

**18th AIAER International Conference
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Learning Centered Holistic Education¹ Dr.B.K.Passi Bangkok

What is learning-centered education?

Meaning of centeredness - One of the key words of the theme learning-centered education is “Centeredness”. What is its immediate background? UNESCO has proposed a new kind of education having fundamental principles called ‘four pillars of education’ (i) learning to know, (ii) learning to do, (iii) learning to live together and (iv) learning to be. We know that learning is the central focus of that education which originates and is conducted with diverse perspectives. We must understand that there are millions of ways to determine this centering perspective. This perspective then guides the principles of centering everything in education. Some of the popular ways of this perspective are referred to as teacher centered education, learner centered education, community centered education, value centered education, craft-centered education, thinking-centered education, examination-centered education; job-centered education, problem centered education, meaning-centered education and so on. Different agents and stakeholders like learners, teachers, and community are the users and sometimes the creators of these perspectives. During the last few decades, people have rejected the perspectives of teacher-centeredness in education. These days, people have chosen child-centeredness in education. Once we choose the learner as the center of education, the next decisive question arises about “what aspects” of learners will be in the center of this education? Let us articulate this question by saying, “Where is the focus?” Is the focus (center) there on “learning” or “thinking”? Some people like de-Bono want to keep ‘thinking’² at the center whereas some others want to keep ‘learning’ at the center. Both these claims are appealing. It is not easy to choose any one especially when they are interrelated. One more point is there for us to consider. People are questioning the amorphous term like learner-centered education. They are favoring to use *learning*-centered not learner centeredness. They like to have *learning*-centered curriculum, *learning*-centered teachers, and *learning*-centered

¹ Prof. B.K.Passi ¹ Presidential Address for 18th AIAER Themes Learning Centered Education January 27th to 29th 2005 by Consultant Learning Organization School of Industrial Education Building Room 30201 King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi 91 Sukaswat 48 Road Pracha Utit Bangmod, Toong-Kru Bangkok Thailand Phone Land: 66 2470 8504 Fax: 66 2427 8886 passi.bk@kmutt.ac.th passibk@hotmail.com President of AIAER: 139 Inderpuri, Indore, INDIA 452 017 Phone India +91 731 2477580 Think tank member Prasena http://www.prasena.com/public/think_tank.html

² De Bono proposes that school curriculum should be redesigned so as to have three components. These are: (a) basic curriculum: language, thinking, mathematics, social skills, and social awareness; (b) background studies: traditional subjects like geography, history, literature, foreign languages and so on; and (c) special or vocational interests: vocations or subjects like business studies, engineering, drama, design, foreign languages and so on.

schools. Before we go ahead, we need to understand *learning*-centered approaches, *learning* centered contents, *learning*-centered evaluation, and *learning* centered management of schools. Ultimately, we must understand Learning-Centered Learning ‘process-of *learning*-centeredness’ and hence, create a learning-centered education.

Preferred meanings of learning-centered education - Experts in the area of learning have proposed a variety of recipes of inputs and conditions for creating learning-centered education. The ideas of contents, assumptions, and even outcomes are varying with different kinds of people. To me, the idea of learning-centered education is linked with the work of Peter Senge who says that we need to develop new learning capacities through learning organization: (a) creating shared visions, (b) organizing reflective communication and (c) seeing a big picture by using five disciplines of learning. Learning-centered education is based upon new assumptions about goals of education, nature of learning, role of instructions, importance of interdisciplinary approach, development of higher-level attitudes, and importance of assessing reasoning. I have my views to prefer learning-centered education. However, we must appreciate that it is quite difficult to take a position in favor of this recipe.

Learning-centeredness is holistic - Learning processes that are required for our lives are not linear and sequential. We know that the phenomenon of life is holistic in all respects; but unfortunately, we have been treating it differently. Our current methods of learning for our lives are linear and teacher centered. Linear learning methods create fragmentation in our thinking and action. This isolated learning of subjects could not prepare our people for creating harmonious life. Hence, we must stop and replace this fragmented kind of learning with holistic learning and education. We need to have learning that implies ‘*learning to learn*’ in depth by covering all possible facets of life. Holistic education will follow continuous learning for whole span of life. The contents of this holistic education will have to have the flavor of life-like and life-wide experiences from different kinds of activities. It is obvious that the new roles will alter - students as teachers; teachers as coaches; parents as role models; community as sources of information; and lastly, the technology as networked project-based learning provider. Schools will alter their narrow frames of logic-cognitive learning to a perspective of multiple intelligences and will respect research findings and use Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (MI) for school budgeting, designing buildings and labs, formulations of curriculum, and recruitments of teachers. Regarding technology, schools will use both face-to-face and web based learning. Electronically enhanced learning environments will become the backbone of worldwide learning.

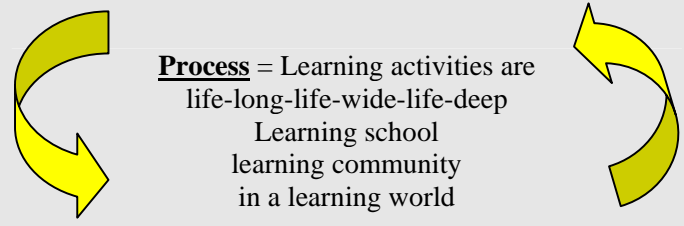
Learning-centeredness is social and contextual - Within the framework of holistic education, the methods of cooperative-learning will receive high priority. Cooperative learning will imply attention for the formulation of shared visions on continuing basis. Moreover, we must learn to examine our mental models that dictate our thinking and actions. We need to use the skills of critical and creative thinking for examining the mental models. While using cooperative learning, we should redefine the concept of talent and go in for broad based development. Individualistic approach of talent development should not dominate over that of the development of group talent. Moreover, learning process must support high standards for all kinds of learners living on any platform of social reality.

Overview of a curricular framework of learning-centered education

External and internal parameters of curriculum framework - A development of curricular framework should essentially have external and internal parameters. I am restricting myself to the internal parameters that are shown in Fig 1: called four dimensions of learning environment. I have focused upon internal parameters that deal with what happens inside a learning environment which is still called a classroom³. This Figure-1 of framework below has an overview of learning environment. The four sides of this Figure-1 represent: (a) a full spectrum of natural, social, and personal themes across curriculum related to problems and opportunities around; (ii) five learning disciplines as ‘means for themes’ and ‘ends for self’; (iii) goals and outcomes in terms of integrated solutions, holistic knowledge, and whole being; (iv) personal forms of a new learning being. The complex process of learning is shown in the central part of the Figure -1.

Fig- 1: Four dimensions of learning environment

³ I wish to avoid this word *classroom* but compulsions of mainstream do not encourage me to do so. Likewise, I wish to change the word school ... In an UNESCO seminar I have criticized the baggage of industrial culture concepts like teacher (replaced it with guru), school (replaced it with paathshala)

Input of Five Disciplines as learning “Means and Ends”	Curriculum Themes Natural Projects	Curriculum Social Themes Projects	Curriculum Personal Themes Projects	Outcome of New Learning Being
Discipline 1 Process	 <p style="text-align: center;">Process = Learning activities are life-long-life-wide-life-deep Learning school learning community in a learning world</p>			Fulfills personal goals
Discipline 2 Process				Commitment to shared vision
Discipline 3 Process				Examines basic beliefs
Discipline 4 Process				Constructs a big picture
Discipline 5 Process				Learning from team learning
	Outcome of Integrated Solutions Goals	Outcome of Holistic Knowledge Goals	Outcome of Whole Being Goals	

Curriculum and matching evaluation

Selecting curricular themes – We have already talked that designing curriculum for learning-centered education is a big issue where we get mixed up with *WHAT aspect of curriculum and HOW aspect of curriculum*. Let us talk of *WHAT* part only. The curriculum will have two component partners – the content of themes and content of disciplines of learning.

First learning component of subject themes

First component of subject matter or content themes - The first component consists of subject matter or content themes that could be natural, social and personal with built in inter-relatedness. The first component aims at dealing with the external world. There is need to do some clarification while dealing with personal themes which create a link relationship with the external world. We have to be careful here as personal themes can be a link between first and second components of the curriculum.

Identify the content of subject themes - Identify a curricular problem of content themes suitable for the students – (i) connect the problem with the context of the students' world so that it presents authentic opportunities; (ii) organize the subject matter around the problem, not the discipline; (iii) give responsibility to students for defining their learning experiences and planning to solve the problem; (iv) encourage collaboration by creating learning teams; and (v) expect all students to demonstrate the results of their learning through a product or performance.

Second learning component of five disciplines

Second component of five 'learning disciplines' - The second component of curriculum consists of learning about self representing five learning disciplines of Personal Mastery, Shared Vision, Mental Models, Team Learning, & Systems Thinking. This second component aims at dealing with internal disciplining of oneself. The process of learning will become a complex event. Thailand will have joint interaction of two learning components. While dealing with the first component of subject-themes the learner will simultaneously lean towards five self-disciplines. The joint interplay of complexity of learning of these two components will be using a variety of methodology called How's. The complexity will have dynamic interplay of two components (subject themes and self disciplines) and a Variety of How's. We must learn to understand the dual role of five learning disciplines by using them as means and ends.

Identify the content of five disciplines - We need to introduce five disciplines mentioned above. We need to work on systems thinking, mental models, dialogue, and personal mastery in our school education and teacher training. The new teacher education curriculum for learning organization should be built around five disciplines of Peter Senge.

Matching evaluation methods

Match assessment procedures with two curricular contents - Regarding curriculum, there are people who have improved upon the idea of subject-centered curriculum. This improvement must be reflected in all the facets of the school. Assessment has direct implications for this new kind of instruction. Unless the assessment in terms of contents and formats do not match with learning-centered instructions, our recommendations of learning-centered education are meaningless. The assessment tools of high quality must be learning-centered in all respects. These must have direct linkage to the decisions that are affecting futures of learners. In fact, it could be viewed as harmful by users and teachers due to the conflict between the desired process and traditional practices.

Implement gradually but comprehensively

Meaning of learning centred school – What is a learning centred school? Let us first understand what is learning origination? A learning origination is one where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, where people are continually learning to see the whole together; where the organisation culture is a critical factor for development and sustainability; and where learning organisations need motivated people. We can find that our schools have to go a long way to attain this status. We have to make our students to enlarge their capacities to study in better ways, where we have to improve our teachers to teach better, where our administrators learn to manage better, and where our supporting staffs learn to support better. It would mean that all people in schools are searching continuously to find new ways for their personal mastery and commit to the shared vision. This goal is much more difficult as the system is having less freedom and less accountability. We should understand that our system is too large

to manage for any change and our practices are deep rooted. The system may not absorb a sudden change.

Comprehensive transformation of mindset - Let us see if our teachers will be willing to go for creating a new learning spaces or environment. Will our teachers stop their methods of direct teaching? Shall they follow the constructivist approach to teach? The frank answer to this question is a big NO! We need to provide more management support for new requirements. Let us move slowly but steadily. However, we have to have clarity of thinking in our mind. The institutions have to persistently focus upon the transformation of mind-sets. Today we plan everything for children and children alone. This segmental view has to become holistic and must cater to the development of children, teachers, heads of schools, staff, community and all other stakeholders. We need to distribute our attention for improving the capacities of all stakeholders.

Generate resources for staff development - Demand of holistic development for all kinds of stakeholders brings requirement of large amount of resources. A new viewpoint about resources will help to meet this demand. The people have to be trained to believe that they themselves are the largest resource. All our people in the institutions are both the resources and consumers. They need to be skilled in creating resources and developing views of critical thinking about their own work and its working. Let us move step by step! Start planning about creating learning organization. As a first step, we need to create relevant projects for supporting an environment for creating learning organization. Team learning and team working can play a central role in the knowledge-creating societies. We need to change mental models of learners, teachers, and stakeholders. Continuity of dialogue will help to examine basic beliefs. During the dialogue, ensure that the underlying assumptions are surfaced, examined and clarified. Diversity of viewpoints in dialogue settings is not a barrier; rather, it can help to create synergy. Dialogue also constructs a pool of new knowledge and creates much needed environment of trust.

Teachers and their development

Deliberate efforts are needed for learning-centered education - Learning-centered education cannot come by chance. Our teachers will have to achieve it with ardor and diligence. Our teachers must enhance their understanding of learning-centered education; expand learning-centered programs and strategies to ensure the success of learners. We need to cultivate an organizational culture in which policies, programs, practices, and personal support focus around the priority for creating a learning environment of "*learning to learn*". This learning environment should transform its focus from developing individuals' talents to *creative collective talent* that will be guided by *Five Learning Disciplines*. The learning-centeredness may encourage futuristic orientation, free exchange and flow of information. The learning-centeredness must support commitment to learning, relevant personal development, attitude to value people, climate of openness and trust, and attitudes of learning from experience.

Pre-service training is inadequate for learning-centered education - Our schools of today are not working like learning organization as our educators feel oppressed in trying to conform to all kinds of rules, goals and objectives. The education enterprise is especially complicated. Teacher's

education is not preparing teachers to deal with the task of learning-entered education. Teachers do not learn to deal with complex, dynamic environment that is embedded within the community. In the past, our teachers have received very little training for appreciating and supporting collective learning. The traditional teachers have learnt to develop the skills of individuals rather than enhancing the collective capacity of people to create and pursue overall visions.

In-service training is not aligned to learning-centered education - Some teachers are thinking that they are learning new things by attending conferences. It is not enough as this learning does not take care of the site-situations and collective-learning is not the primary focus. We need to learn 'in and about' real sites, 'about and through' our real teams. For learning organization group learning is important. Take for example, a group of great musicians if not coherent will create noise and not music. Individual capability and collective capability of learning are different. Today's education supports individualistic-learning whereas, life requires collective-learning.

Caution: Need of new institutional management

Our basic mistake lies in overlooking change in models of management - I need to give you caution that learning-centered education too will fail if we commit the same mistake again and again. We too should become learning organization kind of managers. Let me make my point. We have been bringing in new innovations. Accordingly, we are training our people to learn and implement the innovation. We provide all kinds of capacity building workshops or conferences. We create incentives and provide rewards. But mostly we have found that nothing seems to work. Today again let me say nothing will work if we do not fundamentally change the governing models of institutions. Let me expand this point. Given below are six models of management of institutions contributing in some combination the final prevalent model inside an institution. The idea is an excerpt from a book called Imagination: The Art of Creative Management. The first model is very classical and bureaucratic where the head of institution or department is fully responsible for all decisions and enjoys all powers. The second and the third models are a shade variation of the classical model. These three models cannot nurture learning-centered environment. The fourth model is called matrix model having department heads and functional heads with mutually supporting roles and responsibilities. This model too is not an ideal one for a learning-centered school. The fifth model is project based. It is reasonable and is suitable to nurture a learning-centered school but it misses a very important dimension of continuity. The ownership and long term views are also missing. The sixth model is built around a nucleus team that takes care of task of coordination. The team allows freedom for other floating partners and teams to design their activities as they like. Our institutions have to construct their own design depending upon one's own circumstances and desires. This recipe model will go on changing as the circumstances and capacities are altering. The shape of the local model will depend upon the kind of mix that one has borrowed from the six basic models. Figure – 2: below deals with constructing your model of management for learning environment which is still called a school.

Fig - 2: Constructing management-model for learning-environment

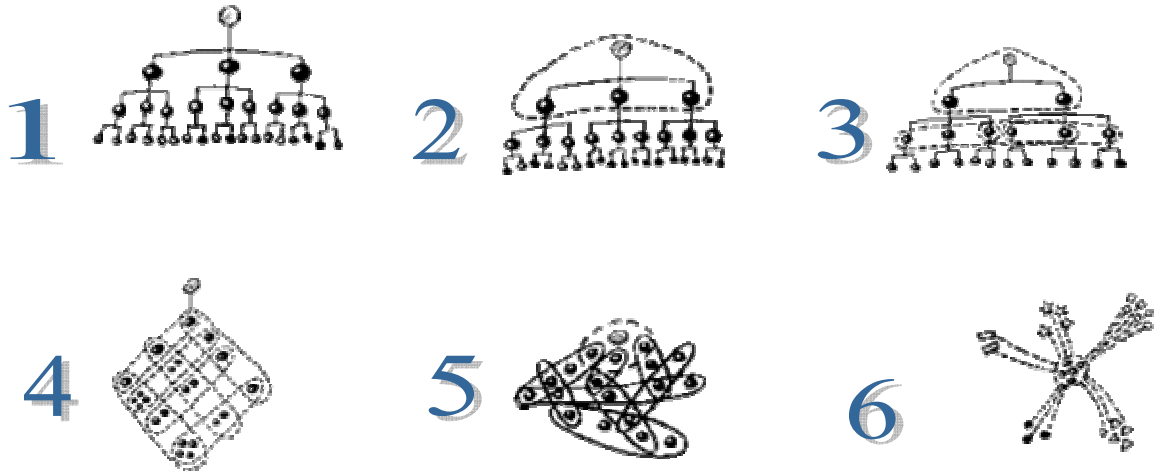
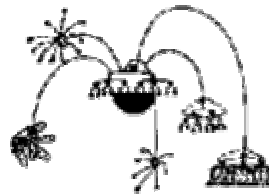


Figure - 2: Constructing your model of management for learning environment
(An excerpt from *Imaginization: The Art of Creative Management*)



Conclusions

Learning is learner centered focusing upon group development and not Individual centeredness. It will not be learning about subjects, or problems, or projects alone. It will include learning about disciplining one-self. Continuous activities having learning-centeredness using three-facet thematic contents and five learning-disciplines will form the substance as well as process of learning upbringing. Corresponding to this there will be change in our management and supporting environment. We hope a new learner will be created who will have new capacities of solving our chronic problems. The organizers of education need a longer and deeper dialogue.

Recognition and rewards

- **Institute recognition of excellence award** by giving rotating trophy for state chapters by consensus of the State Presidents who are in the meeting.
- **Recognize senior delegates** – Four senior delegates presenting quality papers must be recognized in each of the international / national conferences.
- **Recognize people interested in Education** - State chapters may introduce public recognition up to four public persons who have been working to improve education in that state/ area / region.