

RUNNING HEAD: Rathmel Teaching Philosophy

Evaluation, Role, and Development: A Philosophy of Learner-Centered Teaching

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“...the rate of change in the society in which we live forces us to redefine how we shall educate a new generation.” (Bruner, 1973)

The experience of libraries and academia of the 21st century echo eerily Bruner’s prophetic statement, particularly its acknowledgement of the *rate* of change. Moreover, his statement exposes an urgent need for different answers to the problem of change. Clearly, the warning bell of change is in vain when sounded as change itself occurs. Accelerated advances in networking technology have ushered in changes affecting all corners of society. The abundance and accessibility of information has shifted a fundamental need away from simply obtaining information. Current information needs require the added complexity of sorting and evaluating the critical components for building knowledge. Education has had to respond with more collaborative approaches. A learner-centered model (Weimer, 2002) represents one such approach. The role of teachers and librarians in this new model is one of guiding inquiry (Kuhlthau, et.al, 2007). This essay will explore specific changes in three core areas of instruction in a learner-centered model: (a) the process and purpose of evaluation, (b) the role of teachers and librarians, and (c) development of student and teachers. I will show how learner-centered instruction prepares students for learning how to learn in ways that traditional educational approaches have not. I will further explain how the core beliefs and teaching philosophy of library information professionals align with and promote a learner-centered model.

Literature Review

Inquiry based learning takes the focus from the student and puts it on the process of learning. Essentially this kind of learning aims to build each successive level of new knowledge by asking critical questions through inquiry. The word *build* is intentional, as this type of learning is founded in the constructivist thought (Bruner, 1973; Kelly, 1963; Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1962). Bruner frames inquiry in terms of perception naming “value and need as organizing factors in perception”. In information seeking, for example, information is perceived by categorizing its value based on the context of the need. Bruner’s research further adds to the constructivist view of learning by showing how

knowledge is constructed not just with our cognition but also with how information is perceived in the context of personal experience. Similarly, the learner-centered model shows how instruction ought to move beyond just covering content toward making the content relevant to the learner. Much of Bruner's research speaks directly to a learner-centered and guided inquiry approaches to teaching. For example, Bruner calls for replacing the word *curriculum* with a more meaningful term that embodies the "mastery of skills in a series of self-rewarding sequences". This statement also emphasizes another of his recommendations for changing existing systems of evaluation within education. Bruner foresaw an emphasis on highly visual modes of delivering instruction. He also proposed development of metalanguage and metaskills as the solution dealing with the continuity of change, looking to mathematical uses of metalanguage as a model. Bruner's work is highly relevant to library and information science in this way as well as in its recognition that search and retrieval is a mechanism for testing perception. Personal experiences in teaching and working in a library bear out these truths proving changes for educating a new generation is well overdue.

Changes in Learner Centered Teaching

Approaching these changes with evaluation as a starting point is appropriate because the learner-centered approach proposes that it come first in practice. Using evaluation after the fact is ineffectual and may be one cause for such slow progress of change in the current educational system. A learner-centered teacher on the other hand, reveals the structure of teaching and learning by placing evaluation first and making it transparent. Student and teacher agree on the criteria and goals of the learning objectives thereby sharing the responsibility for learning. Seeing these changes in evaluation reveals the significant differences in the role of teachers and students.

According to Weimer (2002) teachers in a learner-centered environment function more like facilitators, mentors, or master learners. Instead of testing rote memorization of facts and content, they guide the learning as a process with value itself. They allow the student to develop curiosity to inquire

and uncover the content on a more meaningful level. One of the most obvious modern failures of the existing educational model is the rising prevalence and ease of plagiarism. When education relies primarily on rote memorization, regurgitation and testing of content, it discourages original thought and invites the plagiarism of others' ideas. While the technology has made it easier to accomplish what constitute plagiarism – through the ability to simply cut and paste -- it can be argued that the educational system's resistance to fundamental change is perhaps shares a significant portion of the blame.

Encouraging inquiry requires students to take on new roles as well. According to Weimer (2002) new roles for both teachers and students must account for the inherent process of intellectual development and interpersonal maturation. This is true not only because a learner-centered model is a fundamentally different approach to education, but also because of its basis in constructivist thought that perception is not static. It grows through individual human development and is influenced by changes in the human environment. Teachers must develop the ability to guide the learner to learn for themselves through their own process of maturation just as students do throughout their educational experiences. Grow (as cited by Weimer, 2002) provides an important model for developmental approaches and perspectives of both teachers and learners as they adapt to a learner-centered model (Table 1). These core approaches to learning coincide with the research of Kuhlthau, et al (2007) on the information search process and, more recently, guided inquiry. Guided inquiry takes this model a step further asserting that the role of librarians is crucial.

Table 1
Grow's stages of learner-centered development

	<i>Dependent (not self directed)</i>	<i>Interested (moderately self-directed)</i>	<i>Involved (Intermediate levels of self direction)</i>	<i>Self-directed</i>
<i>STUDENT NEEDS</i>	Explicit instructions (what how when)	Need enthusiasm and motivation	See themselves as participants in their own education; Group work.	Autonomous atmosphere
<i>TEACHER'S ROLE</i>	Coaching	Teachers as motivators	Teachers as facilitator/participants	Teachers as consultants

<i>OUTCOME</i>	Leaning specific identifiable skills	Goal setting; building confidence and learner skills.	Learning to learn through generic application of strategies and testing the outcomes	Set own goals and standards; meet challenges
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Implications

“It has to do with the need for studying what is possible rather than the achieved – a necessary step if we are to adapt to change” (Bruner,1973).

Throughout the history the profession, library and information science has experienced tension between emphases on reference service or library instruction. In the learner centered model it might seem that instruction comes out the winner. But more likely it will be a test of each one’s ability to join forces to create meaningful, collaborative service opportunities that guide inquiry. Both reference and instruction librarian roles will change. This can already be observed as libraries reconfigure or do away with the reference desk. Operating in a networked environment requires new, efficient, and meaningful conversation across all areas of the library, including areas like technical services that have not traditionally interacted directly with patrons. Staff in these areas are now less removed because acquisition of resources has become acquisition of access. As a result the line between technical services and public services is increasingly blurred. This requires library and information professionals to develop both technologically and interpersonally to remain relevant to the future of the profession.

What the current educational generation and the learner centered instructional model show is that librarians of all professions are teachers whose success is defined by innovation through development and collaboration. All of this will require evaluation of long held assumptions in the profession. It will call for such assessment to resemble more closely the qualities of fast paced change, including asking what is possible instead of what was accomplished.

References

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