

## **Student Centered Learning White Paper**

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July 9, 2023

## **Introduction**

The principal of an elementary school is currently researching a student-centered learning instruction for the classroom environment for the teachers. After researching varying student-centered learning theories, there is one that stands out. The constructivist theory which the principal thinks the teachers could use in the classrooms to help grow the progress of the students. Educators are the guiding tool in the classroom for students and the constructivist theory would be a way to promote student-centered learning in the school.

### **What is Student-Centered Learning**

In the elementary school setting, student-centered learning “incorporates students’ skills and interest into the learning process making the experience more personalized and involved in his or her own future.” (NellieMaeEdFdn, 2015) When student-centered learning is taking place there are four key principles which are followed.

1. Learning is personalized - educators know their students and build relationships
2. Learning is competency-based - students master skills while moving at their own pace, teachers respond to students needs
3. Learning happens anytime, anywhere - students are making connections beyond the school day
4. Students take ownership - they make decisions so that learning is lasting and meaningful (NellieMaeEdFdn, 2015)

Student-centered learning comes from constructivism which revolutionized education when thinking about the student at the center of learning and not a student who solely takes in information from the educator who holds all the knowledge.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Student-Centered Learning**

When we think of student-centered learning, constructivist theory comes to mind. Koohang, A., Riley, L., Smith, T. & Schreurs, J., (2009) defines constructivism using varying researchers throughout the decades stating, “Entrenched in learning theories advanced by

Dewey (1916), Piaget (1972), Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1990), constructivism learning theory is defined as active construction of new knowledge based on a learner's prior experience." Elementary educators who have a student-centered learning environment are using constructivism when students are actively engaged with hands-on experiences, e-learning, among other activities which are self-motivating to keep the students' knowledge progressing. Each educator seeks out ways to make their classroom interactive with hands-on experiences to guide the learner to put new knowledge into long term memory.

Principles of constructivism help the educator understand how it can play a role in the classroom. One is that knowledge is constructed. Meaning that knowledge builds upon previous knowledge. Another principle is that learning is an active process. When the learner can have hands-on experience they are in an active process to internalize what they are doing and gain new knowledge. Another principle is that learning is a social activity and achieving good synergy with the team. Peer involvement is important at progressing the learning of students for when they interact they are able to apply their knowledge in different situations. (Juvova et al., 2015)

A strategy used within the last 20 years, and follows a student-centered learning approach, is The Flipped Classroom. The teacher creates videos and interactive lessons for the student to do ahead of the classroom practice (Tucker, 2012). This allows the student to take control of their learning at their own pace. Implementing The Flipped Classroom would allow the teacher more time to get to small groups and/or individual students to clear up misconceptions. Student-centered learning means students are engaged in their learning.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Students-Centered Learning**

Some advantages to constructivism theory in education is that students do have some say in what they will learn, teachers are the facilitator and not the holder of all the knowledge, and teachers can easily do small group work (Western Governors University, 2020). Some disadvantages to constructivist learning is there is a lack of structure (Western Governors University, 2020) in the classroom with many hands-on activities. Another disadvantage is the

lack of grades since this theory is about progress for each student. With school districts using report cards to show progress in the grade level content this could be hard to show if they are too far below grade level.

### **What does Student-Centered Learning Mean in your Workplace or Field?**

Student-centered learning on the elementary level is to help individual students improve their skills on their time frame. When teachers are able to be successful using the constructivist theory, they are allowing students to be in charge of their learning, the students are more actively engaged, and learning is more personal (Western Governors University, 2020).

### **Summary**

Student-centered learning is an active participation from both educator and student. Student-centered learning takes place when the learning is personalized, competency-based, happens anytime and anywhere, and when the student takes ownership of the learning. Educators are the guide and not the holder of all the knowledge. (NellieMaeEdFdn, 2015)

When educators are using the constructivist theory in a classroom setting, it will free up time in the classroom to meet the needs of individual students and allow for hands-on activities to build on previous schema. To do so, educators focus on a student-centered learning approach and the constructivist theory fits the classroom with a hands-on experienced approach. When following the principles of the constructivist theory, students take ownership and become a life-long learner in the process.

Educators become successful when the students are successful, so find what works best in the classroom to meet the needs of the students. Constructivist theory is one of many theories able to put the student at the center of the learning and the teacher as the guide. The research developed over the years regarding the constructivist theory will encourage any educator not already using a student-centered learning approach to make changes to the classroom.

## References

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