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Do you consider our (Western) higher education system to be democratic?

Do we even want this system to be democratic? Is democratic education something that we should cultivate?

How is student-faculty transformative?

Students as Partners model challenges and scrutinize several foundational features of current higher education system:

• Its non-democratic, hierarchical structures;
• Its focus on predetermined learning outcomes, end-oriented approach;
• Its view of student as client.

"Although advocates for liberal education frequently cite the goal of developing skills necessary for students to function as democratic citizens (such as critical thinking, recognition and understanding of multiple perspectives, and the employment of scrutiny and reason), the actual teaching that students experience often is resoundingly, even hypocritically, antidemocratic" (Manor et al., 2010: 12).

Through student-faculty partnerships, we can have "a more democratic dialogue; [...] making spaces for such dialogue within which faculty and students contemplate together how learning is or could be happening in college classrooms" (Cook-Sather and Alter, 2011: 50).

"students’ perceived powerlessness in their own education translates into a lack of their taking responsibility for their own education” (Manor et al., 2010:10).

Students as partners start viewing education differently and take upon a more active role, become more engaged with learning as they develop a greater sense of responsibility (Cook-Sather and Alter, 2011; Manor et al., 2010; Werder et al., 2012).

"our systems of quality assurance require courses to be validated and reviewed on the basis of clear intended learning outcomes and assessments” (Bovill and Bulley, 2011: 6).

SaP – process-oriented

"Partnership is essentially a process of engagement, not a product. It is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself”(Healey et al. 2014: 7)."

"Radically open to and creating possibilities for discovering and learning something that cannot be known beforehand”(Healey et al. 2014: 9).

Outcomes of partnership

• Engaged Learning
• Transformed sense of self and self-awareness
• Motivation and responsibility
• Greater sense of belonging and inclusion

"Participating in this [partnership] has given me the push i didn’t know i needed back in the direction of hard work and taking college seriously as a learning experience."

"Then one day we happened on the subject of teacher and student responsibilities, and we? The realization hit me: what were my own responsibilities for my education? It was such an odd question. Why had I not thought of this before?"

"You really don’t understand the way you learn and how others learn until you can step back from it and are not in the class with the main aim to learn the material of the class but more to understand what is going on in the class and what is going through people’s minds as they relate with that material” (Cook-Sather, 2008: 481).

"I grew up thinking what I assumed every other student thought and the majority of students still think—what do I want to get out of this class? Am A. The thought of actually trying to learn something never crossed my mind. Then one day as we were discussing...the subject of teacher and student responsibility...the realization hit me: What were my own responsibilities for my education?" (Manor et al., 2010: 5)

"I’ve started thinking about ways I can help make the discussions better for everyone in the class, including the professor, instead of just for me.”

"When a class isn’t working for me, instead of resigning [myself] to the idea that it’s a bad class, i work to understand why i am having a negative experience and what would need to happen to make it a positive one.”

The three pillars of a successful partnership

Respect
• Is an attitude that entails taking seriously and valuing what someone else or multiple others bring to an encounter;
• Demands openness and receptivity;
• Calls for willingness to consider experiences or perspectives that are different from our own; and
• Often requires a withholding of judgment.

Responsibility
• Is a way of interacting;
• Is a process of balanced give-and-take in which there is equity in what is exchanged and how it is exchanged.

Reciprocity
• Is both required for and inspired by partnership;
• In this recognition we see the give and take of reciprocity and we also see how partnership work changes student and faculty orientation toward responsibility;
• Students now have some responsibility for pedagogy and faculty share some responsibility for learning.

How do I develop partnerships?

• Start small and be patient
• Invite, don’t require
• Work together to create a shared purpose & project
• Integrate partnerships into ongoing work
• Cultivate allies

For more information on student-faculty partnerships, please consult CEL website centerforengagedlearning.org