a result, teachers are not well equipped to implement SCC, LCP and/ or IP as the reflective practitioners .

In reflective teaching approach, teachers must establish a relationship of care with students. SCC and IP presupposes different quality of relationship between teachers and students. Teachers must have a good grounding in the field of study they teach (i.e subject matter knowledge), understand why and how to teach in a student centered teaching way .Teachers must be able to sense the needs of students and how to shape learning experience accordingly; must learn and be able to decide, when it is the best time to deliver the content, let students explore information for themselves with out any teacher intervention. Teachers must also know when to focus on skills more than content and when students can be allowed to find their own way through a topic.

Defining learner-centered pedagogy.

LCP appears in differently names; such as child -centered pedagogy, interactive pedagogy, student-centered pedagogy, learner -centered education (LCE), In substance, all these different names can be used interchangeably. As to the definition of LCP, McCombs and Whistler in Kenneth T.Henson [7] have defined it as : the perspective that couples a focus on individual learners (their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capabilities and needs) with a focus on learning (the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning and achievement for all learners). This dual focus, then, informs and drives decision-making in education policy making.

Administrators are responsible for developing, maintaining and empowering a school environment that enhances effective learning. Administrators are also, responsible for ensuring that teachers are knowledgeable about their learners and on how learning takes place most effectively. At the same time, teachers are responsible for having classrooms ,which promote sound and effective learning for all and be familiar with instructional techniques that promote effective learning for all.

Further, school counselors are concerned with improving both the conditions for learning i.e. classroom environment, parents education, teacher attitude and with helping each student develop to his/her fullest potential. The following five premises support the above stated assertions as explained by the Citadel Undergraduate Catalog [18].

– Learners have distinctive perspectives contributed by their history, the environment, their interests and goals, their beliefs, their ways of thinking etc. All these must be taken care of and respected, if students are to become more actively involved in the learning process and finally become independent thinkers.

– Students have unique differences- emotional, learning rates, learning styles, stages of development, abilities, talents, feelings and other needs. These must be taken into consideration, if all students are to learn more effectively .

– Learning is a process that occurs best when what is being learned is relevant and meaningful to the student and when the student is actively engaged in creating his/her own knowledge and understanding, by connecting what is being learned with prior knowledge and experiences.

– Learning occurs best in an environment that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions and in which students feel appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and validated.

– Learning is seen as a fundamental natural process; learners are viewed as naturally curious and basically interested in learning about and mastering their world.

In a LCP, students are provided with an opportunity to questioning, expressing freely their-lived experiences, encouraged to participate in hands-on activities, take responsibilities for their own learning etc. LCP encourages outcomes -based teaching, where as Teacher-Centered Pedagogy(TCP) or Traditional

Pedagogy (TP) focuses on content-teaching. Outcomes-based teaching encourages 'enhancing on competency, rather than content; increasing the significance of continuous assessment as opposed to examinations' [1, p.153].

LCP is dynamic in its nature to serve progressivist ideals; and its implementation could take a variety of forms in different contexts, and accordingly is varied and dynamic [7]. Hence, assessing LCP at times poses difficulties upon its implementations, because it is difficult to label a particular lesson strictly, if it is 'teacher-centered' or 'learner-centered' [6]. And at times, assessment of such a lesson could lead to over simplification, overlooking the value of an educational practice in action.

As to the effectiveness of LCP, in developing countries, one needs a deep research in real classroom settings in view of societal contexts; with the understanding that LCP has deeply rooted cultural as well as political parameters. And hence, pedagogical practices must be connected with the socio-economic and political dynamics of any society. Schweisfurth [12] observed that the problems encountered in different developing countries are similar and raise questions of its appropriateness.

A paradigm shift to LCP (opposed to the traditional teacher dominated and/or talk-and-chalk teaching approach), can be expressed in terms of the roles of students and teachers, the nature of knowledge and classroom organization patterns [3, p.153]. LCP draws from progressivist school of thought, which emphasize the dynamic nature of knowledge and active participation of students in the process of knowledge construction and change. Where as in a traditional pedagogy, emphasis is put on transmitting information from one source (the teacher), where students become passive and dormant listeners. In a traditional pedagogy, the teacher simply passes pre-determined knowledge in the process of instruction. Traditional pedagogy encourages a one-way communication. In traditional pedagogy, instructional outcomes are always narrow, leading to memorization of facts, concepts and vocabularies.

LCP is connected with the theory of constructivism: a theory associated with the Russian educator-Vygotsky. According to constructivism, education is meaningful for students, if they do make their own understanding and are able to transform what is learned [3]. This can take different forms or can be achieved through active engagement with peers supported by teachers as facilitators. Vygotsky called this '*Zone of proximal development*' to underscore the significance of social setting of students to create a 'negotiate meaning' and educational experiences in a cooperative learning environment. The reputed American scholar John Dewey, believed that institutions of learning are conducive springboards for societal change and development. To ensure these changes, the important role of school systems must be re-organized to address individualized, meaningful and relevant learning for every body in the process of teaching-learning.

Briefly, Leyndecker and Chisholm [9, p.197] have coined the main aspects constituting a LCP;

– knowledge is constructed in the mind of the student and not transmitted; learning is mentally active process and learning results from personal interpretation of knowledge.

– Learning is a process in which meaning is developed on the basis of prior knowledge and experience. Prior knowledge and experiences are determined by culture and social contexts.

– Language influences culture and human thinking, and is central to learning and the overall development of higher learning.

From this theoretical perspective, therefore, one can dear to say that educational needs of students are of paramount priority and importance. To address these student needs, necessitates policy and institutional reforms so as to empower school organizations and the role of teachers as the main players [16]. In this game, teachers' creativity and commitment is decisive.

In assisting students construct and or/co-construct knowledge, and students to take responsibility for their own learning, teachers need to assume the role of an 'architect' or 'contractor' [11, p. 252]. Teachers need to participate starting from designing of course material, methodology, and monitoring the lesson progress, understanding individual learners' needs, their background, ensuring meaningful communication among students and checking progress in line with the design.

This role is not an easy task, specially with in-service teachers, who have been trained and used to 'chalk and talk' methods of teaching for years. Though, the mastery of the method is difficult; in view of the dynamic nature of students, enabling them a sense of ownership of the process is an important exercise.

3. Why make preference to Learner- Centered Pedagogy?

There are methodical and technical reasons to adopting Learner Centered Pedagogy. [16, p.49–53]

– Cognitive and psychological : adopting customized and diversified instructional strategies to help learners acquire knowledge that enables higher order of thinking. And raising interest and motivation in a cooperative learning environment that will enable students cope with the ever changing and complex local and global reality.

– Economic : human capital development must expand beyond the acquisition of basic skills and content knowledge to include strategies for becoming 'lifelong learners' and create entrepreneurs in ever changing economic environments.

– Political : LCP is premised on more egalitarian power relationships between the students and their teachers; this is deemed to resist authoritarian political climates, where levels of democracy and civic participation are limited.

Central emphasis and understanding emerge from an integrated and holistic examination of learner – centered approach (LCA). For educational systems to serve the needs of every student, it is essential that every instructional process focuses on the individual student with an understanding of the teaching-learning process.

4. Concluding remarks.

A through review of the literature indicates that LCE and/ or pedagogy has been developing for so many years, and continues to take different forms. The nature of all theories is to guide human thinking; and hence, LCE and/or pedagogy should guide teachers thoughts and shape their behavior, because the nature of all knowledge is fluid and not permanent; responsible use of LCE or pedagogy requires educationists to commit themselves to lifelong learning to improve their understanding of LCE and or/ pedagogy and of the broader processes of teaching and learning in general.

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Концепция личностно-ориентированной педагогики

Рассматривается личностно-ориентированная педагогика, в рамках которой студент находится в центре образовательного процесса, а учитель рассматривается только как источник знаний. Учитель является посредником и наставником в процессе обучения студентов, которые берут ответственность за собственный процесс обучения.

Ключевые слова: *личностно-ориентированная педагогика, интерактивная педагогика, конструктивизм, основные знания, учебная программа, ориентированная на учащихся, учебная автономия, совместное обучение.*