

# Creating an Environment to Enhance Faculty Adoption of Student-Centered Teaching Strategies

Dr. Connie Corrigan, RN Ed. D., CNOR(E), CST  
Bucks County Community College

## Abstract

Student-centered pedagogical techniques have long been espoused as methods helping students retain knowledge. Ensuring that faculty members have the tools they need to develop and utilize these techniques is equally important. A strategy for maintaining enthusiasm over time will encourage faculty participation and make successful cultural change more likely. The study was conducted to identify educator perceptions of changes needed to become adept at student-centered pedagogy. The study focused on concepts, thoughts, feelings, and/or situations that enhanced or deterred an educator during the transition to a student-centered teaching environment.

## Materials and Methods

A phenomenological study was conducted with 6 educators from a small, private college in Pennsylvania who all indicated they had transitioned to student-centered techniques within their classroom. Each faculty member taught in face-to-face classes in either nursing or general education courses. Each faculty member participated in at least two semi-structured interview sessions with the researcher. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was performed to identify participant experiences.

## Contact

Dr. Connie Corrigan  
Dean, Health Sciences  
Bucks County Community College  
275 Swamp Road  
Newtown, PA 18940  
215-497-8717



## RESULTS

The interviews reviewed several commonalities regarding influences on adoption of student-centered techniques, challenges to overcome to implement the strategies, and the need to identify and “act the part” of a student-centered instructor.

A faculty member incorporating student-centered strategies must feel that successfully transmitting knowledge is part of his or her role identity (De Simone, 2001). In the creation of role identity, faculty members develop their own definition of student-centered teaching, and while there are common themes to each definition, each one is unique in its perspective of sharing the educational arena with students (Swaner, 2012). Recommendations from the study participants which can contribute to that success are to have not only subject-matter expertise but flexibility and a good understanding of technology. Lieff et al. (2012) identified that **faculty development** was important to the development of a faculty member’s role identity, and that **administrators must support the development and practice of new techniques**.

Heinrich and Oberleitner (2012) note that the most successful faculty members are those who surround themselves with supportive and mentoring colleagues. Several participants described the networking of a department where ideas are shared for different techniques. A common problem for the study participants was identifying a starting point for developing that ideation which would become the impetus for the in-class activities. This can be overcome through diligent exploration of internet sites, faculty development sessions, and discussions with peers.

It is equally important that students are prepared to enter the classroom. A student who doesn’t come prepared will be frustrated because of not having a grasp on the material. Students do not inherently understand that engagement exercises in a class help to stimulate learning (Dewey, 1900). Successful student-centered teaching requires a communication of expectations. Another challenge is the perceived student indifference (at best) or hostility (at worst) to the use of student-centered techniques. Hains and Smith (2012) also found that student resistance can be strong. They compare the process of students assimilating to student-centered teaching to grief assimilation (“shock, denial, strong emotion, resistance and withdrawal, surrender and acceptance, struggle and exploration, return of confidence, and integration and success” p. 361). Drawing from the assertion of Poore-Pariseau (2009) that administrators are responsible for educating the faculty to be experts in education and pedagogy, then the **administration should also be responsible for educating the students** to understand the need to incorporate student-centered teaching methods and how it benefits the students’ outcomes. The institution could assist instructors by educating students about the importance of preparing for classes when student-centered activities are planned through admission practices and first-semester activities.

During the interviews, the participants noted a variety of factors that frustrated their attempts to successfully incorporate student-centered techniques into their courses. Johnson et al. (2009) showed that faculty comfort with new pedagogy is important to successful implementation. Some areas where faculty need more support are in balancing the ability to cover all the required information with the need to incorporate student-centered techniques. Faculty worry about not spending enough time on student-centered teaching techniques and would like to be able to do more without sacrificing the content.

Administrators are important influences for some faculty when transitioning to a student-centered style. **Administrators should think about classroom design** by providing rooms which promote group discussion and activities. Grouped tables and multiple whiteboard surfaces would be beneficial to enhancing student-centered teaching techniques.

Osman, et al. (2015) identified a need for adequate faculty development to ensure faculty members feel competent to utilize student-centered teaching techniques. **Campus administrators should ensure adequate finances for conference attendance and/or tuition reimbursement** to sustain momentum in developing knowledge or eliminating knowledge deficits. Development of a mentor program specifically aimed at pairing faculty experienced in using student-centered teaching practices with new faculty or those interested in pursuing a new pedagogical style would enhance the role identity of both participants. Additionally, mentoring may be considered service to the college and could be positively viewed for rank and promotion considerations.

## Conclusions

Although faculty find it easiest to talk about what happens in a student-centered classroom (flipped classrooms, group discussion, scenario building, etc.), the act of becoming a student-centered educator has both internal and external influences. The instructor must want to become involved with student-centered pedagogy but once that decision is made, there are a variety of influences as to whether or not the instructor continues to move in that direction. **Having supportive colleagues** is one strategy that can sustain educators as they transition. Institutions who **provide time and resources** for instructors to connect will prevent feelings of isolation. **Ensuring student preparation** is also a key to success. Support from both the instructor and the institution will be important to a successful transition. **Class size** is also an important consideration. The strategies work best when an instructor can work with each group of students at least once during the class time. Ensuring smaller class sizes or incorporating team teaching techniques can also lead to success in incorporating the strategies. Faculty will also need **sufficient preparation time** to develop in-class activities and to assess the student work and it is important that administrators provide this support. While technology is not required for student-centered teaching to be successful, using any type of technology will mean that faculty must be competent and the institution must be able to support the in-class requirements either through internet access or specific software/hardware requirements. **Administrators will need to ensure that the college is ready for such an undertaking.**

## References

- De Simone, D. M. (2001). Identity of the university professor is formulated over time requiring self-discovery followed by being an intellectual scholar and teacher. *Education* 122: 283-295.
- Dewey, J. (1900). *The school and society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gilis, A., Clement, M., Laga, L., and Pauwels, P. (2008). Establishing a competence profile for the role of student-centered teachers in higher education in Belgium. *Research in Higher Education* 49: 531-554. DOI 10.1007/s11162-008-9086-7
- Hains, B. J., & Smith, B. (2012). Student-centered course design: Empowering students to become self-directed learners. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 35(2), 357-374. DOI: 10.5193/JEE35.2.357
- Heinrich, K. T., and Oberleitner, M. G. (2012). How a faculty group's peer mentoring of each other's scholarship can enhance retention and recruitment. *Journal of Professional Nursing: Official Journal of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing*, 28(1), 5. doi:10.1016/j.profnurs.2011.06.002.
- Johnson, A., Kimball, R., Melendez, B., Myers, L., Rhea, K., and Travis, B. (2009). Breaking with tradition: Preparing faculty to teach in a student-centered or problem-solving environment. *PRIMUS* 19 (2), 146-160. DOI: 10.1080/10511970802409164.
- Lieff, S., Baker, L., Mori, B., Egan-Lee, E., Chin, K., and Reeves, S. (2012). Who am I? Key influences on the formation of academic identity within a faculty development program. *Medical Teacher*, 34(3), e208-e215.
- Osman, S. Z., Jamaludin, R., and Iranmanesh, M. (2015). Student centered learning at USM: What lecturer and students think of this new approach? *Journal of Education and Practice* 6 (19): 264-277. ISSN 2222-288X (Online).
- Poore-Pariseau, C. (2009). Should faculty members be exempt from a mandate to receive instructional design training because of their rights under academic freedom? *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 7(3), 223-230. doi:10.1007/s10805-009-9073-4.
- Swaner, L. E. (2012). The theories, contexts, and multiple pedagogies of engaged learning: What succeeds and why? In D. W. Harward, & A. P. Finley (Eds.), *Transforming undergraduate education: Theory that compels and practices that succeed* (pp. 73–89). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.