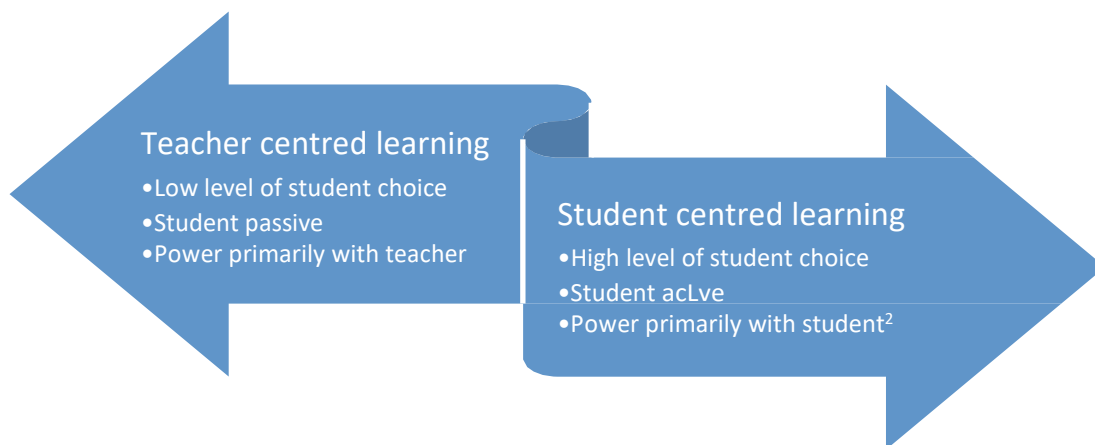


What is student centred learning?

“I seek a method by which teachers teach less and learners learn more”
Johan Comenius, writer of the first illustrated textbook (1630)¹

Much is made of paternalism and doctor centredness within the consultation and the benefits of a patient centred approach. This is mirrored in medical education through a recent shift toward student centred learning. This describes the move from the traditional didactic teacher centred approach to more of an emphasis on the student and what they learn. In practice this means changing our styles of teaching from instruction and transmission of information, to facilitation of learning, where students are actively involved, teaching is responsive and attains deeper and more effective learning².



Why is it important?

The advantages of student centred learning are contained in principles of adult learning: Adults are motivated by learning that:

- Is perceived as **relevant**
- Is based on, and builds on, their **previous experiences**
- Is participatory and **actively** involves them
- Is focused on **problems**
- Is designed so they can take **responsibility** for their own learning
- Can be immediately **applied** in practice
- Involves cycles of **action and reflection**
- Is based on **mutual trust** and respect³

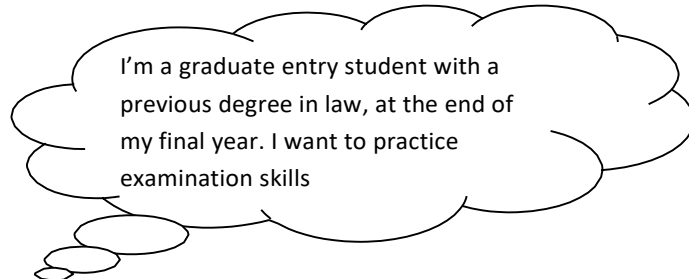
Learning that fulfils these criteria will foster deep and meaningful learning as well as removing wasteful learning (e.g. that which is strategic “to pass exams”, or irrelevant, or repetitive). There is mounting evidence in support of student centred teaching methods e.g. problem based learning.

Student centred learning: in practice....

How do we deliver it?

Before starting any teaching episode it is important to understand where the students are now:

- what level they are at
- their past experience
- their personal goals
 - o overarching
 - o for the placement



We can find this out by asking them at the start of the placement or emailing them beforehand. We can encourage them to consider feedback from previous assessments, their own portfolios, or reflecting on significant events or cases they have encountered to help them uncover their learning needs.

Obviously there will be limits to how much their goals can realistically be addressed during their placements, due to competing / varying needs of other students (especially in larger groups), resources and time available. However, working together to address these where possible will foster student engagement and really encourage deeper, more effective learning⁴.

Certain forms of teaching work well within a student centred model:

- Task based learning e.g. CBD (case based discussions)
- Projects e.g. letter writing, case write ups
- Experiential learning e.g. “hands on”/ practical activities
- Reflective learning e.g. reflective accounts, case discussions
- Group discussions
- Presenting to/ teaching peers
- Self instructional learning e.g. preparing topics
- Problem based learning
- Guided discovery learning⁵ (a combination of best traditional methods with more innovative techniques)

Another key component to student centred learning is the assessment of learning that has taken place e.g. through quizzes, professional conversations, self and peer assessments, log books and portfolios. Formative aspects to assessment are vital in identifying hidden learning needs for future work. Self and peer assessment can work alongside this in identifying learning needs as well as increasing the student’s own autonomy and responsibility for learning.

Dr Elora Baishnab
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²Dacre, J.E. and Fox, R.A. How should we be teaching our undergraduates? *Ann Rheum Dis* 2000;59:662-7

³O'Neill, G. and McMahon, T. Student centred learning: what does it mean for students and lecturers?

Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching. Dublin: AISHE 2005

⁴Lea, S.J., Stephenson, D., and Troy, J. Higher education students' attitudes to student centred learning: beyond "educational bulimia". *Studies in Higher Education* 2003; 28(3), 321-34.

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