



**A Study of the Learner-Centeredness of the Community for Learning (CFL) Program**

by

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Community for Learning (CFL) is a research-based, comprehensive K-12 school reform program that focuses on high standards of student achievement and positive student self-perception. The program includes a site-specific planning framework for schoolwide reform and coordinated instruction delivery that enhance schooling based on the characteristics and learning needs of the students, school(s), and the community (Wang, 1992; Wang, 1998; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). The classroom instruction component, Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM), helps teachers tailor learning to each student's needs. Teachers assist students in learning to take responsibility and initiative for planning and assessing their attainment of educational objectives through assessment of the instructional strategies designed for each student and modification of strategies if necessary. Individual attention is available for students who require more classroom support.

A question of interest in evaluating the effectiveness of the CFL program in meeting its design goals is whether it is "learner-centered" as defined by survey tools developed in keeping with the American Psychological Association Work Group of the Board of Educational Affairs research-validated *Learner-Centered Psychological Principles* (1997). The Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices (ALCP) surveys (McCombs, 1999) address teacher beliefs and their consistency with the *Principles*. The surveys also assess the degree to which classroom practices align with the *Principles* in four domains related to positive student motivation and achievement (McCombs, 1999; McCombs & Lauer, 1997). These domains are (1) creating a

positive classroom climate and relationship with each student, (2) honoring student voice and providing individual learning challenges, (3) encouraging higher-order thinking and learning skills, and (4) adapting to developmental differences.

**Methodology and Findings**

Analysis of the CFL program also addressed (a) whether implementing CFL results in positive changes as assessed by the research validated ALCP surveys that define a learner-centered rubric of meeting the *APA Principles*; and (b) whether high CFL implementers score higher on the *APA learner-centered rubric*.

The ALCP surveys for grades four and five were used to examine relationships between teacher and student survey scores and degree of CFL program implementation at three inner-city CFL sites in various stages of implementation. As shown in prior research (McCombs, 1999; McCombs & Lauer, 1997; McCombs & Quiat, 1999), the best measure of learner-centeredness is student perception of classroom practices. By establishing positive relationships between degree of CFL program implementation and student and teacher perceptions of learner-centeredness, the CFL program's effects would relate empirically to the *APA Principles*.

The sample included seven fourth grade classes and six fifth grade classes, with a total of 13 teachers and 286 students. All participants completed the grades four and five ALCP surveys. The two Spanish-speaking classes completed the Spanish version of the surveys. Level of learner-centered practice was measured by 36 items from the ALCP surveys. These items classify practices into

four domains: providing positive classroom climate and relationships; honoring student voice and providing individual challenge; encouraging higher order thinking and learning skills; and adapting to developmental differences. Learner-centered teacher beliefs were assessed by 35 items on the ALCP survey in three areas: learner-centered beliefs about learners, learning, and teaching; non-learner-centered beliefs about learners; and non-learner-centered beliefs about learning and teaching.

The CFL implementation specialist collected data using the Degree of Implementation (DOI) Assessment Battery for Adaptive Instruction (Wang, 1992). This assessment examines teachers' performance in twelve dimensions of the CFL program, including arranging space and facilities, diagnostic testing, prescribing assignments and goals, monitoring, diagnosing, interactive teaching, instructing, motivating, and developing student responsibility. The number of behavioral indicators observed in the teachers' interactions with students during a specified time period determined the scores. Each teacher was scored in each category and on overall implementation.

Degree of CFL implementation was examined in terms of teacher beliefs, characteristics, and perception of classroom practices to determine differences between teacher and student perspectives. As a final test of the learner-centeredness of the CFL program, the highest achieving students in the CFL sample were compared to students making up the Learner-Centered Rubric from the national validation samples in terms of their perceptions of classroom practices, motivation, and achievement scores. Finally, corre-

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lations were examined between classroom achievement and standardized reading and math scores for CFL students in the high-achieving group and the entire sample.

## Results

High CFL implementers were perceived as more learner-centered in all four domains of practice, particularly encouraging higher order thinking and problem solving, providing individual learning challenges, developing self-regulated learning skills and responsibility for learning, which are areas of particular emphasis in the CFL program. There was an overall trend for CFL program implementers, regardless of level of implementation, to be more attuned to their students' perceptions: the difference between student and teacher perceptions of practice were smaller than those for other schools with comparable demographics.

High CFL implementers demonstrated qualities associated with learner-centered teachers from prior research. The highest implementing teachers perceived that they were facilitating higher order thinking, adapting to individual differences, and meeting the metacognitive and special learning needs of their students. This finding is consistent with the individualized nature of the CFL program and its emphasis on promoting student responsibility for learning.

High CFL implementers expressed high teacher self-efficacy demonstrated by more confidence in their ability to be effective teachers and facilitators for teacher efficacy. For both standardized test measures (reading and math scores), students of high CFL program implementers achieved higher scores than students of low CFL program implementers. Similarly, for student motivation measures that are indicative of CFL program emphasis, there was a trend for students of high implementers to report higher scores than students of low implementers.

Analyses of CFL students who had the highest classroom achievement and self-efficacy as compared to students from the Learner-Centered Rubric validation studies revealed that CFL students closely matched students from national studies. This indicates that the measures of learner-centeredness, the ALCP surveys, and the Learner-Centered Rubric were valid for the population studied.

Analyses confirmed that high CFL implementers engaged in significantly higher percentages of learner-centered practices than low implementers. Furthermore, these practices were correlated with higher degrees

of student achievement. Teacher-assigned student achievement scores were highly correlated with standardized student test scores in reading and math.

## Conclusions

Study findings reveal consistent and significant relationships between CFL program variables and learner-centered variables, particularly those that capitalized on strong CFL program features, such as supporting higher order thinking and problem solving skills, enhancing student self-efficacy and responsibility for learning, and supporting individualized instruction and instructional management. The CFL program thus offers a positive framework for teachers to manage their classrooms and meet student needs in these areas.

To meet the Learner-Centered Rubric in all four domains of classroom practice and produce the highest levels of student motivation and achievement, the findings suggest that the CFL program could be enhanced by increased teacher development of practices and strategies that create positive relationships (see Figure 1). As prior research has shown, this domain provides students with a sense of being cared about and connected positively to others that is essential for maximum learning and motivation (McCombs & Lauer, 1997; McCombs & Quiat, 1999).

The CFL program balances concern for meeting individual learners' needs (by creating caring, challenging, and respectful learning environments) and the concern for meeting high academic standards and achievement goals, which is a critical criterion for all comprehensive school reform models.

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