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THE WAYS OF CREATING STUDENT-CENTERED EFL METHODOLOGY CLASSES

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Abstract: The article presents the authors experience of creating the student-centered EFL Methodology classes. She describes how the reforms and project activities influence the transformation of the system of higher education in Ukraine. The impact of two projects "Ukraine Higher Education Teaching Excellence Program" and "New Generation School Teacher" is specified. There are the examples of positive practices of using project ideas for focusing on learning more than on teaching. The ideas for making digital learning more student-centered are suggested. Successfully organized active engaged learning within small groups collaboration is described. Other student-centered activities used in EFL Methodology classes are presented and specifies. Special attention is paid to the word clouds tools and virtual boards. A range of such modes of interaction as group work, guided reading, jigsaw learning, microteaching, project work, task-based learning, workshop are recommended as student-centered ways of organizing students' learning in EFL Methodology classroom. A set of student-centered classroom characteristics is outlined.

Keywords: student-centered classroom, EFL Methodology class, project activities, transformation, learning.

> *"Excellent teachers are made, not born;*
> *they become excellent through*
> *investment in their teaching abilities"*
> (The Professionalization: 10)

Nowadays there appear a lot of studies devoted to the issues in higher education associated with teaching and learning organization, the factors contributing to creating student-centered

educational space. It has lately become a relevant topic in educational context of both countries Ukraine and Moldova.

When we speak of stakeholders in higher education, we should primarily mention students and their future employers. The highest level of stakeholders is represented with Ministry of Education and Science and National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance. The secretary of NAQA in Ukraine Mykhailo Wynnytsky said that the university is a "place for students' worldview formation" (Wynnytsky). And for these students need the classroom for "interesting discussions, sharing experience, discourse formation ("horizontal" communication caused with their interest, not obligation); the laboratory as a space for search, crystallization, eliciting, generalizing, verbalizing, retaining of new knowledge; stage requisites – the elements of affiliation through which the environment becomes the community: student café, clubs, societies, teams, etc." (Wynnytsky). All these aspects really matter a lot.

The transformation of higher education to more student-centered model is influenced by many factors, one of which is project activity of university teachers. One of such projects has become Ukraine Higher Education Teaching Excellence Program (with the support of British Council Ukraine, Advance HE, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance and National Academy of Sciences Institute of Higher Education). Bogdan Khmelnitsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University was one of the ten Ukrainian universities selected for participation in the project.

The motto of the program was: "Engage learners not 'present' to learners. We as teachers should be focused on creating conditions for students' activity, engagement, independence, empowerment, constructing their knowledge by means of experiential learning, learning by doing, student led discovery, problem-based learning, projects, peer cooperation and collaboration, competitions, flipped learning". The project trainers helped university teachers to dive into student-centered

atmosphere and to understand the mechanism of student-centered teaching and assessment.

Contemporary pedagogy of higher education suggests a lot approaches, methodologies and technologies. We do emphasize their special importance for future teachers. Professor Carol Evans, Professor Muijs, Dr. Tomlinson among High Impact Pedagogies pointed out Visual representations (concept maps, mind maps, time lines); Simulations/ Inquiry based learning; Problem based/project-based learning; Games/gamification; Team based learning; Just in Time Teaching (JiTT); Flipped Learning; Narrative pedagogies (Evans, Muijs, Tomlinson: 25).

The best opportunities for teaching our students to teach in the future are realized through the Methodology of teaching their professional subjects. Active engaged learning is successfully organized within small groups collaboration. It helps to develop some hard skills, in Methodology presented with selecting some texts for reading, designing an activity or a sequence of activities for teaching vocabulary, solving the critical issue in a case-study and a lot of other similar tasks. It is important to emphasize that each member of the group is responsible for the result of their work. The output of the group work should be assessed so that students could see the importance of their collaboration and find out possible ways for the improvement of their solutions, choices, actions.

Development of such soft skills as leadership in the classroom can encourage greater participation and more responses (Collier: 57), and contribute to making the classroom a "dynamic and exciting learning environment" (Greig: 82). As a result, there appears a learning environment favorable for students to feel more relaxed to discuss, raise questions, and express ideas or challenging statements.

The student-led discussion surely facilitates "sharing, clarifying, and distributing knowledge among peers" (Rivard & Straw: 585), moreover it makes the content of the learning much closer to the students and meets their needs, perception peculiarities, generating examples more relevant to their lives

(Collier: 57). One more constructive idea for boosting our students' learning is near-peer instruction, when the peer leader as a near equal can be closer to students' abilities to comprehend and solve problems (Tien, Roth & Kampmeier: 607). So, the interaction becomes more natural and is realized in relevant ways.

A new wave of changes in education was caused by Covid-19 pandemic. Digital technologies saved the situation; still the role of a teacher hasn't become less valuable in digital classroom. Modern methodologists suggest us their help as for methodological support for virtual educational space. For example, we cannot help but mentioning "Virtual team building activities" by Michelle Cummings. The book is especially relevant for current crucially transformed ways of learning and teaching. Since the very beginning of the book the author gives such important pieces of advice:

"Email note-taking handouts with check-in prompts ahead of time. This will help learners stay engaged and will increase retention. If they're listening and writing, they're paying attention. Inject frequent interactivity into your session like polls, surveys, status check emojis (thumbs up/thumbs down) or the chat feature. Invite participants to stand and do a quick stretch. Even little things like this can help keep the brain engaged and help to keep people focused. Use people's names as much as you can. Respond to as many questions as you can. Make their participation count. Be visible to the learners. Appear on camera as much as you can.

Script out your responses or remarks if you tend to get super nervous when presenting to a crowd of people. Dress the same way as you would in the classroom. Smile! If you don't have the option for live streaming or video, put a headshot of you up on the slide when you introduce yourself so learners have a face to put with your voice" (Cummings: 3).

Following these recommendations will help the teacher build rapport and create the most favorable conditions for learning and teaching in the environment catering for interpersonal communication and collaboration.

Graham Gibbs states that even lectures can become student-centered. Lectures can include quizzes and interaction, and some teachers turn 'lecture' slots on the timetable into large class workshops. 'Lectures' can be used to brief and de-brief active learning that takes place out of class, rather than assuming such study will happen automatically as the consequence of presentations (Gibbs: 17).

Each academic subject has its own potential for creating active educational environment with focus on learning not teaching. Each teacher contributes differently to making students the center of the classroom. We would like to share our positive experience of participating in joint project of British Council Ukraine and Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine "New Generation School Teacher", the main product of which was the curriculum of EFL Methodology Teaching. Thanks to the project the system of methodological training in 15 Ukrainian universities has changed. Now we teach Methodology in English and the word 'teach' isn't quite the right word. We help our students learn as we follow the principles: "Start where your learners are, integration of theory and practice, appropriate balance and variety of learning and teaching modes, dominance of challenging and feasible tasks and activities, ample use of reflection: in/on action, on learning experience (both at school and university), use of data from school-based practice (curriculum)" (Curriculum: 116-117). The ways of creating student-centered EFL Methodology classes are based on engaging them in active learning by using a range of modes:

•group work – any learning activity which is done by small groups of learners working together to complete a task;

•guided reading – an activity in which students are encouraged to read specific articles or sections of books with a particular purpose in mind;

•jigsaw learning – a method of organising activity in which different students cover different areas of a topic; they later exchange their learning;

•microteaching – a practice used in the training of teachers which consists of teachers trying out short lesson sequences for an audience of their peers, some of whom adopt the roles of learners;

•project work – a purposeful, task-based activity through which students address authentic problems/questions and create some kind of product which they present at the end of the allocated time; it usually involves an extended amount of independent work either by an individual student or by a group of students in and beyond the classroom;

•task-based learning – an approach in which the learners use language to fulfill a specified task. Their focus is on the task rather than on the language they are using, e.g. case study;

•workshop – a way of organizing student-centered learning in which the teacher plays the role of facilitator. It usually involves hands-on activity by students.

This semester we have begun to work with new groups. In the original version of the Curriculum there is a separate unit "ICT in teaching English", but it will not be studied soon, so taking into account today's reality we decided to use at least one digital technology, tool or resource in class each time. So, we dive into the new topic by means of word cloud tools such as Answergarden word cloud generator. Besides, there are other useful tools such as:

WordArt | Artistic word clouds with shapes
Wordclouds.com | Custom shaped word clouds
WordItOut | Word clouds with emojis
Jason Davies | Word clouds focused on word placement
TagCrowd | Create word clouds from URLs
Abcya | Fun word cloud art for kids
Tagxedo | Word clouds from blogs, tweets, or URLs
 Mentimeter | Interactive word clouds
Word Clouds in Python | Word clouds with code

To prepare for disputes, debates, discussions we use such resources as Kialo, LessWrong, Poll Everywhere.

In virtual reality students share their opinions by means of virtual boards such as Jamboard and Padlet.

But there are a lot of other boards such as:

Miro for turning ideas into tasks,

Stormboard for creating multiple whiteboards in a single brainstorming session,

MURAL for remote, multi-member team meetings,

Limnu for teaching students remotely,

InVision Freehand for annotating design files with a team,

Conceptboard for turning a brainstorming session into a formal presentation,

Explain Everything for creating whiteboard videos

You can see an example by one of the student in class on our virtual board:

Picture 1. A student's poster on a virtual board Jamboard
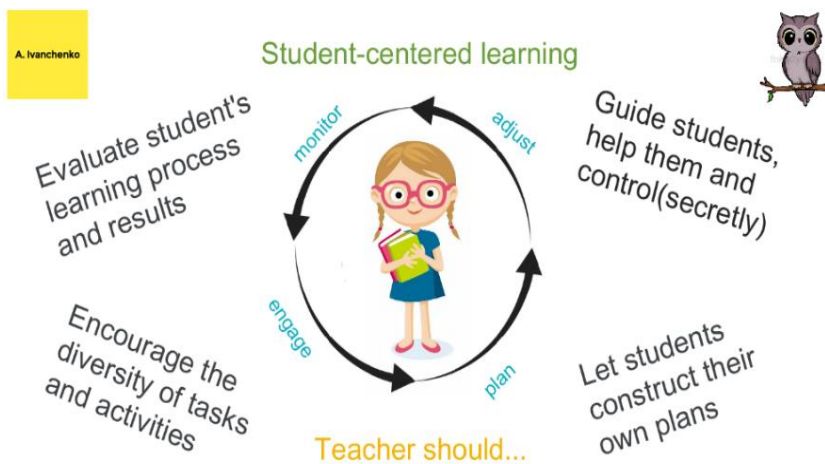
It is even more useful to organize creating posters in small groups. This mode of interaction teaches students to collaborate, to work in a team, to give and support arguments, to be responsible, to communicate and other useful soft skills so necessary in their future professional activity.

Task based approach gives wonderful opportunities for collaboration, communication, hands-on activities and development of soft skills.

Special role play activities which help students use their experience, share it and find the advantages of constructing new knowledge in this way. One of the favorites of my students is the activity "Speaking corners". We have three locations in the classroom 'Agree', 'Disagree', 'Not sure'. They read or listen to a contradictory statement, go to the location which expresses their position, discuss in groups their opinions and present their arguments. Each group or student can ask questions, comment. They can change their point and change the location. The teacher only helps to summarize. When we tried this activity in our first class after the second lockdown, after the end of the class students were leaving the classroom with the words of gratitude. Real communication is one of the most important things in student-centered classroom.

Thus, student-centered classroom differs from teacher-centered with a set of such characteristics:

- Respect and attention to the diversity of students and their needs, catering for their flexible educational lines;
- Various ways of presenting/for discovering the educational materials;
- Flexible use of pedagogical methods variety;
- Evaluation of materials, methods and ways of helping students to construct their learning/knowledge, develop skills/ competences;
- Fostering students' autonomy, teacher's support in students' learning autonomously;
- Students' and teachers' mutual respect;
- Learning is preferred to teaching in student-centered classroom;
- Giving more choice to the students.

The experience of creating student-centered classroom contributes to the whole system of education improvement. The students participating in such classes understand their advantages

and become more demanding as for their academic freedom. The teachers catering for the development of students' hard and soft skills, constructing their own learning are still considered innovators. We do hope that in the very near future all classes will become student-centered and involve students in taking decisions as for their learning.

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