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Teaching & Learning Bulletin

volume seventeen
2012

Student-Centred Learning

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
UNIMAS

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Dean's message

With all the attention given to Outcome-based Learning of late, the conventional approach to learning and teaching, which is mostly "teacher-centred", has almost lost its glory. The Outcome Based Education (OBE) curriculum, which is beginning to be implemented in UNIMAS, and in most public Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia today, emphasises on an eventual achievement of proposed learning outcomes which are clearly defined by eight learning principles proposed by the Malaysian Qualifications Framework. OBE also entails a gradual shift in learning and teaching approaches, from the one-to-many lecture format, to a blend of lectures, collaborative projects, field tasks, and interactive online materials. Students are now given more accountability and responsibility for their own learning, and consequently they are expected to demand for more freedom and space to expand and deepen their knowledge and skills in their areas of interest.

The basic concepts and principles of the Student-Centered Learning (SCL), as demonstrated in the learner-centered paradigm (LCP), is presented in the first article of this issue of INSIGHT. It discusses the impact of using SCL in higher education, particularly to gear university students to become employable in the current job market. The second article challenges lecturers to reflect upon their personal teaching beliefs and their readiness to change in their approaches to their curriculum delivery in the classrooms. It is suggested that belief plays a fundamental role in motivating lecturers to use SCL in their university classrooms.

The third article focuses on Active Learning, and how it can be achieved by implementing SCL. The conceptual and actual experiences of Active Learning are shared, to provide perspectives for those who are keen to try. The use and practice of self-reflection in the learning process is also emphasised. The fourth article highlights a number of challenges that were experienced in teaching Nursing, a programme that has used Problem-based Learning (PBL) for many years at the university. The fifth article talks about the use of movies as a teaching resource to enhance participant-centred learning. The sixth article reports on results of an audit (Academic Program Audit Project 2008) carried out by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) on UNIMAS in 2008, to assess the quality of academic governance, and teaching and learning support services, both of which are indicators of our ability to implement and sustain SCL environments to support Outcome-based Education in our curriculum. The following article focuses on "common failures" experienced by lecturers who have began to use OBE in their courses at the university. The article challenges us to make a significant effort to understand the SCL philosophy, to ensure a holistic adoption of the approach in university teaching. The final article is an extracted interview with a renowned expert in teaching and learning. The interview was done with Dr Marilla Svinicki, by the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association, a non-profit organisation with international membership. The article provides a perspective about SCL and how it can be applied in university teaching.

I wish to thank all the contributors to this issue of INSIGHT. Our next issue (Volume 18) will focus on the theme "Motivating Learners and Lecturers". We encourage writers to submit articles written on this theme but we also welcome articles on topics related to learning and teaching.

Thank you,
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Dean, CALM

Leap Into Student-Centred Learning (SCL) Paradigm: Students' Attitudes Towards SCL

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I have been teaching various subjects mostly in professional work environment for about 15 years, and now academically for the last few years; I have taught subjects that had to do with efficient workforce, productivity, time management, new product introduction, active listening, leadership, managing cross-cultural relationships, empowerment in the workplace, waste-free manufacturing (minimising waste), outsourcing, reengineering, root cause analysis, problem solving, team-centred work, project-centred work, and now the student-centred learning (SCL). Over the years, I've learned through experience that whenever there is a new terminology out there, it usually means that a totally new methodology in the works soon replacing the previous method which is perceived to have inefficiencies or it is viewed by most professionals, academicians, teachers, or parents that the old method is not sufficient enough anymore to accomplish some of the goals in place or prepare today's students for the future. However, just like in any introduction of a new innovative product, a life-changing idea, or a brand new concept in teaching; a clarification is needed to clear up some of the confusion as to how, when, and to what extent SCL should be utilised by teachers and students.

What is SCL? If this question was directed to somebody who has heard this term for the first time in his/her life might logically guess that what's meant by SCL is a method in which the learner (student) is actively involved (centred) in the learning process compared to another given situation where the student is not centred meaning the student is in a passive mode just receiving information/instructions from his/her teacher as it would be in the case of teacher-centred learning (TCL). In SCL, instead of being told what to do by their teachers and given a set of instructions to follow, students are directly and actively involved in discovering new knowledge through experience where they often have to collaborate, cooperate, compete (at times), and share information with other fellow students. Although this style of learning could be considered by some students challenging (because SCL encourages students to use their imagination and full capacity to be creative, and sometimes it forces them to think outside the box), various research papers on the topic show that most students however prefer this type of learning anyway because they say that they feel flexibility and empowerment to use their current knowledge to invent new ways. This is not saying by any means that the students in SCL are totally left on their own to achieve learning by themselves; teachers still play an important role as a coach/facilitator to make sure that the students are organised and grouped well to work together. Probably the most challenging role of teachers in SCL is to develop creative ways to evaluate learning with the involvement of the students. The most positive part of this teaching/learning style is that teachers and students learn together as part of the same team.

Since the 1900s, an extensive variety of learning approaches have been used in business environments and in education; so, we really ought to look at some of these different types of learning styles to actually understand the advantage(s) and disadvantage(s) of SCL. Chickering and Gamson's research (as cited in Bonwell & Eison, 1991) suggested that students must do more than just listen. They must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. Most important, to be actively involved, students must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), the use of active learning techniques in the classroom is vital because of their powerful impact on students' learning. I have personally used this technique in many instances while I teach and I believe

its vitality and powerful impact on students' learning ability, however I must say that teachers do often face certain difficulties using active learning that are mostly related to space (classroom, lab, conference or meeting room), materials, or facility. An excellent analysis done by Huba and Freed (2000) compares teacher-centred and learner-centred paradigms. Maybe I can summarise their wonderful work by highlighting some of the critical differences in two very different paradigms. In teacher-centred paradigm (TCP), the teacher is in control of how information/ instructions are transferred to students who are just passive receivers of information; the teacher's primary role in the classroom is as the information giver and evaluator, and the form of assessment is done by objectively scored tests. However, in learner-centred paradigm (LCP), students are actively involved in the learning process in which the learning is evaluated by both teachers and students together. Students are encouraged to construct knowledge through collaborating, cooperating, and sharing information with other fellow students. LCP places great importance on generating better questions and learning from mistakes. Personally, the most visible difference in LCP on the contrary of the TCP is that assessment of student learning is done through subjective papers, projects, performances, portfolios, and others alike.

Collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of students working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product (Bruffee, 1984). I consider this type of teaching and learning like working in a team in a collaborative effort to accomplish whatever task is assigned to the team. Talking among group members is highly encouraged here because it is truly believed in this style of teaching that meaningful discussions between members of the group actually produce solutions and as a result learning occurs more naturally. Because there is a lot of talking involved in collaborative learning, one may think of this learning style as a social form of solving problems, completing tasks, or creating products or services. However, regardless of the amount of discussions or talking time generated among the group members, we still cannot totally disregard other important aspects of learning such as listening, taking notes, preparing for the class in advance, and actively taking part in the whole learning process.

In cooperative learning, students work together to achieve shared tasks or goals assigned to them by their teachers like as in collaborative learning. But here the difference in collaborative learning may be how students actually work towards accomplishing these specific goals. Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991) claimed that in the ideal classroom, all students would learn how to work cooperatively with others, compete for fun and enjoyment, and work autonomously on their own. According to Montagu (1966), without the cooperation of its members, society cannot survive, and the society of man has survived because the cooperativeness of its members made survival possible. Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991) asserted that teachers first need to understand how social interdependence created when goals are structured because this determines how students interact with each other and how a student's goal is affected by the actions of other students. If no interdependence between various actions exists, it could be an indication of missing connection between students' attempts to achieve their goals.

I should probably make one thing clear that the teacher or the student do not disappear in any of the teaching styles; their roles and their activities just take a different form. For instance, in SCL it does not mean that teachers stop lecturing and students start deciding how their courses are going to be structured or they will actually choose what they want to learn. It simply means that the role of the student in SCL will be more active and more involved; more is demanded from the student in order to do well in a class. Furthermore, the learning experience for the students will be through collaborating, cooperating, and sharing information with the other fellow students by which they will be able to build on their existing knowledge, acquire new knowledge, or invent different ways of doing things. In TCL, teachers decide what activity or exercise to assign to students and their role is to transfer information and to provide content coverage for the course. In SCL, students are actively involved in the learning process and they evaluate the outcomes together along with their teachers; students instead of being passive information receivers as in the TCL, in SCL they are problem solvers and they search for additional information to understand the concepts.

I certainly believe that the key role of higher education institutions is to provide learning rather than just transferring pure instructions. I also think that the times have changed and the requirements by the job market in the new millennium have

increased so much that the students cannot afford to be passive information receivers anymore and they need to become much more actively involved in the learning process, which is only possible through the application of the SCL. In TCL, teachers tend to just cover the subject matter by providing content to students and not encourage student involvement in their classes which then in a way forces students to memorise the material when they could be focusing on more quality and long lasting learning experience instead. In most countries, it seems like there is a major misalignment between basic skills that the universities in general are supposed give to students and the skill sets that are required by the job market once these fresh university graduates enter the job market searching for an employment opportunity. Besides, information technology starting with the Internet and all other wireless technologies are changing so fast and transforming peoples' lives so quickly that we may now have to consider managing information more than learning it.

In this article, I am not claiming or insisting that we have to totally throw away TCL which has been around for centuries, maybe even several thousand years. So many world renowned scientists, entrepreneurs, academicians, philosophers, politicians, artists, inventors, and other famous people who have changed the history with what they have done or accomplished are the products of TCL. The concept of SCL has been around for nearly half a century and no doubt that today's students need in their learning experience the kinds of elements that SCL provides in order for them to be ready with the right set of skills once they enter the job market after graduation. However, more work needs to be done to educate teachers and students about this learning paradigm called SCL because everybody seems to be confused. Teachers are asking a lot of "what" and "how" questions trying to understand how they are supposed to use this new learning concept in their classrooms and to what extent they can successfully implement SCL in the lectures. I am a pro SCL and I believe that it can have very powerful impact on how students achieve learning, but there seems to be other problems more associated with resistance to change and lack of incentives for anyone in the traditional sense of faculty to make that change. I am certain that teachers and students will be better of using SCL than other currently available learning/ teaching methods.

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Moving Learners from the Side to the Centre: A Belief Issue

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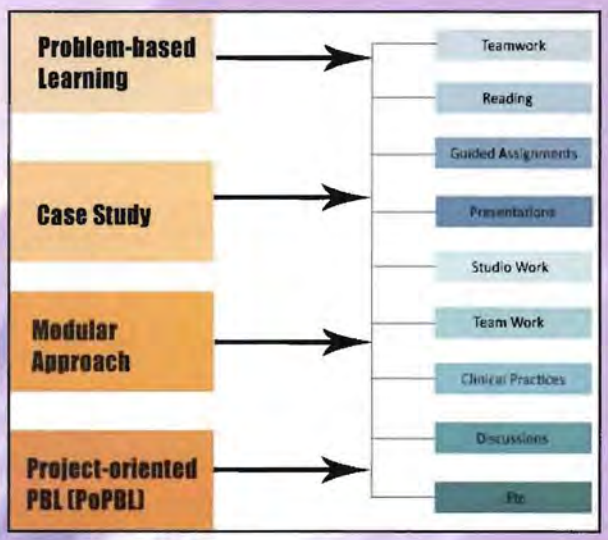

A renowned Italian educator, Maria Montessori, once said, "The greatest sign of success for a teacher...is to be able to say, "***The children are now working as if I did not exist***." The statement suggests her beliefs about the need for learners to take charge of their own learning and for the instructors to facilitate the attempt, not by being by the learners' side at all times, but by moving to the side as the learning experience progresses. Years have passed since these lines were spoken but the issue about the need for learners to assume a more dominant role in their learning process continues to be discussed and deliberated till today.

Recently, the call to have a more deliberate Student-Centred Learning (SCL) approach in instructional delivery at Malaysian higher education setting re-emerges, driven by the need to ensure university graduates would be able to achieve the targeted educational outcomes, which have been pre-determined for them by their respective academic programmes, by the time they complete their studies. A series of workshops has been conducted nationwide to expose university educators to the various ways in which SCL can be practised. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, there are four ways SCL can be implemented in university classrooms:

a) Problem-based Learning
b) Project-oriented Problem-based Learning
c) Case Studies
d) Modular Approach

It is assumed that by adopting such strategies, the learners would engage in a range of soft skills whilst attempting the student-centered tasks designed for them, thus eventually becoming more active and independent in their own learning experience. Such an experience would consequently prepare them, intellectually, emotionally and physically, for their future employment.

While the rationales for embarking on the move from a teacher-focused stance to a more student-centered one may have been clarified, to make the actual transition may not be an easy task to do, especially for university educators who have grown accustomed to the traditional instructional methods. Like any instructional innovations, the most critical factor that should also be addressed is the educators' epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning. Kagan (1992) defines beliefs as tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions which teachers or educators have about instructional practices. It is also regarded as the "provocative form of personal knowledge" (p.65), developed from years of experience in the practice. On the same note, Pajares (1992) views beliefs as the "individual's judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition, a judgment that can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say, intend and do" (p. 316). Thus, it can be deduced that epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning are the assumptions or conceptions upheld by educators about the nature of teaching and learning and how they should be carried out to achieve effective outcomes.

Grossman (1990) argues that the beliefs held by educators are representative of their conceptual map for instructional decision making. The design of this conceptual map, in general, can be classified into two, namely teacher-centered instructional practices and student-centered instructional practices, and as suggested earlier, both of these practices are contingent upon the beliefs held by the educators. Findings from research on beliefs and conceptions about teaching have shown evidence that the beliefs held by educators is likely to influence their behaviour or action (Pratt, 1992; 1998, Trigwell, Prosser & Taylor, 1994; Saroyan, Dagenais & Zhou, 2009; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). These arguments suggest that educators who wish to embark on any instructional innovations which come their way should first examine or reflect upon their personal views about the practice of teaching and learning. Does teaching mean transmitting information to learners based on a set of pre-determined instructional objectives which must be achieved and observed in learners or does teaching mean facilitating learners' meaning making by allowing them to have some control about what and how they should learn? As educators, are we ready to relinquish our status from the sole experts in content domain and assuming instead the role of facilitators or guides on the side? Are we prepared to design a learning environment that encourages the learners to go beyond the textbook and even the curriculum so that they are able to experience learning in authentic settings, with real life experts in the content domain they are specialising? Are we convinced that our university learners have developed sufficient maturity in higher order thinking to enable them to be independent in their learning and take full charge of their learning experience, with little or minimal guidance from us?

There is no doubt that SCL does have its advantages but educators need to do more than just believing in the advantages before adopting it in their instructional practices. They must first reflect upon their beliefs about teaching and learning, examine their views, and analyse whether the views raised are actually reflective of SCL beliefs. Higher education teaching and learning is unlikely to change until educators really believe in what they do and are willing to make changes to their instructional practices for the betterment of their learners' learning experience. As asserted by Palmer (1998), when educators do not know themselves, they would not know who their students are, thus, would only see their learners through a glass darkly, in the shadows of their unexamined life. When educators could not see their learners, clearly, they cannot teach the learners well.

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Student-Centred Learning Through Reflective Practice: A Teaching Philosophy

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Before joining the Centre for Language Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) as an academic staff, I was an English language teacher in a secondary school from 1987 to 1993. I left the school to work in a teacher's training college in 1993 as a teacher trainer. Four years later, along with thirty teacher educators from colleges and schools around the country, I was chosen to attend a three-month course at the University College of St. Marks and St. John in Plymouth, United Kingdom to start a five-year project called the Malaysian Trainers Development Programme for the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The ultimate goal was to help improve teaching and learning in the schools through better teacher education. It aimed to provide an avenue for continuous professional development of all teachers and teacher trainers in Malaysia. The project ended in 2002. When I joined UNIMAS, I was assigned to teach, not only undergraduate courses but also helped trained fellow faculty members on improving teaching and learning in higher education. I am currently a doctoral student majoring in Curriculum & Instruction with emphasis in Measurement & Evaluation. My dissertation focuses partly on improving teaching in higher education in Malaysia.

All in all, these experiences have helped influenced and shaped my own views of teaching and learning. They have become a platform to guide and inform me on what learning should be and how teaching should be carried out to accommodate effective learning. My view of learning is summed-up very well by Gamson and Chickering (1987, p. 3) who stated that:

> *"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves."*

This type of learning is called *active learning* (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) and it is considered 'real learning' by proponents like Adler (1982) who argued that true learning is not a passive act but an active one where students are involved in a process of discovery in which they take centre stage while the teacher is relegated to the role of guide on the side.

I also believe that the purpose of education is to teach learners how to learn and maximise their learning through a variety of learning strategies not only best suited to their learning styles (Dunn & Dunn, 1978) but also to their needs and abilities. I believe I can enhance their learning by developing their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills so that they are more able to do problem solving through creative and critical thinking. Coupled with this, I endeavour to employ differentiated instruction to enable me to plan purposefully to meet the needs of all my students. Differentiated instruction is based on the idea that any group of learners will have differing needs or abilities and that teacher should be able to fine-tune their instructions according to these differences (Tomlinson, 2003). As every learner has a style of learning that is unique to that individual learner, we are actually teaching more than one class albeit in the same room. My main goal in teaching is to ensure my students construct, reflect on, and assess their own learning to become independent learners and ultimately pursue life as lifelong learners. I design classroom experiences that invite students to examine, reflect, practice and re-examine what is to be learned in different contexts employing variety of activities and teaching materials based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984).

In a typical lesson, I allow students to explore past experiences by asking questions or giving them tasks that require them to recall. I would engage students to participate in self-evaluation or reflection that would

lead them to reflect on how these experiences affect them through self-awareness raising activities such as working individually or in pairs to complete a questionnaire or a checklist. According to cognitive theories of learning, schema activation such as these helps to link new information with previous knowledge (Anderson, 1984; Lefrancois, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

If the tasks were carried out successfully, I would present the concept or teaching point of the lesson as my next step. I always vary the methods I used for this purpose. I have used a mini lecture, a video presentation and sometimes, even a talk by a guest speaker. I endeavour to use technology as my educational tool so my teaching materials were often times also incidental teaching opportunities as I demonstrated their use. The plenary or question and answer forum that followed the presentation is used to explore the students' reflections and develop a better understanding of the concept. This is also to allow linkage between received knowledge which is my input and their prior knowledge which is the past experiences that was recalled earlier on. This is in line with schema theory which claims that schema refinement technique such as this helps clarify new concepts and remove doubts in understanding (Anderson, 1984). New information should be linked to what is already known and mention the ways in which this might be useful in future applications. This is especially so if a clear summary is provided at the end of the session to get students to re-examine and refine concepts for better retention and understanding.

The next step is often followed by a "hands-on" activity to practice what they have learned. This is not only helpful in concretising learning but also crucial in retention learning because 10% of retention can be done by reading, 20% by hearing, 30% by seeing, 50% by seeing and hearing, 70% by saying but 90% of what is retained can be done by saying and doing. It was Sophocles in the fifth century B.C. who said, "One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it - you have no certainty until you try."

I often find it useful to make use of small groups to carry out most of the activities. Fink (2004) advocated the use of small groups in teaching because it is an effective way to introduce active learning in the classroom. I encourage collaboration and insist on respect for individual differences. I acknowledge and respect diversity in language, and socio-cultural backgrounds of my students to demonstrate how to help them have equal access to quality education. I strongly believe that shared experiences and understanding is invaluable in helping students to concretise and reinforce their learning. Making links to new knowledge and insights are often best facilitated when there is cooperation and collaboration between learners. "Iron sharpens iron" as the old adage goes. In small groups, I often observe members engaging in teaching others as they struggle to explain what they know about the new concept. I often say to my students, "Teaching is learning twice". Besides, instructions that provide group learning activities to allow learners to interact and solve problems will lead learners to have respects for others' opinion when trying to solve problems because each individual has different learning styles and preferences.

In order to achieve maximum learning based on the approach described above, my ideal class size is a group of 20 to 30 students of equal number in its gender distribution who are both active and reflective individuals willing to take on any task or challenge given at hand. If the class is too big, it is very difficult for me to manage the multiple activities that I require to make my teaching technique more effective. I always have a preference for students who come to the class because they want to and not because they have to. The right attitude is extremely crucial for all my students to have to help me manage my classroom. I can reasonably bring about change in students' knowledge, ability and skills within a time frame that is normal for a course but to change an attitude problem that has taken root for years is a task that stretches beyond my ability and training. Sometimes, I find myself spending more time dealing with difficult students instead of paying more attention to those who truly need my help. I aim to avoid that if at all possible. I usually do this by laying the ground rules right from Day 1.

I work best when I have developed a friendly classroom atmosphere because the best way to conquer their minds is to win their hearts first. Experts agree that creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and support in the classroom is important so that learners sense that they are in a safe environment to express concerns or ask questions (Wilen, Bosse, Hutchinson, & Kindsvatter, 2004). Therefore, my first move is to always show genuine concern and respect for every individual student. My students appreciated the fact that I know them personally and I try to remember each and

every one of them by name. In a group of 20 or 30 students, this is a relatively easy task to accomplish. To strengthen the relationship I must maintain rapport with the students at all instances while still maintaining a professional distance with them. I find that making use of their ideas and contributions in my teaching really is useful in winning their confidence in me as their instructor and mentor. The majority of my students are not as vocal or talkative as American students whom I taught when I was in the USA. Malaysian students have to be cajoled and gently nudged to speak out or contribute ideas in class. So, if they did venture into contributing an idea, I would make extra effort to use it in my explanation by also mentioning whose idea it was. To gain their confidence, I must not only be fair and accurate in my assessment of their learning but must vigilantly try to show them that I want to be fair to them. To maintain that confidence I must be strict and consistent in my evaluation of their work. For this particular aspect, I cannot let my guard down. When I failed to do this in the past, I often found it difficult to regain their confidence thereafter.

To my colleagues and students, I must be a role model by practicing lifelong learning in areas of my own personal growth and continuous professional development. My goal as a teacher is to become a reflective practitioner (Schon, (1983). According to this premise, as a reflective teacher practitioner, I should based my teaching on established theories and endeavour to constantly improve my skills through a meticulous process of self-reflection and employ current research to inform my practices. This process of self-reflection equips me with the knowledge of a wide array of possible methods to choose from and the ability to come up with creative ways to teach my students. My future would lead me to a teaching career which is guided by a continuous professional development cycle, coupled with reflection, to help make teaching an exciting and rewarding endeavour for both me and my students. The real benefit of this concept of teaching is that as a teacher, I am free from the shackles of blindly following one prescribed method that comes along the way in this ever-changing and evolving world and that puts me at where I want to be, at the cutting edge of teaching and learning.

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Nursing Students' Perceptions on their Clinical Learning Environments

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Clinical practicum is a vital component of nursing education (Chan, 2002). Clinical practicum provides students a direct, real experience of nursing profession as they participate in routine nursing activities of the ward and working together with the staff (Chapman and Orb, 2000). It also provides students a chance to involve actively or directly in patients' care (Shin, 2000). More importantly, clinical practicum provides the opportunity for students to strengthen their clinical skills. Students are responsible to integrate theory into practice and to gain real nursing experiences while being facilitated by their clinical supervisors (Chan, 2002). An effective clinical practicum should focus on the students' needs, abilities, interests and learning styles to provide adequate exposure and achieve learning objectives in the clinical settings (Elliot, 2002). Despite being designed to provide a positive exposure to the students, it was often heard that students experienced problems and difficulties during their clinical practicum (McCleland & Williams, 2002).

As nursing education programmes are significantly increasing their undergraduate enrolment in order to ease the ongoing nursing shortage, nursing educators face the challenge to provide quality clinical learning experiences of the growing number of students. One of the most integral components in the nursing education programme is clinical placement. According to Elliot (2002), clinical placements provide students with the opportunity to experience nursing in the real world and enables students to put theory into practice. Chan (2003) stated that nursing students perceived the clinical setting as the most influential context for acquiring knowledge and nursing skills (Al-Kandari et al, 2009). Besides that, clinical placement fosters students in the application of knowledge skills and attitudes to clinical field situations. Hence, it is vital that valuable clinical time should be utilized effectively and productively. Zilembo & Monterosso in 2008 stressed the implication of practicing in an appropriate clinical learning environment at the proper time in order that theory and practice can complement each other (Al- Kandari et al, 2009).

In another perspective, several studies affirmed that undergraduate nursing students perceived their clinical learning environment as stressful and anxiety aggravating. Students have to adapt with unfamiliar ward surrounding and routine, which are complicated by the unfriendly staff, demanding patients and also the complexity of equipments (Elliot, 2002). Moscaritolo (2007) also highlighted that nursing students' clinical learning experiences are stressful which can be evaluated as *challenging or difficult to manage* and hence, they had encountered anxiety. Moreover, not many studies have focused on the perceptions of the undergraduate nursing students related to clinical learning environment, specifically from psychosocial perspectives. Such study offers insights into the clinical experiences at the undergraduate level and is important to the Malaysian undergraduate nursing programme because it has a major responsibility for meeting the demand of the profession in Malaysia and also other countries beyond Malaysia. Therefore, evaluating the students' clinical learning environment will provide useful feedback for clinical training and curriculum revision.

The challenge is often exaggerated by the limited number of health care agency sites available and the competition for the clinical sites among nursing programmes in an area. This situation forces nursing programmes to consider a wider variety of agency sites for the student clinical learning experiences (Berntsen, 2010). There is evidence that shifts in healthcare delivery, which accompanied the changes in healthcare setting, have directly affected upon how nursing is perceived in relation to various clinical specialties. The impact is seen as students become demotivated and having difficulties to find a place in the clinical environment and meaningful involvement as they learn to care for patient. According to Turner et al.

(2004), motivation is seen as influential in determining the success of clinical placements and has been linked to the interest of the students in the placement which is based on his or her overall development (Gillespie & Mclaren, 2010).

Many nursing students perceived the clinical experience as stress and anxiety provoking (Hosoda, 2006; Moscaritolo, 2009). They frequently felt dismay because as they are learning to provide care, they are also subjected to be concerned with reactions of nursing staff to their efforts. According to Windsor (1987), nursing students experienced difficulty in the early phase of their clinical posting such as filled with anxiety and obsession by the rules of task performance and difficult transition period where they struggled in identifying the roles of nurses (Hosoda, 2006). Furthermore, they have difficulty differentiating their roles of learner and worker. Inevitably, student nurses are shoved into the clinical area as short term members of the patient care team (Hosoda, 2006). Therefore, their position is inconsistent and their involvement in patient care usually is different from that permanent employees.

The evaluation of clinical teaching and learning has been of interest for many years. This is because the quality of the clinical learning environment is an essential factor to determine the quality of nursing students' clinical experience. Nurse educators should provide clinical placements that offer positive learning environment to support the achievement of clinical learning outcome (Al- Kandari et al, 2009).

There are many assessment tools that can explore and measure this issue thoroughly. It is the main framework for many studies of nursing in the clinical setting in relation to ward learning environment. Clinical Learning Environment Inventory (CLEI) is developed using the concept of classroom learning environment studies (Chan, 2003). It focuses on assessing the nursing students' perceptions toward their hospital-learning environment. It acknowledges that learning takes place in a dynamic environment where patient care is nurses' core business. It is a multifarious socio-cultural entity that offers a variety of opportunities to engage or disengage in learning, pertaining to students' first hand clinical learning environment experiences. The CLEI consists of 42 items, categorised into six scales which are personalisation, student involvement, task orientation, innovation, satisfaction and individualisation. The scale descriptors are as follow:

Personalisation	Emphasis on opportunities for individual student to interact with clinical teacher/clinician and on concern for student's personal welfare
Student involvement	Extent to which students participate actively and attentively in hospital and ward activities
Task Orientation	Extent to which ward activities are clear and well organised
Innovation	Extent to which clinical teacher/clinician plans new, interesting and productive ward experiences, teaching techniques, learning activities and patient allocation
Satisfaction	Extent of enjoyment of clinical placement
Individualisation	Extent to which students are allowed to make decisions and are treated differentially according to ability or interest

Source: Adapted from Chan (2002).

Several studies have utilised CLEI to explore the nursing students' perception of their clinical learning environment, specifically from psychosocial perspectives. The CLEI has been found to be consistent and its validity has been reputable in several countries such as Australia, England and in China (Perli, 2009). Perli (2009) had conducted an exploratory study on 232 Italian nursing students about their perceptions of their learning environment from three levels of the nursing programme. Nighty four percent of third year nursing students were overwhelmingly satisfied with the tasks done in the wards. Overall, the students perceived their clinical learning environment as good and agreed that practical work experience was useful and not a waste of time. The study showed that Italian nursing students have a positive perception of the clinical learning environment despite of there remains room for improvement.

The studies by Chan (2003) and Chan (2004) also revealed that students preferred a more positive and favourable clinical environment than they perceived as being actually present despite of the study have been conducted in two different countries. Furthermore, he has proposed that the actual clinical posting should be more harmonising with that preferred by the students to ensure the achievement of specific outcomes from it. Kandari et al. (2009) confirmed that the quality and type of clinical placement have a significant impact on the achievement of clinical learning outcomes and provide a strong base for students' development as future professionals.

In sum, it is imperative that clinical practicum should be carefully planned and individualised to facilitate students' opportunities to practice different tasks. As a prerequisite, it is obligatory to develop instruments for evaluating clinical learning environments so that students' perspective can be obtained to improve these learning environments and more importantly, to ensure better nursing education experiences.

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Using Movies as a Teaching Resource to Stimulate Participant-Centred Learning

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Recognising that teaching and learning is one of the core businesses in any university, a university-wide endeavour in the form of The Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning has been initiated since 2003 to train and enhance the knowledge and skills of new and untrained academics in the area of pedagogy and in the use of technology (CALM, 2003). The learning units in Module 2: Principles of Teaching and Learning broadly look at the underlying psychological concepts and phenomena in teaching and learning. Various theories of learning, cognition and learning, learning styles and capabilities, and teaching approaches and strategies are specifically discussed (CALM, 2003).

In an effort to consolidate the application and reinforcement of the diverse body of knowledge exhorted and discussed in Module 2 in various settings of teaching and training in addition to a commitment for an active instructional strategy to enhance participant-centred learning, the use of movies or moving images in the lecture room was attempted in the last learning unit of Module 2 on 25 May 2005.

The cinema (or movies) has been said to be a very valuable education resource that is able to supplement classical teaching methods and encourage critical thinking among students (Garcia-Sanchez, Fresnadillo & Garcia-Sanchez, 2002). In their work in Clinical Microbiology, Garcia-Sanchez et. al. found that the enormous flow of information, images, sounds, consequences, situations and points of views that it provides have been of great use, both in the spread of ideas and in training in infectious diseases and clinical microbiology.

This article looks at the implementation features and comments from the participants in this introductory attempt to use movies as a teaching resource to enhance participant-centred learning.

Method: The class of 34 participants was divided into five groups of 6 – 8 members each, each group being a heterogeneous mix of members from different faculties. Each group was assigned one movie* from the following list to view and comment on the teaching-learning principles portrayed (guided by a set of questions) and how these have led to effective learning (or performance):

- 'Racing Stripes', Warner Home Video, 2005
- 'School of Rock', Paramount Home Video, 2004
- 'Drumline', Twentieth Century Fox Home Video, 2003
- 'Patch Adams', Universal Studios, 2001
- 'The Miracle Worker' from Disney Studios, 2000

An example of questions for movie review

QUESTION	GROUP DISCUSSION FOR MOVIE REVIEW OF 'THE MIRACLE WORKER'
1	a. What were the disabilities of Helen Keller? b. Describe the interaction of Helen with her family before the arrival of Annie Sullivan.

2	Describe the background of Helen's family.
3	a. Who was the 'miracle worker'? b. Why was she called the 'miracle worker'?
4	What was needed by Helen to understand her surroundings and adapt her behaviour to the environment? Give reasons for your answer.
5	a. Why did Helen's mother and maid always give Helen a sweet each time she exhibited behavioural problems? b. In your group's opinion, was the sweet an effective moderator on Helen's behaviour? Why?
6	a. What do you think is the father's stand in bringing up and disciplining Helen? b. Why was Helen's stepbrother, James, antagonistic against Helen?
7	What were the teaching strategies of Annie Sullivan that have proved successful in training Helen?
8	Why was Annie Sullivan able to empathise with Helen on her predicament?
9	What are the various scenes in the movie that impact greatly on your group members and why?
10	What is the group's favourite dialogue and why?
11	As university lecturers, what lessons have you and your group members learned from this movie to apply in your teaching-learning roles and responsibilities?

A separate venue with screening facilities was assigned to each group. The approximate time duration of the exercise was 2.5 hours.

Comments from participants: Comments from individual participants, identified anonymously, were given below:

WNWH, FCS 'School of Rock'	Showing the movie was interesting and very practical, ... and a good technique to expose students to the real life experiences and teaching-learning situations. We learned theories and principles and also (their) application. I never knew that this movie involved teaching and learning theories....I fully understand and ready to apply all the theories and strategies learnt in (this course) to my students.
MHM, FMHS 'School of Rock'	The use of relevant movies is an innovative way to reflect (on) what we have been taught in Module 2. We can see how to "walk the talk". (This assignment) has crystallized the knowledge and stored it in my good memory.

NS, FACA "Drumline'	The movie is a very interesting way to learn. .. I picked many points of teaching and learning in this movie .. and (it) helped me to understand more about ways of learning. As a teacher and a student, I feel this is really beneficial. ...Some scenes were really uncomfortable to watch.
FHAR, FCS 'Drumline'	Using this movie and other movies is an interesting and creative way to assess (and reinforce) what have been taught to us.
LSP, FIT 'Drumline'	The movie is really appropriate for our session. (It) has inspired me (on) how a teacher can bring so much changes to learner and society. ... the movie .. reinforced what have been learned (in the) past few days, ... now everything (seemed) clear (to) me regarding the purpose of this program (module).
LNK, FCS 'Drumline'	The video was interesting and helpful. I recommend (using) Asian English movies (or with translation) as these would be closer to our students' backgrounds and values. ... you can play some snapshots of the video in class to demonstrate what you have discussed in class.
HIJ, FMHS 'Drumline'	It is really useful to use movie for learning purposes. While the room temperature is relaxing and enjoying, the movie portrays .. real presentations of theories that we have learned in the class. I like (this) particular movie because most of the scenes are circled in the development of learning and teaching matters. However, ..some of the sexual intimate scenes did not put us at ease as our group members composed of different gender. All in all, the movie is full of good lessons.
RH, FRST 'Miracle Worker'	...using video is an extremely valuable teaching strategy. Now I start to wonder where to find video/CDs about animal diversity, ..plan to show to my students (coming) July.
SAK, FRST 'Miracle Worker'	It is interesting and enjoyable to learn through this approach because it gives some examples of the theories and concepts that were taught in (the) lectures.
HH, FSS 'Patch Adams'	It is an enlightenment, using movies to enhance what you have stressed in class. (The teaching and learning strategies) are shown clearly on the film and if we follow (the show) closely, some important scenes will stay with us for some time. This strategy simplifies the whole process of teaching and learning, providing the audience learn and appreciate the values highlighted in the film.

SNLT, FENG 'Patch Adams'	(This) is an excellent movie to be presented as a reinforcement tool to understand Module 2 (better). The movie specifically concentrates on the struggle of a student (who is) passionate about his subject and is sceptical towards the conventional teaching principles, ... motivates us to understand our students better. The strategy of showing movies is an effective effort as we were in a relaxed atmosphere (while) presented with the teaching and learning theories, (and) jotted down related scenes .. to what we have learned in the class. We were able to understand the actual application of the theories in actual teaching session.
MAJ, FRST 'Racing Stripes'	The strategy of using video has inspired us to see the relevance of what we have learned and try to connect (these) with our experiences, through classroom theories. I have learned (much) through interaction and discussion among group members. It has promoted thinking and decision-making process besides fostering various viewpoints and opinions. This strategy is also useful for visual learners to recall back facts (from movies) and relate them with theories learnt. The utilization of video has been useful for developing and enriching knowledge, skills and attitudes by watching it. (Teacher's task in) selecting appropriate or related video is extremely important to get the message across.
PCH, FEB 'Racing Stripes'	The strategy of using movies enable us to understand the learning theories and principles better..... and greatly help us to reflect (on) what we have learned so far. We can appreciate better these principles and strategies through watching on the learning and teaching processes in the movie. In addition, the discussion among group members further stimulates our thinking and enhances our understanding on the subject matter. It put us into the active learning environment where we talk, listen, discuss and brainstorm in solving the problem. (Watching movie) is really a good demonstration on a combination of different teaching and learning styles, in which we learned through seeing (*visual*) and listening (*auditory*), we took down important points (*kinesthetic*), then we have group discussion (*problem-solving*) (where) each member voiced out his/her views (*critical thinking and communication skills*), the rest will comment (*peer evaluation and self-assessment*), (and) at the end, we agreed on some important ideas/views (*interpersonal and teamwork skills*), and most of the arguments are based on what we have learned in the lecture (*application and multiple perspectives*).

The feedback from the participants was generally favourable and that the exercise had been useful to reinforce ideas discussed in the lectures. At least three participants commented on the value of discussion in groups and that the movies had served as a means for beginning engaging conversations about important concepts and differing viewpoints, and in the process, develop critical thinking skills. It is important to note that at least two participants were inspired to use this resource in their own teaching.

Some participants highlighted the importance of selecting appropriate movies, relevant to the background and culture of the students, especially with regards to sexual scenes and excessive violence. Using of movie clips in tandem with lectures has been suggested as one creative way of using the images.

The moving image is a shared and vital global language, and clearly in this attempt, its power in highlighting salient features of the lectures and enhancing discussion and learning as directed by the participants themselves, has been demonstrated.

Application to students in universities:

The lives of the young people in our universities are informed and animated by the moving image (British Film Institute, 2000). Through audio-visual texts, they acquire an enormous amount of knowledge and experience and can document and communicate their learning in moving images, assembling and selecting evidence, making arguments or constructing hypothesis. It has been argued that the moving image can often be more appropriate that written texts or still images as a way of presenting ideas or processes, and for some students, it offers new ways of succeeding (*Ibid.*).

A variety of issues and themes can be explored using movies. Various genres of music can be explored through movies like "Honey", "School of Rock" and "Ray". Movies like "Outbreak" and "Lorenzo's Oil" look at different issues in medicine. Sports and its issues of teamwork, sportsmanship, cultural diversity, etc can be explored through "Drumline", "Miracle", "Bend it like Beckham", to name a few. The website www.geocities.com/sportsmovies/SPMD_Use_Tips.htm provided guidelines for using sports-related movies in teaching a selection of themes. Behaviour and training needs of mentally and physically challenged people can be extensively explored in "The Miracle Worker", "Loretta" "Forrest Gump", "I am Sam" and others. To RH of the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology (FRST), I would like to recommend "Animals are Beautiful People" for animal diversity and behaviour. Culture and its diversity, education and its processes and issues, citizenship, race relations, language, individual and gender identity, history are just some of the themes that can be explored in this medium to enhance participant-centred learning.

While there are many movies that are relevant to our curriculum's learning objectives, there are also many entertaining movies that have little or no educational content. For those interested to use movies for history, their historical accuracies have to be carefully attended to. As many movies are made to entertain rather to educate to draw in the big bucks, or in words of popular media, they present both entertainment and education as *edutainment*, it is important that the entire movie should be reviewed in advance to ensure there are no additional problematic scenes or to verify historical, medical or content accuracy.

Enthusiastic lecturers might see moving image material as more than just content to be added to the curriculum. Movies have their own complex and unique language which must be understood properly for these media to be used to their full potential. Technical and financial difficulties to access and use appropriate movies would have to be looked into for universities to develop both their critical and creative uses. Currently there is no specific guidelines of our local copyright laws with regards to the use of movies in the classroom. However, to avoid infringing any copyright issue, only lawfully made copies of the movies should be used.

* Synopses of these movies can be obtained by searching at www.amazon.com

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The Paradigm Shift Towards Outcome-based Learning – The APA2008 Project

by:
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1. Student Centered Learning

In simple terms, student-centered learning (SCL) is defined as an approach where students are to take responsibility of their own learning. An important pre-requisite of SCL is that lecturers must be clear to the students from the beginning what students are expected to learn. The lecturer plays the role of a facilitator, rather than sage on stage, to ensure the learning environment is conducive for the students. At the same time, the student must be willing to develop skills such as working in a team, finding information, thinking critically and communicating ideas. Such roles and responsibilities comply with the requirements of an outcome-based education. It is part of UNIMAS Strategic Planning from 2011-2015 to undertake a paradigm shift from the conventional lecturer-centred approach towards the student-centred approach, which is in line with the outcome-based education. The onus will be on the students to take responsibility of their learning.

2. The Academic Performance Audit Project (APA2008)

IN 2008, an Academic Performance Audit (APA) project was initiated by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA). It determines how much UNIMAS has achieved its mission and goals with respect to teaching-learning, identifies the strengths of the university and proposes recommendations for further improvements. The project aimed to benchmark the quality of Higher Education Providers (HEP) in Malaysia and a total of 59 public and private universities were involved.

MQA produced a guideline called the Code of Practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA) which sets the benchmarked and enhanced standards that all HEPs must comply with. The external auditors came to visit the various universities and produced an MQA External Auditor Report for each of them. The gist of their report is to evaluate whether or not the HEP has complied with the benchmarked standards.

This article reviews the outcomes of the APA process and evaluates UNIMAS readiness in shifting towards an outcome-based teaching-learning culture.

By virtue of the successful implementation of the APA2008 project by MQA, an audit visit was carried out between 8 to 12 March 2010 by a team of seven panel members who represented MQA (one of the panel members was a renowned academician from The Republic of Philippines). The auditors submitted a very positive report on UNIMAS as an institution of higher learning. They focused on the quality of teaching-learning and assessed UNIMAS based on the nine (9) Quality Assurance areas, which are:

QA 1 : Vision, Mission, Educational Goals and Learning Outcomes

QA 2 : Curriculum Design and Teaching-Learning Methods

QA 3 : Assessment of Students

QA 4 : Student selection and support services

QA 5 : Academic Staff

QA 6 : Educational resources

QA 7 : Programme Monitoring and Review

QA 8 : Governance, Leadership and Administration

QA 9 : Total Continual Quality Improvement

Table 1 summarises the number of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations made by the MQA auditor in relation to the 9 QA areas.

Table 1: Number of Commendation, Affirmation and Recommendation by MQA

Quality Assurance Area	Commendation	Affirmation	Recommendation
Area 1	2	1	1
Area 2	2	1	2
Area 3	2	1	1
Area 4	3	1	4
Area 5	0	2	4
Area 6	6	0	4
Area 7	1	1	2
Area 8	1	1	0
Area 9	1	0	0
Total	**18**	**8**	**18**

Based on the contents, these areas can be divided into four categories. Table 2 shows the four categories.

Table 2: The categories of the nine QA areas

Quality Area	Section	Category
1	Vision, Mission, Education Goals and Learning Outcomes	Mission, vision, goals and governance
8	Leadership, Governance and Administration	
2	Curriculum Design and Delivery	Programme related issues
3	Assessment of Students	
7	Programme Monitoring and Review	
4	Student Selection and Support Services	Teaching learning support services
5	Academic Staff	
6	Educational Resource	
9	Continual Quality Improvement	Improvements

Based on their submission, one can infer UNIMAS to have a high quality standard with respect to its governance and programme related issues. The QA that received the most recommendations are QA4,5 and 6. There is plenty of rooms for improvement for teaching learning support services.

Below are some of the extracts from the MQA External Auditor Report that reflects the shift to SCL:

i) The UNIMAS Centre for Academic Information Services (CAIS) is par excellence in providing student support services in terms of providing excellent reading privileges to 37,000 online journals, 466 printed journal titles, a book collection of 200,000 volumes and 1.3 million titles.

ii) Academic staff teaching capability improvement through the Postgraduate Diploma Teaching and Learning programme (conducted by CALM) in which academic members are equipped with necessary skills and knowledge to help students achieving the desired outcomes as planned in the curriculum;

iii) Comprehensive computerised systems for planning, implementing and monitoring the curriculum and learning outcomes through *e-Course Outline*, *Morpheus*, *e-markah*, *digital library*, and *InMinds*).

iv) The curriculum ensures students take direct responsibility for their own learning through innovative teaching-learning approaches as expected of Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) standards. A combination of both conventional and innovative methods such as lectures, tutorials, lab sessions, problem-based learning, projects, industrial training, advanced research and seminar services/colloquium for postgraduate students is used.

v) The curriculum requires students to apply and integrate the acquired knowledge, demonstrate clear understanding of the underlying principles and critically relate them to case studies, academic papers and reviews.

vi) The incorporation of electives and soft skills components into the overall curriculum prepare students not only for academic life but also equip them with life-long skills that are needed to discover, consolidate and generate knowledge.

vii) The language courses (conducted by the Centre for Language Studies) help students in improving their academic writing, professional writing and communication including presentation skills.

viii) The inclusion of computer skills enables students to use technology for various learning activities.

ix) In terms of student assessment, grades are based on students' activity in applying higher thinking skills and their ability to use knowledge. Final examinations place high emphasise on higher order thinking abilities (4^{th}, 5^{th} and 6^{th} level of Bloom's Taxonomy).

x) Various forms of assessment are used which include quizzes, assignments, projects and presentations and written examinations, and the forms of assessment used differ among faculties.

xi) The curriculum across the programmes has clear foci, such as acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes as well as development of writing, public speaking, critical, analytical, thinking, information-mining skills and teamwork.

All of the above remarks by our MQA External Auditors are clear manifestations that UNIMAS teaching-learning quality is moving in the right direction. UNIMAS has all the right ingredients needed to achieve academic excellence and provide an outcome-based educational system by 2015.

3. Changes on the ground

Several faculties have taken some actions on the issues raised in the report. In view of UNIMAS strategy to promote outcome-based approach, all the above comments must be translated into actions and further consolidated. In December 2011, Quality Assurance Department (QAD) had audited all the faculties and centres on the actions taken from the report. The following are some noteworthy actions by faculties:

i) Faculties engage their own students in various processes such as curriculum review, strategic planning, and teaching-learning survey.

ii) Faculties involve students, alumni adjunct lecturers and parents in reviewing their curriculum.

iii) Centre for Applied Learning and Multimedia (CALM) is in the process of getting MQA accreditation for the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching & Learning programme

iv) Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) has conducted the Graduate Assessment Project (GAP) to evaluate the performance of their graduates in the workplace.

v) Student exchange programmes are in place, for example, student exchange from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) with Osaka University for medical programme and University of South Australia for the nursing programme.

4. Conclusion

By taking concrete follow-up actions based on the MQA External Auditor Report, UNIMAS should be able to provide outcome-based education by 2015. In this regard, academic staff members are expected to play the lead role in assisting UNIMAS to shift from a lecturer-centered paradigm to a student-centered learning.

Why Student-Centred Learning is Hard to Implement

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Introduction

Over the past century, there has been a gradual shift in education from lecture-based teaching to the learner- or student-centred approach. Student-centred learning (SCL) is now a part of Unimas' KPI in Teaching and Learning, and every academic staff is expected to be capable of using one such approach in teaching. However, the adoption of an approach radically different from the traditional teacher-centred teaching is expected to be difficult. Hence it has been noted that SCL is commonly found in University policy statements but not necessarily transferred into practice (O'Neill & McMahoon, 2005). To effectively implement SCL, the common failures must first be understood and addressed.

Failure to understand the SCL philosophy

Firstly, many academic staff underestimate SCL as a method rather than a philosophy. As such, they try to introduce SCL within the framework of their traditional teacher-centred mindset. However, this is counterproductive because the philosophies underlying the traditional and student-centred approaches opposes each other. Barr and Tagg (1995) calls the traditional mindset the 'Instruction Paradigm' whereby knowledge can only be acquired when teachers transmit it to students. Knowledge is viewed as matter that can be delivered and students are regarded as passive vessels that ingest knowledge. The learning process is driven by the teacher who holds the knowledge. In contrast, the 'Learning Paradigm' of SCL assumes knowledge is acquired when the mind is actively linking and integrating information. The main driver of learning is the students themselves who have to actively discover and construct new knowledge. The role of teachers is to help facilitate this process by providing a learning environment with appropriate activities and resources. The emphasis is on deep learning and understanding for long term retention, not short term memorisation of large amounts of knowledge to regurgitate in content exams.

When staff fail to appreciate SCL's radical philosophy, they view it as a method that can be added onto their existing teacher-centred environment. At the heart of their thinking is that true learning only takes place when students listen to lectures. Hence they either continue on with lectures or else try to modify the SCL method so that it more resemble their teaching paradigm. For example, in problem-based learning, they will insist on giving lectures even if the content overlaps with PBL triggers, or arrange a post-PBL lecture to 'fill up' any knowledge gaps. Such practices reduces the PBL sessions into regurgitation of lecture notes and demotivates the students from putting effort in active learning (Sefton & Kwan, 2002). However, they do not see any problem because it fits into their concept of how learning takes place. But in so doing the students are prevented from leveraging on SCL's learner-centred philosophy such as active, self-directed learning and cooperative learning. They also become confused when in one course they are expected to be independent learners but in the next course they are regarded as passive vessels. This is the result of implementing two opposing philosophies simultaneously, and happens when academic staff with teacher-centred philosophy view SCL approaches merely as a teaching method rather than a whole-curriculum philosophy.

Failure to implement by directive

Academic staff may find the SCL approach very discomforting because it requires giving up their role as authoritative content experts to become facilitators of learning. Many are reluctant to lay down their collection of teaching slides and relearn how to teach in a new environment. They may express this in a variety of ways, including arguing against SCL at curriculum meetings, reintroducing lectures or modify SCL methods to suit their teaching paradigm.

Hence it is usually unsuccessful to introduce SCL on a voluntary or consensus basis. It has to be an institutional policy with the endorsement, and if necessary, the enforcement of the administrative authority.

A decision to introduce SCL must be accompanied by corresponding changes in staff compensation and how staff performance is monitored. Those involved in SCL methods must be suitably rewarded. There must be clear instructions for how workload involving SCL is to be converted into points that count towards the annual workload appraisal. Since the designation 'lecturer' implies a person who gives lectures, some staff may feel unimportant if they are giving less lectures than others. Others may create lectures just to increase their workload points. Staff can be motivated to involve in SCL if it contributes workload points more generously than the giving of a series of lectures.

Failure to train effectively

If a faculty or Centre wants to introduce SCL but lack of staff with appropriate training, it would be best to send staff to be trained via an attachment to a school with an established SCL programme. When McMaster University's pioneering PBL curriculum became known, staff from Maastricht and Newcastle universities spent months to years learning it at McMaster before returning to implement it at their own institution (Barrows, 2000). The lead time for crafting a new curriculum is usually in the order of a few years. Even prior to the implementation, there must be frequent and regular training workshops to teach the new learning paradigm. Initial staff hesitation can be overcome when there is sufficient training to enable them to function in the new learning environment.

To prevent staff from viewing SCL as just another method, the training workshops must begin with the SCL philosophy before going into methods. Staff must understand how SCL differs from teacher-centred philosophy and how that difference needs to be translated across every aspect of the curriculum. For example, since assessment drives the way students study, the assessment methods must also be changed to become compatible with the SCL approach. If the objective of the training is to encourage SCL, then SCL must not be taught as just one approach among many other approaches - the advantages of the SCL philosophy must be emphasised, together with the institutional policies supporting it.

The teaching of SCL methods should preferably not be done using a teacher-centred approach. It is well known that 'teachers teach the way they have been taught' (Frank,1990). Hence if SCL is taught solely by traditional lectures, the staff will most likely end up giving lectures rather than implement SCL. After an overview of various SCL approaches, the staff should learn SCL methods by active and collaborative learning. The facilitator of learning should not just be knowledgeable about SCL but also a believer. He or she must believe in the positive benefits of SCL and model that by practicing and actively promoting SCL in his or her own place of teaching.

Conclusion

The global shift from teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach has prompted many universities to introduce SCL in their teaching and learning. However, the implementation can be adversely affected by the failure to understand the SCL philosophy, resistance from staff and inadequate preparation. To successfully overcome these problems, SCL must be implemented holistically with the appropriate directive, reward and training.

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Learner-Centered Teaching: An HETL Interview with Dr. Marilla Svinicki

Extracted with permission from:

Svinicki, M. (2011, October 1). Learner-Centered Teaching: An HETL interview with Dr. Marilla Svinicki/ Interviewers: Patrick Blessinger and Krassie Petrova. Published in The HETL International Review, Volume 1, Article 11. Retrieved from http://hetl.org/2011/11/01/learner-centered-teaching

Dr. Marilla Svinicki is the senior author (together with co-author Dr. Wilbert McKeachie) of the latest edition of *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers*, published in 2010 (Cengage Learning). In *Teaching Tips*, Dr. Svinicki asserts that effective teaching requires today's teacher to possess a deep appreciation for and understanding of the latest theory and research on teaching and learning and that it is through this theoretical foundation that the teacher will be able to more readily adapt to new situations and develop his/her own methods for effective teaching. HETL interviewed Dr. Svinicki via Skype to gain a deeper insight into this view.

Bio: Dr. Marilla Svinicki is a Professor and Area Chair (Human Development, Culture and Learning Sciences) in the Department of Educational Psychology and the retired director of the Center for Teaching Effectiveness at the University of Texas at Austin (USA). She currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in instructional psychology, learning, cognition and motivation. Her research interests include application of principles of learning to instruction in higher education and development of faculty and graduate students as teachers. In 2007, she received a lifetime achievement award from the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Special Interest Group on Faculty Evaluation. In 2011, she received the Texas Exes Teaching Award at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Marilla Svinicki was the editor-in-chief of New Directions for Teaching and Learning and is on the Board of Directors at The IDEA Center. She served twice as President of the POD Network. Dr. Svinicki may be reached at msvinicki@mail.utexas.edu

Learner-Centered Teaching

Marilla Svinicki

University of Texas at Austin

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, the main idea of your book centers on the need to create a learner-centered environment in and out of the classroom. You make the statement that "What is important is learning, not teaching." Are you saying that good teaching does not matter?

Marilla Svinicki [MS]: What I mean by that statement is that the purpose of teaching is to help learning happen. Teaching is not an end in and of itself. Even the best teacher cannot learn things for the students. Current learning theory places the control of learning in the hands and heads of the students. So what we have to focus on as teachers is not what we are doing. Instead we have to focus on what the students are doing to learn. In a learner-centered environment, it is the learners' actions that are the drivers of learning. So as teachers we try to provide opportunities for that active involvement in learning to occur. For example, learners might be invited to set goals for a learning session, to choose among activities that would help them meet those goals, to evaluate their own progress, and give feedback to the instructor about what they do and do not understand. The instructor would then use that feedback to offer further suggestions or activities that might target misunderstandings. Thus the instructor is acting in support of the learners rather than directing them.

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, you say that "Most student learning occurs outside the classroom." If this is so, then does good teaching make that much of a difference in student learning?

MS: In every novice/expert relationship, the expert has to create the environment that will facilitate learning, even if that environment is not under their direct control. Students are not in a position to decide on what they should learn. They are not prepared to suggest what the teacher has to offer, so good teachers probably have their impact in setting up the learning objectives, materials, activities and strategies that support student learning, even when it actually happens outside the classroom. I think that students do not do much consolidation of learning during class time. There is too high a cognitive load going on. It is not until they get actively into studying (which does not occur in most classrooms unless active learning opportunities are built into the session) that the actual learning occurs.

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, it seems that there has been, traditionally, a divide between teaching and research at many universities because the reward system for faculty has favored them doing research over good teaching. Are teaching and research incompatible? Can one be both a great teacher and a great researcher?

MS: Yes, the reward system in research institutions does tend to favor activities that are cutting edge research, and yet that is not because teaching and research are incompatible. Rather, research is what makes the institution's reputation, which allows it to attract students, supporters, and mostly money. But, of course, that is not what you asked. You want to know if I think research and teaching are incompatible. The only place where they are incompatible is in the zero sum game of time. The more you have to do of one, the less time you have to devote to the other. Really good teachers can be found both in the classroom and the research lab, teaching every time they interact with students. And really good researchers often find that when they are trying to explain a concept to students, they come up with ideas about moving the field forward. If we had all the time in the world, most faculty would choose to be good at both.

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, you talk about motivational theories in your book. Some say that it is not the role of faculty to be motivators. Is it important for faculty to understand how students are motivated? In other words, who is ultimately responsible for student learning? Is it the student or the teacher or the institution?

MS: Motivation, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder in current psychological theory. The motivating properties of a situation depend on the way the learner interprets what is going on. Two students can be exposed to the same educational situation and one will find it motivating and the other will not. However, that does not absolve the instructor from trying to tap into the sources of motivation that psychology has laid out for him or her. There is a lot we know about how to structure an environment to increase the probability that students will find it motivating.

For example, one interesting finding in the research literature is that students are very attuned to what we call the classroom goal structure. The goal structure refers to whether the instructor is primarily aiming for deep mastery of a topic or surface understanding, among other goals. I want to emphasize that either of these goals are legitimate for college classes. Some courses target a broad understanding while others aim for a much deeper but narrow learning. The goal structure is revealed by the way different activities are "valued" in the classroom (for example, how much time is devoted to each activity, which count in the grading structure or how the instructor interacts with the students, praising one action while ignoring others). Each of these characteristics is considered to be part of the motivational structure of the class. Students use these cues to determine what goals the instructor thinks are important.

If I were to give you three specific ideas that would support student motivation, I would say, first, take advantage of what is already motivating to the student by giving choices so that students will be able to work in ways that fit their own needs, thus putting them in charge of their own motivation. Second, I would suggest changing the goal structure of the class toward mastery by changing the meaning of making mistakes. Instead of viewing mistakes as being a bad thing, mistakes can be viewed as opportunities to correct misunderstandings by allowing students second chances to fix up their mistakes or explain how they came to make them. Finally I would suggest that we remember that students need to hear what they did right as well what they did wrong so that they can develop the belief that they are capable of learning.

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, you also talk about teaching students from different backgrounds. Some may also say that the main duty of teachers is to teach the content, irrespective of the expectations of the students. How would you respond to that view?

MS: I disagree strongly with that view. Our job is to help students learn, not fill them up with the latest content. The problem that usually brings this up is that each discipline is moving so quickly into new areas that faculty are convinced that every finding is important to everyone or needs to be understood before other findings are understood. I think we have to realize that it is no longer possible to be a fully informed adult; each of us must carve out what matters to us most and focus on that. So to expect all students to find value in everything we have to offer is naïve. Our strength is in recognizing and exploiting the differences in interest that eventually lead to wonderful new questions that would never have occurred to us if everyone knew what everyone else did and therefore never had a new idea or perspective.

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, you talk about active and collaborative learning. How possible is it to create an active and engaging learning environment for very large classes, say for a class size of 300?

MS: Well, active and engaging are not synonymous, so I cannot give you a single answer to solve everyone's dilemma. While it is definitely the case that collaborative learning is the most common way we think of using to produce engagement, active does not have to mean interacting with someone else. I can be active sitting by myself in my office reading a book – If I am actively reading that book. The same is true in large groups. Activity can be done by large or small groups or by an individual. However, sometimes what people have students do collaboratively is not really engaging them in learning. The activity we want is for learners to ask and answer questions about what they are learning. One of the most fruitful active learning strategies is for students to explain their understanding to one other person. You can certainly do that in classes of any size. Even rhetorical questions trigger thinking if the speaker would stop talking for a while and let the students think, while rote responding in a group activity does not. I think it is the type of questions or the problems that a teacher poses that foster active learning even in large classes. Of course, not all the students in a large class respond to the teacher's questions with a burst of thinking, but that is not confined to a large class; it happens in small ones, too.

Now about engaging – I know that many faculty bristle when I suggest that teachers are performers, but it is true. Mostly what students mean by engaging is enthusiastic and interested and bringing the content of the course into the real world by connecting it to the students' own experience. If you cannot do that about your topic, then you are not an expert after all. For example, "engaging" in a large class might mean bringing into the classroom real issues that are the current topic of discussion in the field and how those issues might impact student lives now or in the future. We now have the means to electronically "engage" students in classes of all sizes. Posing a question and inviting students to use "clickers" to express their understanding or their opinion is a wonderful way of engaging students. My own students become very animated when we do this and reveal that not everyone has the same opinion. "Engaging" might mean inviting students in large classes to bring their own questions to class when something they have seen or read looks like it might be related to the course topic. This can easily be done through online discussion boards or email to the instructor, who can then bring the topic to class. "Engaging" might mean revealing our own individual

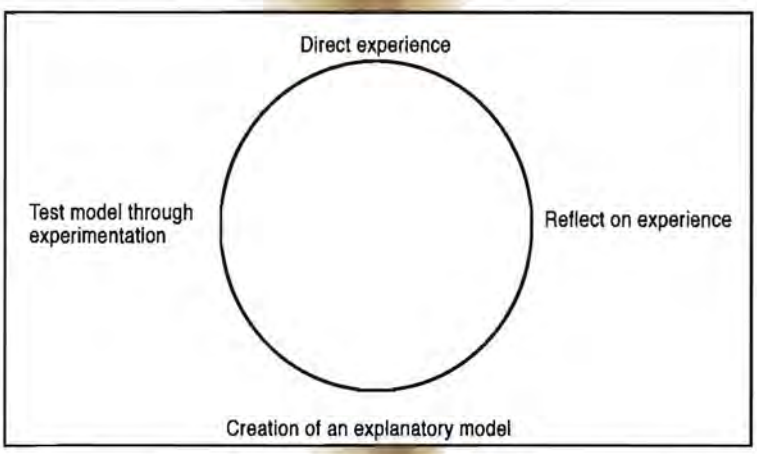
thinking and motivations about the field, becoming a person to the students rather than just a source of information. None of these suggestions need to take a lot of time or effort, but they do change the focus of the course from just listening to "engaging."

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, some faculty have to deal with student problems such as emotional problems and disruptions in the classroom. How can faculty be expected to deal with such situations if they have not received any training in these areas?

MS: They should not, and at most institutions they are not expected to intervene. Most forward thinking institutions have individuals trained to work with students who are having difficulties, if they could just get in touch with them. Perhaps that is the best thing the instructor can do: get the student connected with the trained professional. If a student appears to be slipping, they often really just want someone to care enough to do something, even if it is refer them to someone who can help and then follow up later to see if they are ok. Being a concerned adult may be all we have to do, and surely we are all up to that task.

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, you also talk about experiential learning (EL) in your book. How practical is it to apply EL? Should EL be a part of every course?

MS: Absolutely! You may not mean what I mean when you say experiential learning. In reality all learning is experiential. We do something and get feedback from the situation. Therefore all courses and every part of a course should involve "experiential learning."



However, you may mean the more structured experiential learning models such as those based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle; for example problem-based learning, where students work to explore and solve problems based on real situations. It is used a lot in science and medical training. Another type of experiential learning is service learning, where students work in real world settings on problems that confront the agencies and communities in which they are placed. I do not think that structured experiential learning is possible or even appropriate for all classes and all levels of students. I think it is particularly important when students are at a level of wanting to integrate what they know. I do not believe absolute beginners should have that kind of advanced experiential learning because I am not convinced they even know what they are supposed to be learning. It takes some level of prior knowledge to benefit fully from an experience. There are small experiences that everyone can benefit from and those are something we should strive for in all courses. This is related to our earlier discussion about active learning.

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, course evaluations by students are not without controversy yet seem to be used more and more at universities. How effective are they in your view? And who should use them and for what purpose?

MS: There is so much research on this topic that it's difficult to summarize it in the space allotted. So I will just offer my perspective and invite the readers to consult the multiple articles that have attempted to do that very summarizing. In my view student evaluations are the most reliable and consistent source of data that we currently have on teaching at the postsecondary level. Many researchers have shown that student evaluations across several semesters and several courses provide a fairly stable view of student perspectives on teaching. They are especially valuable for improving one's own teaching, providing they are not considered the absolute end of information that can be gathered. Data should be gathered throughout the semester

rather than solely at the end. We always say that they are best used for formative evaluation and as one of an array of data sources when evaluating teaching for summative evaluation.

HETL: Dr. Svinicki, you talk about the need to teach ethics. Some may contend that it is not the role of teachers to teach ethics. Others may argue that it serves no practical purpose because the examples of recent ethical breaches in the news show it has little effect. How would you respond to that?

MS: How can people be blind to the fact that every teacher is ALWAYS teaching ethics just by being there and interacting with the students? Their ethics are there for all to see every day in class or in office hours or even in the choices we make about how the course is structured. So some may think it is not our role to teach ethics, but it is impossible not to at least model our ethical values in all we do. We teach what and who we are by the way we behave in the day to day workings of our classes.

HETL: What would you want readers to take away from your book?

MS: Perhaps the most important thing is that the book illustrates that one can continue to learn about teaching by reading both the literature and the students. The literature, because there is literature on teaching that is grounded in research on learning and motivation, allowing us to find practices that can help us be better teachers. The students, because as we said at the beginning of this interview, it is what the students do that matters. Being aware of what the students in one's class are doing is the best source of information to help us be better teachers.

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Interview date & place: 1 October 2011 via Skype

HETL interviewers: Patrick Blessinger and Krassie Petrova

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