WHAT MAKES TEACHING LEARNER-CENTERED?

Teaching is learner-centered if. . .

It engages students in the hard and messy work of learning

The problems: Teachers are doing too many learning tasks for students.
Too much teaching is telling, rather than students doing.
Examples that illustrate the solution: Students should be asking more questions than teachers
Students should be doing the summaries and reviews

Teaching is learner-centered if. . .

Students are being taught learning skills explicitly

The problems: Learning the content is more important than learning skills
Teachers assume that learning skills are acquired by osmosis
Examples that illustrate the solution: Facing problems that students can’t solve
Assignments that get students doing the reading at the same time they develop reading skills

Teaching is learner-centered if. . .

Students are given some control over learning processes

The problems: Teachers are making all the decisions about learning for students
Examples that illustrate the solution: Giving students some choice over what and how they learn
Letting students decide the weight of some assignments

Teaching is learner-centered if. . .

Students are reflecting (thinking about) what and how they are learning

The problems: Students don’t know much about learning generally
Students haven’t encountered themselves as learners
Examples that illustrate the solution: Talk about learning
Exam debriefs where student face the decisions made about learning

Teaching is learner-centered if. . .

Students and teachers are learning from and with each other

The problems: Teachers underestimate how much and how well students can learn from each others
Teachers have concerns about using group work
Examples that illustrate the solution: Collaboration on exams

These features of learner-centered teaching are discussed more fully in the second edition of Maryellen Weimer’s book, Learner-Centered Teaching (available at www.josseybass.com). Maryellen’s email is grg@psu.edu and she blogs in the Teaching Professor blog at www.facultyfocus.com