

TEACHING SHOULD BE A TWO-WAY INTERACTION, NOT STUDENT-CENTERED

Phan Xuân Thảo, M.A

We teachers are always concerned about how to teach students and how to teach them effectively. We are especially interested in the more modern student-centered approach, which stands in contrast to the traditional teacher-centered approach. But right at the moment, in *The Teaching Brain: An Evolutionary Trait at the Heart of Education*, a new book with the cooperation of Michelle Fitzpatrick, Harvard University researcher and veteran teacher Vanessa Rodriguez says teaching should be a two-way interaction, not student-centered. Below is a description of each of the three approaches of teaching, along with its advantages and disadvantages.

Historically, **the teacher-centered approach** was once very popular. This approach of teaching is characterized by the following manifestations: the teacher speaks, and the students listen; the classroom is quiet; the teacher is at the center in an active role while students are in a passive receptive role; an example of this approach is the lecture/note taking model.

Pros of teacher-centered approach:

- A large amount of information can be conveyed in a short amount of time.
- Large numbers of students can attend class.
- The class is orderly and well-controlled.
- Assessment of students is quick and easy.

Cons of teacher-centered approach:

- Knowledge is controlled by the teacher.
- Communication is one way.
- Student participation is not encouraged.
- Passive learning is promoted; students are bored.
- Independent, critical, and creative thinking is not promoted.
- The teacher is not interested in building relationships with students.
- Students do not form relationships with one another.

The cons of teacher-centered approaches clearly outweigh the pros. That is why teacher-centered approach is not very common today.

The more modern student-centered approach stands in contrast to the traditional teacher-centered approach. This approach of teaching has been in vogue for several decades. It is characterized by these manifestations: the teacher serves as a facilitator of learning: each student's interests, abilities, and learning styles should be dealt with; the teacher tends to focus on activities; there is much more responsibility placed on the students to take the initiative for meeting the demands of various learning tasks; the teacher typically designs learning situations and group activities for the students to learn by doing, problem solving, and cooperation.

Pros of student-centered approach:

- Engages students in the teaching and learning process
- Encourages student ownership of knowledge
- Provides real life connections
- Promotes active learning
- Fosters independent, critical, and creative thinking
- Deals with multiple learning styles

Cons of student-centered approach:

- More difficult to implement with large numbers of students

- Can be more time-consuming than lecturing
- Not effective in all subject matters
- Not appreciated by passive students

The pros really outweigh the cons. That is why this approach is very much in vogue at the present time.

However, according to Fitzpatrick & Rodriguez (2014) “*teaching should be a two-way interaction, not student-centered*”. Rodriguez criticizes the traditional teacher-centered approach as ineffectively portraying student minds as “empty vessels” waiting to be filled. With regard to the student-centered approach, says Rodriguez, it only looks at part of the equation. She says, “Teaching is automatically a human interaction. It cannot happen in isolation. If teaching is inherently an interaction, then you cannot have anyone at the center. You need to understand the whole interaction, which is much more complex.”

Rodriguez presents five awarenesses that all great teachers should have: Awareness of Learner, Awareness of Interaction, Awareness of Self as Teacher, Awareness of Teaching Practice, and Awareness of Context. Right now, discussions about education tend to focus on the first awareness, Awareness of Learner. She compares the teaching process to a chemistry experiment. “You need to understand [the chemicals] independently first in order to understand what’s going to happen when you put them together.” It is a grave mistake to assume that to understand learning is to understand teaching, she says.

Rodriguez also says that part of the problem with most current research is that it is done by researchers who often have no classroom experience. As a result, they tend to put forth impractical solutions. That is why she recommends that expert teachers should take time away from the classroom to do research.

In conclusion, given the availability of the three teaching approaches discussed above, **what is the solution for us, as instructors in English?** The only way to make a wise choice is to do four things:

- Assess student needs: Why do they study English? For what purpose?
- Examine instructional conditions: time allowed, class size, classroom size, curriculum, materials ...
- Determine the entering level of students: elementary, intermediate, or advanced
- Determine the attitudes, and aptitudes of individual students as much as possible

Having done all these, the instructor will be in a better position to derive a useful approach and practical methods, but always remember the advice given by expert teachers: Adapt; don’t adopt.

REFERENCES

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