

## **LEARNER-CENTRED LANGUAGE TEACHING: TEACHER – LEARNER INTERACTION FORMATS**

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The recent interest shown in learner-centredness in language teaching, apparent in concepts such as learner autonomy, self-directed learning, or teacher-student partnership in syllabus design, revolves around a redefinition of the role students can play in their learning of a language. In a learner-centred approach, students are seen as being able to assume a more active and participatory role than is usual in traditional approaches. Logically, however, student roles cannot be redefined without a parallel redefinition of teacher roles – the issue that is much less often pointed out. It is this aspect of learner-centredness that this paper looks at: the research focus is the role of learning councillor which the teacher has to assume in a learner-centred approach, and the responsibilities which this role brings with it.

Definition of 'learner-centredness' as a concept is often complicated by the fact that the term is used to express at least four related, but clearly distinct perspectives on language teaching .

In terms of an approach to activity organization, learner-centredness relates to a way of organizing classroom activities. The basic idea is that learning activities will be more relevant if it is the students, as opposed to the teacher, who decide on the conceptual and linguistic content of these activities. It is also assumed that students' involvement and motivation will be greater if they can decide how activities are structured.

The humanistic movement stresses the importance of qualities such as understanding, personal assumption of responsibility, and self-realization. Consequently, from the humanistic perspective, language learning is seen as an activity which involves students as complex human beings, not 'simply' as language learners. Language teaching should therefore exploit students' affective and intellectual resources as fully as possible, and be linked into their continuing experience of life.

To put the issue into the perspective of practical necessity, it's worth highlighting that in recent years there has been considerable interest in learner autonomy and self-direction. There can be a number of reasons for this, e.g. students may not have sufficient free time to follow a standard teacher-led course, or budgetary restrictions may place limits on staff-student contact time. Faced with real-world constraints of this nature, the teaching profession has looked for new approaches to teaching which allow students to attain their goals with less direct teacher support.

The curriculum design perspective suggests that curriculum design can be seen as a negotiative process between teachers and students. In this view, decisions regarding the content as well as form of teaching can be made at classroom level via consultation between teachers and learners, which differs significantly from traditional approaches to curriculum design where these decisions are made by 'outside' experts such as course planners.

One of the basic principles of the Council of Europe's language teaching policy claims that the intentions and resources of the learner should be the controlling factor for reaching proper decisions as to what he should learn and how he should learn it. Gearing language teaching in this way has a number of implications for the teacher, who will need to:

- get to know students well enough to be able to understand their intentions (what they need and would like to do) and their resources (what they are able to do);
- help students clarify their intentions and develop their resources;
- channel students participation in a pedagogically useful direction.

From the students' point of view, learner-centred approach involves the development of awareness in the following areas:

- self-awareness as a language learner (motivation to learn the language, understanding of the amount of effort a learner is willing to put in etc.);
- awareness of learning goals;
- awareness of learning options;
- language awareness.