Pedagogies for Student-Centered Learning: Online and On-Ground

Crumly, Cari; with Dietz, Pamela; and d'Angelo, Sarah
Augsburg Fortress Pubs., 2014

Book Review

Tags: online learning | student centered learning | student learning

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"Teachers are like new parents," Cari Crumly asserts. "[T]hey don't want to be told how to raise their children or, in this case, how to teach their students. Yet, sometimes, even the least-experienced teacher can introduce new methods that engage, encourage, and promote motivation and participation among students" (4). Crumly lays down the gauntlet repeatedly in this book: "student-centered learning will revolutionize your classroom and reinvigorate your career" (5).

As Crumly notes, "student-centered learning is a learning model placing the learner in the center of the learning process. Students are active participants in their learning, learning at their own pace and using their own strategies; they are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated; and learning is more individualized than standardized" (4). Certainly there are situations in which (and learners for whom) more external structure is appropriate, but Crumly makes a very persuasive case for those being the exception rather than the rule.

The good news is that if you are a teacher-centered professor, *Pedagogies for Student-Centered Learning* gives you everything you need to make changes in your teaching. There is an historical timeline to remind readers that student-centered learning is not a new fad; it's been with us for centuries. There is a section on teacher-centered classrooms, so we can check whether we are (or are not) as student-centered as we'd like to think we are. There is information on understanding your learning population. There are examples from real classrooms about how student-centered learning can play out, and how it benefits students. Each chapter contains questions for investigation. There is also a list of instructional tactics, with commonly used exercises and the advantages of using each one. Appendices and URLs

point readers to even more resources, and Pamela Dietz adds a section on how to bring faculty, administrators, and tech support on board. If you are a visual learner, there are a number of graphical elements that will assist in your assimilation of the material presented.

Fortress Press's new Seminarium: The Elements of Great Teaching series is ideal for twenty-first-century readers. QR codes dot the pages – but don't worry, if you don't do QR codes, the URLs are available in footnotes. This book is full of great, useful information – and points readers to more useful information online. Certainly, there are some distractions (for example, misrepresentations of quotations from other thinkers at times). Definitions of student-centered learning can become repetitive over the course of the book. And Sarah d'Angelo's chapter on student-centered learning in a theater classroom contains a bit more information than is likely to be useful for religious-studies and seminary faculty. But none of these detracts from the benefits of the book as a whole.

I have been reviewing books on teaching for ten years or more – this is easily one of the most helpful books I have ever reviewed, and one to which I will return often. I have attempted student-centered learning in a number of courses and contexts; it can be very hard to pull off successfully, and does require a rethinking of our role as faculty. While Crumly suggests that "The student-centered classroom, whether on ground or online, is characterized by individualization, interaction, and integration," I did wonder how this might work in an online environment (10). I look forward to further exploring these possibilities.

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