

Eight Descriptors of a Learner Centered Class

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Abstract

Eighty-two (82) professional educators who attended the *1998 Constructivist Design Conference* created the following list of descriptors of a Learner Centered Class. Their work was facilitated by leaders of the *Institute for Learning Centered Education* over a two-day period at the conference. The concepts developed through the exercise continue to guide teachers and school administrators interested in developing learner-centered classrooms and learner centered schools.

Introduction

Eight descriptors of a learner centered class were articulated in 1998 by 36 classroom teachers and 45 facilitators at the summer constructivist conference of the *Institute for Learning Centered Education*. The teachers represented 13 school districts participating in a Targeted Instructional Staff Development grant as part of a year-long initiative to create models of learner centered classrooms in their schools. On a Sunday afternoon, the 45 conference facilitators reached consensus on what they felt were descriptors of a learner centered classroom. The following morning, the 36 teachers created their own descriptors. Finally on Monday afternoon, the teachers were shown the descriptors developed by the facilitators and were asked to reconcile their own descriptors with those of the facilitators. Their consensus on eight descriptors is what resulted from this two-day process.

It is suggested to administrators and staff developers that a good activity for part or all of a staff would be to challenge them to create their own descriptors, and then share the following eight descriptors and ask the people with whom they are working if they want to refine their own list after reviewing these eight.

Eight Descriptors a Learner Centered Class

1. The **classroom** will be appealing in that it is comfortable, colorful, and stimulating. It will allow for flexible grouping and demonstrate an immersion environment, rich in resources, with standards and student exemplars that meet those standards on display.
2. **Learner behaviors** will demonstrate a high level of on-task engagement including effective use of resources and peer teaching. Learners' knowledge of standards for quality work is evident by the amount and calibre of student initiated work.

3. The teacher(s) acts as both facilitator and member of the **community of learners**. The teacher's lesson/unit plans provide options and accommodate the variety of learning styles and intelligences. The teacher provides training and guided practice on classroom procedures such as cooperative learning, peer review, rubric design, and journal writing.
4. Learning is **integrated** in that it is interdisciplinary and students can see applications for their learning beyond the classroom. Investigations and information linked to learning standards for Career Development and Occupational Studies are incorporated. A variety of learning modalities are integrated such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, investigating, problem solving, and hands-on kinaesthetic learning.
5. A **high quality of work** is expected from all and elicited through use of rubrics with clear connections to standards and designed with student input. Parents are aware of rubrics and occasionally become assessors along with peers, teachers, and the students themselves.
6. Multiple opportunities are provided for learners to **reflect** on their processes and products. This includes linking to prior knowledge, journaling, and using formative rubrics for revision purposes.
7. A sense of community is fostered in an environment of **collaboration and teamwork** through cooperative learning and partnerships within and beyond the classroom. Communication with administrators is on-going and includes invitations to visit the classroom.
8. **Technology** allows students to independently research, invent, create, tabulate, analyze, and collaborate inside their school environment and with others outside of their environment. Technology allows educators to record individual student results efficiently, manage time more effectively, access research, and collaborate with colleagues.