LEARNER-CENTERED TEACHING IN ECONOMICS:
AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

A Dissertation in
Adult Education

by

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Abstract

The quest to reform America’s education system has been at the forefront of educators’, policymakers’ and researchers’ efforts since 1983's *Nation at Risk*. Both educators and researchers have realized that educational practices need to be completely transformed and that a research-based framework should guide their reform efforts. One area where educational practices need to be completely transformed is in the teaching of economics. In recent years, the quality of economics instruction has received consistently poor reviews by undergraduate students across the United States. In response to these concerns, researchers have been studying ways of improving economics instruction. One suggested approach is the use of learner-centered teaching principles. This is based on evidence that suggests that motivation, learning, and achievement are highly enhanced where learner-centered principles and practices are in place.

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of learner-centered teaching (LCT) in the teaching of an introductory economics class. The theoretical framework of the study was based upon social constructivist theory and was informed by both progressive and humanistic teaching philosophies. The study utilized a self-study, action research approach to inquiry.

Through the use of pre-/post tests, journaling, observations, and interviews, the study revealed that learning is enhanced when learner-centered principles are in place. The study found that in order for LCT to be successfully implemented, the teacher needs to be both mentally and physically prepared for the numerous challenges posed by the new pedagogic paradigm. The study also found that if a teacher is able to clearly articulate the manner in which LCT is to be implemented, then the guardians of the institutional structures i.e. administrators, will likely support their efforts. The study further revealed that students, who initially resist the implementation of LCT, do so out of the perceived fear that LCT will lead to more work as well
as deny them a source of authoritative academic guidance. The study showed that if a teacher is able to build a nurturing and caring classroom environment, students would reciprocate by working hard and taking responsibility for their learning. However, the study also found that a single semester’s application of learner-centered teaching principles would not change long established teaching practices. Persistence and repeated implementation of LCT over a number of semesters is the only way to sufficiently affect institutionalized educational instruction.
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children; Sheila, Brian, Justin, and Baraka. If I was able to make it at the time I did, you can do anything you want, if you believe in yourself. To my mother, Faustina Nyakerario Ongeri whose love for education inspired me, despite the fact that she never had any formal education herself, I also dedicate this one to you.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For a period of over 17 years, I taught without any specific formal teacher training. As is
the case in many universities where instructors have no formal teacher training, I was confident
that I was well prepared to teach at the university level. It never occurred to me that I needed to
have any training to be a good teacher. Therefore, after receiving my first and second degrees in
economics, I started teaching at Kenyatta University, Kenya. For a period of about ten years, I
taught economics at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. During those years, I embraced
the lecture methods of my university professors. I even used the same economics textbook. I
never saw anything wrong with lecturing. As a former British colony, Kenya follows a British
system of education that has been structured around an African cultural environment that
mandates respect for teachers. Thus, while teaching at Kenyatta University, I never experienced
problems with either students or administrators. As a result, I never felt the need for seeking a
teacher-specific education. The only training that I thought I needed was a graduate degree to
broaden my knowledge base and be able to attract research funds.

After relocating to the United State, I decided to pursue a Masters degree in economics at
Purdue University. After graduating, I took up a teaching position with a Harrisburg area
community college. This was my first teaching experience outside of Kenya and it wasn’t a
pleasant one. It felt very different teaching in the US. I had different expectations regarding
student behavior. Students were loud and talked to one another as if I was not there. They
demonstrated little or no respect for me. This behavior lasted for three semesters. A significant
number of students dropped my class. Students complained to the assistant dean that I gave them
a lot of work and that they couldn’t follow my instruction because of my strong African accent.
Without hearing my side of the story, the assistant dean decided to visit my classroom and evaluate my teaching. Even though the peer review went well, I felt hurt, and, as a result, I didn’t enjoy teaching anymore.

All of this left me wondering about why they were picking on me. Was it because I was a black male from Kenya teaching predominantly white students? I knew I was capable since I had taught at the collegiate level for several years. What I did not realize was that what I was experiencing in my classroom was not unique. Teacher’s expectations often conflict with students’ expectations. When this happens, it is normal for teachers to experience discomfort. As Palmer (2000) points out, “if you are a teacher who never has had bad days, or has them but does not care, this book is not for you” (p. 1). Palmer further argues that, the tangles of teaching usually originate from three main sources;

First, the subjects we teach are as large and complex as life, so our knowledge of them is always flawed and partial. Two, the students we teach are larger than life and even more complex. And third, we teach who we are, that means that one teaches with his/her inner self. That further means that knowing my inner self is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. In fact knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on myself knowledge. (p. 2)

Equipped with this kind of knowledge one is likely to understand the complex nature of the teaching profession. It is clear to me that knowing the subject matter is one thing yet knowing how to present it to students is something else altogether. By not understanding the difference between my own beliefs and assumptions and those of my students, along with my lack of teacher training, negatively affected my teaching experiences.
In recent years, American undergraduate students have listed economics as being one of their least popular subjects (Cashin, 1990; Becker & Watts, 2001b). Due to this poor ranking, there has been an increased effort to understand why students have such a negative perception of economics. One explanation is that economics is one of the few social science disciplines that use statistical and mathematical models to analyze real life problems (Hansen, 2001; Cohn, Cohn, Hult, Balch & Bradley, 1998). Often students are not attracted to courses that put an emphasis on statistics unless they have a strong interest in mathematics. This is despite the fact that no significant relationship has been established between mathematical background and aptitude in economics (Cohn et al., 1998). Another explanation posited is that by making economics a requirement for programs such as business management, nursing, law, and culinary art, a large number of students are taking economics who would otherwise not have (Hansen, 1982; Salemi & Siegfried, 1999). The final explanation offered for the low opinion of economics’ courses is that lecturing has been found to be the predominant mode of instruction (Becker & Watts, 2001a; George, 2008; Quddus & Bussing-Burks, 1997). Becker and Watts (2001a) argue that, “changing teaching methods and increasing the importance of teaching within economics departments, in response to falling enrollments, is a plausible and endogenous response for faculty members and departments” (p. 446).

One of the teaching methods that has been recommended for motivating students is learner-centered teaching (LCT). The aim of LCT is to accommodate as many different learning styles as possible (McCombs & Miller, 2006). LCT incorporates students’ input into course planning and allows students to work both independently and in groups on specific assignments. The idea of learner-centered teaching is not new in educational literature. Teaching from the perspective of the student was first articulated by Dewey’s (1933) reflective work in education.
Dewey’s theory of learning can be closely associated with the main principles of learner-centered teaching. Dewey’s theory was centered on: learners and their experiences, teaching practice reflection, and shifting power to students in order to create a more democratic learning process. According to Dewey, since the student is central to the learning process, their needs should be addressed in the presentation of the subject matter. Dewey discouraged the use of pre-planned subject matter and strongly supported the argument that students and teachers are equally responsible for constructing content that addresses the needs of the learner (Dewey, 1991).

These are the central tenets of learner-centered teaching. The role of the teacher is more of a facilitator than an expert in an area of learning. This is meant to motivate students. As Combos (1976) contends, to create an effective learning environment there needs to be an atmosphere that facilitates the exploration of meaning. Learners must be made to feel accepted and safe. They should be informed of the risks and benefits of seeking new knowledge from the onset. The learning environment should provide for every student’s involvement, genuine learner interaction, and authentic socialization (Cranton, 2003). Students should also be accorded regular opportunities to explore new experiences in the search for meaningful knowledge. These opportunities must be provided in such a way that students are responsible for their learning. Students should also be allowed to challenge new information by using their past experiences. Finally, students should be encouraged to acquire new meaning through the process of self-discovery. The teaching methods recommended for such discoveries are those that encourage individualized learning, with specific adaptation for the student’s own learning style.

Learner-centered teaching principles encompass the qualities that motivate learning. To apply learner-centered teaching principles, Weimer (2002) suggests five areas of change: (a) the
balance of power, (b) the function of content, (c) the role of the teacher, (d) the responsibility for learning, and (e) the purpose and processes of evaluation.

The implementation of LCT principles will facilitate effective learning. However, in order to successfully implement learner-centered teaching it is important to understand the dynamics of teaching adults in higher education.

Teaching Adults in Higher Education

As recent research has shown, teaching adults can be pluralistic, multi-faceted, and complex (Pratt, Collins & Selinger, 2003). Kember’s (1997) review though, conducted between 1983 and 1996, found that only five views - nurturing, developmental, transmission, apprenticeship, and social reform - of teaching in higher education substantially differ. Despite variations in personal teaching styles, there are few substantively different ways of conceptualizing the teaching of adults. This indicates that a single technique of learner-centered teaching may motivate learners across different disciplines.

In learner-centered teaching, it is assumed that learning is only achieved through persistent effort and can only come from the heart of the individual (Collins, & Selinger, 2003). It is also assumed that people are motivated when they work on issues that are of interest to them and when they are not hindered by fear of failure. LCT states that students learn more when they know that: (a) they can succeed if they give it their best shot; (b) their achievement is a product of their own hard work and not the teacher’s effort; and (c) that their efforts to learn are always supported by their teacher, as well as their peers. Teachers who teach from an LCT perspective promote a climate of trust and caring in the classroom. They help their students set challenging but achievable goals and provide an encouraging and supportive environment.
(McCombs, 2003). It has also been demonstrated that adults will be motivated to learn if they are encouraged to set their own goals since they are the ones who know what it is they want to learn (Knowles, 1976).

Teaching from a learner-centered perspective is also grounded in the belief that effective teaching should be planned and conducted from the student’s perspective. A teacher who teaches from this perspective will always strive to understand how their students think. Their primary concern is to help students be able to comprehend complex subject matter. Pratt (1998) argues for the development of two key skills: (a) learn effective questioning skills and challenge students to move from being relatively simple and passive to becoming more reflective thinkers; and (b) bridging the gap between theory and experience that ensures life examples are meaningful to students. Question-answer sessions, corporate problem solving, and case studies are some of the recommended tools for bridging the knowledge gap. Effective teaching should always incorporate the students’ experiences and knowledge into the teaching process (Cranton, 2003; McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

The student is viewed as a social human being when teaching from a learner-centered perspective. LCT assumes that learning is a collective endeavor. Under LCT, teachers have a responsibility to awaken students to the values and practices that are fundamental within the discipline of study. It is the teacher’s responsibility to challenge the status quo and to encourage students to reflect on how they are positioned in a particular discourse or practice. LCT believes that class discussions should be focused less on how knowledge has been developed and more on identifying what purposes knowledge serves. Teaching materials are analyzed for what they say and for what they do not say; for what is included and for what is excluded; and for who is represented and for who is not represented. In LCT, students are encouraged to take social action
to improve their own lives. They are challenged to be critical with respect to the powers that are in place, and to deconstruct whatever is not in the best interests of society (Freire, 1976).

The main critique of learner-centered teaching comes from those who embrace the transmission approach to instruction (Kember, 1997). Transmission is based on the assumption that effective teaching requires a great amount of commitment to the subject matter (Collins, & Selinger, 2003). A good teacher is seen as someone who has mastery of the subject matter and is able to efficiently transmit it to the students. Effective teachers are expected to take their students through planned sets of class activities that ensure mastery of the subject. Teachers are encouraged to: provide clear objectives, regularly reflect on their pace of teaching, make effective use of available resources, avoid misunderstandings by answering students’ questions, and provide necessary feedback in a timely manner. Effective teachers are expected to be enthusiastic about their teaching and should be able to convey their enthusiasm to students. This perspective of teaching usually sees the students as having little or no role in deciding how teaching should be done in the classroom (Brookfield, 1996).

Apprenticeship teaching is another approach to instruction that is not in-line with LCT. Under the apprenticeship perspective, effective teaching is seen as a process of initiating students into a set of social customs and beliefs about work. Effective teachers are highly skilled and they approach their teaching in a professional manner (Kember, 1997). Such teachers are easily recognized for their expertise. They usually reveal the inner aspects of their profession and are able to translate it into a language that is easily understood by students. Teaching from the apprenticeship perspective requires that learning tasks gradually increase in difficulty while accommodating students different ability levels. Teachers are expected to know their students’ capabilities and where they may need guidance or direction. It is also assumed that as students
gain competence, the teacher will step back and allow the student more responsibility. The desired outcome is for students to progress from being dependent to being able to work independently. Apprenticeship teaching sees the instructor as an expert; someone who is equipped with knowledge to pass over to the student, who is nothing more than an empty vessel waiting to be filled. Teaching from this kind of perspective may not motivate students, especially adults, who know what they are looking for (Knowles, 1984).

Statement of the Problem

Reforming the American system of education has been at the forefront since the Nation at Risk report came out in 1983. Efforts have been made toward reforming both state and federal educational standards. The main purpose of all these initiatives has been to improve the standard of learning (Fuhrman & Odden, 2001). There has been a growing need for educational practices that are transformative in nature. Both educators and researchers have seen the need for a research-based framework to guide planned reform efforts (McCombs, 2003).

The “chalk-and-talk” is the instructional approach predominantly used in the teaching of economics. For example, a 1996 national survey of 628 economics teachers found that instructors spent an average of 83% of their class time lecturing (Watts, & Becker, 2008; Becker & Watts, 1998). Students’ views are hardly considered in the teaching of economics (Walstad & Watts, 1985). This study is geared towards exploring other, more effective ways, of teaching economics. Hopefully this change in teaching strategy will motivate students. There is abundant evidence that suggests motivation, learning, and achievement is highly enhanced when learner-centered principles and practices are in place (McCombs & Whisler, 1997). These are practices that address the personal domain of the student. The benefits of LCT extend not only to students,
but to everyone involved in the educational system. Changes in our society are necessitating a change in the role and function of schools so that they better meet the needs of the whole person.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of LCT in teaching the principles of economics. The study sought to identify the learning outcomes in an introductory economics class when LCT principles are used. The study also sought to document any attained successes or failures in applying these principles. The broad research question guiding this study was: How do instructors effectively use the learner-centered teaching approach in the teaching of an introductory economics class? The specific questions include:

1. How are learner-centered teaching principles applicable to the teaching of an introductory economics class?

2. What can be said about the effectiveness of learner-centered teaching in introductory economics?

3. What are the challenges of applying learner-centered teaching principles in introductory economics?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the social constructivist theory of learning and learner-centered teaching. In recent years, the constructivist theory of learning has emerged as a prominent approach to teaching. Building on the work of John Dewey (1933); scholars such as Piaget (1966), Mezrow (1978), Vygotsky (1978), and Von Glaserfeld (1995), have provided historical precedent and rationale for constructivism learning theory.
constructivism represents a dramatic shift from teaching that is based on behaviorism to one that
is based on cognitive theory (Von Glaserfeld, 1995). Constructivist epistemology believes that
students construct individual knowledge on the basis of their interactions with one another. There
are four epistemological assumptions in constructivism. That knowledge is: (a) physically
constructed by those who are involved in active learning; (b) symbolically constructed by those
who are making their own representations of action; (c) socially constructed by those who
convey their meaning making to others; (d) theoretically constructed by those who try to explain
things they don't completely understand (Gagnon & Collay, 2006, p. 6) These assumptions are
heavily informed by both progressive and humanistic philosophies of teaching and learning.

Progressivism has a respect for individuality. It believes that human beings are social
animals who learn best when actively involved in the learning process (Ryan & Cooper, 1995).
In a progressive classroom, the teacher’s role is to focus students’ curiosity and to facilitate class
discussions. Students are encouraged to learn by doing, through which social virtues like
cooperation and tolerance for varied points of view are developed. Students also learn to problem
solve real life situations that they will likely encounter outside the classroom. Progressivism
believes this kind of learning will provide students with the necessary tools to become flexible
problem solvers and lifelong learners.

Progressivism goes hand in hand with the humanist philosophy of teaching. Humanist
philosophy can be traced back to the ideas of Confucius, Protagoras, Aristotle, Erasmus,
Montaigne, and Spinoza (Elias & Merriam, 1980). It is founded on the notion that "human
beings are capable of making significant personal choices within the constraints imposed by
heredity, personal history, and environment" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 118). Humanist
principles stem from the strong belief in the individual learner’s specific human needs. The
underlying assumptions of humanist philosophy are: (a) human nature is inherently good; (b) individuals are free and autonomous, thus they are capable of making major personal choices; (c) human potential for development and growth is virtually unlimited; (d) individual’s self-concept plays an important role in learning for growth and development; (e) individuals strive for self-actualization; (f) reality is individually defined; and (g) individuals have a responsibility to both themselves and to those that they interact with (Elias & Merriam, 1980). These assumptions are true reflections of the APA’s fourteen principles of learner-centered teaching.

Methodology Overview

The project was a qualitative action research study designed to study the impact learner-centered teaching principles have on an introductory economics class at Spartanburg Methodist College, South Carolina. Action research is “learning by doing” (Herr & Anderson, 2006). It is a process in which; (a) a problem is identified, (b) an action is taken in order to solve the problem, (c) reflection on how the action was implemented, and (d) how the action solved, or failed to solve, the problem. This process is done with the intention of reformulating the action in a continuous effort towards eventually solving the problem. Thus, action research is a cyclical four-stage operation of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Herr & Anderson, 2006; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Action research is recommended for teachers who want to better understand their own teaching and their students’ learning. It is a process through which teachers can take charge of their own professional development and learning. Action research was selected for studying learner-centered teaching principles because of the belief that those who experience the problem are best suited for finding the solution. Action research is a process meant to generate knowledge and to inform practice. The process of research design is on going and is done by all
participants. Thus, the application of LCT will be done in a cyclical nature of plan, act, observe, and reflect.

Action research allows for many different research tools to be used concurrently on a given project and the researcher is an integral part of the research undertaking. The various methodical tools that are allowed in action research include: documents collection and analysis, journaling, questionnaire surveys, participant observation and recording, unstructured interviews, and general case studies. The proposed study intends to use all these tools.

The study utilized qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis. Mainly relying on Susman’s (1983) and MacIsaac’s (1995) action research models, the study used a specific sequence of “plan-act-observe-reflect” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In collecting qualitative data, interviews, at both individual and group levels, were conducted, with observations and other documents providing good sources of data (Pattorn, 2002). This study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. Participants were formally asked to participate in the study before the project. As the research teacher, I completed the research project within one academic semester. Following the proper procedures, I formally invited students to participate in the project (Appendix C). Participants were asked to write an iconography exploring their beliefs, experiences, and perception of economics at the beginning stage of the project. I, along with the participants, kept weekly journals to reflect on how the class was progressing. I reviewed students’ journals every other week in order to make adjustments to my teaching strategies, class activities, and speed of content coverage. I asked participants to record their levels of motivation as different teaching styles and activities were adopted. At the end of the course, participants were required to complete a motivational assessment as well as a teacher and subject matter evaluation. The quantitative data collected
included grading data on quizzes, homework assignments, group projects, examinations, and attendance. Two weeks after the end of the course, I administered a follow-up interview with the ten participants in order to assess their perception of economics. This interview helped gauge the impact learner-centered teaching has had on their lives as well as whether they will use what they have learned.

**Significance of the Study**

Research has demonstrated that there is a genuine concern about the way economics is currently taught. Students in introductory economics classes seem to lack a motivation to learn (Becker & Watts, 2001). This study will contribute to our understanding of how to teach economics in two broad ways. First, it will look at the outcomes achieved as a result of LCT strategies being implemented in an economics course. Second, it will provide economics teachers with strategies about how to motivate students and achieve effective results.

The other significance of this study stems from the use of learner-centered teaching principles. McCombs and Whisler (1997) have argued that there is abundant evidence that motivation, learning, and achievement are highly enhanced when learner-centered principles and practices are in place. They state that practices which address the personal domain of students actually increase their level of motivation. This study will assist a great number of instructors seeking to use LCT to help enhance their student’s learning.

The field of adult education, which is increasingly becoming business inclined, will benefit from this study. With changing world economies, globalization, internalization, and the outsourcing of jobs, thousands of adult workers are losing their jobs. Many are finding themselves in adult education classrooms learning new work skills in an effort to remain
competitive in the workplace. The findings of this study will contribute to the effectiveness of adult education classes. This will benefit those workers who are studying new job skills.

At a personal level, this study has enhanced my teaching practice since it challenged my beliefs about teaching. This study has challenged me as a practitioner of economics. I have learned how to deal with my position as a foreign black male teaching predominantly white students. I have learned how to identify and understand my own socially and culturally constructed beliefs that encourage prejudice, racism, and other biases that hinder effective teaching and learning.

Definition of Terms

*Constructivism* – This study will use the term constructivism as defined by Fosnot (1996). According to Fosnot, constructivism is "a theory about knowledge and learning." It is knowledge that is "temporary, developmental, none objective, self-constructed, and socially and culturally influenced." Fosnot perceives learning as self-regulatory. This process involves the internal conflict between personal knowledge and the discovery of new information. Fundamentally, constructivism is based on the premise that learners actively construct their own knowledge by anchoring new information to pre-existing knowledge (Strommen & Lincoln, 1992). Thus, learners are believed to construct new knowledge through cooperative interactions, social activities, discourse, and discussion.

*Constructivist* – Although some scholars may use the term constructivist to represent a different form of the constructivism learning theory, in this study, the term constructivist will be used to refer to the practitioner that practices constructivism as defined above. Thus, the term constructivism will refer to the practice, while the term constructivist will refer to the practitioner.
Social Constructivism - Social constructivism is a branch of constructivism that is mainly associated with Vygotsky, hence the reason why it is sometimes referred to as Vygotskian constructivism. It is the form of constructivism that emphasizes the role education plays in people’s social transformation. Social constructivists believe that an individual’s development is influenced by the sociocultural context within which they live. They see an individual’s development as being derived from group social interactions in which culturally shared meanings are internalized by the individuals (Richardson, 1997). It is believed that as an individual interacts with the environment, knowledge is constructed in a process that changes both the individual and the environment. Teaching from a social constructivism perspective, the subject of study is the link between the individual and a given social and/or cultural context. This approach assumes that theory and practice do not develop in a vacuum; instead, they are shaped by the prevailing cultural assumptions of both the teacher and the students (Martin, 1994; O’Loughlin, 1995). Under social constructivism, both the subject of instruction, knowledge, and teaching style are influenced by the sociocultural/historical environment that produced them.

Learner-centered teaching (LCT) - is a broad teaching technique that utilizes active learning instead of lectures, holds students responsible for their learning, and uses self-directed and/or group collaboration/cooperation in learning. It is teaching that mainly focuses on the individual student’s heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p. 9). LCT’s main concern is on how learning occurs as well as which teaching practices are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation and achievement for every student involved.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect learner-centered teaching principles have on the teaching of economics. This literature review will provide a better understanding of the theories behind effective teaching strategies. The first section explores the literature on constructivism and learner-centered teaching, while the second section examines the empirical literature on teaching economics.

Constructivist Theory of Learning

In recent years, the constructivist theory of learning has emerged as one of the preferred theories used when transforming teaching practices (Kinnucan-Welch & Jenlink, 1998). Building on the work of John Dewey (1933), scholars like Piaget (1966), Mezrow (1978), Vygotsky (1978), Glaserfeld (1995), Fosnot (1996), Anderson, and Herr (1999; 2005) have provided a strong rationale for teaching from the constructivist perspective. Constructivism represents a shift from teaching that is based on behaviorism to teaching that is based on cognitive theory. Constructivism is a learning theory based on the premise that individuals construct their own understanding of the world by reflecting on their own experiences. Constructivism believes that individuals generate their own rules or beliefs. This helps them make sense of their experiences. In constructivism, learning is simply the process of meaning-making since beliefs are often adjusted in order to accommodate new experiences.

Despite the commonly accepted attributes of constructivism, many scholars have different interpretations. Vadeboncoeur (1997) identified three significant interpretations of
constructivism: Piagetian, sociocultural, and emancipatory. These types are differentiated primarily on the subject of study, views about how cognitive forms develop, and "the liberatory power of the pedagogical approaches derived" (p. 22). In general, however, two broad interpretations of constructivism may be deduced in education. First, there is psychological constructivism, which is mainly associated with Piaget. The second interpretation is social constructivism, mostly associated with Vygotsky. A review of the literature shows that the two main characteristics shaping these interpretations are: (a) education for individual development as opposed to education for social change or transformation and (b) the prominence given to the influence that social context has on the individual’s cognitive development (Vadeboncoeur, 1997). Given these broad characteristics, the interpretation that seems to align well with learner-centered teaching, and the one used in this study, is social constructivism.

**Social Constructivism**

Social constructivism is mainly associated with Vygotsky, and hence the reason why it is sometimes referred to as Vygotskian constructivism (Telese, 1999). It is this form of constructivism that emphasizes the role education plays in people’s social transformation. Social constructivists believe that an individual’s development is influenced by the socio-cultural context within which they live. They see an individual’s development as being derived from a group of social interactions in which culturally shared meanings are internalized (Stofflett, 1998). It is believed that the individual’s interactions with the environment will help in constructing knowledge that changes not only the individual but also the environment. Teaching from a social constructivist perspective is the link between the individual and a given social and/or cultural context (Telese, 1999).
This approach to teaching assumes that theory and practice do not develop in a vacuum; rather they are shaped by the prevailing cultural assumptions of both the teacher and the students (Martin, 1994; O'Loughlin, 1995). Under social constructivism, the socio-cultural/historical environment that produced them influences the subject of instruction, knowledge, and the teaching style. In order to accomplish the transformative goals of teaching, the context of teaching must be deconstructed, and the underlying socio-cultural assumptions must be exposed, challenged, and, if necessary, changed (Myers, 1996). Variations of social constructivism include social reconstructivism, situated constructivism, socio-cultural constructivism, and emancipatory constructivism. However, in this study, social constructivism as earlier developed by Vygotsky, (1978), and its later variations (Telese, 1999), will be relied upon.

Fosnot (1996) presents a recent summary of these variations of constructivism and goes into great description about constructivist teaching practices. Given its substantial use in sciences’ teaching transformation, constructivism seems to be ideally suited to transform the teaching of economics. This is even more evident when recognizing that the behaviorist epistemology that is currently used in economics focuses mainly on domains of objectives like intelligence, levels of knowledge, and reinforcement of predetermined successes. On the other hand, constructivist epistemology believes that learners construct individual knowledge on the basis of their interaction with the environment and the experiences they bring to the learning situation. As Gagnon and Collay (2006) put it, the four epistemological assumptions that form the basis for constructivist learning are that knowledge is: (a) physically constructed by learners who are involved in active learning; (b) symbolically constructed by learners who are making their own representations of action; (c) socially constructed by learners who convey their
meaning making to others; and (d) theoretically constructed by learners who try to explain things
they don't completely understand (p. 6).

Constructivism relies on a meaning-making process in which an explanation is provided
about how human beings learn as well as the nature of knowledge. Constructivists believe that
human beings create knowledge by using past experiences to formulate a personal process of
meaning-making. In this approach, the student is assumed to progressively build concepts into
more complex understandings while reconciling new obstructions with concrete knowledge
learned from past experiences (Novak, 1998). According to Fosnot (1996), constructivism is "a
theory about knowledge and learning … it is knowledge that is temporary, developmental, non-
objective, self-constructed, and socially and culturally influenced" (p. 3). Thus, Fosnot perceives
learning as self-regulatory and its process involves struggling with internal conflicts between
existing personal knowledge and the discovery of new information. Fundamentally,
constructivism is based on the premise that students actively construct their own knowledge by
anchoring new information to pre-existing knowledge (O’Connor, 2005; Strommen & Lincoln,
1992). Thus, students are believed to construct new knowledge through cooperative interactions,
social activities, discourse, and discussions.

Constructivists believe that human beings construct their own knowledge by integrating
what they already know with the activities, ideas, and events with which they come into contact
(Brophy, 2006; Richardson, 1997). In constructivism, knowledge is believed to be acquired
through involvement with content rather than by imitation or repetition (Kroll & LaBoskey,
1996). The teacher is seen as a facilitator or guide, and a fellow explorer of knowledge, instead
of being a knowledge expert (Freire, 1976). The main role of the teacher, in a constructivist
classroom, is to encourage students to challenge, question, and formulate their own conclusions,
opinions, and ideas. A single interpretation based on the positivist framework of right or wrong (Dharmadasa, 2000), as is used in the teaching of economics, is not encouraged. For example, a continuous assessment of learning is recommended, rather than the two or three tests that are often given in economics courses.

Teaching that is based on the constructivism theory of learning is based on the belief that learning mainly occurs when students are actively involved in meaning-making and the construction of knowledge (Mezrow, 1990). It is also argued that learning does not occur in isolation. Learning occurs when students interact with new knowledge, the learning environment, as well as with other students’ past experiences (Dershem, 1996). These interactions change the pre-existing knowledge of the students. Thus, what is learned is not just based on an individual's past experiences, but rather on the collective experiences of the entire community of learners. This implies that students are actively involved in the learning process. The teacher, as facilitator, fosters critical thinking and helps create motivated and independent students (Kwo, 1994).

The essence of learner-centered teaching is where students are active in creating their own knowledge. Knowledge is seen as being created, discovered, and experienced by both the students and the teacher (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). In this environment, students have the opportunity to personally take responsibility and exercise their own initiative by controlling the classroom setting with their varied life experiences. The constructivist teacher will empower students and help them construct and interpret their own understanding of knowledge. This challenges the traditional classroom dynamic by allowing the student to be the main architect of the learning process. This has become the preferred theoretical framework for teachers interested in changing their teaching practices (Fardanesh, 2006).
As a teaching approach, constructivism challenges what others have characterized as the default mode in education, an empiricist/reductionism approach to teaching (Wang, 2005; Woolley, Woolley, & Hosey, 1999; 1976; Oldfather, Bonds, & Bray, 1994). Freire (1976) describes this traditional approach to teaching as the banking model. According to Freire, the teacher deposits knowledge into the students; the students are then expected to store this knowledge until examination time, when they spit it back. These traditional models have also been referred to as memory-oriented or didactic transmission models (Richardson, 1997; Yuen & Hau, 2006). Challenging these models, constructivists generally maintain that whenever information is acquired is not well integrated with the past experiences of the student. In most cases, knowledge is only accessed and articulated for formal academic occasions, like examinations (Richardson, 1997; Stofflett, 1998). In contrast, the constructivist approach is regarded for its potential for producing a greater internalization of knowledge and a deeper understanding of what is being learned (Dangel & Guyton, 2003).

John Dewey’s understanding of informal education had its origins in learner-centered teaching, where the student was the main designer of their learning. Theorists of informal education like Coyle (1937), Kolb (1975), Lindeman (1926) and Rogers (1985) benefited from Dewey’s work. His influence on learner-centered teaching, can be seen on a number of fronts. First, Dewey’s belief that education must engage and enlarge the student’s experiences is a significant aspect of learner-centered teaching theory. Second, Dewey’s emphasis on thinking and reflection by both the student and teacher is one of the reasons the role of the teacher has to change in order to successfully implement learner centered teaching. Third, Dewey’s concern with student interaction with the learning environment has provided a framework for teaching practices that are sensitive to the needs of the student. Last, but most important, Dewey’s passion
for democracy in education provided the basis for learner-centered teaching. He believed that in order for all to share in a common life, learning should be democratic and involving of all participants (Dewey, 1933).

According to Dewey, students are active participants in knowledge acquisition and are actively engaged in restructuring what they already know. It is on this basis that learning is seen as an internal process that is heavily influenced by the student's personality, prior knowledge and learning goals (Davidson, 1995). Learner-centered teaching is interactive, inductive, and collaborative. The learning process is also contextualized, which means that both teaching and learning are affected by the context of the student’s environment, commonly referred to as situated cognition (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Authenticity is another aspect of learning that is stressed in learner-centered teaching (Lebow, 1993). It is emphasized that both the teacher and students should use authentic past experiences (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999) when participating in classroom discussions.

The Constructivist Teaching Framework

Even though constructivism may inform and influence the practice of teaching, it is not a theory of teaching, but rather a theory of learning (Wolffe & McMullen, 1996). It should also be noted that translating theory to practice is always a challenging endeavor (MacKinnon & Scarf-Seatter, 1997). Becoming a constructivist teacher may prove difficult at first because most instructional materials are geared toward traditional instruction. It requires a willingness to abandon familiar perspectives and practices and adapt new ones. Educators who utilize constructivist strategies usually encourage their students to take responsibility for their own learning (Wilson, 1996). As a result, students get to decide what they need to learn and how to
manage their learning activities. This results in the development of greater learning skills. When students are given the opportunity to construct their own learning environment, they are likely to do well. Students are also more likely to develop higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills (Bailey, 1997). In the constructivist’s worldview, knowledge is perceived to be constantly changing, which is a dramatic departure from traditional theories that viewed the world and knowledge as static and unchanging.

Constructivist principles have been used successfully in both biology and mathematics (Burrowes, 2003; Dhindsa & Anderson, 2004; Haney & McArthur, 2002; Stofflelt, 1998; Telese, 1999). Although the bulk of the literature on constructivism and teaching is found in the K-12 educational field, there have been a number of research efforts made in higher education (DeJong & Grooms 1996; Kaufman, 1996; Lord, 1999; Palmer 2005; Richardson 1997; Yuen & Hau, 2006). Despite the increasing presence of constructivism in science, the application of constructivism principles in economics presents a fundamental shift in the student/teacher relationship. It advocates a new role for the student as the active constructor of their own knowledge. Instead of being a passive recipient of knowledge, the student will actively participate in designing the instruction. Students will assist in determining learning activities, deciding on the learning process, and assessing their performance (Schroeder & Spannagel, 2006). It will challenge students to move away from learning simple facts and towards a more individualized understanding of economics reflective of their own worldview. This process will enrich my own understanding of economics as I become a co-learner with my students.
Defining Learner-Centered Teaching

Although a number of scholars (Brodie, Lelliott & Davis, 2002; APA, 1997; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Pine & Boy, 1977; Robertson, 2005; Weimer, 2002) have defined learner-centered teaching with slight variations, there seems to be a common understanding of the term. McCombs and Whisler (1997) define learner-centered teaching as:

The perspective that couples a focus on individual learner (their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs) with a focus on learning (the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners). This dual focus then informs and drives educational decision-making. The learner-centered perspective is a reflection of the twelve learner-centered psychological principles in the programs, practices, policies, and people that support learning for all. (p. 9)

Institutions of higher learning in the United States have also contributed to the understanding of LCT. For example, in 2005-2006, the University of Southern California (USC) appointed a learner-centered task force to serve as a faculty resource for an educational shift in the university’s teaching practices. The task force traced the idea of learner-centered teaching back to the 1980s when K-12 education first started using terms like child-centered and student-centered. The task force also found that the term learner-centeredness may have started being used in the early 1990s. According to the USC (2005) task force, the term learner-centered describes a concept and a practice in which students and professors learn from one another. It proposes a shift away from instruction that is fundamentally teacher-centered. This is with the realization that the main purpose of post-secondary education is ideally to prepare students for
their lifelong professional endeavors (Pratt, 2000). To meet this purpose, it requires students
develop in-depth understanding of their disciplines and in nurturing their critical thinking
capabilities (Stage, Mullen, Kinzie & Simmons, 1998). The nurturing of students’ critical
thinking is at the heart of the learner-centered teaching. There is also an increasing desire to
make teaching practices at the university and college level consistent with learner-centered
teaching theories (Thompson, 2003).

The Arizona Faculty Council (AFC, 2000), defines learner-centered education as the
educational practice that places the student at the center of education. As with LCT, it begins
with the understanding of the educational context from which a student comes. It continues with
the educator supporting the student’s progress towards their learning objectives. By helping the
student acquire basic skills, it provides a basis for learning throughout the student’s life. It
therefore places the responsibility for learning on the student, while the educator assumes the
responsibility for facilitating the student’s education. This perspective strives to be flexible,
individualistic, self-assessing, varied in style, and not constrained by time or place.

The main tension that has existed in the definition of LCT is the distinction between
learner-centered and student-centered. During the 1990s, both terms were used interchangeably,
although now, there seems to be a shift from student to learner. This shift acknowledges the fact
that we are all learners. The term learner is therefore more inclusive. Both terms, however, cover
wider aspects of learning, and allow for much broader definitions of the learning environment.

For the purpose of this study, learner-centered teaching will be seen as a broad teaching
technique that holds students responsible for their learning, mandates active student
participation, and uses self-directed and group collaboration/cooperation to enhance students’
motivation, retention of knowledge, depth of understanding, and appreciation of the subject content taught (Daley, 2003; Weimer, 2002).

**Origin of Learner-Centered Teaching**

Understanding the origin of learner-centered teaching will not only rationalize the concept, but it will also formally link it to general efforts toward improved learning. Now more than ever before, both educators and researchers are unanimous on the need for a research-based framework to guide planned reform efforts in education (McCombs, 2004). In 1990, the American Psychological Association (APA), appointed a task force to review more than a century’s worth of research that was related to education. The studies that were reviewed consisted mainly of research done on learning, student’s motivational development, and individual student differences (Wlodkowski, 1999). As a result of the task force, there emerged 14 learner-centered psychological principles (LCPs). The task force’s report clearly indicates that these principles are meant to emphasize the active and reflective nature of learning. The report recommends that the educational system be redesigned with the student becoming the primary focus.

The 14 principles focus on psychological factors that are primarily internal and under the control of the student. Also acknowledged are external, environmental, and contextual factors that interact with the internal factors during the learning process. The 14 learner-centered psychological principles are presented in the following table (APA, 1993; 1997):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nature of the learning process:</td>
<td>The learning of even complex subject matter is most effective when it is an intentional process of constructing meaning from information and experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Goals of the learning process:</td>
<td>The successful learner, over time and with support and instructional guidance, can create meaningful, coherent representations of knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Construction of knowledge:</td>
<td>The successful learner can link new information with existing knowledge in meaningful ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Strategic thinking:</td>
<td>The successful learner can create and use a repertoire of thinking and reasoning strategies to achieve complex learning goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Thinking about thinking:</td>
<td>Higher order strategies for selecting and monitoring mental operations facilitate creative and critical thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Context of learning:</td>
<td>Learning is influenced by environmental factors, including culture, technology, and instructional practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Motivational and emotional influences on learning:</td>
<td>What and how much is learned is influenced by the learner’s motivation. Motivation to learn, in turn, is influenced by the individual’s emotional states, beliefs, interests and goals, and habits of thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Intrinsic motivation to learn:</td>
<td>The learner’s creativity, higher order thinking, and natural curiosity all contribute to motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation is stimulated by tasks of optimal novelty and difficulty, relevant to personal interests, and providing for personal choice and control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Effects of motivation on effort:</td>
<td>Acquisition of complex knowledge and skills requires extended learner effort and guided practice. Without learners’ motivation to learn, the willingness to exert this effort is unlikely without coercion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Developmental influences on learning:</td>
<td>As individuals develop, there are different opportunities and constraints for learning. Learning is most effective when differential development within and across physical, intellectual, emotional, and social domains is taken into account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Social influences on learning:</td>
<td>Social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others influence learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Individual differences in learning:</td>
<td>Learners have different strategies, approaches, and capabilities for learning that are a function of prior experience and heredity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Learning and diversity:</td>
<td>Learning is most effective when differences in learners' linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds are taken into account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Standards and assessment:</td>
<td>Setting appropriately high and challenging standards and assessing the learner as well as learning progress including diagnostic, processes, and outcome assessment, are integral parts of the learning process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to note that these principles are intended for real-world learning situations that are different and unique. Therefore, they are best understood and used as an organized set of principles taken together (APA, 1997). The 14 principles encompass most, if not all, of the known psychological aspects of the learner, such as cognitive and other motivational ingredients that affect teaching and learning.

The initial traits of learner-centered teaching can be traced to earlier theories of adult education. Scholars in areas like informal, non-formal, and experiential learning in adult education have a lot in common with learner-centered teaching. For example, Lindeman (1926), made significant contributions to the understanding of informal education. He is the one who first formally acknowledged student-initiated learning. Other scholars who have contributed to the idea of learner-centeredness include Coyle’s (1937) group work, which first articulated the effectiveness of using groups in learning. Kolb and Fry’s (1975) theory of experiential learning is very popular in identifying how individuals learn, even when they are not conscious. Freire’s (1970, 1986) radical pedagogy gives students a prominent role in the entire learning process. Knowles’ self-directed learning and Brookfield’s teacher reflection theory also acknowledge the important role of the student in learning.

The main ideas of learner centeredness, as presented in the APA’s 14 principles of psychological learning, were first articulated by Knowles in 1970 (1970, 1984). During the 1970s, there was an increased realization that adults learn differently. Research supported the notion that adults have unique learning characteristics (Houle, 1972; Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1970; 1984). These studies have since generated more interest in codifying the differences between adults’ and children’s learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). These efforts aimed at researching the differences in adult learning have been stimulating for a number of adult educators (Knowles,
Even though there have been many frameworks developed for trying to understand how adults learn, the one that stands out is Knowles’ concept of andragogy.

Andragogy is based on five crucial assumptions about the characteristics of learners. These are different from the assumptions upon which traditional pedagogy is based. These assumptions state that as individuals mature: (a) their self-concept moves from being a dependent personality towards being a self-directed human being; (b) they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning; (c) their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and (d) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation towards learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness (Knowles, 1984). A fifth assumption states that as a person matures the motivation to learn becomes internal (Knowles, 1984). These five assumptions by Knowles provide the basis from which the 14 APA principles of learner-centered teaching are derived. Even though Knowles’ five assumptions have individually generated a lot of debate in the adult educational circles, it still remains a formidable foundation for understanding the differences between children and adults’ learning.

Knowles’ assertions and claims about the differences between andragogy and pedagogy has been the subject of considerable debate (Davenport, 1993; Tennant, 1996). According to Freire, educators should always emphasize the need for students to become actively involved in community affairs. Freire also believed students should critically reflect and analyze their own reality and be willing to participate in bringing about change (Freire, 1985). Freire argued that rather than separating educators from students, both should share or interchange roles to ensure that both the student and the educator are equally involved in the learning process.
Despite the debates on andragogy, most adult scholars have embraced Knowles’ assumptions for effective teaching. Based on these assumptions, McCombs and Whisler (1997) have provided some of the reasons why educators should use learner-centered teaching principles. They argue that there is abundant evidence that motivation, learning, and achievement are highly enhanced where Knowles’ assumptions and learner-centered principles are in practical use. The benefits of learner-centered teaching extend not only to students, but to all participants in the educational system. It is also with the realization that changes in our society are necessitating a change in the role and function of schools so that they better meet the needs of the learner as a whole person. As Chickering and Gamson (1987) have eloquently put it, “learning is not a spectator sport, students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing repackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves” (p. 3).

Weimer (2002) maintains that in order to be learner-centered, there should be at least five key areas in which the practice of teaching changes: (a) the balance of power, (b) the function of content, (c) the role of the teacher, (d) the responsibility for learning, and (e) the purpose and processes of evaluation. In addressing issues of power and authority, Weimer argues that in the past, it was assumed the teacher would control the learning environment as well as the process through which students acquired knowledge. It was also assumed that by assigning these powers to the teacher, the students would directly benefit. Weimer states that these assumptions were legitimized through school policies and procedures. Weimer further states that these assumptions were flawed because they were based upon the faulty belief that students come to class without any skills, abilities, or level of maturity that would allow them to become self-directed learners.
Weimer asserts that the change in power from teacher-controlled classrooms to shared decision-making is a necessary step in the implementation of learner-centered teaching. As a result, the teacher allows students to exercise ownership of their learning. This also leads to students becoming more enthusiastic and comfortable with the learning process.

In regard to content changes, Weimer recommends that content be used as a tool for developing learning skills. Thus, the function of content should serve a dual purpose; acquiring knowledge while at the same time developing new learning skills. This will not only meet the broader purpose of learning at the institutional level, but also enable the students to become more aware of themselves as learners. As a result, students will not only learn to identify and understand their strengths and weaknesses, but also allow them to develop strategies that will build upon their strengths while compensating for their weaknesses. This will help students become self-directed and confident in their learning skills.

In learner-centered teaching, teachers become guides and/or facilitators for individualized learning that continues beyond a taught lesson. This places greater responsibility upon the student and away from the teacher. It becomes the role of the teacher to help develop the student’s intellectual maturity, effective learning skills, and learner awareness that is necessary for functioning as an independent and autonomous lifelong learner. Lifelong learning, as opposed to “now” learning, is emphasized.

Weimer sees the purpose of evaluation in learner-centered teaching as both a learning opportunity and a chance to provide feedback to students. Ideally, in learner-centered teaching, students assess not only their own work, but also participate in the assessment of their peers' work. In the learner-centered teaching environment, the teacher’s role as evaluator still remains
the same. The only change is that students now participate in the assessment process. This results in students becoming more reflective, autonomous, and self-actualized individuals.

Implementing the five key changes for learner-centered teaching may not be easy, but Weimer urges educators to approach these changes as normal developmental steps that will not only benefit the students, but will also be beneficial to the teacher. Weimer’s position is supported by both the progressive and humanistic philosophies of education.

**Philosophical Perspective for Learner-Centered Teaching**

Although learner-centered teaching ideas may have started becoming popular during the 1980s, concerns about the role a student plays in learning have long existed. Some of the earliest thinking about ideas closely associated with learner-centered teaching principles are found within the pragmatism school of thought.

Pragmatism was the first philosophical movement in America that considered students as entities that required attention. It was a movement that was first articulated by Charles Sanders Pierce (Sidorsky, 1977) and later popularized by Dewey in 1894. Pragmatism believes that there is diverse thinking in human beings and that any ideas meaning is a function of its practical outcome (Sidorsky, 1977). Since an individual’s meaning is always changing, it is logical to conclude that individuals should be allowed to express their meaning-making processes in their own natural ways. This is the premise upon which LCT is based; that students should be actively involved in their learning process, since they are the only ones who know what it is they want to learn, and are the only ones who will be applying it.

In 1894, Dewey was eager to put pragmatist principles into practice at the newly built University of Chicago. The application of pragmatist principles gave way to an empirically based
theory of knowledge that mirrors the principles of learner-centered teaching. Based on pragmatic ideals, Dewey started and directed a laboratory school at Chicago, where he had the opportunity to directly apply his developing ideas about pedagogical teaching. He taught science subjects by allowing students to \textit{learn by doing} in an open and democratic manner. Students participated in the cooking of their meals as they learned subjects like biology practically. This empirical application was soon followed by Dewey’s series of four essays entitled collectively - \textit{Thought and its Subject-Matter}.

Dewey is considered one of the most prominent architects of the progressive philosophy of education. Progressives believe that human beings change and that it is up to the individual to initiate that change. According to Ryan and Cooper (1995), progressivism believes that human beings are social animals who best learn when actively involved in the learning process. Student interactions are believed to increase learning, especially when the activities are meaningful to the student.

The role of the teacher in a progressive classroom is to facilitate learning through the development of students’ critical thinking skills. Question-answer sessions are a good way of engaging students in thought-provoking teaching. Practical activities that guide students through real-world problems is another way of developing critical thinking skills while demonstrating how classroom activities are relevant to their outside lives. Progressives believe that hands-on-learning instructional techniques will not only help students discuss what they are learning, but it will also allow students to experience what it is they are doing by role-playing. A progressive learning environment would consist of many group-work and/or discussion sessions. All these are done in a relaxed and democratic environment where students learn from one another and
assess themselves. Progressives believe that knowledge creation is better applied if learned directly by the student. This helps prepare the student for life outside the classroom.

Progressivism goes hand in hand with the humanist philosophy of teaching. Humanist philosophy can be traced back to the ideas of Confucius, Protagoras, Aristotle, Erasmus, Montaigne, and Spinoza (Elias & Merriam, 1980). It is founded on the notion that "human beings are capable of making significant personal choices within the constraints imposed by heredity, personal history, and environment" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 118). Humanist principles stem from the strong belief in the individual learner’s specific human needs. The underlying assumptions of humanist philosophy are: (a) human nature is inherently good; (b) individuals are free and autonomous, thus they are capable of making major personal choices; (c) human potential for development and growth is virtually unlimited; (d) individual’s self-concept plays an important role in learning for growth and development; (e) individuals strive for self actualization; (f) reality is individually defined; and (g) individuals have a responsibility to both themselves and to those that they interact with (Elias & Merriam, 1980). These assumptions are true reflections of the APA’s fourteen principles of learner-centered teaching.

In discussing the concept of self-actualization, Maslow (1970) writes that it is a concept that covers "the full use and exploitation of the talents, capacities, potentialities, etc." (p. 150) of the individual. Maslow states that being tolerant of ambiguity, accepting of self and others, and using "peak experiences" for personal transformation through newly learned insights are all characteristics of self-actualized individuals.

Rogers (1961) writes about the concept of learner-centered teaching from a humanistic point of view, but calls it "client-centered therapy." Rogers notes that the major goal of therapy is to help clients (learners) foster greater self-direction. According to Rogers, self-direction
"means that one chooses -- and then learns from the consequences" (p. 171). Thus, nobody can claim to be the cause for learning in another person’s learning process.

Other writers have also written about the importance of teaching from a humanistic perspective. Patterson (1973) stated that "the purpose of education is to develop self-actualizing persons" (p. 22) who can live a fulfilling life. According to Valett (1977), the humanistic perspective of education ensures a life-long process, the purpose of which "is to develop human beings who are able to live joyous, humane, and meaningful lives" (p. 12). The humanistic perspective of teaching stresses empathy, understanding, acceptance or respect, and the authenticity found in the teaching/learning process (Patterson, 1973; Rogers, 1983).

Humanists (Pine & Boy, 1977; Rogers, 1983) believe that the main purpose of education is to assist the student become a fully functioning, self-actualized human being. Thus, the role of the teacher is to provide for the needs of the student. In order to facilitate the student’s development, the teacher focuses on the student’s personal experiences. Humanistic teachers tend to structure learning around the student. The humanist perspective of teaching sees the act of teaching as more than just doing something with the students; it requires teachers who are fully functioning human beings, and who are able to see themselves as adequate persons. Pine and Boy (1977) have argued that “the teacher who is a whole person will make the most significant contributions to the development of learners as self-actualizing persons” (p. 4). They believe that the teacher’s role as an educator is transcended by their existence as a human being.

A teacher who teaches from a humanist perspective will create a humanizing and psychologically nurturing classroom in which students feel accepted. Their teaching styles reflect wholeness as well as respect for both themselves and their students. Humanism, though, in the teaching of economics, may seem counterproductive, since economics is based on the strong
individualistic principles of capitalism. These principles are based on the assumption that human actions are driven by self-interest, and that whatever one does is for their individual self-fulfillment.

Conclusion

The concern for improved learning through enhanced teaching has, for many years, been at the center of education. As Merriam and Caffarella (1999) contend, “learning, so central to human behavior yet so elusive to understanding, has fascinated thinkers as far back as Plato and Aristotle” (p. 248). Since “there can be no teaching without learning, each discourse of teaching operates in concert with discourses of learning” (Pratt & Nesbit, 2000, p. 119). It is on this premise that learner-centered teaching has emerged. To understand adult teaching and learning prior to the 1970s, educators primarily relied on the psychologists’ understanding of learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). During this period, education was primarily dominated by behaviorism. Behaviorism defines learning as a change in behavior. Teaching under this premise means deciding what is appropriate to be learned, designing appropriate conditions for learning, and assessing what has been learned. When teaching from this perspective, educators are often concerned with covering a specific amount of content within a specified period of time. This is often the case in the teaching of economics. Under this orientation, teaching is expected to improve through the acquisition of teaching skills, knowledge, and the development of appropriate teacher attitude through appropriate instructional techniques’ training (AFC, 2000). A comprehensive review of what the existing literature says about the current teaching practices in economics, and what alternative methods might exist is therefore necessary.
Teaching Economics: Empirical Studies

In this section, the empirical literature on the teaching of economics is reviewed with a broad purpose of identifying what the current literature says about the teaching of economics. The questions that are explored include: What does the literature say about the current practices in teaching economics? What are the effective practices for teaching economics? What are the areas that require further research on the practice of teaching economics?

To identify appropriate literature for review, there was an initial search of a variety of databases, including ERIC, Econlit, Proquest, and dissertation and abstract databases, using a combination of three descriptors: teaching economics, learning in economics, and teaching accounting. The initial search provided a total of 98 articles, while the search in dissertation and abstracts yielded 18 doctoral dissertations, although many of them are on teaching economics at the K-12 level. After adding four more descriptors: appropriate teaching, teaching techniques, teaching methods, and effective learning, the search yielded a total of 361 studies, of which 128 were journal articles, 67 were peer-reviewed articles, 98 were conference articles, 70 were books, and one was a website article. A quick browse through some of the most relevant studies’ references provided links to other studies that were then considered. Four criteria were then used in selecting relevant articles from this pool of studies. First, the articles had to be published no earlier than 1985, providing a definitive time frame of slightly over 20 years of review. Second, the studies reviewed had to have utilized data derived from teaching at a higher education level - post-high school. Third, the articles had to directly address teaching and/or learning in economics or a closely related field such as accounting. And fourth, the article had to have a definitive methodology and results/findings section. Using the above criteria, a total of 37 studies qualified for review.
Although the studies selected examined a wide range of issues that are related to the current concerns in the teaching of economics, four broad themes emerged. These themes included: the nature and characteristics of a typical introductory economics class as well as identifying what is unique to an economics class (Becker & Watts, 1996; 1999; 2001a; 2001b; 2006; 2008; Boex, 2000; Bosshardt & Watts, 2001; Cameron, 1992; Guest & Duhs, 2002; Grimes, Millea & Woodruff, 2004; Lian & Goh, 2003; Wentland, 2004; Salemi & Siegfried, 1999); second, instructors’ attributes as a factor in teaching economics (Becker, & Kennedy, 2006; Becker & Watts, 2001a; Boex, 2000; Chambers, 1991; Dynan & Rouse, 1997; Finnegon & Siegfried, 1998; 2000; Hathcoat, 1994; Lay, 1993; Saunders, 2001; Shu-Hai & Goh, 2003); third, the assessment, testing, and overall scholarship in the teaching of economics. Dealing with who should determine the curriculum, what should be taught, and how it should be taught, assessed and tested (Crosling, Edwards, & Schroder, 2008; Alauddin & Butler, 2004; Anderson & Siegfried, 1997; Bailey, Langdana, Rotonda & Ryan, 1997; Finegan and Siegfried, 1998; Finegan & Siegfried, 2000; Freedman, 1985; Johnston, James, Lye & McDonald, 2000; Johnston, McDonald & Williams, 2001; Saunders, 2001; Sherry, 1989; Van, 1988; Walstad & Watts, 1985); and fourth, the current and potential teaching techniques in economics (Caropreso & Haggerty, 2000; Cohn, Cohn, Hult, Balch & Bradley, 1998; 2001; Loviscek & Cloutier, 1997; Leeds, Stull & Westbrook, 1998; Christoffersen, 2002; Smith, 2002; Saunders & Christopher, 2003; Hawkins, 1989; Hervani & Helms, 2004; Little, 1985; Manning & Riordan, 2000; McGoldrick, 1998; Murphy, 1987; Nettleship, 1992; Pereira-Ford, 1998; Post, 1985; Spencer, Roger & Van, 1986; Reynolds, 1989; Risinger, 2001; Vo & Morris, 2006; Walstad, 2001).

Methodologically, all of the 37 studies reviewed were quantitative in design. Most were case studies that predominantly used regression analysis as the main analytical tool. The main
sources of data for these studies were student evaluations of teaching, the national normalized sample of objective and subjective data from the third edition of the test of understanding college economics (TUCE III), primary collected data, and a combination of primary and secondary data from school documents such as GPA records, instructor evaluation records, and transcripts. A total of 29 studies made use of student ratings data in one way or another, with 13 of them using it as their only source of data. Four studies relied heavily on TUCE III as their main source of data. Half of the studies collected primary data through questionnaires, using surveys as the main technique of data collection. Only one study used a combination of other secondary data sources such as school documents, instructor evaluation records, transcripts, and student evaluation of teaching. Overall, it is clear that these studies heavily relied on secondary data initially collected for purposes different from the objectives of the individual studies themselves. This may imply that most of these studies used data that is not suitable for the purpose of the study but rather were used for convenience. Despite this shortcoming, a more interesting finding is that, even though qualitative studies have been found to be rich in issues of perception, none of the studies reviewed utilized descriptive research methods. This is a concern, because it has been shown that qualitative methods are more appropriate for socially constructed, complex, and ever-changing situations such as those addressed in the studies reviewed (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Thus more research that utilizes qualitative techniques is required to validate, or contradict, the quantitative research findings already reported.

In reviewing the selected studies, the four emerging themes identified will be covered in the following order: (a) nature and characteristics of a typical introductory economics class, (b) instructor attributes as a factor in teaching economics; (c) assessment, testing, and scholarship in teaching economics; and (d) current and potential teaching techniques in economics.
Nature and Characteristics of a Typical Economics Class

The first theme focuses on studies that identify the characteristics that are unique to an introductory economics class. In other words, what is unique about teaching economics as opposed to other college level classes? Most of the characteristics identified pertain to subject content, student expected preparedness, and other teacher expectations (Johnston, James, Lye & McDonald, 2000; Johnston, James, McDonald & Williams, 2001; Smith, 2002). Despite the institutional differences, the size of class, or even the instructor’s teaching load, teaching in economics is usually structured around formal mathematical and/or statistical models. Conceptually, introductory economics is perceived as boring by students because they do not know the discourse of the mathematical models (Colander, 2000; Lay, 1993). This is further compounded by the fact that there is a perception that to learn economics successfully, students need to have the ability for both abstract thinking and application of learned materials (Johnston et al., p. 13). Students in economics are expected and sometimes assumed to be capable of expressing complex ideas logically and eloquently. However, the development of these skills is not easily learned, and students often feel intimidated when they are unable to meet this expectation. For example, Lay (1993) in a study to identify personal and institutional characteristics that significantly contributed to the use of mathematics in teaching principles of economics, found that some instructors use mathematics as a tool for eliminating potentially unsuccessful students from the major. Arguably, this may be the reason why students end up viewing economics as a difficult course, which should be left to gifted persons only. Caropreso (2000), states “because economics is an abstract, theoretical field of study, beginning students especially find it difficult to learn the fundamental content” (p. 1). A closely related factor is that most introductory economics classes use a standard textbook as the main resource for students’
learning. The over-reliance on standard texts effectively places a restriction on instructors who may want to be innovative by soliciting ideas from other sources of learning like the internet, magazines, and/or movies, but feel obliged to follow the textbook contents as if it were a curriculum for the course. Because of the course content, and textbook constraint, most economics professors prefer to lecture, instead of using other more stimulating techniques that are available and often used in other social science classes (Becker, 1997; Becker & Watts, 1999; 2001; Smith, 2002).

Economics subject-content adaptability is another characteristic that has generated some interest in recent studies. Adaptability refers to the ease with which research findings are transferred to teaching, and it serves as a measure of how easily new knowledge can be adopted into the teaching process of a specific course. As a scholarly undertaking, teaching is seen as an extension of research activities, where the subject content should allow the application of research findings. For example, it has been found that popular media provide not only entertainment, but also relevant information that is current, interesting and easily accessible. But how easy is it to teach economics with popular culture/media? In bridging the gap between theory and practice, there seems to be an increasing interest in using current research findings in teaching economics. The main questions that have been raised in these studies include “Who should determine the curriculum? What should be taught? and How should it be taught?” (Johnston, McDonald & Williams, 2001, p. 196). Currently, the major determinants of what is taught in economics are the academic departments and the individual instructors. This usually leads to content related to the interests of the instructors and the standard textbooks that they use. Since textbooks are slow to undergo major paradigm changes, it has been suggested that the immediate clients, the student body, need to be listened to for views on both course content and
method of delivery, with the use of examples and illustrations that relate to the students’ experiences being recommended (Don, 2004; Johnston et al., 2001). However, there has been no research to show if these recommendations are being put into practice in economics’ classrooms. No doubt it will be interesting to see how teaching in economics would change if students participated in both curriculum development and in the selection of the teaching technique or activities.

Overall, studies covered under this theme have at least two shortcomings. One, it is important to note that, although the characteristics discussed above are perceived as unique for an economics class, some of them, such as student attitudes, instructor perceptions, and subject adaptability are common to other college level classes and have been addressed. Every subject instructor has a set of expectations for their students, and each student has particular expectations for each course that they take. Therefore, some of the included characteristics may not necessarily qualify as a unique characteristic of teaching economics.

Another point of concern is the fact that many of the studies reviewed did not give a clear justification for why they chose the specific characteristic evaluated. For example, Karstensson and Vender (1996) did not explain why they studied students’ attitudes and not instructor’s attitudes. Nor was a rationale provided for the kind of measures used in determining students’ attitudes, or the strengths or weaknesses of their data collection techniques. This partial analysis of educational concerns may not be able to address the core issues about the lack of creativity in teaching economics. A detailed study of all the characteristics of a specific economics class with data collected from the same student/instructor population may thus yield better results than the individual characteristic studies.
Instructor’s Attributes as a Factor in Teaching Economics

Several studies have explored attributes or qualities of an effective economics instructor (Becker & Watts, 2001a; Boex, 2000; Dynan & Rouse, 1997; Fernandez, 2006; Finnegan & Siegfried, 1998; 2000; Saunders, 2001; Shu-Hai & Goh, 2003). The typical image of a U.S. undergraduate economics teacher continues to be a male, Caucasian, Ph.D. degree holder, who has not written or edited a book within the past five years, who lectures to a class of students as he writes text, equations, or graphs on the chalkboard, and who assigns students readings from a standard textbook (Becker & Watts, 2001a). A number of scholars (Boex, 2000; Finnegan & Siegfried, 1998; Saunders, 2001) have researched different attributes of effective economics instructors separately, and arrived at varied conclusions. For example, data from student evaluations of instructors at Georgia State University showed that the most important attribute of an effective instructor is organization and clarity of material (Boex, 2000).

It has also been shown that a positive relationship exists between course grade and pre-course students’ attitude toward economics and instructors of economics (Karstensson & Vedder, 1986). Furthermore, the incidences of taking additional economics courses were positively and significantly associated with various measures of student attitudes towards the course and the instructor’s grading expectation and the expected grade. Studies have also been done to evaluate instructors’ from the students/instructor perceptions and subject contents perspective (Boex, 2000; Bosshardt & Watts, 2001; Johnston, McDonald & Williams, 2001). In looking at the differences between instructors and students’ perceptions of what constitutes good teaching, Bosshardt & Watts (2001) found that, although students’ and instructors’ perceptions of how well the instructor teaches are different, they are actually positively correlated, and thus not in contradiction.
Using responses from students’ evaluation of the instructor to describe the characteristics/attributes that are associated with effective teaching, Boex (2000) reported that the most important attribute of an effective instructor was organization and clarity. This was found to increase in importance as one moves to more advanced levels of learning. Presentation of materials and the ability to motivate students were found to be the second and third most important instructor characteristics, while grading and assignments were ranked fourth. If students expected a bad grade, it was indicative of a less effective assessment, and therefore a poor evaluation for the instructor. Therefore, students’ and instructors’ different expectations may be seen as playing a large role on the way economics is perceived by the student.

Another attribute of the instructors that has received a substantial amount of attention is gender (Dynan & Rouse, 1997; Anderson & Siegfried, 1997). Although no significant difference was found between the student ratings of male and female instructors of introductory economics, women received higher ratings than men on all instructor dimensions (Anderson & Siegfried, 1997). Being a male-dominated profession, it is encouraging to know that the few women who have ventured into the profession are viewed favorably. In addition to gender, research found that instructor ratings were not affected by their attributes of experience or rank (Dynan & Rouse, 1997; Shu-Hai & Goh, 2003). For example, in a regression analysis on the TUCE III data found that, after controlling for other attributes of the instructor, school, and students, there was no significant difference in objective measures of learning between classes of economics taught by a Ph.D. holder and similar classes taught by a master’s degree holder (Finegan & Siegfried, 1998).

Fluency in the language of communication has also been reported to play a substantial role in student perceptions of the instructor (Hurd, 2005; Finnegan & Siegfried, 2000; Brossard
Instructors who speak English as their native language, have good oratory skills, are generally rated as good teachers while instructors for whom English is a second language are assessed as good teachers only on their grading rigor, and not on their overall teaching effectiveness (Bosshardt & Watts, 2001). Instructors of classes in introductory economics for whom English is a second language received significantly lower student ratings, on average, than did other instructors (Finegan & Siegfried, 2000). This rating does not appear to depend on the quality of teaching (Saunder, 2001). Data collected from one unnamed university for six years covering classes taught by 97 instructors - 62 native English speakers, and 35 non-English speakers - found no significant difference between introductory economics classes taught by instructors whose native language is English, and those taught by instructors for whom English is a second language. However, the same study found that students do give significantly better ratings to instructors whose native language is English, than to those whose native language is not English. If the quality of teaching is the same, what then accounts for the differences in students’ evaluations? Further research is necessary in this area to enhance our understanding of how cultural perceptions affect student/instructor interactions. This attribute is important in view of the fact that international students make up a significant proportion of Ph.D. holders from U.S. graduate schools, and many of them could potentially be hired to teach (Siegfried & Stock, 1999).

All these studies individually have highlighted significant attributes that may affect the instructor’s teaching. What is not clear is whether these findings will hold regardless of the teaching context, the type/level of students, or level of any course that may be considered. More research is needed, for these questions have to be answered. Furthermore, whereas the findings of the studies done on English as a language of instruction are important, they don’t show the
percentage of economics instructors whose native language is not English. Unless there is a big proportion, fluency in English does not seem to account for the negative perception of the subject of economics.

In addition, many of the studies reviewed only evaluated the effect of individual instructor attributes on effective teaching. It has already been demonstrated that single attribute studies inadequately explain the effectiveness or non-effectiveness in teaching. Effective teaching is a process of enculturating students into a set of social norms and ways of working. (Pratt, 2002; Woodward, 2008). Similarly, Marsh (1987) advocates that teaching should be viewed as a multidimensional activity, by identifying nine dimensions of good teaching. These dimensions include learning value, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, individual rapport, and breadth of coverage, examination and grading, assignments, and workload ease or difficulty. Therefore, any study examining a single instructor’s attribute fails to address the issues of teaching appropriately.

Assessment, Testing, and Scholarship in Teaching Economics

Assessment and testing can be a powerful tool for both the students and the instructor in shaping the learning outcomes as well as the learning approaches that students adopt in relation to a learning task. There are many forms of assessment used in economics courses. These forms include, but are not limited to, assessment for testing and grading, assessment as feedback to instructors, and assessment for student feedback (Adriazola-Rodriguez, 2007; Boex, 2000; Hansen, 2001; Johnston, McDonald, & Williams, 2001; Smith, 2002; Walstad, 2006; 2001). The traditional standardized tests, such as multiple-choice and true-false tests, which are predominantly used in economics courses, provide minimal direct feedback about the instructor’s
teaching and course design. The advantage of this type of testing is that it gives the instructor the flexibility of setting more questions, potentially covering most of the material studied (Ashia, 2007; Hansen, 2001; Walstad, 2001; Walstad, & Allgood, 2005). The counter-argument, as presented by Hansen, centers primarily on the fact that the multiple-choice and true-false assessments do not ensure the acquisition of knowledge to the same degree as essay, short answer or direct clinical observation forms of assessment. This has led to calls for new standardized test, one that allows students to express themselves through an essay, as an alternative to multiple-choice/true-false tests (Hansen, 2001; Walstad, 2001). Assessment, if effectively used, should be viewed from a multidimensional perspective (Hansen, 2001). However, in economics, studies have shown that assessment is rarely used for feedback purposes, but most often assessment is used to gauge the grade level attained by a learner (Walstad, 2001). In addition, the amount and type of assessment that students are subjected to is also found to influence students’ approaches to learning (Johnston et al., 2001). There are seven issues that are highly related to the assessment of undergraduate students of economics (Walstad, 2001). Included in these issues is the feeling that assessment is more than just testing or grading and when used appropriately, can inform the teaching practice through feedback. The other issues touch on reinforcement of text material, range or depth of knowledge coverage, allowance for individual students’ learning styles, ease of grading, opportunity for cheating and deception, time demands or difficulty, and the opportunity for repeat assessment during the course (Walstad, 2001, p. 283). Instructors can use various forms of classroom assessment techniques to get feedback from students to find out if they are being effective or not. This feedback, if used well, can effectively guide instructor’s attention and energies for a focused teaching practice (Smith, 2002).
However, assessment can be a double-edged sword, in the sense that the difficulty of assignments and the grading strategy adopted by the instructor may or may not motivate students’ learning. If the instructor poses difficult assignments, it could lead students to expect low grades. Unfortunately, this expectation is indicative of a less than effective assessment (Boex, 2000). In the literature review, however, there was no single assessment technique that was found to be superior in the teaching of economics. Any given assessment technique, whether it be multiple choice, true/false or even essay assessments, has both advantages and disadvantages; therefore, to ensure sufficient feedback for improvement, a combination of assessment techniques has been recommended (Walstad, 2001). This recommendation is very well accommodated within learner-centered teaching, where assessment is primarily done for feedback purposes and effective learning.

Current and Potential Teaching Techniques in Economics

Currently, economics teaching is predominantly done through the lecture method (Becker & Watts, 2001a). However, there have been increased efforts towards changing that pattern through using alternative teaching techniques. Individuals perceive and process information in many different ways. The literature on learning styles has demonstrated that individuals learn differently in different environments. Gardner (1983) believes that human beings have multiple intelligences, rather than a general intelligence that underlies performance in all tasks. By using appropriate teaching technique alternatives, educators will enhance students’ learning and enjoyment of the learning experience.

Various teaching techniques that have been identified as having great potential for teaching in economics. They include, but are not limited to: collaborative problem-solving
approach, service learning, lecture method, lecture plus, interactive role play, inverted classroom, technology based, case studies and experiments, and demonstrations and dramatizations (Bartlett & King, 1990; Christoffersen, 2002; Loviscek & Cloutier, 1997; Leeds, Stull & Westbrook, 1998; Parkinson, Greene, Kim, & Marioni, 2003; Walstad, 2001; 2004; Smith, 2002; Saunders & Christopher, 2003; Hervani & Helms, 2004). For example, Bailey, Langdana, Rotonda, and Ryan’s (1997) study found that incorporating multiple teaching techniques enhances long-term retention of course content. Therefore, as instructors consider various techniques of instruction, they should keep this in mind since students will benefit from what they do, both in and out of the classroom. Thus, rather than deciding what students should do in the learning process, they should also get help from students in selecting activities that can help aid learning. Among the recommended techniques include lecture plus (Wentland, 2004), where students are incorporated into the teaching/learning process through discussions and group activities; the collaborative problem solving (CPS) approach, where students solve problems together in groups; service learning (McGoldrick, Battle & Gallagher, 2000) which can also be seen as practical learning, interactive experiments, demonstrations, and dramatizations (Wentland, 2004). According to Becker and Watts (1996), “great orators should lecture while the rest of us should consider using a variety of teaching methods to actively engage our students and reduce lecture time” (p. 699).

A number of studies have investigated different aspects of alternative teaching techniques, although a comprehensive study to investigate how effective alternative teaching techniques have been in economics, and how they compare with the lecture method, would be useful. In an effort to identify methods of instruction that facilitate long-term retention of content, Bailey, Langdamn, Rotonda and Ryan (1997) surveyed 500 alumni of MBA programs from the 1990, 1991, and 1992 classes at Rutgers University. Using frequencies and correlations,
they demonstrated that teaching methods that emphasize the four factors, traditional lectures and standard text, interactive discussions, rejuvenating interruptions, and use of relevant subject content, enhanced long-term retention of course material as well as the overall quality of the course. Interestingly, data from their study underscored the importance of basic methods of instruction such as lectures and standard textbook use. Although these methods appear to have fallen out of favor among education theorists, the study found that the alumni surveyed believed in the use of such basic modes of content delivery and retention of knowledge.

What is interesting is that, in spite of the attention given to alternative teaching methods in economics, there has been little or no change in the teaching of economics in college classrooms over the past several years (Becker & Watts, 2001b). A comparison of surveys of 1995 and 2000 found that despite the attention given to cooperative learning methods, few professors of economics made adjustments in their teaching approach. Overall, there has been little effort to use alternative techniques, regardless of the type of institution or class size. It was further found that professors of economics rarely use press material like the Wall Street Journal.

In their study Leeds, Stull, and Westbrook, (1998) found that an active student’s participation did not increase what students learned, neither did it improve students evaluation of their instructors. This study utilized data from three sources from an introductory economics class at Temple University, 1990-1994. It included student evaluations of teaching, economics department employment files, and face to face or telephone interviews with instructors. Analysis was done for multiple-method teaching techniques. There was never a direct or indirect correlation with student ratings. Like Baumol (1988), who believes that there is “no magic formula for teaching economics,” this study seemed to contradict Loviscok and Collier’s (1997) study that evaluated the effectiveness of supplemental instruction in economics. Using a probit
regression model and transcript data, Lovesick and Collier (1997) found that there is a significant difference between students who enrolled in the supplemental instruction, where other methods of instruction were employed, and those who did not enroll in the program. This would suggest that, unlike what Baumol (1988) found, using active learning methods in economics education is preferred by students. Similarly, Johnston, James Lye, and McDonald’s (2000) research supports the use of innovation in teaching economics by evaluating a package of measures designed to introduce a collaborative problem solving (CPS) approach to teaching economics. A regression analysis of pre-project and post-project students’ attitudes found that: (a) the initiative was received positively, and that CPS led students to value more highly the performance of their tutors and to enjoy their tutorials more; (b) the CPS package had a mixed effect of improving students learning practices; and (c) although there were no remarkable gains in examination marks for the local students, there was a remarkable improvement in the international student’s examination performance. Overall, these studies demonstrate the need for diverse teaching techniques in order to improve the teaching of economics.

Implications of the Reviewed Literature’s Findings

In discussing the findings of this literature review, both empirical and conceptual pieces were used. Note that the existence of a substantial amount of literature on teaching economics may be considered indicative of a legitimate interest in improving teaching and enhancing learning in this area. Based on the literature review, I can draw four main conclusions: (a) the lecture method continues to be one of the dominant characteristic of a typical economics class; (b) based on the analysis of teaching economics as a subject, instructors’ attributes, and assessment requirements in economics, a number of different teaching techniques have been
tried with mixed results; (c) one of the most recommended teaching practices is the one that utilizes the multiple-method teaching technique; and (d) there is a need to undertake a detailed and comprehensive study to assess the effectiveness of the recommended multiple-method teaching technique in economics.

Many studies have shown that teaching and learning would be more effective if a variety of teaching techniques were used in combination (Christoffersen, 2002; Hervani & Helms, 2004; McGoldrick, 1998; Saunders & Christopher, 2003; Smith, 2002; Walstad, 2001). However, other studies see instructor’s attributes as being the main determinants of effective teaching and learning (Boex, 2000; Finnegan & Siegfried, 1998; 2000; Saunders, 2001; Shu-Hai & Goh, 2003). These mixed positions on the approach to effective teaching and learning might be attributed to the way these studies were conducted. Consequently, the discussion of these findings will be centered on research design, source of data used, and the reasons for lack of application of innovative teaching techniques in economics.

Starting with the methodology, all the studies reviewed only used quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Quantitative analysis has limitations as a research tool in the field of education, where many parameters evaluated are subjective in nature. Researchers should appreciate the fact that outcomes of human inquiry are difficult to quantify, and the scales often assigned to responses are not replicable in nature (Merriam, 1991). Thus, forcing a quantitative model on some educational issues may not yield accurate results. The appropriate strategies of inquiry should be those that recognize the ambiguity of human nature and the importance of context in whatever attributes one studies. Qualitative methods have a strong capability of capturing reality and the everyday experiences of the subjects. Because the bulk of the issues addressed in the literature involved perceptions and attitudes, they should have benefited from
the use of qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. A case in point is in Chamber’s (1991) study, where no single significant relationship was established concerning attitude variables. Without a qualitative methodology, most, if not all, of the attributes of perception are not adequately covered, and in some cases are lost. Thus, there is a need for comprehensive qualitative studies and/or mixed method studies that combine quantitative and qualitative techniques.

The second concern with the literature that was reviewed is the source and type of data used. Nearly half of the studies used secondary data from student evaluations of teaching and the TUCE III. Thus, all those studies are subject to the pitfalls of using secondary data. It is difficult to put data collected for a specific purpose into another use without adjustments. How these studies adjusted the data to fit their individual purposes is not clear. Moreover, the student evaluation of teaching data that most studies relied on has its own shortcomings. In most cases when students’ rating assesses an instructor’s effectiveness, it may not present a true picture of the instructor. Although positivists may argue that ratings accurately reflect the amount of learning achieved in a class, it is also likely that students’ perceptions of learning effectiveness are affected by their expectations prior to enrolling in the class, as well as by the difficulty of the course and the grading standards (Siegfried 1997, p. 347). Thus, collecting primary data using appropriately designed methods is required to adequately address issues that affect the teaching of economics.

Most studies were concerned with the lack of utilization of the available alternative teaching techniques that have worked in other areas of teaching. There is a growing need for innovative teaching practices that incorporate active learning (Johnston, James, Lye, & McDonald, 2000; Vo, & Morris, 2006). Based on the literature reviewed, effective teaching will
have to use a combination of techniques that include the nine dimensions of learning: value, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, individual rapport, breadth of coverage, examinations, grading, assignments and workload/difficulty of good teaching (Bosshardt & Watts, 2001; Hawkins, 1989). However, in the practice of teaching economics, instructors are less likely to use innovative teaching techniques, and students have fewer opportunities to experience active learning and teamwork. As demonstrated in the review, a number of studies have shown the need for increasing the level of creativity in teaching economics (Caropreso & Haggerty, 2000; Christoffersen, 2002; Saunders & Christopher, 2003; Smith, 2002; Walstad, 2001). It has been shown that a creative teaching method based on classroom interaction can lead to a more effective delivery style that would improve instructional education in intermediate and upper level economics courses (Hervani & Helms, 2004, p. 267). Some of the suggested ways of increasing creativity in teaching economics is to include interactive and/or cooperative learning, such as in collaborative problem solving and service learning. Motivating students through innovative ways such as the lecture plus method or the adoption of other instructional support material like computers have been widely encouraged (Cameron, 1992).

Using the Internet in economics classes not only will enhance learning, but will also improve instructor-student communications (Agarwal & Day, 1997; Leuthold, 1998; Manning & Riordan, 2000; Pereira-Ford, 1998; Risinger, 2001; Sosin, 1998; Van, 1988). Computerized tutorials and stimulations enhance student learning and may improve attitudes towards economics (Grimes & Ray, 1993). Other studies suggest that the use of sports and sports examples improves teaching in economics (Siegfried & Sanderson, 1998, p. 161). The advantage with using sports examples goes beyond simply attracting students’ interest. Since economics is often taught by analogies, students are more likely to gain a better understanding of a point if
they can connect personal body movement experiences to the analogy. The use of literature and drama in teaching undergraduate economics courses has also been advocated (Watts, 1998). Teaching economics by structuring class discussions around short handouts or student presentations of dramatic scenes can be effectively achieved, (Vo & Morris, 2006).

Although many creative ways of improving the teaching of economics have been recommended, there is scant evidence that these recommendations have been implemented, and whether they have been effective or not is unclear. Unless the already identified techniques are put into use, and tested for their effectiveness, there is no justification for directing more resources into evaluating new ones. This calls for a detailed study to shed light on the most effective method of teaching economics, and how best that effective method should be used. This would suggest that, unlike what Baumol proposed, students prefer using active learning methods in economics education. Similarly, Johnston, James Lye, & McDonald’s (2000) research supports the use of innovation in teaching economics by evaluating a package of measures designed to introduce the collaborative problem-solving approach to learning in economics. Through a regression analysis of pre-project and post-project students’ attitudes, they found that: (a) the initiative was received positively, and that CPS led students to value more highly the performance of their tutors and to enjoy their tutorials more; (b) the CPS package had a mixed effect of improving students learning practices; and (c) although there were no remarkable gains in examination marks for the local students, there was a remarkable improvement in the international students’ examination performance.

Overall, these studies demonstrate the need for diverse teaching techniques to improve teaching economics. As observed from the literature review, some of the most innovative teaching practices that have been recommended are those that address the four factors of
traditional, interactive, rejuvenating and relevant subject contents. However, it appears that these teaching techniques require long time blocks to be effectively implemented. This may present a challenge to institutionally structured contexts, where timing is strictly schemed within a teaching semester. Further research is needed to better understand how to effectively manage time when engaging these different teaching techniques.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect learner-centered teaching principles have on the teaching of economics and to obtain information that will help teachers become more reflective practitioners. This study was an action research project guided by a qualitative research design paradigm. This chapter is an overview of the qualitative research design paradigm and its associated elements. The chapter will also examine how data will be collected and analyzed.

Research Paradigm and Methodology

The methodology of this action research study was guided by a qualitative research design paradigm. A qualitative research design paradigm was chosen because of its strength in solving problems rooted in peoples’ perceptions. According to Cresswell (1994), "A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (p. 1). Qualitative research places great emphasis on the understanding of people's actions, words, and/or records. The main advantage of using qualitative methods of research is that they facilitate the study of issues in a more detailed manner (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) states that, qualitative methods “approach fieldwork without being constrained by any predetermined categories of analysis” (p. 14). These methods provide the means by which to organize and interpret information without losing either the individuality or the richness of the responses.
The analysis of data includes the presentation of participants’ words. This provides meaning out of their experiences. The main task of the qualitative researcher is to find emerging patterns within participants’ actions or words and to present these emerging patterns while making sure that they are as close to the participants’ perspectives as possible. Some of the qualitative techniques used in adult education include in-depth interviews, observations, and focus groups. These research methods are designed to help researchers go deeper into understanding the meaning people assign to any given social phenomena and to elucidate the mental processes that underlie peoples’ behaviors. In qualitative research, hypotheses are generated during data collection and analysis. The measurement trends are subjective and the analysis is mainly on the patterns that naturally emerge from the study. In the qualitative research paradigm, the researcher is but an instrument of data collection, and the realized results may significantly vary depending on who conducts the research.

The main advantage of using qualitative techniques in research is that it generates rich, and detailed data that leaves the participants' perspectives intact. Usually the focus of the data is on the process of determining the reasons why. The main disadvantage of qualitative techniques however, is that data collection and analysis may be highly labor intensive and time-consuming. There is also a feeling that qualitative techniques are easily challenged, especially in regards to validity and the generalizability of the study. However, this argument is quickly countered by the rich characteristics of qualitative research. Scholars argue that qualitative research is a multi-method focus that involves interpretation of a subject matter in a naturalistic way (Patton, 2002). This means that a qualitative researcher will study things in their natural environment or setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the participants’ meaning making. This involves what the researcher observes, and records about what participants are
saying. Therefore, a wide range of data is collected in a qualitative research. This may involve a variety of empirical materials such as interviews, storytelling of personal experiences, observations, and/or visual texts. Qualitative research is also varied in form and in nature. As Cresswell (1994) argues, although qualitative research may come in many forms, it can be divided into five main categories: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. This study will focus on action research.

Action Research

Action research as a research design is heavily informed by the qualitative paradigm. According to Patton (2002), “… qualitative methods can contribute to useful evaluation, practical problem solving, real-world decision-making, action research, policy analysis, and organizational or community development” (p. 145). Different research forms are possible in action research, including self-study, participatory research, practitioner research, teacher research, and many others. A number of educational scholars (Carr & Kemmis, 2006; 1986; Ebbutt, 1985; Elliott, 1991; Hopkins, 1985) have advocated for action research in most, if not all teaching improvement endeavors. Terms such as teacher research and teaching as research are normally meant to refer to situations when teachers expand on their role to include critical reflection on their teaching. Teaching as research takes place when teachers undertake research in their classrooms, educational programs, or the entire school system with the purpose of improving teaching. When describing this particular approach to research, teacher researchers have adopted the label action research. This is research that is considered to be a collective reflective inquiry that aims at gaining a complete understanding of a given situation (Butler, 2001). This implies that reflection is a fundamental aspect of action research. In order to fully
understand the process of action research, it is important to have a well-grounded understanding of reflective theory. It is in action research that one gets to reshape what they are working on, while they are working on it. It is an on-going experimentation of types of actions that may lead to the discovery of a new and viable solution to a given situation. However, as Susman (1983) asserts, action research is not a trial-and-error method, but rather a hands-on technique for solution finding. The actions taken are much more reasoned out and purposefully thought through. In this process, if something is not working correctly or it does not seem to make sense, then there should be continuous reflection on the present action (Schon, 1983). What is important in this reflection process is the fact that one is continuously questioning the assumptions of knowing. The central point in action research is that the action indicates that one actually knows. In most cases knowing is revealed through a skillful performance. It is in action research that surprise appears in the process of accomplishing a given action. It is this surprise that leads one into questioning how the surprise occurred given their usual thinking process.

After the action, which is accompanied with the in-action reflections, what follows next is what Schon (1983) calls reflection-on-action. In Schon’s (1983) own words, “We reflect on action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome” (p. 26). Reflection-on-action, may be an individual activity or one entered into with colleagues in similar situations. The process is mainly subjective but with a strong analytical structure. The researcher focuses on the reflecting, acting, and feeling connected to a particular action and situation. Through this self-reflection, the individual is capable of making a detailed analysis of the event that will lead to a clear understanding of the situation under study. This is a systematic way of reviewing the practice by integrating the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of all participants. The outcome of any reflective learning is self-
knowledge about one's knowing in action. Gaps in knowledge and skills are identified and remedied through the use of existing or past-learned experiences.

Reflection can provide a forum in which practitioners can view their experiences "by systematically exploring meaning and applying new insights to new situations within a reflexive spiral of beginning to become an effective practitioner" (John, 2001, p. 237). By paying attention to practice, one is capable of exploring unclear meanings in their everyday occurrences. New understandings are revealed. This process is known as reflection. Reflecting on teaching experiences is known to reveal deeper understandings of one’s beliefs and how those beliefs impact their teaching practice. Questioning one’s assumptions about education and the roles of the teacher and student may expose the root cause of many problematic issues in teaching. This kind of study has the potential of closing the gap between the intuitive behavior of an individual teacher and their professional knowledge founded in rigorous discovery of themselves.

Knowledge that informs professional practice is usually broad, multi-faceted, and in most cases difficult to articulate (Schon, 1983). Schön explained that the difficulty describing most professional practices can be resolved through reflection (Clarke, James & Kelly, 1996). Clarke and Kelly further state that the daily reality of professional practice is more detailed and complex than the specialized skills that most professionals use. In every practice, they maintain, there is that unique type of knowledge held by an individual practitioner but how it came into being is hard to explain. Therefore, there is that part of a practitioner’s daily practice that is based on previous experiences gained through reflection of a particular situation.

Unlike the knowledge in action, reflection on action takes place when a meaningful event has happened and it allows the practitioner to describe, review, and analyze the event in order to obtain a good understanding for future practice (Cotton, 2001). Reflection in and on practice is a
reconstructive process, in which one revisits his or her own behavior in a particular action. This is usually done when acknowledging that there is some degree of biases in whatever events, thoughts, or feelings (Jones, 1995). In general, reflection in educational research may be done through reflection on one’s practical experiences. In which case, this personal reflection will be linking practice to the start of a research idea. This kind of linking reflection to the research question is not as clear in the reflective literature as it is with the link of reflexivity in the research process.

In reflexivity, the action of the researcher is also used to explore the personal values and beliefs of the researcher related to an action issue. Thus, reflection on action to identify a research topic is not the same thing as reflexivity in the research process. Patton (2002) states that, “complete objectivity being impossible and pure subjectivity undermining credibility, the researcher’s focus becomes balance – understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness” (p. 41). The action of exploring reflexivity has been described as a very thoughtful, conscious and self-awareness process like that of journaling (Finlay, 2002). The action of journaling in education is now gaining prominence especially in radical pedagogy, critical, and feminist’s theories. Scholars, who rely on reflexivity, see their actions as a way of situating themselves within their research through reflection on their research processes, and reflection on how they are themselves affected by that process of their actions (Walter, Glass & Davis, 2001). They also situate themselves by delineating personal beliefs and experiences relevant to the research undertaking. It can be reasonably argued that the reflection on action research usually brings forth the essence of individual subjective to his or her own experience, which is highly valued in qualitative research (Morse, 2002).
Teaching though reflection on practice may facilitate the acquisition of new insights to effective teaching now and in the future. Since participation in reflection implies a great amount of willingness on the part of the individual teacher, working with students has great potential for being a rich source of knowledge for practice. It must be noted that reflection is not indicative of any deficit in professional knowledge and practice, but rather a desire to address the conflict or contradiction between desired outcomes, professional and personal values and beliefs, and the everyday constraints of teaching practice (Perry, 2000). When teachers view their students, as important social partners in practice, and their environment as a big part of what to reflect on, they are likely to gain a deeper understanding of their own practice. Thus, it can be concluded that teaching is a highly personal and a complex activity.

As Cole (1990) argues, teaching is personal because "each teacher’s practice is an expression of a personal and professional way of knowing that which is shaped and informed by personal and professional background, experience, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and goals" (p.203). It is also complex because, the domain of the teacher’s knowledge, is as vast as its application and the many possible contexts of application (Carlsen, 1999). As revealed in educational literature, reflection that is characteristic of a teacher’s critical practice has been recognized as an essential element of the professional development process (Rust, 1999). This then has great potential for reshaping the teacher’s beliefs. Educationist Thouless (1974), believes that “the best teachers are not those who use their prestige to force meek acceptance of what they say, but those who retain, to the end of their days the spirit of students, always ready to learn more, and expecting from those whom they have to teach, argue with, contradict, and above all, their impartial testing of the truth by experiment” (p. 124). For sure, there is eminent growth and professional development in action research reflection.
Self-study Teacher Action Research

Self-study, as a component of reflection in action research, is when teachers systematically and critically examine their actions and the context of those actions as a way of developing a more consciously driven mode of professional activity (Samaras, 2002) Thus, self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) is a form of a qualitative research methodology that is mainly concerned with the examination of the teacher’s role in a given research project. It examines “the space between self and the practice engaged in” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) argue, it is through teachers’ written reflection of their own practice that teachers negotiate their tensions between self and context. How longtime beliefs and assumption manifest themselves in their own practice.

When self-study is done as action research, it enriches the teacher’s assessment of self at two levels. The first level examines one’s own reflections on self, and the second level examines conversations with colleagues before, during and after the project. It leads the researcher to a better understanding of the deeper complexities of teacher education. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend, apart from identifying a problem, collecting required data, implementing a plan, recording the results, and reflecting on our own actions in order to change our future actions, we may employ narrative inquiry methods, such as journaling and reflections. Therefore, this study intends to use self-study as a methodology within a broader framework of action research.

In action research, teachers are provided with the opportunity to apply traditional research’s findings to their own classroom teaching and to apply theory to practice. Action research also involves teachers as active participants in the educational process that assists them in improving their critical and reflective thinking for their own instructional improvement.
processes (Lederman & Niess, 1997). It gives teachers a unique and systematic way of collecting classroom data, which can be used to improve instruction. It also offers teachers a flexible approach to instructional improvement through planning, actions, and reflections on practice. As Lederman and Niess (1997) argue, action research is the most direct and effective way through which teachers can facilitate their development into being reflective practitioners. It also helps teachers to become life-long learners.

Using students’ responses to learner-centered teaching, I modified instruction on an ongoing basis. Thus, changes to areas of teaching that are recommended for learner-centered teaching - classroom power sharing, role of the teacher, content, and assessment - were reflected on. Using spiraling cycles of questioning, planning, and acting, data was collected for active reflection through journal writing as proposed by Yarrow, Millwater and Fraser (1997). This was meant to assist with the development of strategies that were aimed at improving economics teaching. The implementation of learner-centered teaching in the classroom was documented in a daily journal. This was intended to provide a framework that would serve as a point of departure from the traditional lecture method to learner-centered teaching (LCT). Students’ responses to LCT assisted me when I was reflecting on the epistemological assumptions and beliefs in order to reshape the economics teaching practice.

**Implementing Learner-centered Teaching**

Having chosen to implement learner-centered teaching, I felt there were some areas where I could share power with my students. These areas were: deciding the course content, the pace at which content will be covered, the structure of assignments and tests, attendance policy determination, assignment deadlines, grading responsibilities, and classroom communications.
The syllabus language was intentionally friendly and without the usual command phrases like: “No late assignments will be accepted” or “You must do the assigned readings before class.” Language like this sounds authoritative and relates to teacher power and control. A sample syllabus that was used is included in Appendix D. As I made major learning decisions, I used students’ input as a way of sharing power. By giving students a choice of five possible assignments, and asking the students to decide which one they preferred, I felt I was giving them a sense that they were in control of their learning. Course policy decisions were also shared.

Although content selection poses a very challenging item to involve students with, it is doable. I let students decide which topics to research and write group projects on. This took place after the basic principles of economics had been covered. In reviewing material for examinations, I gave students the opportunity to select areas for review and examination. During class meetings, I distributed a draft course outline, and asked students to take it with them, discuss it among themselves, and make any necessary modifications. We then went over the suggested modifications and adjusted the course outline in class as a group. Despite the long standing metaphor “the more the content and the more rigor the content the better,” learning was more important than covering content. I used content as a means to develop learning skills. As a facilitator, I helped students develop basic skills like time management, computational skills, money management skills, as well as other life connected skills. I used content to create student awareness.

Research Setting

Research for this project was conducted at Spartanburg Methodist College, South Carolina, during the spring semester of 2008. This is a two year college that recruits both regular and adult learners for freshman and sophomore years of their four year college degree programs.
Many students from this college transfer to four-year colleges and universities in the country upon graduating. Adult learners in principles of macroeconomics (BSAD 201) were formally asked to participate in this research project. Principles of Macroeconomics is the introductory economics course in most colleges and universities. It is a required course in many career programs like business administration, accounting, engineering, architecture, cutlery, as well as many others. This three credit-hour course is specifically designed to give foundational concepts in economics and help students to understand how fundamental economics is to their day-to-day lives. The class selected for this project came from one of the three macroeconomics courses that were offered during the fall and spring semesters. The class met for 50 minutes every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (MWF) for the entire semester. I taught all three macroeconomics courses during the project semester. The majority of the students in my classes were usually contemplating degrees in business administration, accounting, and marketing. The adult learners were usually interested in careers such as psychology, sociology/social work, and law. There was a wide spectrum of ability levels represented in each of the classes. I believe students came to my class with varied perceptions about both the subject of economics and its instruction. Although, I have never had a chance to analyze these perceptions, I did have the opportunity to talk with some of the adult learners about their perception of economics. The impression that I received was that many adult learners have a negative view of economics. I decided to investigate how the implementation of learner-centered teaching would change those perceptions.

Participant Selection

Before the start of the semester, I sent a letter describing the intent of the research project to all students registered in section B, of BSAD 201 Principles of Macroeconomics. The exact
number of participants to be involved was determined by the number of interested adult learners who had enrolled in this section of the course for spring of 2008. Although specific characteristics such as age, sex, and race/ethnicity was evident, I decided to keep these characteristics confidential.

During the orientation week, I asked the business division chair to meet with all the registered adult learners in the target section of the principles of economics class in order to find out who would be interested in participating in the study. Those who were interested in participating were given an “Informed Consent Form” to sign (see Appendix C). This form stated that each participant understood that his/her participation was optional and that they could withdraw from the study without any repercussions to their grades or status in class. Before the first day of class, all necessary documentation were completed as required by the college’s human subject handling. As part of the requirement, all participating students were informed of their role in the study which included taking both the pre-test and post-test of their perceptions, maintaining a journal, interviews, discussing and reflecting on the kind of teaching and learning done throughout the semester. As part of the project, follow-up interviews were conducted two weeks after the end of the semester. It was anticipated that most of the activities proposed, in the initial stages, might have to be substantially altered or replaced, as the study unfolded. These new discoveries helped form part of the research results.

Data Collection

As noted elsewhere, this research used qualitative techniques of data collection and analysis. Qualitative data was collected from both the pre-test and post-test questionnaires, in-depth interviews, teacher and students’ journal records, and class observations. The most
authentic means of data collection in a qualitative research study are interviews, at individual and group levels, observations, and the use of available documents (Patton, 2002). The pre-test was administered during the first week of class, while the post-test was administered two weeks after the end of class. In-depth reflection and class observations were done continuously throughout the semester. Students were encouraged to reflect on each completed course unit, and record their insights in their journals before starting a new unit. In particular, they were asked to reflect on how the teacher handled power sharing and their role as the teacher. They were also encouraged to make suggestions about possible improvements. Each type of data collection technique was used in this study.

**Pre- and Post-tests.** In formulating the pre- and post-tests, this study made use of McCombs and Miller (2006) “The Assessment of Learner-Centered Practice (ALCP): Tool for Creating Learner-Centered Classrooms and Departments – College levels” (p. 117). This tool contains two set surveys, one for students and the other for instructors. The student survey that this study used in formulating the students’ pre- and post-test identify:

1. Student assessment of classroom practices, and
2. Student assessments of motivation in seven research areas, which are related to a variety of positive academic and social outcomes (McCombs & Miller, p. 117).

Apart from the questions related to the above two areas, other questions that were included were those concerning the students’ perception about economics before and after the class.

I also took the instructor’s version of the survey before and after the class project. Taking the instructor’s survey was intended to provide instructors with an opportunity to assess their
own awareness of their impact on students’ learning. Three areas were assessed, using McCombs and Miller, (2006):

1. Instructor’s beliefs and assumptions about students, learning, and teaching;
2. Instructor’s characteristics related to effective teaching; and
3. Instructor assessment of classroom practices in areas most related to student motivation and achievement (p. 117-118). Both surveys are included in Appendix A.

These three assessments were administered before and after the research project.

Learner Journals. Every participating student was asked to keep a class journal. In this journal, the student was asked to reflect on both teaching and learning after each course unit. I included weekly journal reflection prompts in the course syllabus. I assured students that their journal information was only for the benefit of the study and that their honest feedback would not result in repercussions on their grade. Each week, I prompted the students to reflect on specific class issues. When I didn’t have something in particular to reflect on, I asked students to reflect on anything that they had observed during the week that pertained to teaching and learning.

The students’ journals were collected and read every other week throughout the semester. Participating students received two points, out of ten extra credit points, towards their final grade for every journal handed in. The issues raised in the students’ journals were used in subsequent class activities and in overall class instruction.

As required by qualitative methods of research analysis, data collection and analysis was done concurrently throughout the project period. Thus, while reading students’ journals, for the purpose of reshaping my teaching, I was also looking for emerging patterns. Therefore, student
journals were analyzed on an ongoing basis throughout the semester. I had hoped that these journals would provide a rich source of data for the study. At the conclusion of the course, all the participants sat down for an in-depth interview.

During the in-depth interviews, I asked students about the process of journaling and how it influenced their overall learning. I encouraged them not only to reflect on the teaching of economics, but also on how the course affected their lives. I asked open-ended questions and let the students explain the process of teaching and learning as they experienced it (Patton, 2002). Interview questions that were administered are included in Appendix F.

**Researcher’s Journal.** I also kept a journal as part of the study. The journal was a weekly record of the events that occurred during the teaching process. As expressed by Brookfield (1995) “a teacher’s log is a weekly record of the events in the teacher’s life that have impressed themselves most vividly on his or her consciousness” (p. 72). I relied heavily on the framework suggested by Brookfield (1995). The framework contains the following questions:

1. Looking in the past week, what was the moment/moments when I felt most engaged, connected, and/or affirmed as an effective teacher?
2. What was the moment/moments when I felt most disengaged, disconnected, and/or disillusioned as a teacher?
3. Which situation caused me the greatest anxiety or distress? Situations that made me feel like I shouldn’t continue teaching?
4. As I taught this week, which event took me by surprise that caught me unawares in a pleasant way?
5. What aspect of my teaching would I change if I had a chance to do it over again? And how would I change?

6. What aspect of my teaching do I regret about most and what do I think caused it?

7. What aspect of my teaching do I feel best about? And which teaching activity (ies) do I think contributed towards this aspect?

These questions provided a guideline for my weekly journaling, which helped me keep the study focused. I kept an account of everything that happened during the class. I described students’ participation as well as points raised by students, both in their journals and in class discussions. The journal was also a place where I reflected on my own beliefs about teaching and learning. I also described the personal interactions and conversations I had with students. The journal proved to be very useful during the dissertation analysis phase.

I took notes on how each class was taught, which activities were used and how effective those activities were. Journal notes included: What should be maintained, and why? What should be discontinued and why? What has been introduced that was not part of the initial plan? and What are the plans for the following week? The journal was an effective tool in improving student’s learning experiences. It also served as a way of incorporating personal emotions and students’ nurturing techniques into the study.

In-Depth Interviews. A semi-structured open-ended interview was conducted at the end of the semester to gather information about the implementation of learner-centered teaching in economics. Participating students were interviewed in-depth at both the individual and group level at the end of the semester. The selection of students who were interviewed was taken from the pool of participants who had signed the informed consent document. Those selected had
shown interest in the project when it had first been presented. The goal of the interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of the application of learner-centered teaching. During the interviews, the researcher sought to unearth the meaning of students’ journals. Both sets of journals were used to form the main source of follow-up questions. I posed questions structured in an open-ended form, in order to find out what students’ perception of learner-centered teaching principles was. As exemplified by Bogdan and Biklen, (1992), “I treated every word as having the potential of unlocking the mystery of the subject’s way of viewing the world” (p. 98). Students further enlightened me that I was not there “to change views, but rather to learn what the subjects’ views were and why they were that way” (p. 99).

For the purposes of accurate interview recording, I ask students for permission to audio record the interviews before the interview began. Participants were given copies of the interview questions, which were followed strictly in order to best uncover the intended information. I took notes of each interview, noting exactly what was said during the interview. These after interview notes were used to account for the context of the interview and the body language of the participant. These notes also formed part of the data analyzed at the dissertation data analysis stage. The audio tapes were transcribed by a professional transcriber for quality and accuracy.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts (Cresswell, 1994). Cresswell, further argues that “the researcher be open to possibilities and see contrary or alternative explanations for the findings” (p. 153). There are several ways through which qualitative data may be analyzed. This study relied upon Patton’s (2002) framework for qualitative data analysis. The first set of
qualitative data to be analyzed was the students’ journals. The process of analyzing constituted an accurate reading of the journals and interview notes and the identification of common themes within the data. I looked for areas where effective teaching and learning was indicated. Individual quotations from learner journals were used to document teaching and learning improvements.

Each interview was recorded and professionally transcribed for accurate qualitative analysis. The interviews’ analysis followed the same process as that of the journals’ analysis. I carefully read the interview transcripts in order to identify emerging themes. Linking specific comments made by students to specific areas that need to be changed were used to help determine whether or not the application achieved the intended objective. Results from pre- and post-tests were analyzed for any differences in perception about the course of economics and it’s teaching under learner-centered principles. The main goal of overall data analysis is to provide meaningful interpretations of the data collected as well as to make connections that provide important information about the overall purpose of the study.

Verification of a research study entails the dependability of the study’s findings. This is meant to give specific assurance of how good the research is, by the researcher him/herself. According to Patton (2002) study verification requires establishment of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of a given study. Researchers, need to be clear about how trustworthy their study is in order for others to believe in the study’s findings. However, to be able to judge a given study’s worthiness, a clear criterion of judgment needs to be established. As Patton (2002) contends, “judging requires criteria” (p. 542).

Concerns of study credibility are usually based on the degree to which the experiences of participants reflect the data as described by the study. I worked hard along this line to ensure that
measurements of all qualitative variables were done with a high degree of trust. Usually, quantitative techniques have fewer rigors in proving their worthiness, given the fact that quantitative data can easily be checked in their sources. For example, the quantitative data used in this study is also maintained in college records. The credibility of the examinations and attendance records used in this study can be easily established from the college records. As for qualitative data, the rich data collected, is accompanied by a detailed description of the interviews. I have included direct quotes from the transcript, to confirm the study’s credibility. A detailed and complete coverage of the students’ journal descriptions is also provided to supplement the study’s credibility.

Transferability of research is measured by the extent to which research findings can be transferred to other contexts. Ideally, transferability in qualitative research is similar to the external validity in quantitative research, and it actually implies the likelihood that research findings have usefulness in other contexts, while at the same time preserving the study’s unique result (Patton, 2002). Even though, qualitative research findings are not generalizable, the process that I have gone through in applying learner-centered teaching should be able to be replicated in future studies. Even though the research participants were unique, the research process can still be repeated in a different context with totally different participants. I have provided detailed accounts of every stage of my action research.

Confirmability of research stems from the question of whether or not the research’s findings can be confirmed. Just as with the credibility aspect of this study, data from college records that were used as quantitative data, can easily be confirmed. With qualitative data, confirmability is established through direct, frequent, and repeated affirmation of the research records taken by the researcher. Interviews with participants were conducted for the purpose of
reaffirming that participants’ journals and interviews were accurate. The use of audiotapes during interviews, and the subsequent transcription of the tapes by a professional transcriber ensure the accuracy of these interviews.

The research’s dependability is based on its credibility, transferability, and confirmability as described above. Dependability of research is also based on the research’s rigor and on the credibility of the researcher. The fact that this research utilized both quantitative and qualitative variables is a clear indication of how rigorous the study was. As a researcher, I have taken both statistics and computer statistical software training at the graduate level. My four years of doctoral coursework training in adult education has further equipped me for rigorous and credible research. I hold two masters degrees, from two different systems of education. For seventeen years, I have taught economics at both college and university levels. Given, my level of training and experience in teaching, I feel that I was well prepared for a dependable study.

Triangulation of data is recommended in improving research findings’ credibility. Repeat interviews were done specifically for data triangulation purposes. Research triangulation requires that the researcher check with the participants to make sure that what is transcribed is accurate. To ensure accuracy, I checked with individual participants about the conclusions I arrived at from reading their journal to ensure accuracy. I also confirmed the authenticity of transcriptions with each participant.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

An African parable once stated that “If you make stew from equal proportions of two animals – one rabbit and one elephant, the stew will taste as that of an elephant” Likewise, implementing learner-centered teaching (LCT) principles within a larger establishment of traditional teaching may still seem like traditional teaching.

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of LCT through action research. The study was to explore the implementation and impact of LCT principles within an introductory economics class. It was also to document any attained successes or failures in applying these principles. The broad research question guiding the study was: How do instructors effectively use the LCT approach in the teaching of an introductory economics class? The questions included:

1. How are LCT principles applicable to the teaching of an introductory economics class?

2. What can be said about the effectiveness of LCT in introductory economics?

3. What are the challenges of applying LCT principles in introductory economics?

This chapter begins with an overview of the initial preparations for LCT as well as an examination of the researcher’s initial concerns. These concerns include institutional constraints, rigid time frames, and the ability to gauge student learning. This is followed by an account of LCT implantation. The implementation was carried out in three stages; the first two weeks, next four weeks and last four weeks. The first two weeks sets the stage for LCT implementation, the next four weeks implementation discussion covers the building of various aspects of the student-teacher relationship. This involves strategies like respecting students’ voices, nurturing student
development through responsibility taking, and accommodating students’ developmental
differences. Discussion of the last four weeks deals with three interventions following interim
reflection on the initial six weeks. And the chapter concludes with a discussion of the reflection
on LCT implementation challenges experienced by the researcher.

Initial Preparation

Preparation for this research project involved designing a course structured around LCT
principles. With the help of my advisors, Dr. Taylor and Dr. Cranton, I designed the course
syllabus (Appendix E), participant’s introductory letter (Appendix D), and a “what to do” list
(Appendix E) which was used as a guideline for broad classroom activities. These activities were
ultimately refined through classroom based learner input. I also received permission from the
college to conduct research with students in Spring 2008 (Appendix C). The class chosen for the
study was BSAD 201 B, Principles of Macroeconomics, with a student enrollment of 24.

BSAD 201 is an introductory core course that economics students are required to take
during their first semester of their freshman year. The course has five objectives: identify
specific economics issues, describe and apply economic perspectives, explain available policy
options, and appraise economic issues. Upon completion, students should be able to demonstrate
an understanding of basic economic concepts and how they relate to everyday situations.

The instructional design and format of the course differs from one instructor to another,
but the stated objectives remain the same. The course typically meets for an average of three
hours per week. During the course of this research project, students met every Monday,
Wednesday, and Friday at 12:00 noon. During after school hours, students met every Tuesday
and Thursday from 6:00 – 8:00 pm. The two meeting rooms were equipped with computers,
internet access, overhead projectors, and DVD/CD/VHS player/recorders. The seating
arrangement was adjusted to fit the appropriate LCT format. Instead of learners sitting in rows, all facing the front of the room where the instructor stands, oval/round table setting of sitting was adapted.

I requested the head of the computer science and business division to help administer the signing of the informed consent form. During the first day of class, she stepped in for me and provided a detailed explanation of the study as well as what was expected of those who chose to participate. She handed out the introductory letter, along with the informed consent forms, and provided students with time to read them. She then asked those who were willing to participate to sign the two forms; keeping one copy for their records and handing the second in. Out of the 24 students in the class, 13 agreed to sign the consent form. Nine of those who signed the consent form were adult students while the remaining four were traditional students between the ages of 18 and 21. Since this study was targeting adult learners, the nine adult students were selected to be participants in the study.

I was not made aware of who the participants of the study were until after I had completed teaching and awarded grades. This is done to ensure the researcher cannot influence participants’ opinions by awarding good grades. Therefore, the head of the computer science and business division had to keep the signed consent forms until after I had submitted the grades. The only information I had received was the number of participants in the study. This meant that the right protocols for human subject recruitment had been followed.

Institutional Constraints

Spartanburg Methodist College uses traditional teaching as the main method of instruction. The curriculum has well defined objectives and clear student outcomes. It has a set
time frame within which to complete the curriculum. These constraints forced me to find a new way of implementing LCT while still meeting the schools expectation’s. In my journal I wrote:

As interesting as LCT may sound, I must remember that keeping this teaching job depends on how satisfied my employer is. I have just been hired, and I will not jeopardize my chances of continued employment. Therefore, to implement LCT, I must do it within the acceptable practices of the college. I will follow the curriculum and abide by the set expectations and time frame. I will try to maximize my flexibility and make the best of the given circumstances (Field notes, December 15, 2007)

What was clear was that there were a number of options for providing a sound student-centered teaching environment. I knew that the curriculum provided broad guidelines about what needed to be covered but that specific details were to be decided by the individual instructor. In my journal I noted:

In my instruction design, I will use the college curriculum as a framework within which I will design a student-centered classroom. My syllabus will reflect LCT principles. I will start with a broad outline of learning activities. I will gradually incorporate the students in deciding the daily learning activities as the semester progresses. (Field notes, December 15, 2007)

I planned on using the privacy and autonomy of my classroom to implement LCT principles. I knew that hours spent outside of class would be open to activities outside the school curriculum. I knew that I was not ready to implement the perfect LCT class, but I planned on doing my best with the given circumstances. As I noted in my journal:
I will not do anything outside the schools guidelines, and I will not seek to convert everybody in the college. Instead, I will try my best, and let my actions speak for myself. (Field notes, December 15, 2007)

One of the concerns I had was the student reaction to a teaching environment completely different from what they were used to. I was well aware that most of my students would be taking classes that followed traditional methods of instruction, but I wanted to introduce the students to a new form of classroom teaching. In my journal I wrote:

I believe that students are all good and that they will do their best based on their own self-interest. If I am good to my students, they will also be good to me. And since all students come to college with the intention of acquiring knowledge, I will implement LCT in the best way I can, and I believe the students will respond positively. (Field notes, December 15, 2007)

LCT Course Syllabus Development

The syllabus is one of the first points of contact between a teacher and their students. I knew that setting the appropriate tone for the course would require a syllabus that reflected LCT. By incorporating the language of LCT into the syllabus, students would be able to see the type of classroom experiences they could expect. Therefore, as suggested by Weimer (2002), I sought to avoid the type of directives that are common in traditional syllabus language (see Appendix E). Instead, I listed the assumptions that would guide my actions in the classroom. These assumptions addressed the equal partnership that would exist between students and me, while at the same time encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning. The list included the following assumptions:
1. Every student comes to class with the intention of acquiring knowledge and that each student will do what is right per their signed Honor Code. The college requires every student sign an integrity code.

2. Each student is a free and autonomous individual. Together our different experiences, attitudes, and abilities will enhance learning.

3. Students’ potential for growth and development is virtually unlimited as long as the classroom environment is a place where all students are actively engaged and effectively appreciated.

4. Since students concept of self plays an important role in growth and development, each student will contribute to the learning environment.

5. Each individual student is motivated and has a desire for self-actualization, whether it be for personal or professional application.

6. Reality is defined by each student. We will be engaged in activities designed by all of us.

7. Individual students have a responsibility to both themselves and others.

Developing the course syllabus was not as easy as it may sound. I had difficulty differentiating authoritative language from the necessary soft language used in LCT. As Dr. Cranton, one of my main advisors’ commented:

Here are more comments on your syllabus. I think you are getting there. It's really a paradigm shift, and it's hard to make. The emphasis on tests is still a concern of mine, as is the emphasis on content rather than process in your outline. But your "language" is much better! Please do send me your "what to do list.” (Email of January 5, 2008)
I struggled making this paradigm shift. I had to constantly remind myself that I was doing LCT. I thought that making a “what to do” list (Appendix F) would help me remain focused. Unfortunately, the struggle did not end, as I indicated in my journal:

It is hard to let go of my authority as a teacher! The struggle is with what the college requires. The specific curriculum objectives, and the college’s rigid time frame Limits how much LCT I will be able to do.

I went ahead and created my “what to do” list, and tightened my syllabus language. I made sure to avoid statements such as, “no late papers will be accepted, under no circumstances, Failure to….., Do not….., and You must…..” This kind of language has been found to be associated with power and control in the classroom (Weimer, 2002). I then sent the documents to Dr. Cranton, hoping for affirmation. What I got back was the following:

Do students have any input into this? Is there a way they can have? Rather than emphasizing topics/content in this outline, can you also include/emphasize activities (as Weimer suggests)? I’m not sure how this would be done, as I don’t know your subject area, but using some problem-based learning activities might be one way. That is, you create a problem related to a topic, and students work in a team to research the problem and present a solution to the group. In doing so, they learn the content but the process of learning is emphasized” (email, January 3, 2008)

This was frustrating because the college wanted me to be specific. The college wanted me to provide specific course learner outcomes (CLO) as well as student learning outcomes (SLO). After talking with both my college mentor and division head, I decided to strike a balance and design broad-based learning activities that could be modified over the course of the semester. I sent these changes back to her for further advice. Her comments were encouraging:
I think this is coming along. Your "what to do" list is good, but a bit abstract. I wonder how it will translate into practice. I have also been trying to think of other strategies you can use. For your tests, for example, you could have learners work in groups to develop test items. Then you would select items from those they developed for the actual test. This gives them input into the tests, gives them some power over the content of the tests, and the creation of items would, in itself, be a learning experience. I'm also thinking about problem-based learning as a strategy. Can you develop problems that are based on the topics you have listed for the course, and have students work in teams to address the problem? They would find their own resources, construct knowledge together, and learn how to learn, which is one of the central tenets of learner-centered teaching. When do your classes start?? You must be ready to go with this (email, January 6, 2008)

I was happy to be given the green light to proceed. Therefore, I went ahead with the final syllabus (Appendix E) with the understanding that I was going to implement Dr. Cranton’s suggestions.

LCT Room Selection

Selecting an appropriate room for this action research was as important as the research itself. Spartanburg Methodist College (SMC) has traditional classrooms. Students sit in rows facing the chalkboard. The teacher stands and lectures from the front row. This setting has been criticized by presenting the teacher as an expert authority who stands in front of students giving orders. Such “a set-up not only discourages people from talking to each other by forcing them to turn around to see behind them, but also establishes a clear power position – the front of the room usually occupied by the teacher” (Cranton, 2003).
I wanted to secure a classroom that would help facilitate LCT. Unfortunately I was provided with a regular classroom where students sit facing the teacher. I was fortunate though to gain access to one of the special meeting rooms, otherwise known as GOSA. It is a conference room with a large oval table surrounded by chairs. The GOSA room was primarily used for discussions and other group activities. The regular classroom provided me with an opportunity to utilize different instructional designs since it was equipped with a computer, an overhead projector, and a television with a DVD/VHS player.

It was not easy to secure these two rooms for a single class. I suspect it would have been even more difficult had I been utilizing LCT in all of my classes:

Looking for the appropriate room was hard. I contacted the rooms’ allocating administrator three times before she allowed me to put in a request. Even after submitting it in writing I was forced to wait for approval from higher authorities. I wonder, how easy it would have been if I had asked for all of the groups that I teach? (You probably should include a date for each of your journal entries.)

*Room Setting for LCT environment*

Setting up the action research project involved picking the appropriate classroom and structuring it in such a way as to maximize the environment for LCT principles. Dr. Cranton, (2003) argued:

If we want students to learn, they must be interested in the class or course material and believe that the learning will be relevant to their own personal or professional goals. If we want students to discuss issues, they must feel free and comfortable in speaking to each other. If we want students to be curious and questioning, they must be sure that questions
are welcome. (p. 1)

From the outset, I wanted to present a different class setting; this was the reason I wanted to use the GOSA room. The GOSA room afforded us the luxury of rearranging the chairs in a manner that reflected the principles of LCT. The regular classroom was only used when scheduling the GOSA room was not possible. During those times, we performed activities that were suitable for the traditional classroom setting. These activities included showing films, and having guest speakers.

I tried arriving in the GOSA room early in order to make sure everything was set up. I would then stand in one corner and wait for the students to arrive. After all the students had settled into the chairs surrounding the conference table, I greeted everyone by joining them at the table. This was then followed by a clear introduction of the day’s business.

It was not always smooth sailing though. One of the problems had to do with the size of the class. There were 24 students enrolled in the class. This is not an ideal number for group discussions. According to Dr. Cranton (2003), “if the group is larger than 20 or 25 people, a circle is less effective.” (even though she thinks it can be done with larger groups, in some situations). Therefore, I knew it would not be appropriate to use a single group for an entire class. Only for class presentations did I use a single group and even then it was not ideal:

Even with the GOSA room, presentations were not appropriately done. Our group of 25 people, 24 students and me, was not effective. We could not adequately involve everyone even when they wanted to participate. By the time we got to the third person, the rest who wanted to participate had given up.
LCT Implementation

The process of implementing LCT for this research project was covered in a continuous cyclical action research pattern of planning, acting, reflecting, and planning….. But since the implantation was done in ten (10) weeks, the main activities of the implementation process were divided into four main stages that are discussed next. The remaining section of this chapter therefore, will cover these stages as follows; starting out two weeks, four weeks after starting, second four weeks after starting, and final reflection on challenges of LCT.

Starting Out – The first two weeks

During the first two weeks, I covered the administratively required paper work and introduced the learners into the principles of LCT. It was during this period that I had participants sign the informed consent, and started teaching. Having set the LCT environment as described above, during the first day of class, I went through the syllabus discussing each item with the students. The impact of this introduction was well received as noted in their journals. One student said:

Today Mr. Ongeri passed out the syllabus and we went over all we were gonna do in class for the semester. I was impressed by the organization on the first day. I felt that the course would be challenging but that I would be able to learn a ton.

Another student remarked:

Today was our first day of class and I enjoyed it because instead of just taking notes we had a class discussion of what was to come - syllabus. We talked about our perspective/ lens and by this we view the world differently. Everyone has a different perspective of
life. We also talked about how our wants are unlimited but our resources are limited. I would rather have more of a discussion class than a note taking class.

And yet another student wrote:

Today we learned about the class and professor. He told us how the class was going to work and he went over the syllabus with the students. I enjoyed the first day a lot because the professor got the class involved and made the class sound exciting. I couldn’t wait to see what kind of things we were going to be learning.

Even though the majority of students were excited with the way I had designed the class, a few did not understand how they might benefit from it. One student wrote:

We started class and started on discussions. I have no trouble understanding the teacher’s accent. However, there were only four terms discussed during the entire class. This to me seemed too long and a little boring. I think the class should move faster. I don’t even understand how he expects us to discuss what we have not learned! He should teach first and bring discussions after we have learned something to discuss. I honesty don’t know what he is up to.

Another one remarked:

Today class started with a review of the syllabus and we did nothing else. Although class was active, I don’t understand why we wasted time talking about the professor’s assumption about us. Class was slow, so my attention wandered a lot. I wish the class would move faster, and if anyone has questions, should ask the professor after class, instead of discussing people’s issues. Most of the things discussed today seemed personal.
It was clear that my objective had resulted in mixed feeling amongst the students. While some may have liked the way I introduced the class, others did not. This type of reaction was expected given that many have experienced nothing more than a teacher lecturing and leading all classroom activities. Students are expected to resist any change from the norm (Weimer, 2002). My preparation for this was to remain positive even when students expressed dissatisfaction or frustration. Reflecting on this concern, I wrote the following in my journal:

I don’t expect all students to be positive with what I am about to embark on. Most students will be excited, but I know some will be resistant. I will not take offense to this. I will appreciate the support of those positive students. I will also help those who are questioning what I am doing, to see how it might help their learning.

After the first two weeks’ reflection, I realized that I needed to put more stress on learner-centered teaching, by being purposefully proactive with the learners.

The First Four Weeks after Starting

Based on the first two weeks’ of LCT process, I felt that I would be more effective if I helped the learners to appreciate what I was doing. Thus, I decided to help foster students’ understanding of learner-centered teaching. I first started on relationships.

Positive Student-Teacher Relationships

The main rationale for building positive student-teacher relationships was to help students feel cared for, respected, and appreciated as individuals. I needed to show my students that they belonged and that the learning environment was safe. I accomplished this by fostering a personal and caring relationship with each student. In creating caring relationships, teachers help
students become connected to the academic environment (Brum, 2005). This was confirmed by participating students. For example, Charles said:

My expectation of a good teacher is that person who takes time to understand his students both academically and personally; knowing what happens to the learner outside of class that may affect learning is very important. A good teacher has a good balance of control over the class but also knows how to cut back and have a sense of humor, and develop a warm relationship with the learners. I usually don’t enjoy serious and cold teachers who do not know how to engage the students, and even make fun.

Charles’ remarks were positively supplemented by what other students said. Ashley described what encouraged her to learn during this project as follows:

I actually felt very comfortable coming for help from you as my professor, and I also felt like I would come to your office anytime, ask any question without any fears of feeling like I don’t know what I am talking about, or that I will be wasting your time. You made it sound as if I can actually be an economist…..That was great! Another thing that was important to me was the hands on, the fact that we as students would help one another in doing assignments, was very encouraging. It was really kind of you that you did have confidence in what we did as student in our individual groups. I am not sure if I would have done as well if we did not have group discussions. The movie clips were equally important, in putting some fresh to the economic abstractions that we discussed. I am usually a visual person, meaning that what I see usually remains in my memory for a long time. For example, that movie clip about a neighbor not taking care of their lawn leading to other neighbors’ property value going down, really helped to understand the concept of “externality”!
The relationship a teacher builds with students is a valuable asset in learning. I knew it was important to build relationships with my students. However, as I went through the student’s journals and interviews, I was struck by the following three themes: emotional nurturing, positive reinforcement and relaxed classroom environment.

_Emerald Nurturing_

Students interviewed have indicated a strong feeling about teacher’s concern for students’ emotional wellbeing. They seem to value teachers who step out of the formal structures to care about their emotions. According to Amanda:

I was happy to have taken your class, ….I mean, I was completely comfortable in your class. I felt as if I could come to you with any question any time. You even encouraged us to come to your office, even without appointment. I don’t think that I would have gotten the grade I got in this course, if I hadn’t gotten the kind of support you gave us.

One needs to be able to differentiate the power that Ginott speaks of from the power that does not reside with the teacher. Administratively, one may argue that universities are governed by presidents and that each college has deans who oversee the designing and implementation of the curriculum. Teachers are required to follow not only acceptable syllabi and lesson plans but also the schools rules, and policies. If this is the typical university structure, where is the focus on creating a conducive learning environment? This university structure is enforced through personal incentives such as tenure. Even when teachers want to implement out of class activities, there are rules and restrictions that often get in the way. When looking at it from this perspective, it is evident that teachers may be feel as limited in what they can voluntarily do to improve their teaching.
It should not be lost however, that it is only the teacher who can engage the mind of the learner. The respect accorded to students, and the manner in which teachers express enthusiasm for students’ experiences both have the power to transform students’ engagement in the learning process. Studies related to student motivation and enthusiasm for learning all show that students are negatively affected when teachers control learning (Weimer, 2002). Findings from students’ journals supported this conclusion. For instance, Greg wrote: “What increases my motivation for learning is probably having a teacher who cares; the one who is concern not only about my grade, but also how I am doing in my whole life” On the other hand, Thomas remarked:

“I learn better if I know that what I am doing is going to help me in the future. Therefore, I want a teacher who can help me get what I want. A teacher who is kind and understanding. Not the one who expects me to know things by osmosis! But, rather the one who takes my hand and leads me home.

Later Thomas wrote:

Learning is a journey that one makes; it’s a journey better done with a motivating and caring teacher. I don’t like when a teacher yells at students who don’t get it. It is not one’s fault that things aren’t sinking! If you take your time to understand each and every student, you will come to know everybody’s strength and weaknesses.

One of my concerns was whether students were comfortable letting me know when they disagreed with me. Some of the other concerns I had were: How was I perceived by students in regard to dealing with their individual shortcomings? Are my students satisfied with the way I handle them? Am I seen as a motivated and caring teacher? Reading participants’ journals, I feel that I may have had an impact on my students.
Mike said:

Mr. Ongeri has an interesting way of delivering his class objective. Although his accent may be a little challenging I am looking forward to what he has to offer. The second class was particularly very good.

Ashley wrote:

The class was enjoyable as well as informative. Things like opportunity cost were explained very clearly and well. I liked the way discussion was encouraged throughout the entire class. The professor seems to know his stuff too; and he is friendly.

The conclusion drawn from these comments is that, with emotional nurturing learners are more likely to be appreciative of the instructor’s good gesture; and in return, participate in the learning process with a sense of belonging.

Reinforcing Learners’ Efforts

Human beings feel good about themselves when they are appreciated and are recognized for their efforts (Ginott, 1977). Students respond well to positive reinforcement, especially when it is for doing something right. Psychologists state that people react well when positive things are said about them (McCombs & Miller, 2007). Complementing a student for just trying often goes a long way towards encouraging future participation. I always tried to be positive with students, even when they were wrong. For example, if a student did not give the correct answer, I would acknowledge their effort by saying, “Good thinking. Does anyone have a different perspective?”

When asked about the characteristics of a good teacher Mary responded:

It’s the one who supports his students. A good teacher takes his time to explain in great detail what he is teaching. He loves what he does so he has his own type of tactic to
explain clearly. Most importantly though, is that teacher who tries to make it fun and exciting--besides it is his favorite thing to do; so it shouldn’t be hard to persuade the student to get involved. A teacher who values students’ inputs and who complements them whenever they try.

I sought to create an environment where students could go for help whenever they needed it. This was well received by most students and was well documented in their journals. For example, one student remarked:

I really like the way the professor cares about what he is teaching. It shows understanding of the subject; and what is interesting is that, he shows caring about our learning. He listens to our points of view. He is always complementing those who try, even when they don’t get it right. And because of this, I think I learned more and more about economics. I have learned how to graph a supply and demand curve with given information that relates to everyday life (I wish he knew how terrible I am with math!). I have learned to measure price elasticity of demand using different formulas and using averages. Also, I have a better understanding of why certain customers buy certain things at certain prices. Like people buying in bulk, the quantity of the product, and the different types of customers and what they are likely to purchase. I have learned about products that are considered to be compliments or substitutes and how they affect the market if a price is raised or lowered and who would still buy these products even if the prices were higher.

When teachers show students that they care, it provides students with the type of confidence they need to try new things.

Acknowledging a student’s efforts further encourages the growth of knowledge and skills. It also provides an environment for learners to freely express their opinions and thoughts.
without fear of being wrong (Ginott, 1977). Data from the field seems to strongly support this argument. According to Charles:

My initial perception about economics was that it is a difficulty subject. Therefore, I came into your class because it was a required course, and I just registered for it and was prepared to come sit, listen, and try to pass it and move on. But, from the first day when you gave us the syllabus and explained the assumptions you have for students, I had a total change of my perception. Your positive attitude towards students, made all the difference that caused the change in my perception.

Another participant, Tasha, wrote this in her journal:

Mr. Ongeri is very respectful, helpful, and supportive. He had a lot of nice things to talk about our group project… he actually made it feel like we were standing on top of the world of economics! Being that positive about students’ work I think is a good thing, because it sort of gives more energy to continue doing even better.

The first four weeks after starting were mainly meant to giving the students a relaxed learning environment and observing/collecting data on what they felt about learner-centered teaching. High student anxiety may lead to less concentration in the classroom. One way to reduce student’s anxiety is by making them feel comfortable in class. Therefore, the objective of these four weeks was to make learners comfortable and a number of appreciated as noted in their journals. One student wrote:

The professor’s patience and understanding has made all the difference. I can walk to his office at any time and ask a question. In class, he sometimes behaves as one of us….I like when he takes a back seat and lets groups take charge of the discussion. I think,
many people will agree with me that the fact that each and every question is answered by
the professor or any student, make me feel comfortable asking.

Another one, as if talking specifically to what my intentions were, used the exact
words that I would have expected from my actions. She said, “Mr. Ongeri, makes us feel
relaxed in class and we can take as long as we want discussing a single topic. This is
unlike most professors who teach and allow for question time. I think Mr. Ongeri has no
problem with time.” She further continued, “My economics class is the most relaxed
among the five classes I am taking this semester. I hope that my economics teacher will
be teaching some course next semester – I will definitely take it”

I sometimes felt flattered reading some of the learners’ journals, but they really
captured the actual moods that were present during some of the implementation process
days. As though talking to somebody, one journal entry read; “What can I say? I am not
sure I know of any professor who makes students feel as comfortable and respected as
my economics teacher. The class feels warm with Mr. Ongeri’s nurturing attitude, which
makes people feel less involved.”

A number of students also reported in their journals that they felt very relaxed in my
classroom. The following journal entries capture the degree to which students reported feeling
relaxed during my LCT project. Tasha said, “The professor takes all the pressure away, allowing
us to be ourselves, relax and enjoy the learning process.” Greg, on the other hand, remarked,
“The teacher is doing a great job of making economics enjoyable. The power point presentations,
movie clips, discussions, and group projects, have all made my economics learning a memorable
experience, thanks to Mr. Ongeri.”
These journal entries made my teaching experience more enriching and comforting. Mike’s journal entry was particularly touching when he wrote, “I am not sure, if in my entire school life, I have had a teacher who respects his students like my econ teacher. Right from the word go, the class is warm and has a nurturing feeling for me. It makes every student to feel less vulnerable I think” As though summarizing what Mike had wrote, Carlos’s last journal entry read:

Because of the professor’s understanding, patience, and openness, we have developed tremendous liking for economics. For me, I have learned more than I thought possible from other students. The sharing and a friendly environment created by the professor’s attitude, has made all members of the class to accept one another, and learn from one another than we have learned from the professor himself. This is awesome!

Student anxiety may lead to less concentration in the classroom. When students are comfortable they will be better able to contribute to classroom discussions. A number of students reported this belief in their journals. Thomas wrote the following in his journal:

Today we learned about the last objective in this chapter, which was production possibilities. I understood the concept of what we were being taught once the graphs started helping me visualize the lesson. We also watched a video on economic growth that also helped me see how it works in everyday life. I enjoyed today’s lesson. I think the reason why I am liking economics is because of the way the professor relates with us. He appreciates our participation and he tries things. I like the movie clips as they connect economics to real life.

Amanda on the other hand reported;
What can one ask for?....Economics is what I have always done. The professor make it sound so easy. When I make a shopping list, he calls it a budget. He doesn’t need to tell me how my pocket money is little,…he call it scarcity. I wish you could hear him baptizing economics terms—African wild animal names! It is really fun.

Tasha, also wrote:

What can I say? I am not sure I know of any professor who makes students feel as comfortable and respected as my economics teacher. The class feels warm with Mr. Ongeri’s nurturing attitude which makes people feel less involved.

Teachers have the power to determine what kind of classroom environment prevails (Ginott, 1977). In order to effectively engage students, teachers must establish a relaxed learning environment. Effective teachers are those who set out to create a warm and welcoming environment where students are respected. An environment where students take responsibility for their learning.

Once students see that their teacher respects them, they are likely to return the respect and go the extra mile. Teachers need to recognize that current students come from a generation that believe in a world of fairness, and are more aware and concern about their rights that older generation students. In working to develop a relaxed classroom environment, I tried to show my students that I saw their ideas as worthy of discussion. I also allowed students to suggest topics for discussion. By validating students’ opinions, I discovered that they were willing to come up with ideas on how to enhance learning through discussion.

As Dr. Cranton, (2003) suggested, I used what if situations to correct faulty arguments. For example, instead of telling a group that they did not meet expectations, I would instead
suggest ways of improving whatever was presented. This allows students to relax and think over what they did with an open mind. In my journal I wrote:

- I also tried to show interest in students’ personal lives by trying to make them feel accepted. If a student offered to talk about their personal issues, I would listen and try to suggest solutions. I also referred these students to places where they could get help. By carefully listening to students’ opinions, I helped establish a sense of belonging.

Reflecting on these entries, together with my own journal entries based on my daily observations, I was able to come up with specific interventions in the implementation process.

The Last Four Weeks

After six weeks into the implementation process, and after reading learners’ journal entries for the first six weeks, I fully reflected on the entire process of LCT implementation. I collected learners’ journal regularly for reading. Using different colors, I highlighted stand out journal entries for a specific emerging theme. I also, read each student’s journal entries for either consistence or inconsistence. Three areas of interest emerged: respecting students’ voices, nurturing students’ development, and appreciating and accommodating students’ differences. I then addressed these areas in the form of three interventions.

Intervention One - Respecting Students’ Voices

I believe that respecting students’ voices, while encouraging different perspectives, goes a long way in showing students a sense of belonging and responsibility taking. During this research project, I sought to provide students with opportunities to express their different perspectives. I also encouraged students to think for themselves and to help one another identify
their own uniqueness. I challenged students to develop personal responsibility, and to appreciate multiple perspectives in learning.

Students' Voice in Content and Learning Activities Selection. In most schools, neither the teacher nor the student gets to select course textbooks. The school determines what content is covered and how the curriculum is to be followed. There is, however, room for the teacher to pick supplementary learning materials. I designed the syllabus so students could consider alternative textbooks, apart from the one recommended by the college. In the syllabus I wrote, “The College recommends *Economics* by McConnell and Brue 17th edition, but if you have other relevant materials, we will discuss and consider them in class. However, I suggest that you get a copy of McConnell and Brue”. Ultimately, this allowed students to participate in the textbook selection process.

I struggled with my conscience in deciding what content to cover. I knew what the college wanted covered, but I also wanted students to be able to study what interested them. In my journal I noted:

For students to be able to transfer to another college, they must have covered specific topics in macroeconomics. I know what the curriculum for this course is, but how can I apply LCT principles without compromising the college curriculum? I will help them in selecting a supplementary textbook and ask for suggestions on how to cover the topics in the book. Most economic textbooks cover similar topics although the order of coverage is not always the same. Understanding economics requires prior knowledge, so even if students wanted to study a particular subject in economics, they might have to cover other subjects first in order to obtain the necessary knowledge I am not sure if the
students took my suggestions in good faith or if they thought I was trying to control them.

Given the circumstances, it was the best I could do!

In a way, I did not give students full control of content selection, but at least I shared with them the process, even though it was with guidance.

The pace of learning was another issue I struggled with. The college had specific calendar days that had to be observed. For example, the date for submitting mid-term and final grades was set by the college. In my journal I wrote:

How best can I accommodate students’ learning if I have to meet the school’s set deadlines in submitting grades? I will not rush students in covering topics that are of interest to them. So, how do I proceed? What I decided to do was guide the discussions in a manner that would not waste time. I would make sure that whatever we covered was covered well and that assignments were completed with enough time to submit the required grades.

Students had a hand in setting the pace for the class, although with my guidance. I directed their discussions, making sure they stayed focused. I also made sure students completed assignments well before the grades were due.

I allowed student input in setting content boundaries and in determining what content to cover. I also allowed students to select the supplementary sources that were used alongside the official textbook. Students were also given the opportunity to choose homework assignments. I felt that if students set their own content, they would be better motivated with the tasks that they set for themselves. Also, by setting the time frame for completing their tasks, they could adopt a partnership role with me in teaching. I planned on adopting a coach’s role where I would provide expert subject specific advice as well as respond to students’ requests to validate their learning
Students’ Voice in Homework Assignments, Quizzes, and Examination Choices. Many different strategies were used in deciding how to utilize assignments, tests, and examinations. One method was suggested by Dr. Cranton. It involved having students break up into groups of six and have each group design two examination questions. We then gathered as a class and asked each group to submit their questions and explain why they felt they were good questions. After all the groups had presented, we then voted on which four questions would be used on their next exam. The class then decided on a deadline for submitting answers for the exam. Another method used was to have the students create their own question and then answer it extensively. The last method used involved the teacher setting multiple choice and true/false quizzes and exams. This was done to make sure that everything covered in class was ultimately tested in order to reflect a fair grade.

Students’ reactions to these strategies were mixed. When asked, “What can you say about the learning activities in economics?” Michael had this to say:

The power point gave us an outline of what we were learning and from what we were reading and what we discussed in class. What I liked most, is when we set our examination questions. That was really nice, ‘cause we knew what we wanted to discuss. The movie clips were on exactly what we were talking about. It made it more lifelike examples of what we were learning. Basically we had the stuff, and the discussions brought them to life in what we were learning. We may not understand it but movie clips gave a different perspective and helped us learn.

Jackline said:

Homework, I think making your own questions is a good idea because like you think you can examine what you know. Sometimes I felt the quizzes were scrambled up
and went back and forth, you think you will do good on them and will give them confidence about a topic they know something about and ask them a question they know something about so it makes it easier. Tests – the testing like I felt I enjoyed sometimes the questions were confusing the way they were worded and I thought Journaling could be worded a little bit better maybe they can go through chapters and pick out stuff they like and ask questions about that. It has been a lot of fun with learning environment, thank you.

John had this to say:

They were very fair and I believe unlike in some of the classes I have the tests and exams that I don’t even associate with, what we covered in class, is what we examined ourselves on. I believe we covered everything and I feel very well about it. I have never had a missed an assignment where I had to write my own questions. I have never had anything like that and we kind of learned from ourselves. I enjoyed the discussions, I don’t feel like I was one who just sat back and let everybody else discuss. If I had a question about finance I would ask to find the right answer. I would be involved in a discussion and definitely benefited from that.

The assumption I make here is that these students are being truthful. And thus, one is tempted to conclude that students did enjoy participating in content selection, setting the learning pace, and participating in assignment determination.

**Intervention Two - Nurturing Students’ Development**

In applying LCT, my main goal was to put the responsibility for learning back in the hands of learners. I believe this is where it belongs. In my journal I wrote:
My strategy is to incorporate students into the actual design of the course. Students will regularly submit projects and I will provide them with feedback. Students will be expected to design, organize and lead their own discussion groups for their self-selected projects. The reason for doing this is twofold; (a) to make students responsible for identifying their own academic weaknesses and strengths, and (b) to make learners more responsible for improving their skills.

Some students liked this approach while others did not. One student, Ashley, recorded the following:

The idea that we can set our own homework assignment and answered it was really cool to me. Even though it was hard at first, but when we got together as a group, we were able to come with a project that all of us were happy to work on. And, I think we did very well.

Mike on the other hand, had the following to say:

This is crazy! How does he expect us to set our own assignment? I know some people can set a very easy assignment, do it in a few seconds, and still get a full credit. How fair will that be given that there may be a group that will take their time to do a comprehensive search for a good question and answer it well? Worse still, that student will be grading other students’ projects.

From the outset, I knew some students would take the short cut described by Mike. I had offered clear guidelines about how detailed the assignment would be. I also provided students with a clear grading rubric from the very beginning.
Caring for Learners’ Selected Materials. Students responded by saying they were happy that I cared about their content suggestions. Students wrote the following in their journals:

Greg wrote:

It was a very exciting experience in getting a professor to include your suggestions to the class work. It was even more important that we as students would help one another in assignments. For example, sometimes my friend would understand the concept better if I had trouble that day. If I had trouble with understanding the homework and he did, then we could help each other and get it right.

Ashley wrote:

I like the fact that the professor asks us to think of our own assignments using our own examples. It was helpful since everyone has room to grow and that is why I think you wanted us to think on our own and come up with a project. The feedback you gave us were also helpful, because this gave us more opportunities to grow and understand what we could have understood on our own.

Mike said the following:

If I did not get it in class, you would explain it again and again, and even ask other students who have understood to explain it to me. In most cases, other students used more appropriate examples that made sense to me than the ones you used in occasion. Some quizzes were a little harder, but discussing amongst ourselves did help. I can tell you, not many teachers give you a chance to work with friends. It was much easier to work with friends. I can tell you, your class was fair otherwise other classes you have the tests and exams that don’t even resemble what we covered in class, but with your exams I believe we have covered everything and I feel very well about it. I could never miss an
assignment where I had to write my own questions. I have never had anything like that and we kind of learned from ourselves a lot.

I was excited with this particular aspect of LCT, because I knew it would place the responsibility for solving student concerns on their shoulders. This approach gave students a degree of responsibility for their learning. By assigning students the role of assessing one another, I no longer needed to provide detailed assessments of student’s paper. Together we decided on group projects while students figured out how to best carry out the project - deciding what hours to meet for discussion, who had what responsibility, and when and how the project was to be completed. Students regularly kept one another on track, making sure group members were meeting their responsibilities. As I noted in my journal:

When students take responsibility for their learning, they are able to demonstrate their strengths. For example, in dealing with positive economic issues like national income accounting or computation of quantities demanded and supplied, students with mathematical competencies could help students without those competencies during group discussions as well as during one-on-one peer tutoring sessions. In completing group projects, there would be a true and practical division of labor. Those with mathematical skills could handle the quantitative aspect of the project, while the analytical part could be handled by those who are competent in writing skills. This will result in students learning more from one another than they would listening to me.

In encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning, I tried many different activities. One of these activities involved the use of CAMS instructional software. I thought it would be a good gateway for using supplementary materials. I ended up creating a web site were I posted course materials such as announcements, course syllabus, lecture notes, slides, and
homework assignments. This allowed students the option of accessing assignments and examinations from anywhere where there was an Internet connection. The fact that they had an option of taking a test, either in person or online, was popular with most students. This meant that students had to shoulder more responsibility for their learning. The flexibility of the Internet opens doors to student cooperation and collaboration. With web posting comes an automatic kind of peer review by which teachers can provide a common place for students to review and comment on one another’s postings. By exchanging and building upon each other's ideas, students are encouraged to learn from one another. This was further supported by my suggestion that students contact me to discuss any concerns, whether they be academic or personal, that they might have. An example of this was when one student came to my house to consult with me about an assignment that was due.

*Group Homework Assignments.* The other way I encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning was by requiring students to have at least one reading buddy. A reading paddy was an arrangement where each student had to partner with at least one other person to share readings, exchange class notes, and do class assignments with. I also encouraged each reading paddy to create web-based discussion boards where they could discuss class content, compare notes, and work on assignments together. In my field notes I wrote:

> By using the tools that students are comfortable with, I think I can make learning interesting and at the same time encourage students to take responsibility for their learning. Students will be free to invite me onto their discussion boards.

When I saw how students had designed, arranged, and displayed their content on the web, I was very surprised. Students had posted a variety of designs that included digital artifacts which
illustrated their understanding of key concepts. This seemed to be a good measure of students’ accomplishments. I was surprised though when I saw that it was not reflected in their opinions. Charles wrote:

I don’t believe it… you mean he wants us to do homework in groups? What if your group members are not ready to do an assignment? I thought he should lecture before we do any assignments. It doesn’t sound right.

Kevin stated, “He can’t be serious about this. If I ignore it, may be others will too and he will change his mind” Amanda’s journal was even more revealing. She wrote:

I can’t do it, I think I will be better off dropping this class and take it next semester. How can he do this to us? I am going to complain to the departmental head; maybe he will be told to stop it.

What was common with all of these negative journal entries, is that they were made during the start of the semester. As the semester progressed, and as learners received my comments to their journals, most learners changed in attitude. I guess, it was due to the initial fears that learners have of trying new things – just like any other human being. Actually some of the skeptic student like Kevin, turned out to be one of my best student.

Students were also asked to keep a portfolio in which they kept all class handouts, graded assignments, group projects, and class materials considered important to the course. The portfolio project encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning. I wanted to post their portfolios on the web for others to see, but I was not able to do so. I plan on keeping the portfolio project alive, because I believe students take great pride in their projects.
Extra Teacher and Peer Tutoring. Students took responsibility for correcting their problem areas by regularly using the tutoring center for more practice as well as attending my extra tutoring sessions. Students also visited me in my office and consulted peers for help. Whenever graded papers were returned, students would gather, as a group, to make sure everyone understood the recommended corrections. Students were very agreeable to this process as evidenced by their journals. One of the students, Greg, noted:

Because of our group, I learned many different things out of chapter one. I learned about consumption curve, vertical axis (vertical intercept) and more on direct and inverse relationships. I also learned the difference between independent and dependent variables. I even learned to find the slope of a line, which is the vertical change divided by the horizontal change. I learned the difference between definite and zero slopes. Definite slopes are vertical and zero slopes are horizontal. The equation of a straight line was also learned.

Another student said:

The first days of the economics class were pretty good. The first thing we did was to identify who we were going to work with. I liked the fact that we were allowed to choose who was going to be in our discussion groups. Some of our group members were not so good in math, but Ashley and me were happy to help them understand concepts like graphing data. As a group, we talked and did many assignments together. Kim was really good in summarizing our project, which worked very well. The first few chapters of the book were mainly about the characteristics of supply and demand. We discussed the laws of both supply and demand. We also talked about the many determinants of demand
and supply. Then we started to discuss and took notes as we discussed. The chapter on
elasticity was the most difficulty, although researching in the Internet really help us
understand it. We talked about what it means when things are elastic or inelastic.

In order to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning, I decided to hold
extra tutoring sessions on Tuesday and Thursday of every week in the GOSA room. By just
making time to come for extra tutoring, learners are assumed to have taken their learning
responsibility seriously. Attendance in these tutoring sessions was optional and was meant to be
an informal way for students to discuss a variety of issues. These sessions turned out to be very
popular. Many students would come and share their experiences at college, especially in
economics courses. Quite a few students would stay late to discuss various learned concepts. A
number of those who participated in these sessions were also going to the tutoring center to get
assistance with their problem solving skills. They were also the ones who frequently came to my
office for additional tutoring.

Over the course of this study, I realized that I had been too eager to assume the
responsibility for student learning. In doing so, I have been denying students the opportunity to
become more engaged in the learning process. One of the byproducts of students becoming more
involved in their learning is that I would have more time to attend to students’ personal
concerns. I was pleased to see students motivated to learn more. The students who were actively
involved in many of the semesters’ activities, including the extra tutoring sessions, all performed
above average in class.

Students should be allowed to take charge of their own learning. Teachers may encourage
students to take more responsibility for their learning but they need to give students access to
resources as well as communicate about what is expected of them. The main aim of LCT is to provide students with the opportunity to plan and guide their learning.

**Intervention Three - Appreciating and Accommodating Students’ Developmental Differences**

Appreciating and accommodating individual developmental differences is very important to student learning. I tried to adjust my teaching style in order to meet the educational needs of my students I did this by focusing my attention on learning the students’ names, where they come from, and what their future goals are. I adjusted assignments whenever students showed a lack of understanding. I also encouraged students to work in study groups, and to use peers as tutors. Overall, my aim was not to change the student, but rather to change myself through LCT.

**Improving Students’ Self-Esteem.** In helping to build students’ self-esteem, I offered specific examples that were intended to increase student’s self-esteem and to change their own perceived attitudes. As I noted in my journal:

I realize that if I can help students to overcome any of their perceived weakness; and if I manage to help them succeed in any area of their lives, then success in other areas is feasible. It is acknowledged that negative self-esteem is a major problem for most young people, especially those at-risk students from either low income families or disadvantaged families of color. Self-esteem is an attitude people have about themselves. It is believed that most hard-to-reach students have developed attitudes that lead to poor self-esteem. These attitudes have been reinforced by poor personal choices as well as by prevailing environmental circumstances. However, these attitudes can be unlearned, and a student can end up succeeding.
Students who have any kind of perceived weakness often develop poor self-esteem which results in poor classroom performance. Many of these students are said to be at-risk. Unless these students are helped, they will continue to make poor decisions, which often results in further failures. But if helped, these students are capable of changing their attitudes and improving their self-esteem in order to become successful.

Efforts to help students with low self-esteem will help them overcome their shortcomings. The best way to help students with poor self-esteem is by accepting, accommodating and appreciating them as people with worth. It is important for a teacher to be able to identify students who are suffering from low self-esteem. A practical framework for regaining one’s self-esteem is to assist students with building themselves up. Working on my own attitude towards students, and accommodating their need with an open office hours policy was one way I tried to make time and talk with learners show them what they were able to accomplish if they tried.

Teacher’s Attitude. In implementing LCT, I did not know how important the teacher’s attitude can be in either making or breaking the student’s learning development. The following are some student journal entries about my attitude and how they felt it helped them learn.

Greg reported:

I really enjoy my econ. professor’s teaching, particularly his attitude about students and the subject of economics. He always sounds as if he very excited about economics, and he can always find a new example from real life to illustrate an economic concept. Just
ask any question, and there he is with a fitting situation….I really enjoyed the killing of
the lion story and the concept of utility.

Kevin on the other hand observed:

This is a unique professor; he doesn’t seem to care if students shared homework answers.
So long as the assignment is handed in any time, it will be accepted. I think, this has
discouraged students who like making excuses for not doing their assignment….it is
tough. Because, if you wanted to excuse yourself for not having time to do the homework
due to sports activities, he will give you more time to complete. That is very kind of him.

Carlos was the one who surprised me most. He wrote:

I thank the professor for making time for private individual conferences and extra
tutoring sessions. The GOSA room extra tutoring meeting are so much entertaining and
informative. Everybody is relaxed and willing to discuss a variety of topics. It is
interesting, the way we always find something to talk about. May be it is because of Mr.
Ongeri’s caring attitude. I hope he will continue buying the snacks.

On another entry, Carlos said:

Our professor is very encouraging. He shows a personal interest in our areas of interest. I
did not know that he also likes soccer…this is big when he comes to cheer me play. I
know, he will understand if I am late with my homework assignment.

I had not realized the impact little things can have on somebody’s life. My initial
objective was to appreciate and accommodate each student for who they are. By showing respect
for their opinions and ideas, I hoped to encourage them to do even better. As a matter of practice,
I have coached myself to use phrases recommended by Cranton (2003) - like, “I hadn’t thought
of it that way before” and “that is an interesting point…can you tell me more?” and “that really is a different way of looking at it.” These kinds of phrases tend to encourage students to participate in class discussions. My openness to students’ ideas and opinions made me seem like a peer to them. This must have given students a feeling that their contributions were valued. I believe this is the reason why students showed enthusiasm for whatever we did.

*Open Office Hours Policy.* Another aspect of my teaching that students viewed as having impacted their learning was my open office policy. They reported that, my open office policy gave them a sense of belonging. Mike wrote in his journal the following:

I don’t think I would have passed Mr. Ongeri’s class if he had not given free access to time. I have a baseball scholarship that requires me to put in a number of hours of training. But, Mr. Ongeri is very understanding; if I miss a class, I make time and go see him in his office for private tutoring – I wish I would find a better way of expressing my appreciation!

When asked to talk about a typical economics class, Amanda said:

What can I tell professor? Our typical economics class was full of fun…power point presentations, movie clips, discussions, group projects, but most important is what we did out of class. You were always available to help us understand economics. You must have wondered why our group kept coming to your office. We actually learned more by stopping by your office whenever we had a question that even ask it in class. Thank you for making yourself available.

Students seemed to appreciate the fact that I would take as much time as needed to answer their question, especially on a one-to-one basis.
A Reflection on LCT Implementation Challenges

The implementation of learner-centered teaching was not as smooth as I had hoped. There were a number of areas in which I struggled. The actual implementation proved to be more of a challenge than I thought it would be. I have come to the painful conclusion that the benefits of LCT are not as immediate or automatic as they may seem. I have had to struggle with not only my own fears but also with my students’ active resistance. I have come to realize that students who previously have had everything done for them were not going to be excited knowing that they were now going to have to take responsibility for their learning.

Managing the Curriculum against Time

The first challenge I had to overcome was my fear of the school’s specific institutional requirements. The school had a curriculum that I was supposed to follow. The challenge was to find a way of meeting the school’s curriculum requirements while at the same time implementing learning activities that required longer time blocks. I was afraid that if I spent too much time with active learning activities, I would end up not being able to cover the mandated curriculum. To deal with this particular curriculum challenge, I told myself the following, as noted in my journal:

I don’t need to spend class time using an active learning activity. We can cover the curriculum during class time and do most of the active learning outside of class. I can ask short-answer questions and give students time to answer either in groups or individually. Selecting a few of their answers would provide for good class discussions.
For example, students’ group project presentations required large blocks of time. These were scheduled and carried out outside of class on either Tuesday or Thursday. I was able to meet the school’s curriculum requirement by engaging students in short-answer questions during class time.

This strategy also helped me deal with my fear of not being able to cover the entire syllabus. Even though I had identified the content to be covered, I was still afraid I would lack the time to cover all that was in the syllabus. As I noted in my field notes:

I may not be able to cover the entire syllabus if I regularly use active learning activities. I have decided the college requirements of the course need to be met. I need to find a suitable way for using active learning activities that are focused on the daily item of discussion.

I soon realized that I did not need to spend a lot of time on in-class activities in order to make a difference. Usually one or two activities was enough to keep students active and attentive for the entire class period. It surprised me that students actually seemed to enjoy these activities. One student wrote in her journal:

I like the learning environment, where we discuss instead of being lectured. For example, this week I learned many different things out of the chapter, -- just because, I think, we discussed them in detail. I especially liked examples given by other students.

These same sentiments were expressed by Ashley. When asked about what interested her most during the semester, she responded:

I like the learning environment where we discuss instead of being lectured. For example, this week we learned many different things out of chapter one. We had discussions instead of lectures. I learned about consumption curve, vertical axis
(vertical intercept) and more on direct and inverse relationships. I learned more from my
fellow students than I did from the book. I also learned the difference between
independent and dependent variables. I even learned to find the slope of a line which is
the vertical change divided by the horizontal change. I learned the difference between
infinite and zero slopes. Infinite slopes are vertical and zero slopes are horizontal. I also
learned the equation of a straight line from another student.

Gauging from learners feelings, I concluded that the benefits managing the curriculum
time well may increase the learners’ comfort ability in class and hence increasing learners’
motivation for learning.

**Overcoming the need to lecture.** The other challenge I had to overcome was my tendency
to lecture. Lecturing has always provided me a feeling of control. I was afraid that the LCT
technique would precipitate a loss of classroom control. If I allowed students to have a
democratic say in how the class was going to be run, I would lose control, and therefore be
unable to meet the college requirements for the course. In my journal I wrote:

> I am used to lecturing. How will I have control of my class if I don’t lecture? The word
> *control* is what I want to run away from, but how do I make sure that time is well
> managed? It is hard to balance time management with freedom of expression by students.
> If left loose, they may extend the topic of discussion to whatever they like and make it
> hard to cover the curriculum.

It was a bad feeling, but I knew I could not change my teaching. Therefore, I incorporated as
many LCT principles as I could while still engaging in the occasional lecture. The lectures were
supplemented with power point presentations. Student’s reactions to my modified teaching methods were generally positive. A student wrote in her journal:

Mr. Ongeri explains everything verbally as well as visually through power point presentations. He does a wonderful job making sure everyone has understood by asking if everyone understands every so often. It also helps when I have to read the chapter. Even if it wasn’t clear, I am confident that it will become clear once we discuss it in class. I really like the power point presentations and the movie clips that Mr. Ongeri uses to capture real life examples of what we are covering in class. Everybody seems to be participating, which is a good thing.

This kind of reactions was not unique. Another student wrote:

I like how our teacher gives us good examples of everything we discuss. I can understand our teacher very well. I appreciate the fact that he tries to make us understand and works with us so that we can get the material.

While another student said:

I appreciated that our opinion was asked on the first quiz. I really like the fact that you are a teacher who is trying to get better rather than being set in your ways without any consideration of getting better.

And yet another recounted:

Today we talked about economic systems. I like how Mr. Ongeri wants people to be involved in his class, instead of just him talking. I also like it when he talks about the country where he is from. I would like for Mr. Ongeri to give us more examples to read over when we start studying. So, far I really enjoy this class.
These were some of the comments that helped me shape the implementation of learner-centered teaching in economics. They kind of confirmed or delineated the activity being implemented.

_Trusting students to complete the readings._ Another concern I had was that my students would not take their assigned readings seriously and as a result not understand the concepts. In my journal, I noted the following:

I fear that students may not undertake the assigned readings, or even if they did, they may not understand the new concepts. My fear is that not many learners will undertake their reading assignments seriously. And even if they did, I fear that they may not understand the new concepts unless explained/illustrated by examples. I will have to convince myself that learners are capable of understanding what they read. I will further remind myself that learners should take responsibility for their learning.

This was a challenge for students who were used to having things done for them. One student wrote in his journal the following:

I don’t understand why Mr. Ongeri wants to make life unmanageable here at SMC. He is the only teacher who wants us to teach ourselves. The textbook he is using is too hard to understand. It is either graphs or math. He is asking us to do what he may have not done himself.

Another student was a bit bolder. He wrote, “I pay school fees to be taught, not to be harassed with group work.”

However, while some students were complaining others had a different opinion of what they were being asked to do. One learner noted the following in her journal entry:
Today we really got into deep conversation about the class topics. I really liked when we discussed scarce resources. We were all involved and talked about things that I have never thought about. I never stopped to think about what we do with money problems, or even time. All I knew was money was hard to get and that I did not have enough time for stuff. I was very interested in the individuals economizing problems; limited income; unlimited wants, budget line, attainable and unattainable combinations, tradeoffs and opportunity costs. I could relate to that fully. I really didn’t know that I was dealing with macroeconomics. I was very interested in class today. This has been one of my best days in the class.

Another student said:

Today I did not understand anything in the class discussion. I want him to explain things instead of asking us to tell him. He will ask a question with a question, and expects us to tell him. He should know that we are here to learn and not to answer questions from nowhere. I can’t stand that. When I ask a question, just answer the question, don’t ask somebody else to answer for you. Sometimes, I can grasp the information, but I just don’t fully understand it. I tend to understand the material better when you compare the material to true life. Sometimes he does and then sometimes he doesn’t. When he doesn’t I am lost. So I take the time to read the book. So I am going to have to read this material from today in order to understand what’s going on.

These two students had totally different views about student involvement in content determination. The first student had a positive reaction to student’s opinions being incorporated into the learning process. The second student, on the other hand, did not understand why I was
asking students to discover the answers to their questions by themselves. Student’s views on my
teaching methods seldom changed over the course of the semester.

In deciding the pace of learning, I wanted students to pursue what was interesting to them
and to cover it at their pace. This was not easy, as I noted in my journal:

For the students to transfer to another college, they must have covered specific
topics in macroeconomics. I know what the curriculum for this course is, but I am not
sure how to best apply LCT principles without compromising the college curriculum. My
decision is to help the students with the selection of a supplementary textbook and to ask
for suggestions on how to cover the topics in the book. What was helpful, was that most
Principles of Economics textbooks cover similar topics. Although the order of coverage
is not always the same, there is usually a way of accommodating each required topic.

This study, therefore confirmed that trusting students in taking full responsibility for their
work can go a long way in improving learning. Learners feel respected and cared for. In return,
they work hard not to disappoint their instructor who respects and cares for them.

The Nature of Economics. Another challenge I faced was that in economics chapters
build upon one another. Thus, even if students wanted to cover chapter Y first, I would suggest
that they cover chapter X in order to have the required knowledge needed to understand chapter
Y. It was frustrating to read students’ journals about how they felt about learning economics in a
classroom structured around the principles of LCT. One student wrote, “Economics is so hard
that I don’t think I can understand it by myself.” Another student expressed similar sentiments:

I don’t think it is fair for the teacher to expect that somehow we can teach ourselves
economics. In class, he is either asking probing questions or preparing for discussions.
How can one discuss what they have never heard? The textbook is equally difficult; even if one wanted to read it, it has enough new terms that you will need somebody to explain them first. I feel as if I will fail this class.

Another one wrote:

Today we met for the first time in a week because of the snow day we had last Thursday. I’m not gonna lie, I was glad to miss because of the snow on Thursday…no offense Mr. Ongerie. During class today we talked about direct and inverse relationships and the graphs of the two. Overall, I think I will never understand these concepts because of both Mr. Ongeri’s accent and the math involved. However, I learned the fact that the variables move in the same direction in a direct relationship and they move in opposite directions in an inverse relationship. We also talked about the slopes of lines and curves, which I think Mr. Ongeri has a difficult time explaining.

I have really struggled with finding a balance between LCT principles and holding student’s hands while navigating the complex ideas in economics. Some students have had positive things to say which have given me the strength to carry on despite the discouraging comments of others.

Managing the pace of learning. Another issue that I struggled with was the pace of learning. The college has specific calendar days that have to be observed. The date for submitting mid-term and final grades is one day that has been specifically set aside by the school. I had this to say in my journal:

How best can I accommodate students’ learning pace if I have to meet the college’s set deadline for submitting grades? I will not rush students that are covering topics of interest to them. I will not skip a topic that is of interest to students. I will also not miss the
deadline for submitting grades. So, how do I proceed? First, I will guide the discussions in a manner that students don’t waste time. Second, I will make sure that whatever we are able to cover is covered well, and that selected assignments are completed with ample time to submit grades.

This allowed students to still be involved in setting the pace of the class. I directed their discussions and made sure that they stayed focused and completed assignments before the grade submission deadlines.

Managing the pace of the class produced a degree of student dissatisfaction. Those who were opposed to the pace of activities took issue with me personally. One student wrote the following in her journal:

We should not be meeting during after school hours because I want to participate in sports. I think we should use the time we spend discussing personal things to cover all that is required to pass this course.

Therefore, managing the pace of content coverage is very important in balancing learner-centered teaching and curriculum coverage.

*Evaluating students.* The other challenge that I struggled with was how to assess student learning. We tried many different strategies. Students’ reactions to these strategies were mixed. During the interviews, when I asked, “What can you say about the learning activities in economics?” Jacqueline replied:

Homework, I think making your own questions is a good idea because you think you can examine what you know. Sometimes I felt the quizzes were scrambled up and went back and forth. You think you will do well on them and will give them confidence about a
topic they know something about and ask them a question they know something about, so it makes it easier. Tests – the testing I felt I enjoyed. Sometimes the questions were confusing, the way they were worded, and I thought journaling could be worded a little bit better. Maybe they can go through chapters and pick out stuff they like and ask questions about that. It has been a lot of fun with the learning environment. Thank you.

Similarly, John had this to say:

They were very fair and I believe, unlike in some of the classes, I have the tests and exams that I don’t even associate with what we covered in class, is what we examined ourselves on. I believe we covered everything and I feel very well about it. I have never missed an assignment where I had to write my own questions. I have never had anything like that and we kind of learned from ourselves. I enjoyed the discussions. I don’t feel like I was one who just sat back and let everybody else discuss. If I had a question about finance, I would ask to find the right answer. I would be involved in a discussion and definitely benefited from that.

It is hard to know if these students were talking this way in order to please me or if they actually meant what they said. However, I feel the students did enjoy participating in content selection, setting their learning pace and participating in assignment determination.

*Lack of preparation.* The last fear that I had to confront was whether a freshman class could handle the challenge of taking responsibility for their own learning. For example, I was afraid that they may not be prepared to differentiate between open-ended and answer-specific questions. I noted the following in my journal:

It is frustrating to realize that my students do not understand how to handle open-ended questions. Given their past experiences, they seem to prefer specific-answer questions.
Even when I ask questions that require discussion and offer a variety of solutions, my students seem to be pushing for a single answer to the problems. I think this is inherent in the type of subject matter economics is, especially when dealing with positive economics which tends to be quantitative in nature.

The fear I had was not any different from those other teachers have about the preparedness of their students.

*Challenges Posed by Students*

Right from the start, I was not sure how students were going to receive my teaching style. I knew the rest of my colleagues were using the traditional lecture method. Even though I was unsure of how my students would react, I knew some were going to be uncomfortable. As a result, I was not surprised by the students’ journals. One student wrote, “I don’t understand why Mr. Ongeri’s class should be different from the other classes at SMC. We are here to be taught. The idea that we should somehow teach ourselves, is incomprehensible to me!”

Another student said:

I wish we could all agree not to waste time in class. There are some people who come to class just to pass time. They sometimes ask stupid questions and make sure they prolong the discussion just to waste time. And the teacher allows this to happen.

And yet another one noted:

This is the most unfair class I have ever taken. The teacher gives group projects that some people get credit for not participating at all. In my group two students who never took part in whatever we did ended up getting the same grade as the rest of us.
Some students viewed learner-centered teaching as a threat to their well being. Others argued that they were paying school fees to be taught. I experienced some of this and it was devastating to say the least.

**Student support questioned.** In implementing LCT, some students felt as if their entitlements were being withheld. One student wrote the following in his journal:

To be honest, I had a very tough time understanding Mr. Ongeri because of his accent. It’s cool to hear, but different and tough to understand. And he wants us to learn by ourselves! But anyway, it is an interesting class, but I think I will have to work hard to receive the A that I desire.

Another student wrote, “I’m not gonna lie, I was glad to miss because of the snow on Thursday…no offense, Mr. Ongeri, but I am having a hard time understanding what the hell you want of us!” I realized that if students do not like what the teacher is doing, they will make it sound bothersome and not worth their time.

**Wasting students’ time.** Some students felt I was wasting their time by allowing them to take control of their learning. One student recounted the following in her journal:

At the beginning of class, we received our homework back that was graded. I didn’t even do halfway as good. I made an 11/20, that’s an F. My first homework grade is an F. That’s definitely not a good look (of) things to come. It seems so easy when he went over it, I mean I thought I had so much of it down pat, but I was wrong. I was so mad. I looked carefully at what I was doing, but I guess not close enough. Soon after, we were
done with discussion. So, I suggest that Mr. Ongeri should start teaching and stop asking question after question as if riding on our backs.

Yet, another student wrote:

I did not get much out of class today. There was a lot of time spent on the homework rather than new material. Also, I was very distracted because of some stuff that was going on in class. The teacher seems to have lost control of the loud students in class. While these journal entries may sound negative, I took them as students’ frustration at doing something unfamiliar. They could not understand why I was teaching so differently from all the other professors at the college.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

This chapter will discuss the findings of three research questions: (a) How are learner-centered teaching principles applicable to the teaching of an introductory economics class? (b) What can be said about the effectiveness of learner-centered teaching in introductory economics? and (c) What are the challenges of applying learner-centered teaching principles in introductory economics? Each question will be addressed using data gathered from pre- and post tests, learners’ journals, the teacher’s journal as well as follow-up interviews conducted with the students.

LCT Application in an Introductory Economics Class

The principles of LCT provided me with four areas to concentrate my energies on: (a) creating positive relationships with my students, (b) respecting students’ voices, while at the same time fostering different perspectives, (c) nurturing critical thinking and responsibility taking, and (d) appreciating and accommodating individual developmental differences (McCombs & Miller, 2007). The main rationale for creating a positive relationship between a student and teacher is to help foster a classroom environment where the student feels respected and appreciated. Students need to know that they belong and that the learning environment is safe. From the first day in class, I sought to nurture a personal and caring relationship with each student. The relationship building began with the design of the course syllabus. I avoided using authoritative sounding language and instead used language that provided students with a sense of belonging. The findings of this study confirmed McCombs & Miller’s (2007) position that “when educators care about students learning and about them as individuals, students feel connected to the academic environment” (p. 90).
By giving students a sense of belonging, my hope was that each one of them would come to value their own unique abilities. In order to help influence students’ commitment to learning, I focused on building positive relationships, nurturing their emotions, and displaying an overall sense of caring. As a result, students became more open and free with me. They even began to share their personal concerns with me. I found that creating this type of environment is the single most important element in the development of student’s learning. Ginott (1972) once said:

I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized, or dehumanized. (p. 78)

During this research project, I encouraged students to express their own points of view while at the same time listening and respecting one another’s unique perspectives. I also encouraged students to challenge themselves whether in or out of class. I challenged students to develop personal responsibility and to appreciate multiple learning styles by working with one another in groups. Together, students would decide how to structure their projects as well as writing and answering their own homework questions. Research has shown the students enjoy working in groups when they feel the teacher and their fellow students respect them. Students feel a sense of commitment to the group when they know their input is valued and respected.

Appreciating and accommodating individual student’s developmental differences was equally important. I adjusted my teaching to meet the learning styles of each of my students. I sought to understand my students’ cultural backgrounds, individual needs, and other personal
requirements. I accomplished this by focusing my attention on learning where each of my students was from and what their future goals were. I adjusted my assignments whenever students showed a lack of understanding. I encouraged students to work in groups and to use peers as tutors. Students appreciated being recognized for their achievements, especially when it demonstrated their ability to their peers. Peer tutors were challenged even more since they had to be able to explain difficult content to their classmates. Even though my aim was not to change the students, I ended up affecting how they perceived themselves and each other. This finding actually confirms what is already reported in the literature. For example, when preparing to implement learner-centered teaching, Weimer (2002) recommends changes in areas that are adversely affected when teachers control learning. Research shows that student motivation and enthusiasm improve when students are allowed to take charge of their own learning. Students also feel more confident and perform better in class when power shifts from the teacher to the student.

Weimer recommends that we ask ourselves the following questions: (a) How will I decide which content is studied in this class? (b) What kind of input do I receive from students in deciding what should be covered? (c) Who controls the pace at which content is covered? (d) Who determines the makeup of assignments, tests and examinations? (e) Who sets the conditions for learning, attendance, and assignment deadlines? (f) Who evaluates the learning? and finally, (g) Who controls the flow of communication? These are the main questions that I struggled with in trying to be learner-centered in my teaching.

The syllabus is typically the first contact students have with their teacher. I decided to follow Weimer’s suggestion and avoid the usual directives that are found in course syllabi (appendix x). Guided by both Progressive and Humanistic philosophies of learning, I clearly
stated my assumptions for students. These assumptions guided my daily actions in class. The assumptions reflected the equal partnership that existed between the students and myself.

It became clear to me that while LCT (Weimer, 2002; McCombs & Miller, 2007) may provide guidelines about how it should be implemented, the classroom teacher is the only one that is able to see whether the intended function of LCT is being achieved. It is important that teachers examine every situation as it presents itself before determining the best way to deal with it. In the process of introducing interventions for improved learning, I found that improvisation brings out the best strategies for implementing LCT. Taking every situation as it unfolds, ends up giving birth to most flexible ways that produce appropriate results. The study found that good learner-centered teaching practices should only be taken as suggestions, and not stone wall specific guidelines.

Incorporating students into the selection of learning activities provided them with a sense of belonging. Students felt respected when asked to provide input into content selection, homework assignments, and assessment due dates. It allowed students to take ownership of assignments. One result was that students tended to place more time and emphasis into their assignments.

Even though I struggled in the area of power sharing, positive strides were made towards learner-centered teaching in economics. As already reported elsewhere in this dissertation, my own fears presented a tall mountain to climb as I did what I did throughout this research project. The first step towards learner-centered teaching was accomplished, through the development of the course syllabus. The second step was accomplished through the building of positive relationships between the teacher and the student. Finally, I allowed students to take charge of their own learning process. As a result, students ended up working more and this was reflected in
their classroom performance and class grades. The pre/post tests and the students’ self-reflective journals allowed me to observe what was happening with students at every stage of the research.

When reflecting on Weimer’s proposed implementation strategy, there are three areas where the study diverged from it. First, the study’s implementation did not meet Weimer’s expected administrative resistance. Administrators and teaching colleagues were very supportive of the project’s implementation process.

The second area where the study diverged from Weimer’s implementation strategy, was the role played by teacher’s own fears of implementing LCT. Weimer’s implementation strategy ignores or it instead plays down these fears when it should had recognized the impact teacher’s fears would have on LCT implementation. The study found that one of the main barriers to the successful implementation of LCT was that teachers were afraid of losing their jobs. Not that institutional administrators are not willing to embrace instructional changes, but rather that teachers themselves that implementing new strategies may expose them to a possibility of failure. And since, nobody wants to fail, few teachers have the courage of trying new ways.

The third, and last area the study diverged from Weimer’s implementation strategy, was in regard to the impact LCT implementation would have on teaching. Weimer felt that even a single implementation of LCT would have a groundbreaking effect. The study found that repeated trials, with constant revisions, would be needed in order for an implementation of LCT to be able to impact teaching as it is currently done. Judging from the one semester’s implementation done for this study project, its feasible to say that it may require several semesters of implementation before meaningful stride are made. Repeating the implementation process consistently over a period of several semesters, will give an opportunity of trying many learning activities; in different scenarios till appropriate instructional design is found for LCT.
Effectiveness of Learner-Centered Teaching in Introductory Economics

Implementing LCT in an introductory economics class is not a unique process. Findings indicate that there are three areas that need to be addressed. These areas include: the course designing stage where an appropriate tone needs to be set via the syllabus language; the building of a positive relationship between the teacher and student; and allowing students to take greater responsibility for their learning.

Course Syllabus

The course syllabus provided me with an avenue through which I was able to share my teaching philosophy as well as establish the teaching tone that was learner-centered appropriate (Appendix X). The manner in which it was presented to the first class was meant to assure the students that they would do well in the class. During the first class meeting, I made sure the students understood the difference between the class that they were about to start and the other classes that they were currently taking. I made it clear that I would value and respect their input in the planning and carrying out of class activities. I explained to them that all their concerns would be addressed and that all students would be an integral part of the class’s learning process.

I witnessed a good example of students’ self-assurance while spelling out the courses key assumptions. As I explained each item on the syllabus, I saw students becoming excited as they realized that they would be a part of the learning process and that their opinions would be valued and respected. I noticed that students had become more attentive to what I was saying. Their facial expressions were bright and encouraging. They actually looked more relaxed than when they first walked into class. I felt good about the impact the syllabus had on them. By assuring
the students that they would be respected, their self-esteem became reinforced and strengthened their desire to work hard.

One student thought that the free and accommodating environment was too much for the class to handle. This was one of the issues that I really struggled with. Drawing the line between productive learning discussions and stubborn behavior from students. I had difficulty deciding what to do when students became unreasonable during class discussions. I wondered whether or not to impose some level of discipline. Building good relationships with students though, seem to solve this dilemma.

Building Relationships

According to Windschitl (1999), teachers should answer the following questions before starting teaching: (a) Is my role to disperse knowledge or to nurture independent thinkers? (b) How do I show respect for the ideas of students? (c) Am I here to learn from the students? The answers to these questions may differ depending on the teacher’s method of teaching. Even though both traditional and learner-centered teachers try to teach the best they can, they will never answer the above questions the same way. However, both traditional and learner-centered teachers believe they should inspire their students into developing an interest for knowledge. This confirms Cranton’s (2003) position that “the more we identify with and relate to learners in an honest way, the more supportive our interactions will be” (p. 192). Even though this was found to be true, it was also found that students may choose to resist, regardless of the positive relationship building. Students’ fear of added work, along with the fear of losing academic guidance, may hinder the effectiveness of positive relationship building. Teachers should be aware of student resistance to LCT, notwithstanding positive relationship building by the teacher.
This suggests that for effective learning to take place, teachers should be compassionate to their students and they should respond to their students’ emotions (Windschitl, 1999). However, traditional teachers believe that when being compassionate, clear boundaries need to be set for acceptable classroom behavior. Thus, a traditional teacher may be seen as being more focused on setting boundaries and planning for what students need to know, than being flexible to students’ emotions and concerns. On the other hand, the learner-centered teacher is seen as being more focused on appealing to the emotions of the students. According to Windschitl (1999), it is the learner-centered teacher who can better help students feel more competent in their classroom work. Findings of this study seem to confirm this conclusion. Whenever I appeared to identify with students’ emotional feelings, they in turn worked hard in class. All these was found to improve learners’ motivation for learning tremendously.

I implemented a strategy of building relationships with my students and it took time to nurture students’ emotions by listening to their personal concerns. I took it as a serious responsibility to continue building positive relationships between the students and the teacher. I maintained an open office hours’ policy. Students could come and see me anytime I was in my office or anywhere on campus. This act alone helped bring students closer to me and made them open-up and share whatever they had in their life circle. Students would come in for a single question, but as other students joined, more questions ended up being asked. Often the answering of one students’ question would lead another student to share a difficult situation they were in. This study showed that when I gave students time to open up, as I purposefully engaged in building positive relationships, they ended up sharing concerns that they could not have shared in an official or formal encounter. It was further shown that when students share their private
concerns with their teacher, they feel a sense of connection that makes them strive towards working for better grades for the teacher who usually empathizes with them.

Allowing Students to Take Greater Responsibility for their Learning

As postulated by the APA’s fourteen LCT principles, the main aim of applying LCT is to put more of the responsibility for learning in the hands of students. My strategy was to incorporate students into the designing of the course. Students would regularly submit projects and I would provide them with feedback. Students were expected to design, organize and lead their own discussion groups for self-selected projects. The purpose of this was twofold: to make learners responsible for identifying their own academic strengths and weaknesses, and to make students responsible for improving their lifelong skills.

Some students embraced the idea of taking charge of their learning, while others felt like they were being punished. The main point to remember is that the student resistance is usually a natural part of the journey that they are taking from being intellectually dependant to being intellectually independent (McCombs & Miller, 2007). Therefore, instructors who may want to apply LCT may need to be aware of this phenomenon. There can be a group of students who may feel like the teacher is making it harder for them to learn by asking them to do most of the assignment by themselves. They see responsibility as more work for themselves and less work for the teacher. These students are the ones who are likely to resist LCT implementation. Their resistance takes different forms. For example, they may drag their feet in forming groups or even refuse to do assigned work. The best way to deal with such students is to ignore their initial efforts and pretend as if it was an unintended occurrence and give the resisting students more
time to complete their assignment. If the teacher remains friendly, they will most likely give up
their resistance and work collaboratively with the rest of the class.

I was excited with this particular aspect of LCT, because I knew it would take away the
burden of keeping track of the students’ concerns and place a bigger responsibility on them. This
approach gave students a sense of responsibility for their learning. By assigning students a role in
assessing one another, I no longer needed to do detailed assessments of each students’ paper.
Together, we decided on group projects. Students decided how best to carry out the project;
deciding which hours to meet for discussion, who had what responsibility, and how the project
was going to be completed. This meant I was only grading six group projects. The students
policed one another into taking responsibility. Findings showed that learners are likely to learn
more through this approach since students are involved in the search for answers Students also
benefit from frequent feedback from the teacher.

By allowing students to take responsibility, they demonstrated strengths that are difficult
to teach in economics. For example, in dealing with positive economic issues like national
income accounting or computation of quantities demanded and supplied, or equilibrium price
levels, students with mathematical competencies helped those that did not during group
discussions and in one-to-one peer tutoring sessions. In completing group projects, there was a
true and practical division of labor. Those who were mathematically competent, handled the
quantitative aspect of the project, while as the analytical aspect was handle by those group
members who were competent in writing skills. Students learned more from one another than
they did from me.

In encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning, I tried many learning
activities. One of these activities was the use of instructional software CAMS. I thought it would
be a good gateway to supplementary materials and other resources. I created a course web site where I posted and allowed students to easily access course materials such as the announcements, syllabus, lecture notes and slides, and homework assignments, at any time of the day. The flexibility of taking assignments and examinations, from wherever there is an internet connection was something that most students liked. They also had an option of either taking a paper or online test. Although, this meant that students were to shoulder more responsibility for their learning by knowing when to take examinations as well as to schedule a discussion before class meetings. Based on the study’s findings; all these actions seemed to improve learners’ motivation for learning in a tremendous way.

The flexibility of the Internet opens the door to students’ cooperation and collaboration in learning. With web posting comes an automatic kind of peer review tool, by which teachers can use to provide a common place for students to review and comment on one another’s postings. By exchanging ideas, and by building upon each other's ideas, students are encouraged to learn from one another. This was even further supported by my encouraging them to freely contact me by email or phone to discuss any concerns they had.

The other way I encouraged students to take responsibility, was by asking them to have at least one reading buddy. A reading buddy arrangement meant that each student had to partner with at least one other person, with who to share readings, exchange class notes, and complete class assignments together. I also encouraged each reading buddy to create web-based discussion boards where they could discuss class content, compare notes, and work on assignments together online, or on phone. Students were also encouraged to phone text messaging in assignment working. By using the tools that students are comfortable with, I thought I could be able to make learning interesting and at the same time encouraging them to take responsibility for their
learning. Students were free to invite me into their discussion boards, if they wanted, or they could decide to keep it private, so as to be comfortable with whatever they discussed. I was surprised by students’ capabilities in designing, arranging, and displaying content on the web. They had a variety of designs that included digital artifacts which illustrated their understanding of the class contents.

Students were also asked and encouraged to keep a well arranged portfolio, in which, they kept all class handouts, graded assignments, group projects, and any class materials that learners considered important to the course. The portfolio project turned out to be a very good tool to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning. I intended to display or publish these portfolios on the web for others to see, but I was not able. But, I plan on keeping the portfolio project alive, because I believe students take great pride in a project that they can display the talent in organization.

Students also took responsibility in correcting their problematic areas by regularly using the tutoring center for more practice, attending my extra tutoring sessions or by visiting me in my office, consulting peers who are better in specific areas. They also reviewed any graded and returned papers together as a group to make sure they better understood recommended corrections. Students were very agreeable to this process and actually they were more participatory in the learning process as evidenced in their journals.

Challenges of Applying LCT in Introductory Economics

The last research question was about the challenges of applying learner-centered teaching principles in introductory economics. As presented in Chapter 4, the implementation of LCT principles in an introductory economics class was not smooth sailing that I expected. The
discussion of these challenges presented in the findings chapter will be discussed under three broad categories. These are challenges emanating from the researcher’s own fears, challenges imposed by the institutional structures, and challenges caused by learners.

**Challenges of Researcher’s Own Fears**

The main challenges that were found to impact the implementation of LCT in introductory economics course were those emanating from the implanting teacher’s own fears. No individual teacher could like fail in their teaching assignment. Given our individual pride, one would rather be in the comfort zone than try new things that they are not sure of the outcome. The main reason why teachers do not meet to discuss new ways of teaching, unlike other professions such as medical doctors or lawyers, is that they do not like to expose their own weakness in teaching (Pratt, 2002). Many teachers, more especially untrained one, have a picture of that “good teacher” who taught them at some level. Since they must have liked the good teacher’s teaching style, they try to copycat the way that good teacher taught regardless of their teaching environment, subject content, or type of learners.

Therefore, my own fears were found to be my first line of challenges during this research project. First, I feared to fail, and the consequences of failure. I feared about what my colleagues will say if I failed. I also feared to lose control of my class, my content coverage, and my students’ discipline. For example, I was really worried that I could not be able to cover the course required material if I used active learning activities instead of my usual lecture method. Since my “good teacher”, was that who used lecture method, I was always comfortable using the same teaching style. Whenever, I used lecture method, I felt as if I had full control of my class, learning content and my time schedule. I also thought that I could instill some discipline into my
learners as part of the learning. Findings of this research project have shown however that letting go lecture method, and employing more active teaching style –LCT, does improve learning based on the findings of this study. It is a teaching style that instills self-regulation and self-discipline into learners. It is a situation created in such a way that learners can learn, and get disciplined by themselves, and with a smile.

My other fears were to do with failing in my teaching, losing my job and what my colleagues could say about me if I did fail. I realize that the finding of this project on this aspect was that I had decided to take a risk with careful considerations for whatever I did. I knew, it was not an option that I fail! I was aware of what my colleagues could say if I failed, but went ahead and did it anyway. I knew, active learning activities could take more time, but still went ahead with many activities that required long time blocks. The way I accomplished this was by utilizing after class hours that were available for activities that could not be accommodated during normal class hours. Based on the researcher’s experience from this project, even though it may sound as a good idea to try LCT principles, It is recommended that the implementing teacher gauge every situation as it presents itself. Rock solid guidelines may only be used as tools of shaping the situation on the ground. Every teaching environment will present different challenges, that may not match any other situation already known. It is recommended that implementing teachers try to be as creative as they can, to improvise for whatever situation that they find themselves. That is how I became aware of the repercussions of my actions, and chose to carefully implement LCT with a sense of cushion. I knew I was not going to be able to implement pure LCT, but I was also determined to at least make the first step. My hope was that implementing LCT, bit by bit, it will set base for one day’s full implementation.
How to Deal with Institutional Structure Challenges

Institutional structure has been identified as one area that has potentials of posing challenges for LCT implementation (Weimer, 2002). The main challenge that is usually identified is the institutional politics. In most institutions, the top administrators happen to be old folks who also happen to have been in the institution long enough to know how the structure is shaped and how it has always worked. The people in this category have enough power to make change, and yet they are the most difficulty group to accept change. Therefore, implementing LCT, just like any other change to the institution is likely to meet the resistance of the establishment. The instructor intending to implement LCT should therefore, be prepared to convince the administrative structure, right from the departmental head, the dean, the college principal, and finally the college/university president of the need for changing the instructional style. Due to the massive nature of the convincing required to make any change, most instructors will rather not attempt; instead prefer to continue with what has always worked.

The finding of this research project was however contrary to the expected institutional politics. The above described inherent fear may be farfetched from reality. Many of the institutional administrators; both old and young are eager to improve their institutional education performances. Thus, they are open to most of the well thought out instructional changes if presented to them with confidence of achieving the desired learning improvement. Based on that good will, It was not difficult for me to get a go ahead with the implementation of LCT as a research project. The professionalism of the college administrators, from the college president, vice president academic affairs, to the head of my division were all willingly supportive of my initiatives.
Despite this supportive institutional structure, I had my own institutional fears that posed some challenges to my LCT implementation. My institutional fears were at two but related areas. First, I feared that I could not be able to meet the institutional set course curriculum if I implemented LCT, where learners are expected to give inputs into what kind of materials they covered. Second, I feared that I would not cover the institutional course content within the institutional set time frame of one semester, if I did not lecture; but instead used active learning.

The findings of this study indicated that with discipline, an instructor can use active learning activities in combination with other teaching styles, and still cover the required curriculum/content within a specified time period. What are required are discipline and a commitment to making LCT work. In this research project, a number of teaching strategies were used. Some improvisation of the best use of available time, like after class hours of some days were used to conduct long hour block activities, such as group presentations. This study also found that what is perceived as a waste of time during class discussions may actually not be time wasted. The fact that learners are not discussing a scheduled topic does not necessarily mean that there is no learning. Moreover, many hours get wasted in traditional lecture instruction were instructors lose their learners in long boring lectures. Think of how many students go to lecture halls and immediately they sit down dose off!

Whereas, it is not foreseeable that LCT can be implemented in one single semester, it is a step forward to initiate the implementation. Start crudely, but refine as time passes by. With this research’s findings, I have come to conclude that, with persistence, implementing LCT in small bits over time will finally encourage critics to come on board.
Students’ Challenges

Literature reports substantial studies by researchers and instructors who have experienced learner resistance firsthand (Felder and Brent, 1996). Some of the reasons why learners resist LCT, include the fear that it will involve more work for them, they are afraid of losing the authoritative voice of a subject expert, they fear losing their refuge moving into a world of uncertainty, and they also fear losing guidance of an experienced teacher (Weimer, 2002). The findings of this study were not different when it came to learner resistance. Going over learners’ journals, it was found that a number of entries reflected learner frustration which would easily be considered resistance. Fearing of the above losses, it can be argued that learners’ resistance is a manifestation of what they perceive as their loss as LCT is implemented. With that kind of fear, Weimer, (2002) seems to have captured their feelings with her quote of what learners said when she implemented LCT; “if we do a really crummy job with this, just barely, barely do what she wants, maybe, just maybe, she will figure out that this isn’t working and won’t try again” (p. 155).

The finding of this study was that learner resistance may come in many different forms. These forms may include finding fault in the instructor trying to implement LCT, blame LCT for their failing in the course, or blame both the instructor and the course content, just to reject LCT. In the current study learners were found to directly and/or indirectly resist LCT implantation by all of the above. Some learners’ journal entries were as negative about the instructor as they were about the subject of economics. Some students wrote about the instructor’s accent as a problem to the learning, while in the actual fact they did not like the idea of taking more responsibility for their learning. Others reported that they were getting more problems understanding the economics concepts because, they did most of the work by themselves.
With all these negative side of LCT implementation, this study found that after the initial two weeks of introduction of LCT, most learners will empress it and do a good job. So longer as the instructor remains friendly and caring to all learners, even to the negative ones; over time the negative student numbers will decline. It was also noted that, it is impossible to expect 100% acceptance of LCT during the initial implementation. Any minimal acceptance level, should be seen as a step towards the right direction.

Implications for Practice

From this study’s findings, there emerged a number of implications for practice. First, the implications associated with the application of LCT in the teaching of economics in particular, and business course in general will be discussed. That will then be followed by a discussion of implications for adult education practice in general.

Implications for Economics Courses

Teaching economics from a learner-centered perspective will enhance learning since active in-class learning activities will be complimented by out-of-class assignments, like group projects, corporate problem solving, and peer tutoring. LCT produces a positive feedback loop that is suitable for student learning; in that students learn from themselves, from their teacher and from each other. During group projects, students are able to share their inputs and present their own work in class. As they work on their projects, they develop a heightened sense of ownership for their work and hence enhancing learning. With this sense of ownership, learners are more likely to complete any assigned exercises on time; and are most likely to be actively involved in making sure their classroom discussion and activities are of high quality. That means, students
will always come to class better prepared to share what they have learned, and most importantly they are likely to gain more from each class session attended due to their level of preparation. In LCT, students also receive immediate feedbacks for their work, and this may also enhance their understanding of the economics concepts that are covered in class and other out-of-class assignments.

LCT provides an environment that is conducive to economics teaching that is usually absent in traditional teaching where homework assignments and/or quizzes, only provide feedbacks in a delayed manner. Instructors too, receive timely and valuable feedbacks that may make in-class teaching and learning more interesting and effective. Because instructors are co-learners in LCT, exercises are completed with the instructor’s guidance as facilitators. Instructors can also learn about students’ misunderstandings of economic concepts before too late for remedial purposes. They have humble time to design classroom activities with their students and to overcome any misunderstandings while the concepts are still fresh in students’ minds.

Implication for Adult Education

The field of adult education has a number of ways it can benefit from this study. First and foremost, the use of LCT is in line with all of the adult learning characteristics. Given the current global nature of the world economy, where business has no boundaries, labor mobility is at its highest gear. Outsourcing of jobs has fueled the need for adult retraining. Many adults are being retrenched by companies that are relocating to areas/countries where they can reduce costs of production and improve on profits. The end result is that the retrenched adult workers are left with no choice, but to join adult education class for new trades. These adult learners have been found to be different from traditional learners. Since early 1970s, a number of attempts have
been made to distinguish adult learning from traditional pedagogy. The best known of these attempts is by Knowles, whose concept of andragogy that he first introduced into the US from Europe has made great inroads (Knowles, 1970).

The findings of this study have shown that with LCT, where greater responsibility for learning is left for the learner, learning tended to improve. This is the position espoused in Knowles’ concept of andragogy. Andragogy is seen as the art or science of helping adults to learn. A concept, based on five assumptions about the adult learner; first, it is assumed that as a person matures, her/his self-concept moves from a dependent to a self-directing individual; second, an adult is assumed to accumulate rich learning experiences that should be tapped as time progresses; third, the readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his/her social roles. The fourth assumption is that adults are more problem centered than subject centered. And lastly, adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones. Equipped with this understanding of adult learners, teaching from a LCT perspective will tremendously enrich teaching and learning in many fields of learning. As learners take up their learning responsibility, they will be able to challenge themselves to working towards their own set goals. This will also prepare learners for lifelong learning strategies.

Since the center piece of adult learning (Knowles, 1970) and educational psychology is based on the assumptions that adults control their personal destiny, and they voluntary participate in a learning process, adult education has some insights to learn from this study. The findings from this study that will be of great importance include the knowledge that in LCT, learners are capable of heightening their personal and group responsibility, if well guided. They were further found to use life experiences to enhance learning, and/or decide on whether or not to allow these experiences hinder learning. Adult learners come to class with held beliefs, that need to be
examined, but it must be noted that they are also capable of integrating nature into their set of held beliefs into new knowing. And lastly, given the positive findings of LCT, it can be concluded that they are capable of applying whatever is learned in a productive way.

With these findings at the back of an adult educator’s mind, and knowing that there are different ways of knowing/learning, which lead to different learning styles, based on an individual adult learners’ up bringing environments and socialization style, instructors should try to accommodate as many of their learners’ needs as possible. Diversifying teaching methods is one way of accommodating different learning styles. In both program planning and curriculum design, adult educators should be aware of the diverse nature of adult learning based on the learners’ biological, psychological and sociological factors. Its complex of course in trying to accommodate each and every learner in the class, but it is worse and unfair to totally ignore the learners’ needs in designing a lesson plan or a curriculum. At a broader level, educators should accommodate visual learners, as well as descriptive learner. Objective as well as subjective learners; i.e. accommodating all learners, regardless of the side of the brain they are using. And this may be achieved by using different types of learning activities, in different teaching techniques adapted by an adult educator.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study supplements the existing body of knowledge for both in the teaching of economics and adult education. It contributes to the understanding of how best teaching of economics in particular, and business course in general can be taught using active learning activities. The use of action research as a research methodology, provided a suitable means through which the researcher’s experiences as a facilitator and those of students were a central
point of the research. Action research’s cyclical nature, of planning, action, observation, and reflections was instrumental to the trying of new learning activities as described by Herr, & Anderson (2005); Kemmis & McTaggart, (1988); and Patton, (2002). For instance, learners were instrumental in deciding which learning activities were used in our daily learning. They decided on their group make ups and did implement their learning schedules that met their busy schedules elsewhere. Learners’ inputs were regularly incorporated into the teaching by using individual journal entries. Based on learners’ concerns and progress made, additional learning activities were tried. Thus, this study, gave learners a voice in the teaching and learning decision making process throughout the semester.

The findings of this study give a very promising future for learner-centered teaching in high education. However, a one semester short, may not be enough dose for changing the already established traditional teaching methods like lecture. Therefore, further studies should be continued were different teaching environments are tried, and different learning activities are used to identify appropriate activities for specific given situations. Informed by the finding of this study, it is recommended that future studies could be conducted on each of the specific themes that emerged from this action research study. For instance, the emerging themes that may be further studied include; how building of positive learner-teacher relationship may improve learning; why do learners resist new teaching methods; and how resistant are college/university administrators to new methods of teaching.

It could also be beneficial to conduct further research on comparative LCT implementation between business and arts courses to see if there are any subject specific benefits of using LCT.
Summary

In summary, the chapter has provided a discussion of the main findings of this action research. And the discussion of these findings was organized around the three research questions; How are learner-centered teaching principles applicable to the teaching of an introductory economics class? What can be said about the effectiveness of learner-centered teaching in introductory economics? What are the challenges of applying learner-centered teaching principles in introductory economics? Using the findings presented in the previous chapter, each of the three research questions was answered.

The course syllabus was presented as the first line of action in the implementation of LCT in introductory economics class. Building of positive learner-teacher relationship during the semester, and allowing learners to take greater charge in the learning responsibility were found to be important aspects of implementing LCT principles in the teaching of economics. The effectiveness of LCT implementation in introductory economics was in the assuring learners that they would be cared for and that they could succeed. This was done by designing an appropriate course syllabus, building learner-teacher positive relationships, and allowing learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

The main challenges of applying learner-centered teaching in introductory economics ranged from institutional structure challenges, to individual instructor’s own fears of failing or just the knowing that there is a possibility of failing, to learners’ challenges. The discussion also covered learners’ fears of added work, fear of losing academic support and authority, as part of the reason why learners may pose challenges to LCT implementation in introductory economics. The chapter discussed this action research study’s implications for teaching of economics in
particular, and Adult education in general. Suggestions for further research were related to the specific themes of this action research study.

In conclusion, it can be argued that even though a perfect LCT implementation in the teaching of introductory economics was not achieved, great strides were made. Future instructors wishing to implement LCT in any level of economics or in any other subject may benefit from both success and failures of this research project.
REFERENCES


Date: February 7, 2008

From: Dolores W. Maney, IRB Administrator

To: Joseph D. Ongeri

Subject: Results of Review of Proposal - Expedited (IRB #27486) Approval Expiration Date: January 30, 2009

“Learner-centered Teaching in Economics: An Action Research”

The Social Science Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your proposal for use of human participants in your research. By accepting this decision, you agree to obtain prior approval from the IRB for any changes to your study. Unanticipated participant events that are encountered during the conduct of this research must be reported in a timely fashion.

Enclosed is/are the dated, IRB-approved informed consent(s) to be used when recruiting participants for this research. Participants must receive a copy of the approved informed consent form to keep for their records.

If signed consent is obtained, the principal investigator is expected to maintain the original signed consent forms along with the IRB research records for this research at least three (3) years after termination of IRB approval. For projects that involve protected health information (PHI) and are regulated by HIPAA, records are to be maintained for six (6) years. The principal investigator must determine and adhere to additional requirements established by the FDA and any outside sponsors.

If this study will extend beyond the above noted approval expiration date, the principal investigator must submit a completed Continuing Progress Report to the Office for Research Protections (ORP) to request renewed approval for this research.

On behalf of the IRB and the University, thank you for your efforts to conduct your research in compliance with the federal regulations that have been established for the protection of human participants.

Please Note: The ORP encourages you to subscribe to the ORP listserv for protocol and research-related information. Send a blank email to: L-ORP-Research-L-subscribe-request@lists.psu.edu

DWM/dwm
Enclosure
cc: Edward W. Taylor
Appendix B

Approved Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Learner-Centered Teaching in Economics: An Action Research Study.

Principal Investigator: Joseph D. Ongeri
250 Wycliff Drive
Spartanburg, SC 29301
Phone: 717-580-6533; E-mail: juo3@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Edward W. Taylor
777 W. Harrisburg Pike
Harrisburg, PA 17057
(814) 948-6364; E-mail: ewt1@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the study: The purpose of this research is to explore the use of learner-centered teaching (LCT) approach in teaching principles of economics class. In carrying out a constructivist action research, it is hoped that an appropriate way of teaching economics will emerge. This will require teaching a whole semester as an action research, where learners will help shape the teaching. And at the end of the semester, participants will be interviewed on the teaching and their learning.

2. Procedures to be followed: The design of this study is within the teacher action research conducted to apply learner-centered teaching principles in an introductory economics class at Spartanburg Methodist College, South Carolina. Participants are students enrolled in principles of economics class and volunteer to be participants. The participants will attend all scheduled class sessions; participate in class learning by deciding on among many things, class activities, and taking reflective journaling for each session. Both structured and unstructured interviews will be undertaken by the participants at the end of the course. These interviews will audio-taped and transcribed.

3. Discomforts and risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Participation or non-participation will not have any affect on your grade for the class, or any know effects.

4. Duration/time of the procedures and study: This study will be conducted within a single academic semester, during college scheduled class times.

5. Statement of confidentiality: All of the information collected during this study, including any information that directly links you to the study, or identifies you will be kept confidential. You are therefore assured that during the research period, the gathered information in the form of perception survey, journals, interviews, self-assessments, and all discussions will be securely kept in a locked cabinet file at the primary investigator’s home. After the survey administrations, and any time journals or any research documents are collected from class, will be carried in a locked briefcase to the investigator’s home for safe keeping. Any coded information that may identify your identity will be destroyed.
immediately after the dissertation defense. Therefore, should you decide not to participate in this study, your grade in this course will neither be affected, nor will your relationship with the instructor of this course, Joseph D. Ongeri, or with Spartanburg Methodist College is in jeopardy. And, even if you decide to participate, but change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the study at whatever time you choose. The following may review and copy records related to this research: The Office of Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Penn State University’s Office for Research Protections.

7. Right to ask questions: You can ask questions about this research. Contact Dr. Edward Taylor at 717-948-6364 or ewt1@psu.edu with questions. You can also call this number if you have concerns about this research, or if you feel that you have been harmed by this study. If you have questions about your right as a research participant, or you have concerns or general questions about the research, contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775.

8. Payment for participation: There will be no monetary payment that will be made for participating in this study. However, should you decide to participate, I want to assure you that all information that will be collected from the perception survey during the first and last class meetings, your reflection journal, interviews, and any self-assessments, will only be used for this study. Some students will be selected for a follow-up interview four weeks after the end of class. Additional information would be provided to you at that time.

9. Voluntary participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time by notifying Dr. Edward Taylor at 717-948-6364 or ewt1@psu.edu. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

Option for the Use of Coursework: May the researcher use your coursework, journal entries, or other information for research purposes? Please choose option one response. Please circle one option.

1. I DO give my consent to have my work included in this study
2. I DO NOT give my consent to have my work included in this study

Tape Recording: Please indicate below your willingness to participate in a follow-up tape recorded interview. All audio recording will be stored in a locked cabinet until destroyed after transcription (by the end of December 2013). Only I will have access to these tapes. You may decline to have this interview tape recorded at any time before or during the interview. After the interview, you have the right to ask that the tape recording or your interview not be used in this research study.
1. I permit this interview to be tape recorded

2. I do not permit this interview to be tape recorded.

Please sign both copies of this informed consent form. Return one copy to Dr. Edward Taylor and retain one for your records. A stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent for your records.

______________________________________________  _____________________  
Participant Name (Please Print)                      Date
______________________________________________  _____________________  
Participant Signature                                   Date
______________________________________________  _____________________  
Person Obtaining Consent                               Date
Appendix C
Institutional Research Approval

December 20, 2007

Mr. Joseph Ongei
250 Wycliff Drive
Spartanburg, SC 29301

Dear Joseph,

The college president, Dr. Charles Teague, and I have reviewed your action research proposal for Spring 2008. We approve your plan for exploring the use of learner-centered teaching (L.C.T) in BNA 201, Principles of Macroeconomics here at Spartanburg Methodist College.

We understand that all participants will first give their consent to participate; they will complete the consent forms provided by Penn State. Further, we understand that participants will be guaranteed anonymity.

Accept our best wishes for success as you complete this phase of your doctoral program. Let us know how we can further support your work.

Yours truly,

Anita K. Bowles, Ph.D.
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dear Student,

Apart from being your instructor for an economics class during the spring 2008 semester, I will also continue being a doctoral student at Pennsylvania State University. Currently, I am doing my dissertation research on how I can be more learner-centered in teaching economics. I believe that learners can be motivated to learn if learner-centered teaching principles are applied; and therefore, I am planning to carry out an action research during the spring 2008 class that you have registered in.

The purpose of this letter therefore is to request that you be one of the willing participants of this important study. My most exciting moment in teaching is when I see students cultivating a more positive approach to their own ability to learn economics. Therefore, my interest here will be to look at what in teaching nurtures the positive perspective of learning from learners. The majority of the data I will be collecting will mostly come from current requirements of BSAD 201 course. Every enrolled student in this course, will take an attitudinal evaluation during the first and last day of class, and will keep a reflective journal of class activities throughout the semester. As an instructor, I will also keep a reflective journal to account for student inputs to my adjusted teaching. Apart from the evaluations and journal keeping, students will also be requested to do a short (less than 5 minutes) self-assessment of own perceptions about economics prior and post class meeting. Participating students will also be asked to take part in a follow-up interview that will take place after the end of the semester. Your consent to participate in this study means that you permit me to use your attitudinal evaluation result, your journal account, your self-assessment of perception about economics, and interviews in my dissertation.

In spite of this consent, I however promise that all of the information obtained during this study that may identify you, will be kept confidential. Participant names, addresses, or any other individual participants’ particular information will not be used in the dissertation, presentations or even future published articles. During the study period, all collected data will be securely locked in my home/office cabinets, and destroyed immediately after the study. One must be 18 year or older to participate in this research. Note, that participation in this study is voluntary, and that your decision to participate will in no way influence your current relationship with Spartanburg Methodist College or myself. And it is allowed that you may withdraw from the study at any time you decide to. I request that you keep this letter for your records.

Should you have any questions or concerns about this study, and your participation and/or your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the Human Research Participants’ Protections-Research Review Committee, Office for research protection, Pennsylvania State University, 201 Kem Building, University Park, PA 16802, Phone: 814-865-1775, Fax: 814-863-8699, E-mail: ORPProtections@psu.edu. But should you have any questions for the primary investigator, please, contact me on phone: 717-580-6533, or e-mail: juo3@psu.edu.

Yours truly,
Joseph D. Ongeri, Prof. of Economics, and Doctoral Candidate.
Spartanburg Methodist College
BSAD 201: Principles of Macroeconomics
Course Syllabus
Spring 2008     Office: Walker Rm. 114
Instructor: Joseph D. Ongeri  Phone: 864-587-4274
Meeting: MWF, 12:00 – 12:50 PM Room: MONT. 116
Office Hours: TBA.

Catalog Description: This course is intended to provide learners with the fundamental understanding of the whole economy. It will introduce learners to facts, concepts, and overall economic analytical methods and tools for understanding how the free market economy works. Among the main topics covered will include: the structure and the operation of the American economy; national income accounting; employment, inflation, and the fiscal policy; money, banking, and the monetary policy; American economics growth achievements, problems, and solution policies.

Course Learning Outcomes: It’s my earnest goal that, upon completion of this course, you the learner should demonstrate an understanding of the basic concepts used in economics, and how they relate to everyday’s life situations. Apart from the understanding of economics concepts, it is also my goal that this course will increase your confidence and comfort level in communicating and applying economic concepts. Therefore learners will:
1. Identify specific economics issues
2. Describe the economic perspective
3. Explain available policy options
4. Appraise economic issues.
5. Apply the economic perspective

Assumptions of the instructor: The specific assumptions that have influenced my expectations of the learners, the way I have designed this course, my teaching methodology, and my course assessment, should be known to the learners. I believe that if learners know these assumptions ahead of time, they will be able to take full advantage of them, or challenge them, if they find them inappropriate. The specific assumptions I make for this course are informed by the progressive and humanistic philosophies of education, and they are:
1. Every learner comes to class with good intentions of acquiring knowledge. And that each individual learner will do what is right as per their signed HONOR CODE.
2. That each learner, is a free and autonomous individual, and together as a class, our different experiences, attitudes, and abilities will enhance learning
3. Learners’ potential for growth and development is virtually unlimited, if the classroom environment is where all learners are actively engaged both cognitively and effectively and appreciated.
4. Since self-concept plays an important role in growth and development, each learner will contribute positively to a suitable learning environment for everybody involved
5. Each individual learner is motivated and has an urge toward self-actualization, for both personal and professional application for what is learnt.

6. Reality is defined by each learner, but together, we will be engage in the activities to be designed for learning, by all of the involved.

7. Individual learners have a responsibility to both themselves and to others in the course.

**The Recommended Textbook:** The College recommends *Economics* by McConnell and Brue 17th edition, but if you have other relevant materials, we will discuss and consider them in class. However, I suggest that you get a copy of McConnell and Brue first.

**Attendance Policy:** Every learner’s attendance will be expected and appreciated. Since there will be many in-class activities and other group projects, everyone’s input will be necessary and expected. Participation in all class activities will give you a total of 10 percent points towards the final grade. If you know that you will miss a class a head of time, please let me know.

**Course Assessment:** The following assignments and examinations will be designed specifically with the single purpose of assessing learning in this course.

a.) **Quizzes and Homework Assignments -30pts:** There will be 5 quizzes and 5 homework assignments for the course. All quizzes will account for 10pts while home work will account for 20 pts. You will be given a choice of either taking a quiz or a homework assignment. If a homework assignment is chosen over a quiz, then please hand it in on the time agreed on. It is your responsibility to make sure that you have completed and handed in all assigned work and communicated with the instructor when additional time is required to complete an assignment. All quizzes and assignments will account for 30 points towards the final grade.

b.) **Reflective Journal -8pts:** You will be asked to maintain a reflective journal for this course. I will explain in detail what will be included in this journal keeping during the first day of class. It will include individual learners’ reflection on each class attended; whether or not it met learner’s expectations; what missed, any surprises, and classroom activities used and their effectiveness or ineffectiveness. The instructor will collect learner journals for reading every other week. And learners will get a maximum of 8 points for a well maintained journal each time it is handed in.

c.) **Group Projects - 5pts:** Several types of group project will be discussed in class, and agreed upon by the learners, with the instructor as a facilitator. The number of the total projects will also be determined in class. Grading for each project will be done 50% by peer-groups and 50% by the instructor – a maximum 5 points towards the final grade.

d.) **Class portfolio – Extra Credit:** Each learner will need to keep organized class materials. These materials will include handouts, help sheets, assignments, quizzes, projects, etc. The portfolio will be assessed during the last day of class for a maximum of 10 points towards the final grade.

e.) **Examinations -57pts:** You will take a total of three tests during the semester. Each will account for 19 points towards the final grade.. You will have options of where and when you take the tests. These options will include, but not limited to online testing, on paper testing, or take- home tests.
Grade Assignment: The following key will be used in awarding your grades. 90%-100%= A, 80%-89% =B, 70%-79% = C, 60%-69% =D, <60% =F

Tentative Course Guideline and Reading Assignments

Part One
Introduction to Economics and the Economy
- Limits, Alternatives, and Choices Chapter 1
- Graphs and Their Meaning Pgs 21-27
- The Market System and the Circular Flow Chapter 2
- Demand, Supply, and Market Equilibrium Chapter 3
- The U.S Economy: Private and Public Sectors Chapter 4

Test # 1

Part Two
Macroeconomics Measurements and Basic Concepts
- Measuring Domestic Output and National Income Chapter 6
- Introduction to Economic Growth and Instability Chapter 7
- Basic Macroeconomic Relationships Chapter 8

Test # 2

Part Three
Macroeconomic Models and Fiscal Policy
- Aggregate Expenditure Model Chapter 9
- Aggregate Demand and Aggregate Supply Chapters 10
- Fiscal Policy, Deficits, and Debt Chapter 11

Test # 3

Part Four
Money, Banking and Monetary Policy
- Money and Banking Chapter 12
- Money Creation Chapter 13
- Interest Rates and Monetary Policy Chapter 15

Final Exam
Appendix F

Instructor’s what to do list

Adapted from McCombo & Miller, 2007*.

In creating positive relationships and a positive climate for learning, I intend to do the following:

1. Demonstrate to my learners that I appreciate each one of them as who they are by;
   • Having individual conferences with each learner whenever they are available
   • Building on learners’ strengths by giving them leadership roles as facilitators and evaluators
   • Showing respect for learners’ ideas and opinions in using phrases such as “That’s an interesting point”, “You have a different perspective” or “Can you tell me more” instead of outright rejection of an idea.
   • Showing a personal interest in learners’ areas of interest by discussing their favorite current events, sports, hobbies etc.

2. Provide encouragement and positive emotional support for learners who feel insecure in performing well by;
   • Helping them to see what they have already accomplished, and showing them how they are capable of doing more.
   • Demonstrate that I care about their concerns, and encouraging them when they feel that they might fail
   • Praising learners’ efforts to accomplish a learning task
   • Creating a safe environment for learners to express their opinions and ideas in small group settings or individual conferences.

3. Demonstrate to learners that I care about them as individuals by;
   • Communicate with learners personally and by showing that I am responsive to their concerns and needs
   • Showing understanding of underlying reasons for learner’s acting out

4. Help learners to value their abilities by;
   • Allowing learners to decide on learning activities such as choosing between quizzes and homework, or deciding on their project topic within a general area
   • Assist learners in figuring out their own solution to a given problem
   • Using peer-tutoring to provide opportunities for learners to share their knowledge and at the same time demonstrate their skills with each other in pairs or in small groups
   • Providing learners with standard assessment rubrics and allowing them to assess one another.

5. Help learners to feel classroom sense of belonging through;
   • Knowing learners’ background and personalities by encouraging them to share their stories voluntarily
   • Brainstorming of different topics related to course contents
   • Arrange for a specific room where learners can study or informally talk to each other and to the instructor if they wish

Appendix G

Learner-centered Teaching

Interview Questions

1. Assume that you are talking to someone about your experience in BSAD 201:
   a. How would you describe a typical class?
   b. How did you feel about being in class?
   c. How did you feel about learning a new economic concept?

2. The goal(s) you set in your economics were………?
   a. Were these goals met?
   b. In your own views, Why/why not?

3. What was your perception of economics before taking BSAD 201?
   a. Has that perception changed?
   b. Why/why not?

4. Tell me how confident you think you are with economic concept that we covered in class….

5. Please describe the atmosphere in a BSAD 201 class?
   a. Was that atmosphere different from that in other classes you took this semester?
   b. In your own observation, why/why not?

6. Can you think of specific times in class that you felt in control of your learning economics?
   a. Tell me more of what actually happened…….
   b. Were there times you felt less empowered to learn economics?
   c. What are your feelings about that?

7. Do you think you may use any of the economic concepts we learnt in BSAD 201?
   a. Why/why not?
   b. If you will, give examples.

8. What would you say to college economics instructors to help them to be more effective teachers of adults?

9. How did the teaching of BSAD 201 impact your experience in the class?
   a. What can you say about journaling in this class?
   b. What about my comments on your journaling?

10. What can you say about the learning activities in BSAD 201?
    a. What about peer learning in specific?
    b. Can you describe the role you played best in class?
    c. What about me?
    d. Talk about assessment in BSAD 201. In your words, how do you think assessment was used in BSAD 201?
VITA

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