15 Ways To Make Learning More Student-Centered

A Crowdsourced Anthology of Strategies from Real Education Professionals

A Word From the Editors

Student-centered learning repositions students from passive participants in their education, to owners of knowledge who are active participants in their own discovery process. What students learn, how they learn it, and how they're assessed on what they've learned are all directly linked to students' needs, abilities, and preferences.

When students take responsibility for their own learning, their confidence and independence increase and they develop a love of lifelong learning. It's a truly empowering experience. Fortunately, teachers all over the world are making the shift to student-centered learning. This transition requires implementing curriculum planning processes, assessment methods, strategic technology usage, and general pedagogy that support the student-centered approach.

We asked our community to share their best student-centered activities, strategies, and ideas.

This eBook is a compilation of crowdsourced responses from real education professionals around the country sharing their best tips to improve your students' education experience and encourage them to own their learning.

As you read through this book, commit to exploring at least one these strategies further. Who knows, you may become the student-centered learning expert on your campus.

Self Paced Learning

With Schoology, I am able to make my lessons student-centered by developing self-paced units. When my students are learning how to use Google Docs, it is important for them to learn how to format text, insert pictures, comment and review their work, and more!

Students work at different paces, so to allow students to work at their own speed, I create video tutorials that walk students through the content they need to complete the challenge.

Using completion rules, students unlock the next challenge once they submit. Some students are working on challenge five while others are still on challenge two. That is okay!

I use this opportunity to review and help students who need extra help. If a student is breezing through, they will unlock bonus challenges or receive a badge specifically for guiding their peers and being the peer teacher! By creating my units in this fashion, I am allowing the students to work at their pace and unlock the opportunity to be a leader with their peers.

Stephen Rao

Computer Teacher
Howell Township

Curiosity Spaces

Just because final assessments must be standard in their measurements, doesn't mean they have to be standard in their delivery.

When planning assessments consider designing your brief around a structure that allows the flow of curiosity and creativity. As long as a learner is encouraged to communicate the key criteria of an assessment to assure rigour, then by giving your learners the fresh air to consider how they want to deliver the outcome creatively you often find they go above and beyond to create a personalized understanding of the topic.

In previous years I have run a story development assignment, with the main aim of students demonstrating their understanding of specific narrative devices. By leaving a creative space and yet indicating the key criteria the students went wild. I had students complete the assignment by creating: interactive fiction books (choose your own adventure); simulated dialogue conversations, narrative topic card games, infographics, augmented reality posters. Some students played safe and wrote a report, however after seeing the project ideas and creativity other students put in the next assignment, many branched out and personalized their assessment delivery to allow for creativity.

Jo Patton

eLearning Developer
The Archbishop of York
Youth Trust

Teach Me Project

I allow students to select their own topics during high-interest historical units. Then, they have time daily to research the topic and decide what's most important to know, outline the information, create any type of presentation they would like (prezi, Google slides, PPT, Popplet, Infographic, Pictocharts, etc.) and present it to the class.

Some students "teach" the class for a time, ask students questions, and get them out of their seats to act an event out. They may do a simulation, or wrap it up with a quick check for understanding (Kahoot, Quizziz, Quizlet, etc.) and some even add a short video clip as well.

They have fun with it, learning and teaching at the same time.

These became a favorite activity for my students. I wasn't dictating what they had to learn...they were making that determination. I would conference with them and make sure they were progressing and completing their goals. It was incredibly rewarding for both the teacher and student.

Liz Lubeskie

Coordinator of Online Learning and Technology Integration K-12
Manheim Central School District

Increasing Engagement Through a Student's Voice and Choice

In my role as the district Instructional Tech Coach, it is my job to model to teachers what we would like to see in their classrooms.

The most successful thing to date has been gamifying our PD course. By having teachers participate, they can see, from a student's point of view, the impact of what having choices and a voice in this process feels like.

We had more participation in online PD than ever before. I believe there were several key factors.

1. Teachers had a choice in what kind of challenges they did, there were a lot of options.

2. Teachers were given small rewards along the way - even if it was just a note card with a message.

3. We made it fun! Teachers were completing activities that we had zero participation in before this challenge. Something about making it a "challenge" and part of the fun, changed everything. The best part of all is that several teachers are already planning to try it out in their class next year.

Hope Elliott

Instructional Technology Coach

Lowndes County School District

Structured Self-Paced Learning

In two of my classes (Office Applications for High School, and Effective Technology for Middle School), students are able and encouraged to work as quickly as they want. They have weekly deadlines, so they must complete a certain amount of work each week. But they may work ahead of that pace, and are rewarded with extra points if they do so. And if they complete the course early, they then have that class period to do whatever they would like to do (within reason).

This enables the students to decide how much time they want to spend on my class vs. spending time working on other classes or doing other activities. For example, if they are in athletics, I encourage them to work ahead before their season begins so they can use my class time later when they might need it for other class work. The point here is that the students can choose their pace, but still within the parameters of the course.

Rod Kirby

Academic Dean
Cherokee Christian School

Student Choice is Key!

Sometimes when I assign a big project, summative assignment, or something really important, I will let kids have choices in how they turn in their final project. This allows my assignments and work to be more student-centered. For example, I can let my students play "project bingo" where students can look at a bingo sheet made by me, and must choose a "bingo line" of requirements to meet all the requirements of fulfilling that project.

For example, students can choose to write a one page report, include a multimedia component, and complete a short quiz to get credit for the bingo.

However, if other students are not fans of writing, maybe they could replace the report with a short digital video, or a poster. Letting students have choice in the classroom is a great way to ensure that you are getting better work turned in, and more enthusiastic work from the students.

Michael Cabral

Teacher
Cincinnati Public Schools

Offering Various Levels of Mastery

In an instructional lesson on Google Docs, I have various levels of tasks that students can choose to complete based on their competency.

In this assignment, called the Google Doc Skills Challenge, students demonstrate that they can use Docs by creating a Google Doc in your BOWOW Google Drive folder, then completing objectives.

Students that are new to Docs could start with the "Basic" level, which would be simpler and more straightforward. Those who are more skilled would complete "Basic" plus "Intermediate" level work, and those who go above and beyond can do "Basic", "Intermediate", and "Advanced" level tasks.

Stephanie Hwang

Instructional Technologist
Bishop O'Dowd High School

Performance Reflection

I have students complete reflections on their own performance using the Google Drive Assignments feature, which makes learning much more student-centered.

First, I create a Google Doc template with specific directions and writing prompts and have the students complete it after a concert or an individual performance assessment. They reflect on their performance contemplating positive and negative aspects of our performance, areas where they have seen growth in their performance, and areas where improvement can still be made.

My goal is for the students to develop a metacognitive process which generates ideas for self improvement, ensemble improvement, and instructor improvement, while simultaneously developing the student's ability to communicate fluently about music. As a music teacher, I have created a rubric which allows me to primarily focus their grade on the content of their thoughts, not the context of their writing. I utilize the thoughts the students share to influence my instructional priorities as we move through the course of the year.

Brian Bruggeman

Band Director
Monroe Middle School

Sharpening Communication Skills Through Socratic Seminars

I utilize Socratic Seminars in my courses as a way to discuss big issues and the culmination of each unit. Students are given anywhere from 5 to 10 open-ended discussion questions to prepare for prior to the seminar. This is a pre-seminar assignment available to them within Schoology.

Prior to the seminar, students must prepare their personal thoughts as well as evidence from various resources. During the seminar, I am solely an observer. Students sit in a circle or at a table and discuss each topic they were provided. They practice the art of listening as well as asking questions and responding to one another. Students are not allowed to speak over each other and must respect everyone in the group. The activity is completely student-centered and student-led. Students generally enjoy the experience and often ask to do more Socratic Seminars throughout the school year.

Cristina Toflinski

English Teacher
Northwood High School

Pacing Guide and URQs

There are two things I do for each of my flipped History of Western Civilization classes to help make them more student-centered. First, I make all of the unit's assignments available as soon as the unit starts—all of the readings, question sets, even the unit study guide. While due dates keep the students on pace with their classmates, completion rules keep them on track, but to allow them work as far ahead as they wish.

Second, I employ a set of open-ended questions for reading and video assignments. I call these my Universal Response Questions or URQs. 1) List two things they found that were interesting or important along with why they think so; 2) List two things they either did not understand or that they want to know more about; and 3) Make one connection from the material to past materials, modern society, their lives, or pop culture. These provide insights into what students' feel is important, ideas of their background knowledge, and help them learn to apply the material to their lives.

Phillip Pulley

Teacher
Fieldcrest High School

Library Resources at Your Fingertips

I created a course for my library. I do not have classes with our 7-12 grade students. When I found students didn't know what was available to them, I created a course in Schoology.

Schoology provides students a one stop place to find everything they need whenever they need it. Students can easily access databases that our school subscribes to, resources to help students during the research process, video updates of new books available for checkout, and video tutorials for apps. Students can also message me if they need additional assistance.

Stephanie Dannehl

School Librarian/Tech Integration Specialist
Bertramd Community School

Nearpod Meets the Station Rotation Model

I love to use the station rotation model in my workshops and trainings. I set up 3-4 stations, with one being teacher-led. With all the materials for each station in Schoology, they are easy to locate.

In the teacher led station, I love to use Classkick or Nearpod so students are learning new content and get immediate feedback from me or peers. Using this feedback, it is easy to adjust and personalize the learning to meet all the unique needs. Another station pairs the in-class flip with an assessment. Students access the video from Schoology and work on an activity using the power of on-demand video to pause, rewind, and play again. After completing the activity, they take a short assessment in Schoology with multiple attempts available. They must achieve at least an 80% to move on.

Another station is reflection. Students create reflection videos where they can teach someone what they learned and share their reflection via a Schoology discussion so their peers can learn from them. The station rotation model is a powerful way to teach using technology as an integral part of students' independent work in stations. Students shift from being passive learners to active learners. Schoology is integral to make this model of teaching a success!

Ann Feldman

District Instructional Technology Trainer
Bellevue Public Schools

Leveraging Self-Paced Learning to Harness Student Engagement

For things to become more student-centered, we have to be able to manipulate time. Time is the biggest differentiator when it comes to creating true student-centered, personalized learning. To do this, I leverage Schoology to create various units that put the onus on the student to be able to work at their own pace while mastering the necessary skills.

Everything is built on choice and need. Units open and close on respective days and students have as much time as needed in between to complete the chosen tasks that show mastery of the concept/skill.

To increase engagement, I have also gamified the course to include badges, leaderboards, awards, etc. I have now been doing the same thing for the past 3 years with my teacher professional development and have awarded over 800 badges this year alone! Teachers love it!

Nick Amaral

District Staff Development Coordinator

Ramapo Indian Hills Regional High School District

TEC'em

Since I work with teachers, I try to make my PD more teacher-centered. Professional Development needs to be designed around that specific teacher. I developed my TEC'em program to help deliver personalized tech training to our staff.

I meet with each Building once a month for an hour. During this "Tech PLC" teachers will be asked to investigate current TECHNOLOGY teaching practices, Learn basic ESSENTIAL technology skills and knowledge, and then CELEBRATE and share their successes.

Jeremy Mahoney

Director of Instructional Technology
Springfield Platteview Community Schools

Conclusion

If student engagement and mastery are the ultimate destinations, and technology is the vehicle, then students must be the drivers. So, teachers, it's time to hand over the keys. By focusing on student-centered learning, you're offering your students an opportunity to own their learning and growth, which is fulfilling for everyone involved.

Hopefully, you're able to implement a few of these strategies and ideas in your own classroom this school year. Your students are sure to thank you.

See why 20 million students and educators use Schoology's Learning Management System (LMS) as their hub for education.

SHOW ME SCHOOLOGY