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Book Review: Helping Students Learn in a Learner-Centered Environment by Terry Doyle (Stylus, 2008)

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Abstract

Excerpt: According to Terry Doyle in his book Helping Students Learn in a Learner-Centered Environment, "Most important, this book has been written to answer the single most asked question I hear when working with faculty groups: How do I help my students adjust to a learner-centered practice?" As desired, Doyle has offered some excellent answers for faculty struggling to transform their students into lifelong learners.

Keywords

Terry Doyle, Learner-centered, Learner-centered environment

Book Review

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Terry Doyle (Stylus, 2008)

Review by

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According to Terry Doyle in his book ***Helping Students Learn in a Learner-Centered Environment***, "Most important, this book has been written to answer the single most asked question I hear when working with faculty groups: How do I help my students adjust to a learner-centered practice?" As desired, Doyle has offered some excellent answers for faculty struggling to transform their students into lifelong learners.

In the introduction, Doyle stress that "creating a learner-centered environment is the most important thing an educator can do to optimize students' learning." However, he also cautions that initially these learner-centered environments will be uncomfortable for students who are accustomed to teacher-centered classroom. A learner-centered environment forces students to acquire learning roles and responsibilities that go far beyond taking notes and passing test. Doyle describes it as "an environment that allows students to take some real control over their educational experience and encourages them to make important choices about what and how they will learn." This book was written to serve as a guide as you assist your students in adapting to a learner-centered classroom, teaching them new skills and making them comfortable with their new responsibilities.

The first four chapters of Doyle's book focus on the importance of providing students with clear rationales for moving to a learner-centered practice. Doyle identifies the greatest challenge faced when adopting a learner centered approach as getting students to buy into the change and to switch their learning paradigm.   He outlines and develops a three step plan for meeting this greatest challenge. Step one is to be aware of why students are opposed to the roles and responsibilities of a learner-centered environment. Step two is to share with students reasons, backed by research, why they must take on new learning roles and responsibilities. Step three is to teach students the new skills they will need to be successful in a learner-centered environment.

The remaining eight chapters of Doyle's book focus on those skills students will need to master to become effective learners in this new environment. These skills include: independent learning; communication skills for working with peers; taking control over their learning; teaching other students; becoming better presenters and assessment performers; becoming lifelong learners; recognizing previous knowledge and misconceptions; and learning how to honestly evaluate themselves, others, and the teacher.

Throughout his book, Doyle describes many activities and assignments that faculty can easily incorporate to transform their own classrooms into learner-centered environments regardless of discipline. For example in chapter 6, he describes in detail an exercise allowing students to develop the guidelines for group activities, resulting in students taking

responsibility for abiding by the guidelines. In the appendices many additional resources are provided for faculty members, including several sample rubrics for evaluating those skills students must master in a learner-centered environment. The Reference Section at the end of the book with over 150 citations is a tribute to the extensiveness of knowledge that Doyle possesses concerning learner-centered environments.