

Learner-centered Vs. Teacher-centered

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What is authority? According to the definition on Google, authority is the power to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience. Those are qualities a teacher pursues; they create rules to enforce obedience. Teachers make decisions on what they are going to teach in class and they give orders to the students. But, do teachers use less authority in the classroom today? Are students not as respectful? Those are some of the questions asked about why teachers have changed over the years. Some people say teachers use the same amount of authority but students are not as obedient. Others say that the classroom has become more learner-centered, allowing the students to have more responsibility in managing the classroom. Teachers have become more adapted to a more learner-centered teaching style, where the students have the responsibility of the classroom. Some strategies such as Montessori, responsive classrooms, and constructivist are towards the learner-centered classroom environments. The behaviorist model is a teacher-centered teaching strategy, where the teacher has a lot more authority and say on what the classroom does. Do teachers care more about their students in the present than they did in the past? Teachers do not get a great paying salary, so they have to be teaching for the love of instilling learning in children.

A study was done on selected math classes by Amit and Fried (2005). They found that math teachers have three types of authority: expert authority, charismatic authority, and authority of rules (Amit & Fried 2005). They define an expert authority as “a person who knows their subject” (2005). They say teachers are authority of rules because many teachers have to create rules to keep a well-behaved class. Charismatic authority is their unavailability to ordinary humans. This is said because some of the students did not ask for their teacher’s help.

Learner-centered strategies are very common in today's classrooms. When using a learner-centered program, the design of management is in the form of guidance according to Tracey Garrett (2008). She goes on to say how students remain neutral when in the functioning of the classroom, discipline comes from oneself, the students get to participate in being part of the classroom management, the teacher and students decide the rules of the classroom, consequences are only reflected on one person, there are intrinsic rewards, students take responsibility of the classroom, and businesses and community create relationships and interact with the school. There are positives to the learner-centered classroom. One positive is learn how to collaborate with others on projects (Which is best, 2016). Students also learn how to teach themselves (Which is best, 2016). One strategy of a learner-centered classroom is called Responsive Classroom. Responsive Classroom has a morning meeting, jobs for each student, and group activities. Constructivist believe students learn from their own experiences and reflecting things to those experiences.

The flipped classroom model also allows the students to have a little more authority in the classroom. A flipped classroom is where the students learn the lesson at home from a video given by the teacher and come into school the next day to do homework in class (Hazlett 2013). This allows the students to learn at their own pace. Students can watch the video as many times as they want, pause it whenever they want, and watch it at anytime of the day (Hazlett 2013). Some teachers give their students an option from multiple videos to look at and choose what helps them best. A teacher in Colorado, Aaron Sams, even allows his students to choose if they want to take a test or if they want to show them some other way of showing that they understand

the topic they have just learned. He explains that students come into the classroom with questions and he can help them individually.

The Montessori Model was created by Maria Montessori. Montessori was popular in the 1900s (Brewer, 2007). There are Montessori elementary and preschools. They are usually not public schools. Brewer tells us the key elements of the Montessori philosophy are the ideas of the prepared environment, the absorbent mind, autoeducation, sensitive periods, and principle of freedom for the child (2007). The teacher provides materials that the students can select from so they can choose how they want to learn. Montessori instruction is usually self-correcting, so students can teach themselves (Brewer, 2007).

Responsive Classroom is used to create a community within the classroom (Northeast, 2007). It splits the responsibilities of running the classroom amongst the students. I observed Mrs. Cianci's fifth grade class of Greenville Elementary School that uses the Responsive Classroom method. Mrs. Cianci tries to run her classroom in an environment centered around the students. The first thing she has the students do when they come into the classroom is to correct the morning message that is posted for the morning meeting after they have unpacked. Mrs. Cianci says, "This allows organization and keeps the students from running amuck before the bell rings and the morning announcements are read. If I forget to write it on the board or pull it up on the smartboard, the students begin to panic, in a way. Students at this age like routines. It creates a safe environment for them (P. Cianci, November 15, 2016)." She then has the students answer a question that would lead them into the topic of the day to see what the students already know. She started off having the students tell me what was in the morning meeting. The order of the meeting starts off with the greeting, share, activity, and morning message (Northeast, 2007).

The importance of the morning meeting is to teach social skills and give the students a chance to be told good morning (Northeast, 2007). There are rules for this task that Mrs. Cianci set, that allows her to still have some power in the classroom, but not as much. The rules are to make eye contact, smile, firm handshake, and talk loud and clear. Those rules allow the students to develop proper greeting skills that could be used in the future. The most important part of the morning meeting, according to Mrs. Cianci, is the sharing. It allows the students to be the center of attention and allows them to see that everyone cares. This allows one or two students a day to have the authority of the morning meeting. Again, in a Responsive Classroom, the students share the authority with their peers and the teacher (2007). Now for the activity. The students choose from a list of activities on what game they want to play that day. While I was observing they played the game ten. The game ten is when all students start standing. One student starts off by saying at least the number one but can say up to three numbers, one-two-three. Now, the students standing next to the first can say up to three more numbers, four-five-six. Last, the third student can end the round by saying these three numbers, seven-eight-nine. The fourth student will be forced to say ten and sit down because he or she is out. Mrs. Cianci explains to me that she frequently gets complaints about this portion of the morning meeting. She tells me that parents often do not understand why I do an activity. Parents tell her, she should be using that time to teach the students. Mrs. Cianci says, “The activity is just as much of a lesson as the rest of the morning meeting. It creates sportsmanship, not to be a sore loser--or sore winner for that matter (P. Cianci, November 15, 2016).” The last part of the morning meeting is the morning message. This just allows the students to know what topic they are going to be learning about in class.

Mrs. Cianci has a student read it and some other students tell her the mistakes she made in the message. Mrs. Cianci thinks it is very important to let the children gain a sense of responsibility.

Anyway, the point of the Responsive Classroom is to allow the students to have more authority in class and gain a sense of responsibility. The students during Mrs. Cianci's lesson take control in any class reading by being the ones who read instead of her reading to them. One of the goals of a Responsive Classroom is to teach positive behaviors instead of discipling students. There are even restorative practices where the whole school adopts the responsive classroom to create a community amongst all students (Mirsky, 2011).

The constructivist theory was based on the learning theories of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Jo Ann (2007) said they believed learners should be in charge of learning. Constructivist try to focus on physical, emotional, social, language, and intellectual development. Brewer says, "Encouraging children to become actively involved in their own learning and developing children's desires to continue to learn are also important goals" (2007). Piaget explains that learning is to create children who want to discover, invent, and who learn things by themselves. Constructivists want to focus on all skills, fine motor and gross motor. Brewer (2007) explains that in the classroom teachers that use the constructivist theory are facilitators. The constructivist believer social interactions and developing relationships are very important, according to Brewer (2007). As I asked earlier, teachers getting too involved in students' personal lives could be the reason why it seems teachers have less authority. The constructivist theory allows the students to take responsibility of the classroom and have some power.

Tracey Garrett (2008) then goes on to explain the characteristics of teacher-centered strategies. She says that this strategy has the focus on the teacher, management oversight, the

teacher takes all of the responsibility of organization and paperwork, the teacher gives the discipline, the teacher may have a couple student helpers, teachers come up with the rules that the students must follow, there are specific consequences for every student, extrinsic rewards, students have limited responsibility, and not many people from the community come into the classroom. The positives of teacher-centered classrooms are that they are usually quiet and better to manage, students will become more independent because there is less group work, and the teacher can keep control of the lesson (Which is best, 2016).

Behaviorist theory is a teacher-centered strategy. This theory was used by Edward Thorndike and B.F. Skinner who were well-known in the 1870s to the 1990s. This uses direct instruction from the teacher to the students. The teacher teaches their students by repetition and rewarding or punishing according to Jo Ann Brewer (2007). For example, the teacher will continue to do a lesson until the students get it correct. Once they get it right the teacher will reward them, but if they continue to get it wrong, the teacher will punish the student or students. They tend to have instructional groups when teaching the class. Brewer (2007) explains that the environment is controlled by the teacher so no distractions are created. The teachers who do this have more authority, or power, in the classroom. They create the rules. They choose what is rewarded and what deserves a punishment. They do this to shape the behavior of the students. They want to focus in the intellectual development of the students as well. This was popular in between 1870s to around the 1960s (Brewer, 2007).

Corporal punishment, to some, is the abuse of the teacher's authority. There is eleven states that use corporal punishment in their schools (Beth et al., 2005). Researches have found that corporal punishment is ineffective (Beth et al., 2005). It does not teach students positive

behavior and promotes hitting as a problem solver. Corporal punishment can mentally hurt a child. Corporal punishment lowers moral standards for teachers. Teachers who use corporal punishment, parents and teachers usually used corporal punishment (Beth et al., 2005). Most schools that have corporal punishment are usually found to have a majority of conservative Protestants. This is one way teachers have not lost authority in the classroom but may abuse their authority.

There are negative effects of learner-centered classrooms. Teachers sometimes allow the students to have too much say in the classroom. If that occurs then students can behave badly because they have too much freedom, causing the classroom to become noisy (Which is best, 2016). Also, some people believe that the teachers then become too involved with student's lives. I was not able to find statistics on this, but I have had multiple people tell me this was a reason for teachers to seem like they have less authority. By giving students a lot of responsibility in the classroom, teachers sometimes become disappointed when students do not take that responsibility seriously. For example, if a student repeatedly forgets to do his classroom job or does not do it because they do not like it, it will become frustrating as a teacher. Since the teacher is teaching more individually, students have a chance of missing important information (Which is best, 2016). Another downside to learner-centered classrooms is when teaching a new topic it is difficult to not have a teacher-centered lesson. This is when the teacher gains the authority of the classroom again.

There are also some negative characteristics of teacher-centered classrooms. Teachers who use teacher-centered classrooms can sometimes be boring and students do not pay attention as well, depending on the age group. Students may not have as much respect for teachers if they

do use the corporal punishment method. Students are not interacting so they can become unengaged and not comprehend all the important factors of the lesson. For example, if teachers are going through a PowerPoint, I know I would get bored, sometimes doodle, and stare off at nothing. If students are not as engaged, they will not be able to retain as much information or miss important information (Which is best, 2016). Lectures and techniques like that could be helpful for those who are audio and visual learners, but if they are bored, students will not stay focused. When students are always working by themselves, they may not develop proper social skills (Which is best, 2016).

I have also found that this study is not a current study. I found more studies done in the 1960s than I have found from 2005 to present and very few from 2005 to present. I have found books from the 1960's and years before that about teachers having power. For example the books *Patterns of Power* by Thomas E. Linton and Jack L. Nelson that has a copyright of 1968 and the book *Education as Power* by Theodore Brameld the has a copyright of 1965. This could be because power is not as important to day as it used to be. The cause of this could also be because this is still the transition period from student teacher-centered teaching to learner-centered.

The definition of authority by Google, the power to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience, that I mentioned earlier is shown in teachers. They provide rules and enforce those rules. Teachers make decisions no matter if it is a learner-centered classroom or teacher-centered classroom. From my class observation of Mrs. Cianci's fifth grade class, students are less respectful. She says that society just does not raise children the same way they used to. I have read many times in many different books, that teachers want to teach students because they want to instill the love for learning they have in children. In other words, yes

teacher do care a lot about their students, making them an effective teacher. In conclusion, I have found that today's age is trying to do a more learner-centered teaching style. I have found that learner-centered teaching creates more respect because they are trying to teach positive behaviors instead of the teacher-centered way of punishment. I have also noticed that a lot of the learner-centered strategies are used more in early childhood classrooms. Teacher-centered strategies are better for high school students because, I like to think most although not all, have learned how to behave properly. Although both have negative characteristics, students tend to be more engaged about learning when they can work with classmates and have more say in the classroom, so student-centered is in favor for teaching students at any age. Student-centered lessons may be more tricky for high school students but it is still possible.

Resources

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