

Student-Centric Learning: Improving the Teacher-Student Dynamic

In traditional classroom environments, teachers lead and students follow. It can be difficult to imagine any other system of organization. It seems intuitive that teachers have knowledge of curriculum material and establish a plan to impart that knowledge to pupils. However, when students are taught how to learn and given the freedom to exercise their curiosity, the dynamic shifts. Teachers and students have more equal roles, and they are guided rather than driven through the curriculum. This style of education is known as *guide by the side*, or *student-centric learning*, and it holds much promise for boys education.

Difficulties for Boys in Traditional Settings

In the US, boys lag behind girls at every level of education, from elementary school through college. They also make up an overwhelming majority of disciplinary referrals, suspensions, dropouts, and hyperactivity diagnoses. While educational reform has allowed girls the chance at a successful education, it has also inadvertently put up obstacles for many boys to enjoy the same opportunity. Boys require a high level of activity and learn most effectively when they are able to use spatial reasoning. However, boys, even at a young age, are expected to sit still in classrooms that have increasingly emphasized language-based abilities and skills. Instead of allowing students to focus on their individual strengths, children often have little choice or influence in their education, leaving the responsibility for their education to teachers and school boards. Student-centric education, on the other hand, gives students choices and compensates for the differences between individual learning preferences.

Equalizing the Classroom & Creating Motivated Learners

A major emphasis of student-centric learning is placed on activity, discovery, and independent learning. Students are engaged in the course because they are shaping the curriculum and influencing what they learn.

In traditional settings, it's not uncommon to see highly intelligent students and struggling students both perform poorly. Bright children and teens may lock into a power struggle with educators, who they feel are condescending or who focus on personally uninteresting material. However, a student-centered environment shapes itself to the needs of the students. The teacher acts more as a mentor than an authority, so power struggles cease. Those who have fallen behind are able to focus on areas they excel at (instead of taking a test, they may prefer to give a presentation or create a diorama). Those bored with their coursework have the ability to pick their own concentration for a given subject and study topics more deeply. This freedom of learning is able to overcome problems faced in traditional settings so that all children are engaged, focused, and most importantly, *learning*.

Responses to Student-Centered Learning

Studies report favorable outcomes for student-centered learning. Students feel that they are more respected, that the material is more interesting, and that they are more motivated to complete

coursework. While students may progress slowly at first, they develop better study skills in the long run, and they ultimately are able to perform just as well in academics as traditionally educated peers.

While this teaching method is seldom seen in public schools, it is gaining some recognition in small private schools, particularly for tackling problems of boys' education. Grand River is a firm proponent of student-centered education, and our teachers have found it to be the best way to help unmotivated learners re-engage with their studies and learn in a way that is meaningful for them. By allowing students the freedom to learn, [high school for boys](#) can offer the emotionally supportive and mentally stimulating environment that we expect of our education systems.