Five Ways to Teach Students to Be Learning Centered, Too

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By Carl S. Moore, PhD 9/19/2016

Have you ever wondered if your students are as concerned about their learning as you are? If you prioritize student learning, you may be the only person in your classroom with that goal. Learning-centered teachers seek to coauthor classroom experiences with their students, whereas students may seek only to be taught passively. How might you inspire your students to share accountability for their learning? These five considerations can help you teach your students to be learning centered, too.

- **Encourage students to view themselves from a capacities and growth mindset ("I can learn with adequate effort and use of appropriate strategies"), rather than a fixed or deficiencies mindset ("I'm just not smart enough").** For example, instead of accepting a struggling student's mindset that "I just can't do math," the instructor can help the student understand the importance of time and practice.
- **Coach student success by encouraging and rewarding hard work.** Students possess a wide range of learning preferences that allow them to be successful in some classes but not others, depending on the course content and context. If students view their dispositions as "muscles," where some are stronger than others, instructors can more readily build their academic potential.
- **Provide students with ample active-learning activities.** Break up your lectures with activities that get students working with the content, both in and out of class. For example, have students create diagrams/graphic organizers to help improve their understanding of how concepts relate to each other. Additionally, field trips and online modules can provide a range of opportunities to help solidify the material outside of class. Providing students with a menu of optional assignments allows them to reinforce, practice, and learn content in a way that is more aligned with their interests.
- **Build "learning how to learn" outcomes into your course.** Fink's work on significant course design provides key considerations for teaching students how to learn. He proposes that students' educational experiences will be strengthened if there is a focus on building universal skills for approaching learning opportunities. These acquired competencies will help them in your course and beyond.

- **Provide students with structured opportunities to think intentionally about the cycle of learning.** The authors of the book *How Learning Works* recommend building a cycle into your pedagogy in which students assess the demands of tasks, evaluate their own knowledge and skills, plan their approach, monitor their progress, and adjust their strategies as needed. Providing students with these opportunities not only teaches them how to become learning centered, but also gives them techniques that can help them monitor their learning processes in your course, the next, and beyond. For more specific approaches, check out the book *Using Reflection and Metacognition to Improve Student Learning*.

When we broaden our approach to implementing learning-centered methods, we have the potential not only to inform how students approach tasks, but how they view themselves as learners. The previous strategies are just a sample of the many ways you can better align students with your efforts both to prioritize and enhance learning in your classroom. You might also consider reading the book *Creating Self-Regulated Learners,* which provides helpful details for how to integrate some of the ideas mentioned here into your own strategies and designs.

Knowledge is a great gift, but teaching students to be learning centered is a gift that keeps on giving.

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