

Learner Centered Theory And Practice In Distance Education: Cases From Higher Education

The Learner-Centered Paradigm of Education

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This article, the third in a series of four installments, begins by discussing the need for paradigm change in education and for a critical systems approach to paradigm change, and examines current progress toward paradigm change. Then it explores what a learner-centered, Information-Age educational system should be like, including the APA learner-centered psychological principles, the National Research Council's findings on how people learn, the work of McCombs and colleagues on learner-centered schools and classrooms, personalized learning, differentiated instruction, and brain-based instruction. Finally, one possible vision of a learner-centered school is described.

Introduction

The dissatisfaction with and loss of trust in schools that we are experiencing these days are clear hallmarks of the need for change in our school systems. The strong push for a learner-centered paradigm of instruction in today's schools reflects our society's changing educational needs. We educators must help our schools to move into the new learner-centered paradigm of instruction that better meets the needs of individual learners, of their work places and communities, and of society in general. It is also important that we educators help the transformation occur as effectively and painlessly as possible. This article begins by addressing the need for transforming our educational systems to the

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Paradigm Change in Public Education

This is the third in a series of four articles on paradigm change in education. The first (May-June 2008) addressed the need for paradigm change in education and described the AECT FutureMinds Initiative for helping state departments of education to engage their school districts in this kind of change. The second (July-August) described the School System Transformation (SST) Protocol that captures the current state of knowledge about how states can help their school districts to engage in paradigm change. This article describes the nature of the learner-centered paradigm of education, and it addresses why this paradigm is needed. The final article (November-December) will explore a full range of roles that technology might play in this new paradigm of education.

learner-centered paradigm. Then it describes the nature of the learner-centered paradigm.

The Need for Change and the (Critical) Systems Approach to Educational Change

Information-Age vs. Industrial-Age Education. Where, as society has shifted from the Industrial Age into what many call the "Information Age" (Toffler, 1984; Reigeluth, 1994; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000), current schools were established to fit the needs of an Industrial-Age society (see Table 1). This factory-model, Industrial-Age school system has highly compartmentalized learning into subject areas, and students are expected to learn the same content in the same amount of time (Reigeluth, 1994). The current school system strives for standardization and was not designed to meet individual learners' needs. Rather it was designed to sort students into laborers and managers (see Table 2), and students are forced to move on with the rest of the class regardless of whether or not they have learned the material, and thus many students accumulate learning deficits and eventually drop out.

The (Critical) Systems Approach to Educational Change. Systemic educational transformation strives to change the school system to a learner-centered paradigm that will meet all learners' educational needs. It is concerned with the creation of a completely new system, rather than a mere retooling of the current system. It entails a paradigm shift as opposed to piecemeal change. Repeated calls for massive reform of current educational and training practices have consistently been published over the last several decades. This has resulted in an increasing recognition of the need for systemic transformation in education, as numerous piecemeal approaches to education reform

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