

# The Perceived Effect of Learner-Centered Pedagogy in Secondary Active Learning Spaces and Impact on Student Engagement

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This study collects perceptions from educators about how pedagogical practices could be transformed for a learner-centered concentration in active learning spaces to support student engagement. Seven participants provide data through a focus group, interviews, and observations. Four main themes are identified: (1) Collaboration and Engagement, (2) Learner-Centered Pedagogy, (3) Professional Development, and (4) Positive Classroom Behaviors. Professional development focused on best practices helps to build teacher capacity and collective efficacy. With an investment in professional development for educators focused on learner-centered pedagogy, there are opportunities to realize a return on this investment in increased student engagement and collaboration. The researcher recommends a tiered-pyramid representation of an integrated active-learning system, with a solid foundation of learner-centered pedagogy.

## Introduction

Student engagement and the joy of learning continue to decline as students move to the secondary level (Gallup, 2016; Hodges, 2018). Gallup conducted surveys with Grades 5-12 students and found that about “Half of the students who responded to the survey are engaged with school (47%) with approximately one-fourth ‘not engaged’ (29%) and the remainder ‘actively disengaged’ (24%)” (Hodges, 2018). Educators require training and development on best practices for student engagement and collaboration in classrooms in order to make improvements.

At the center of the transformation to learning-centered approaches in changing classroom environments and design is the powerful professional development for educators on learner-centered approaches that lead to improved student outcomes (Barrett et al., 2012; Akey, 2006; Kariippanon et al., 2019; Connor & Pope, 2013; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). When the pedagogy is centered around students' learning, they are empowered to direct their own learning, and solve real-world problems (Nair, 2017). To improve a love of learning while empowering learners, we need to provide quality professional development to our educators on learner-centered pedagogy.

It is the actions inside those learning spaces that bring authentic learning, engagement, and progress (Hare & Dillon, 2020). When an educator brings together learner-centered pedagogy, integrated technology, and flexible learning spaces, an integrated active learning ecosystem can be achieved. In Figure 1, we can connect technology and space with learner-centered pedagogy for a more robust learning environment for all students (Steelcase Education Solutions, 2013).

The integration of flexible seating, technology integration, and active learning, coupled with high-quality professional development for educators, can help improve student learning outcomes and engagement (Gebre et al., 2015; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017; Hattie, 2021; Kariippanon et al., 2019). Blackmore et al. (2011) clearly stated:

The critical role of teacher professional learning and pedagogy as key mediating factors. Unless teachers are prepared and provided with the necessary professional skills, tools, and resources to change their practices, then newly built spaces will not move them to innovative pedagogies (p. 38).

Learner-centered pedagogy in active learning spaces and its impact on student engagement has been understudied and not deeply reported as qualitative research. More research was needed to address this gap. The purpose of this study was to collect perceptions and evidence from middle and high school suburban educators about how professional development with learner-centered pedagogy in flexible

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