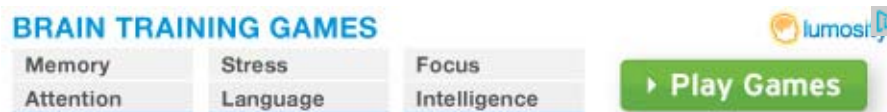


Effective Learners and a Learner-Centered Classroom



By Douglas Brown

6

Tweet

Each learner and each learning experience is unique; yet educators can identify patterns in the learning process. Designing effective learning requirements requires a clear understanding of, and attention to, both commonalities and differences in the learners and the learning.

Since ancient times, the learning process has been a subject of study for philosophers, educators, and scientists. This curiosity continues to drive forward the methodologies used in a classroom. One major change in educational philosophy brought on by this research is the shift in paradigm from a teacher-centered classroom to a learner-centered classroom. This shift makes the students (learners) more responsible for their education, forcing them to draw upon previously learned skills in order to learn new material. Gone, then, is the simple task of memorization; replaced with an active, educational process. How does a teacher create a learner-centered classroom? Simple; by following these eight suggestions (the first four given now, the second four given in my next installment), a teacher can not only create a learner-centered classroom, but also shift his/her classroom position from simple lecturer to a knowledge facilitator.

Step 1: Effective learners link new information to prior knowledge.

Meaningful and lasting learning is a cumulative process that connects previously learned material with new knowledge. Background knowledge creates a context and foundation for new material. Unsuccessful students often do not have the skills for linking previous learning to new information. They often lack essential retrieval strategies. Prior knowledge and experience remains inaccessible for these students.

The instructional challenge is to help students get in touch with what they already know. Learners need a repertoire of strategies to help them access this knowledge, as well as strategies for organizing new information into patterns that will help them make connections and integrate new understandings. Some strategies that can aid in this process include (but are not limited to):

1. Visualizations of past learning experiences.
2. Quick (five minute) reviews.
3. Brainstorming and grouping.
4. Venn Diagrams.
5. Semantic mapping.
6. Group or class discussions.

Step 2: Effective learners engage with process and context simultaneously.

Motivating students' mental engagement is critical to successful education. Engaging instruction is student-centered, designed to instill a sense of wonderment, build self-esteem, and foster creativity. Open-ended experiences, with no "right or wrong" answers allow students to practice generating alternatives to simple memorization of facts, and choose actions and answers based on judgment and not just what they think the teacher wants to hear. In this way, context comes alive as knowledge and skills are applied in context actively and interactively.

When students are given a choice in the when, what, and how of learning, they are more likely to embrace learning goals and increase their commitment to learning tasks. This idea is particularly important to students who feel they have little control over many aspects of their lives. Teachers who provide flexibility will most often get a higher level of responsibility from their

students. Methods to accomplish this include:

1. Choices in assignment time frames.
2. Various levels of difficulty for assignments.
3. Different formats for final products.
4. Different methods for task completion.



5. Options for either individual or peer work.

Step 3: Effective learners access and organize information.

The ability to organize information is fundamental to effective thinking and learning. Skilled learners are able to organize information by recognizing and developing patterns both "in and out of the box."

Learning-focused teachers move from isolated skills lessons to learning strategies lessons, sending the message to students that information gains value when we understand it and apply it. In this way, students gain a tool kit for building, shaping, and connecting information. Teaching students various organizational tools (along with constantly modeling them) provides cues for thinking, frameworks for accessing and retaining information, and the transfer of learning to other settings. This tool kit can contain:

1. Venn diagrams.
2. Story maps.
3. Concept maps.
4. Graphically displayed patterns and connections.
5. Sequence charts.

Step 4: Effective learners require internal and external mediation.

In a meditative learning environment, open-ended questions are the norm and both praise and criticism are limited. Students are encouraged to articulate "thinking in progress" as they experiment with both ideas and materials. The goal here is to transfer the external meditative voice of the teacher to the inner voice of the student. This self-talk and student-to-student talk guides the work on topics at hand and provides ways of focusing on and thinking about the materials at hand.

Meditative teachers and their learners mutually develop challenging goals and criteria for success for units and projects. Reflection and self-assessment along the way are critical components of such classrooms. To accomplish internal and external mediation, these tools help:

1. Journals (single-subject and general thought).
2. Learning logs.

The concept of learning and teaching has come a long way from the simple lecture. Teachers now need to take a proactive hand in aiding and developing the learning process as well as teaching students how to learn. Unfortunately, most standard four-week TEFL courses do not include this kind of information during their learning and certification process. It is my hope that these first four suggestions for creating a learning-centered classroom augment your prior knowledge gained through training and experience.

About the Author

Douglas Brown is a moderator and writer for <http://www.totalesl.com>, a free resource helping the ESL/EFL community in Asia and the Middle East for jobs, resumes, schools, resources, yellow pages, classifieds, information and lessons.

TotalESL.com-First Stop for Your Second Language Needs

<u>Full-Text Journal Library</u>
Browse millions of journal articles from top academic publications.
www.Questia.com/Journals



July 10th, 2009 | Tags: [Designing effective learning requirements](#), [Effective Learners and a Learner-Centered Classroom](#) | Category: [Douglas Brown](#), [Learner-centered activities](#), [Methodology](#)

2 comments to Effective Learners and a Learner-Centered Classroom



sunisa

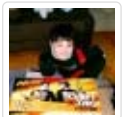
September 19, 2009 at 11:39 am

Hello,

Your article is very helpful for me. I am doing my master degree in Thailand. I just want to know when is your next installment on Effective Learners and a Learner-Centered Classroom is coming.

Thank you.

Sunisa



Adam

April 19, 2010 at 12:21 pm

Nice summary and some fairly useful ideas, thank you.