Assignment #1: Instructional Strategy Trade Fair Proposal

Jana McMurray

Student Number: [REDACTED]

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Professor Jane Cudmore, MA

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Teacher-centered instruction, according to Reigeluth and Carr-Chellman, is “an instructional approach in which the teacher is the primary delivery channel for instructional content—often through presentation and lecture (p. 37). Although the current education landscape seems determined to write off teacher-centered instruction as outdated and ineffective, I would posit that it still has a very real and very important place in the classroom – and particularly in the classrooms’ of new post-secondary students. The purpose of this proposal is to position teacher-centered instruction as a valuable and foundational approach that can and should be used effectively in adult learning environments, thereby making it more than worthy of inclusion in the Instructional Strategy Trade Fair.

Relevance to Adult Learning Environments

Teacher-centered instruction, when done well, can be extremely relevant and useful in adult learning environments because it produces:

- a positive example that can be modeled,
- a foundation that encourages growth and development, and
- a safe space to adapt to new and differences educational approaches.

Modeling

Education consultant Mary Minter (2011) identifies the primary characteristics of teacher-centered instruction as a focus on the instructor in terms of speaking, answering questions, choosing topics, and evaluating student learning (p. 55). Many adult learners, and particularly ‘new’ adult learners, need to see these characteristics modeled by an experienced adult educator before they can feel comfortable and capable of performing
tasks like public speaking or peer evaluation. Adult learners who find themselves in a new learning environment are often without the knowledge and skills necessary to take full control of their learning. Teacher-centered instruction can create this foundation of knowledge and skill.

**Foundation Building**

According to Minter (2011), it is the job of the instructor to “determine the developmental and commitment level of the students regarding the subject matter, student experience, and maturity” (p. 58). When learners are found to be at the lower level, as many students new to post-secondary education are, teacher-centered instruction techniques like lecture and presentation are recommended to provide the foundation, in both content and learning skills, necessary for students to play a more active role in their learning. With this foundation in place, the adult learning environment then becomes a safe place in which to introduce new instructional approaches and techniques, including those that place greater responsibility on the learner.

**Safe Platform for Adaptation**

In their 2010 study, Ioakimidis and Myloni found that first term college and university students in Greece had a clear preference for teacher-centered instruction because “it has been going on for many years, and students since elementary school have been socialized and educated through it” (p. 303). This suggests that students coming from high school to post-secondary education are both familiar and comfortable with the characteristics of teacher-centered instruction and that a sudden, radical change in approach may not be in the students’ best interests.
While this does not necessitate that teacher-centered instruction is the only method to employ in post-secondary and other adult learning environments, and certainly it should not be, it does bring to light a clear need for a degree of consistency during the transition from traditional pedagogical approaches to more complex androgogical approaches.

**Rationale for Inclusion in the Trade Fair**

Because of the useful role teacher-centered instruction can play in adult learning environments in terms of modeling, building, and practicing positive learning behaviours, it deserves to be revisited. It need not be treated as an archaic throwback to a bygone era. The life skills developed in response to teacher-centered instruction techniques are still valuable today. Active listening, effective note taking, and longer attention spans are only a few of the skills that are being eroded as effective teacher-centered techniques are abandoned.

Teacher-centered instruction does not need to exist in a vacuum. Although teacher-centered instruction is often placed in opposition to student-centered learning, a 2007 study by Jan Elen et al. found that, “according to students, student-centeredness and teacher-centeredness are not conflicting, but mutually reinforcing features of a learning environment. When properly combined they contribute jointly to its quality” (p. 115).

Given the fluidity of the student-centered and teacher-centered continuum, it stands to reason that an effective adult educator will be able to move smoothly back and forth between both approaches, often several times, in a single lesson. This demands that adult educators develop a strong foundation in teacher-centered instruction, making its inclusion in the Instructional Strategy Trade Fair both valuable and necessary.
Conclusion

As I see it, teacher-centered instruction is at the heart of all other educational approaches because good educators must always be ready and able to make themselves the effective center of a learning environment when the need arises. Given that this need arises more frequently in the classrooms’ of ‘new’ adult learners, who need the models, the foundations, and the practice in positive learning skills, there is a clear benefit to returning to teacher-centered instruction and exploring all that it can offer adult learners.

It is my belief that I have created a strong case for including teacher-centered instruction in the upcoming Instructional Strategy Trade Fair and I look forward to expanding on this theme over the next several weeks!
References


