



STUDENT VOICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION PEDAGOGY

CSU Research Report



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Introduction

We are now at a time where international organizations and leading educational researchers emphasize the necessity of student voice in learning (Quaglia, Russell & Fox, 2018). This year, the Concordia Student Union conducted a large mixed method survey, in which the findings showed a large majority of Concordia Undergraduate students want to be more actively involved in their learning, as well as in the decisions made regarding pedagogy within their program. The aim of this report is to review the CSU survey and consultation findings, while providing research and examples of pedagogical methodologies that encourage student agency and participation within higher education pedagogy.

Advancing pedagogical accessibility and next-generation teaching directly aligns with Concordia and the CSU's core values. Student voice is at the forefront of the Concordia Student Union's mission and mandate. One of the union's core values is that accessible, high-quality higher education is a human right. Moreover, the CSU advocates for experiential, hands-on learning opportunities through the undergraduate curriculum, and addressing the diverse interests of Concordia students and their communities. Concordia takes pride in its rich, progressive history as an educational institution known for its accessibility in providing options and accommodations for students, such as having smaller class sizes and providing a variety of night class options.

In 2015, Concordia established nine strategic directions, one of which is Teach for Tomorrow that acknowledges that "Universities need to prepare students for a world that, in many ways, will be dramatically different from today's" (Concordia University, "Teach for Tomorrow"). This statement aligns with the CSU's perspective that students need skill sets to be prepared for an unknown future. In doing so, students need to be active and engaged participants in the university in order to foster a continued desire to learn, adapt, and develop collaborative, creative and critical thinking skills.

Many of Concordia's strategic directions align with increasing student voice within higher education pedagogy:

Teach for Tomorrow: focuses on fostering "a next-generation education that's connected, transformative, and fit for the times." (Concordia University, "Teach for Tomorrow");

Get Your Hands Dirty focuses on the importance of experiential learning, stating that it is

the most effective way for students to be engaged, as “it provides students with complex, collaborative tasks and projects that test their conceptual knowledge against experience and situates their learning in real-world contexts” (Concordia University, “Get Your Hands Dirty”);

Go Beyond focuses on “push[ing] past the status quo and go the extra mile for members of our community” (Concordia University, “Go Beyond”);

Experiment Boldly focuses on creating environments that foster innovation, resourcefulness, constructing new knowledge, and critically thinking (Concordia University, “Experiment Boldly”);

These directions have prompted a variety of initiatives to improve teaching experiences and increase student engagement. For instance, more interdisciplinary programs and internship opportunities are emerging, as well as the Centre for Teaching and Learning offering valuable workshops on creating inclusive classrooms. Beyond these directions, Concordia is also committed to Indigenizing and decolonizing pedagogy, and has completed a student health and wellness review.

Given Concordia undergraduates’ interest in having more of a say in their education, and Concordia’s commitment to advancing pedagogy, the next steps in moving forward involve creating spaces where students are encouraged to participate more within the institution. Shown through both quantitative and qualitative responses, Concordia students understand the conditions which enhance their learning and can offer diverse, unique perspectives to share within the classroom and within the broader institution. Investing time and resources into the development of inclusive outreach, consultation methods, and student partnership — through which students can not only share their ideas, and opinions, but to actively participate in decision-making — provides a more enriching learning environment for experiential learning, collaborating, and developing meaningful partnerships.

Higher Education Context

Now more than ever, students need to be part of real world decision-making. Students are faced with a complex present and future that carry many unknowns due to the climate crisis, the automation of employment, wealth disparity and inflated costs of living, among other issues. As a result, higher education institutions must lead the way in establishing

space, time and resources for students to develop skills in taking initiative, being part of improving processes, embracing their creativity, thinking beyond current systems, collaborating and communicating well with others, and being active citizens who feel a sense of civic responsibility.

Educational change needs to happen at macro, meso, and micro levels. Therefore, it is necessary to address how the North American political and economic context (macro level) influence higher education structures in ways that make it challenging for students to participate more within their education.

Impact of Austerity Measures

Government austerity measures have made substantial cuts to education. The continual reduction of public funds has incentivized North American universities to adopt neoliberal models of corporate managerialism which has normalized “competitive funding regimes”, “short-term performance contracts”, “privatization of services”, “commercialization of research and online teaching initiatives” and “increasing bureaucratization...[to] monitor and measure academic performance and to maximize returns from research” (Peters, 2013, pp.11-13). Behari-Leak (2017) cites Gosling who states that universities are “adopt[ing] business models...to balance their financial scales” (p.485). We can see this in increasing student enrolments (increasing class sizes), increasing tuition and administrative fees (increasing student debt), providing less access to resources and support, and prioritization of time and resources on research over teaching. Furthermore, access to academic funding is becoming exceptionally competitive: professors are under pressure to increase their research funding, with greater emphasis quantifiable output measures and performance targets (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Peters, 2013). An example of this at Concordia is the first strategic direction of the institution being “Double Our Research” (Concordia University, “Double Our Research”).

Traditional Educational Frameworks

There is increasing recognition of the numerous limitations within traditional teaching models. Traditional models of education center around the ideas of hierarchy, boundary formation, and standardization. Business models of education encourage traditional education frameworks through the promotion of productive efficiency with unrealistic time frames and not allocating necessary resources, limiting the possibilities of thoroughness, quality and establishing meaningful processes. A Concordia student from the 2019 CSU Survey responded to the question, “Do you have any comments about your experience in

Academia?” saying:

“I find that although I get very good grades I haven’t actually learned anything practical from my professors, with few exceptions. I have doubts about the practical use of my degree after graduation. This is not to say that this is a characteristic of Concordia in particular, but just a sad state of the standardized institutions in general in North America.” (Clark-Gardner & Idris, 2019, p.5)

Considering the pace of economic, technological, and social change, teaching practices and classroom structures have been slow to evolve (Darling-Hammond, 1996). The predominant model of higher education continues to position the student as “passive consumers of, rather than participants in” their learning (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014, p.7). The current economic austerity measures and increasing prominence of business models within higher education contribute to maintaining traditional practices of pedagogy through its focus on quantity and outcomes. For instance, the focus on quantifiable indicators, such as GPA, as the main, often sole, indicator of student success. The pressure to have a high GPA creates a learning environment where “students come to feel less powerful and thus act subserviently to earn good grades” (Morrison, 2008, p.9). Moreover, university class syllabi tend to cover large amounts of content with numerous assignments that can inhibit deeper learning and long-term retention of knowledge (Lujan & Dicarlo, 2006). The average course workload is becoming increasingly challenging for students, in an economic climate where costs are steadily increasing, and the majority of students are working part-time (Clark-Gardner & Idris, 2019, p.5).

Educational reformer and philosopher John Dewey is one example of someone who has critiqued traditional models of education since the late 19th century, and whose work remains relevant to this day. Dewey (2015) argues that traditional education often teaches knowledge as a static, finished product “with little regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future” (p.19). How can educators prepare students within traditional models of education if future employment, technology, and skill sets are rapidly changing or have not yet been actualized? And, what is the role of educators if students have unlimited access to material and information? Dewey states that it is “a mistake to suppose that acquisition of skills in reading and figuring will automatically constitute preparation” (p.19). Instead, he emphasizes the importance of creating educational experiences that promote a continued desire to learn. Pedagogical frameworks that encourage a continued desire to learn emphasize the importance of process, and experience in creating multi-disciplinary and egalitarian structures of learning. Klein (2006) states that these frameworks of pedagogy “call attention to

boundary crossing and blurring, integration and collaboration, cross-fertilization, interdependence in epistemological and social environments characterized increasingly by complexity, nonlinearity and heterogeneity” (p.11).

Benefits to Student Participation

Creating spaces where the diversity of students have opportunities to voice their strengths, needs, concerns, ideas and dreams furthers Concordia’s “ongoing commitment to providing accessible advanced education” (Concordia University, “Embrace the City, Embrace the World”). Research from fields of sociology, psychology, and education highlight a variety of beneficial outcomes from utilizing more democratic practices and participatory methodologies in the classroom. Some of the benefits outlined include:

- Enhanced confidence and enthusiasm (Healey et al., 2014)
- “Increased intrinsic motivation and determination in learning” (Bennis, n.d.)
- Engagement in process, not just outcomes of learning (Healey et al.)
- Responsibility for, and ownership of their own learning (Healey et al.)
- Deepening understanding of and contributions to the academic community (Healey et al.)
- Fosters cooperative learning and collaborative problem-solving (Klein, 2006)
- The ability to connect academic and workplace learning (Carnell & Fung, 2017)
- Higher student attendance and achievement (Bennis, n.d.)
- Greater creativity and conceptual learning (Bennis, n.d.)

Undergraduate Survey Findings at Concordia

The majority of undergraduate students share a common interest of wanting to participate more in decision-making around their learning and overall experience at Concordia. In 2019, the CSU implemented the Annual Undergraduate Survey (AUS) to provide a platform — in addition to the existing platforms of referendum questions, the Council of Representative meetings, occasional surveys — for students to annually voice their opinions, ideas, and feedback to the union within a comprehensive survey, in order to keep up to date on issues concerning students. The survey covers a range of topics, largely

pertaining to students' experience in the classroom. 2019 was the annual survey's first year, where we received 1023 Concordia undergraduate responses, with the majority of respondents between the age range of 21-24 (47%), female (63%), white (63%), and Quebec residents (76%) (Clark-Gardner & Idris, 2019, p.4).

Recognizing Student Realities

As mentioned in *Higher Education Context*, students are increasingly facing higher instances of financial precarity due to increasing living and tuition costs. As a result, many students feel financially stressed and find it necessary to work part-time during their studies. Moreover, the large quantity of course materials and evaluations per course has resulted in students experiencing a negative impact on their mental health. This is shown as a reality for many Concordia students:

49% of Concordia undergraduate students surveyed work part-time (p.5).

56% of Concordia undergraduate students shared that they are “almost always” or “always” feel financially stressed (p.20)

21% “some of the time”

23% “hardly ever” or “never”

49% of student respondents indicated that they “hardly ever” or “never” feel that their homework is appropriate or proportionate to the amount of credits received (p.5).

32% “some of the time”

19% “almost always” or “always”

56% of students relayed that they “almost always” or “always” feel that the amount of course work affected their mental health (p.7).

22% “some of the time”

12% “hardly ever” or “never”

The data portrays that over half of surveyed students indicated experiencing financial stress and/or mental health impacts from high course work loads. Deregulated tuition rates, administrative fees, and course criteria are under the university's control, however, student responses indicate that the university's financial and academic expectations can be out of touch with student realities and thereby not effectively supportive of students' academic success. These survey findings highlight that Concordia needs to strengthen

their recognition of and responsiveness to students' complex, challenging realities and implement university policies that create accessible (including financially) learning environments for students. The best way to be in touch with student realities is by having student perspectives at the table and contributing to these policies and decisions. This involves a change in university processes and priorities. Namely, when the university is working within a business model system, there is a prioritization of increasing funds over accessibility and recognizing success based on outcomes over process. With regards to financial decisions, for instance, it is important to assert that including only one or two students within the consultation or decision-making process can be tokenistic, not inclusive or impactful, as students often feel that decisions will stay the same whether students are present or not.

Student Voice and Participation

The results from our 2019 dataset shows that a large majority of Concordia undergraduate students want to have more of a say in providing feedback and being part of decision-making in regards to their learning and program of study:

72% “almost always” or “always” want a say in how they learn (p.18).

61% “almost always” or “always” want a say in what they learn (p.6).

61% “almost always” or “always” want a say in how they are graded (p.18).

61% “almost always” or “always” want a say in university decision-making and policy (p.18).

The next highest response for each question is “some of the time” ranging from 24% to 31%. Less than 10% of students said that they “hardly ever” or “never” want a say in how they learn (4%), what they learn (7%), how they are graded (8%) or university decision-making and policy (9%) (p.18).

Although over 90% of students indicated that they would like to have a say “always”, “almost always” or “some of the time” in relation to their program, curriculum, syllabi, teaching styles, and types of assignments, many students responded that their current experience does not offer these opportunities. The majority of students stated that they “hardly ever” or “never” have a say in how they are evaluated (69%), or in university decision-making and policy (57%). Just under half of the students stated that they “hardly

ever” or “never” have a say in how they learn (46%) or what they learn (48%) (p.6).

Qualitative Responses

From the responses to the open-ended question, “Do you have any comments about your experience in Academia?”, it is evident that Concordia students can clearly articulate their concerns, insights and ideas in regards to pedagogy and their learning experience. Some main themes from student responses were a need for more hands-on learning experiences, diversifying types of evaluation, and diversifying teaching methods.

Hands-on, practical learning experience

“I wish it were more practical and hands-on so that I can learn beyond the four walls of my classroom or pages of my textbook” (p.8).

Although there are university initiatives to increase experiential learning at Concordia, many students mentioned that they felt there was not enough experiential learning within their program. This may be due to experiential learning opportunities being only available within certain faculties and departments, for instance, there are currently no co-op options for Fine Arts students. Moreover, these opportunities are generally additional experiences to have outside of their required courses and have restrictions (e.g. minimum GPA restrictions, and full-time status) that are not accessible to all students.

Diversifying types of evaluation

“Concordia places far too much grading emphasis on exams and tests (p.8)”

“It would be nice to improve the exam situation, less weight on finals maybe. Or allowing to learn other skills than memorizing. If team-work was allowed during finals, skills such as cooperation, time management and team work could be improved. It doesn’t make much sense to be tested on things that can be looked up quickly and memorized” (p.8).

Diversifying Teaching Methods

“Since starting at Concordia, I’ve felt as though very few professors actually care about the teaching part of their job and are far more concerned with their own research affairs.” (p.8)

“Professors should be people with good teaching ability rather than simply being a researcher who is forced to teach.” (p.8)

Many students say that there is a need for professors and the university as a whole to prioritize enhancing learning environments. Responses indicated that professors being experts in their field, is not synonymous with being a good teacher. Other students indicated that they have a mixture of “thoughtful, engaged, interdisciplinary people offering rich and nuanced pedagogy... [and] some professors obviously have never thought about teaching before landing the position and are doing the bare minimum.” Other notable comments were that describing teaching methods as “monotonous”, and professors not making themselves available enough for their students.(p.8)

Specific Ways to Increase Student Engagement and Participation

We asked students their opinion on four specific ways they could be more engaged and actively participating at the university. A large majority of students would like Concordia to implement the following:

More opportunities to learn outside of the classroom and in the Montreal community (p.6)



74% of students would like to have more opportunities to learn outside of the classroom and in the Montreal community

Faculty breakdown of students responding “Yes”:

81% Fine Arts

74% Arts & Science

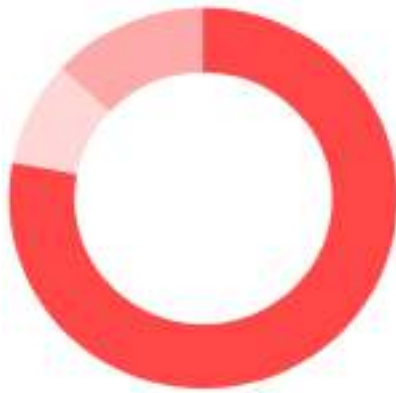
70% JMSB

68% GCS

12% of students responded “No”

13% of students responded “I don’t know”

Providing students with choices of assignments (p.6)



78% of students would like for professors to provide students with choices of assignments

Faculty breakdown of students responding "Yes":

83% Arts & Science

81% Fine Arts

74% JMSB

61% GCS

12% of students responded "No"

9% of students responded "I don't know"

Feedback to professors mid-way through the semester on the quality of their teaching in order for them to re-evaluate and improve their pedagogical tools. (p.6)



84% of students would like to be able to give feedback to professors mid-way through the semester

Faculty breakdown of students responding "Yes":

85% Arts & Science

84% GCS

81% Fine Arts

81% JMSB

7% of students responded "No"

9% of students responded "I don't know"

Increasing student representation on university boards and committees (e.g. Senate, Board of Governors, Standing Committee on Sexual Violence) (p.6)



62% of students would like the university to increase student representation on boards/committees

8% of students responded "No"

30% of students responded "I don't know"

Classroom Pedagogy: A Conversation Between Students and Professors

With the results from the survey indicating that students would like to have more voice and agency in their learning, the CSU co-organized a workshop with the Fine Arts Student Alliance (FASA) called Classroom Pedagogy: A Conversation Between Students and Professors on April 25th, 2019 in the SenseLab. The event received a high level of interest through our social media outreach, over 250 people were interested in attending, further demonstrating that students would like to be part of discussions around pedagogy.

Given the fundamental power dynamics between professors and students, it is especially important to create a space that encourages students to speak openly and honestly without repercussions. Small group discussions in spaces that are comfortable and allow people to move around easily tend to be more conducive to meaningful connection and sharing. The workshop created an open, welcoming and intimate space wherein attendees from across the university could share knowledge and converse about fostering more inclusive teaching practices and learning experiences. Similar gatherings could be initiated — either faculty-specific or across faculties — as a way to share ideas and receive regular feedback from members of the Concordia community, and thereby creating spaces for students to participate and contribute to pedagogy at Concordia.

During this facilitated conversation, participants highlighted these three main themes:

Student evaluation

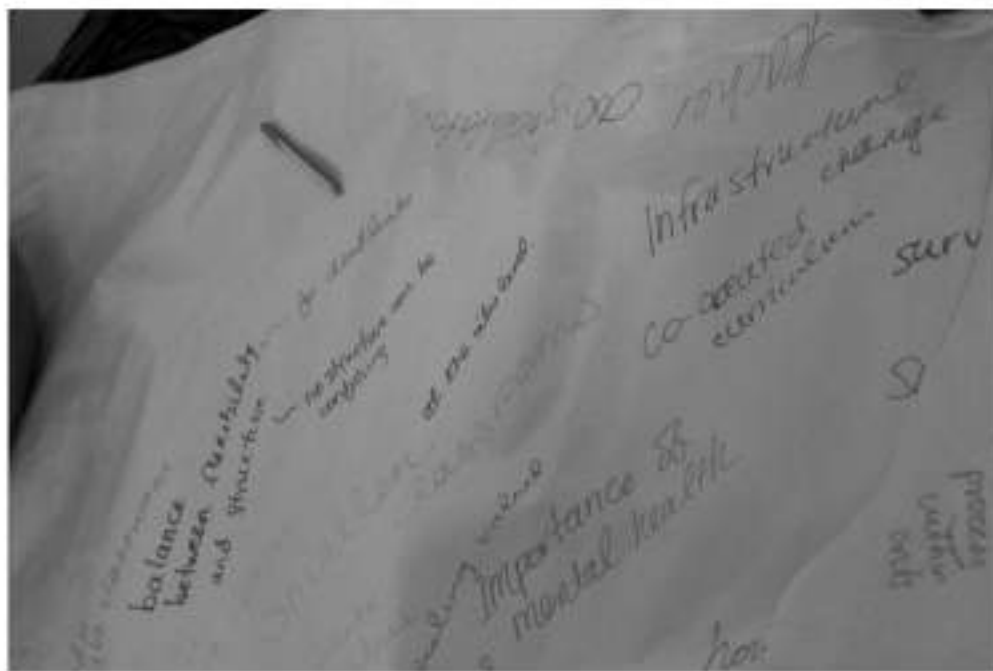
- Most students expressed a shared concern of “having to learn how to get good grades rather than learning.” (anonymous, personal communication, 2019, April 29)
- A desire to have more diverse forms of assignments and evaluation (e.g. peer evaluation and self-evaluation).

Courseload

- A need to focus more on quality of learning over quantity: “An essay is like a borscht, it needs to have time to ferment. An essay is a meal; it needs to be whole no matter the size of the paper.” (anonymous, personal communication, 2019, April 29)
- Large courseloads (covering a lot of material and having many assignments) can create unrealistic expectations that can impede sustained learning and academic success, as well as negatively affect mental and physical health.

Learning environment

- Large class sizes, particularly for introduction courses, can result in alienating and inaccessible learning experiences for first-year students.
- A desire for increased student responsibility in regards to having choices and contributing to decision-making, resulting in more ownership of their own learning experiences.
- Slow pedagogy was mentioned throughout the conversation, in regards to focusing on in-depth and process-based learning.



Photos by Hannah Ewen (2019) at Classroom Pedagogy Event.

Frameworks and Methodologies to Increase Student Voice

There are a variety of pedagogical entrance points that focus on encouraging student participation and voice within the classroom. The following frameworks relay some of the relevant approaches to promoting greater student voice and engagement. We begin with examples of broad pedagogical frameworks, then look at specific practical approaches and methodologies that relate and reflect the above theoretical frameworks in different ways.

Pedagogical Frameworks

Learner-centred Pedagogy

This framework is based on the idea that students must be active in constructing their own understandings of the world, with support from the teacher. The traditional teaching functions of “telling, delivering, directing...are replaced by the models of mentor, mediator, facilitator, coach, and guide.” (Klein, 2006, p.15). Emphasis is put on professors responding to student work through comprehensive feedback and providing divergent questions. Furthermore, students often have a say in the selection of learning tasks as well as how the task is completed (Mascolo, 2009).

Co-constructivism

Constructivist theory is based on an understanding that knowledge and meaning are constructed through experience. Constructivist theories highlight the importance of comprehensive, integrative learning rather than fact retention and recall. A co-constructivist approach focuses on shared responsibility of learning and collaborative construction of knowledge. Co-constructivism focuses on facilitating learning environments that encourage open dialogue, as dialogue “prompts reflection, critical investigation, analysis, and construction of knowledge” (Carnell, 2007, p.31).

Democratic Pedagogy

Within a democratic classroom, knowledge is seen as being “created and shared by both professor and student” (Egbo, 2009, p.113). Dewey describes democratic pedagogy as “more than a form of government, it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 2015, p.87). This participatory structure is based around students and professors working as partners in learning and decision-making, which cultivates student responsibility and accountability, as well as collaboration,

negotiation, listening and communication skills. Furthermore, “sincerity, openness, civic-mindedness, freedom, equity, respect for self and others, solidarity...a sense of belonging” are essential qualities in fostering a democratic space in order to create “an ongoing forum where students thoughts are valued and where the needs of the group are addressed” (Egbo, p.113).

Pedagogical Methodologies

Universal Design for Learning

Within a learner-centred pedagogy, UDL is often used as a set of principles as a way to create more accessible learning environments across ages, abilities, and disciplines. It is based on three primary principals: multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement (Wideman & Odrowski, 2012). UDL guides the design of teaching methods, materials and assessment by customizing and adjusting to meet individual needs. For instance, offering varied ways in which students can express what they have learned, could mean providing students with choices of assignment formats (i.e., essay, video, presentation, exam, etc.).

Experiential Learning

Paulo Freire (2005) states that education “must begin with the human-world relationship”, as we “do not exist apart from the world, apart from reality” (p.85). Experiential learning is a broad term that can take different forms within and outside classroom spaces. Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall (2009) defines experiential learning as “the notion that understanding is not a fixed or unchangeable element of thought and that experiences can contribute to it's forming and re-forming” (p.15). As mentioned earlier when reviewing the qualitative responses from the CSU’s annual survey (see *Undergraduate Survey Findings at Concordia*), Concordia students specifically indicated that they want more practical application and hands-on learning opportunities. Moreover, only 45% of Concordia students indicated that they felt that their program prepares them for a related workforce or to pursue further education (Clark-Gardner & Idris, 2019, p.5).

Inquiry-based/problem-based approaches aim to go beyond subject knowledge into applying real-world problem solving and exploration. Problem-posing education allows the student to “perceive critically the way they exist in the world...[seeing] the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 2005, p.83). Furthermore, there is substantial evidence in the “effectiveness of this approach in stimulating deep and retained learning” (Healey et al., 2014, p.8).

Collaborative learning through group discussions, group projects, and even group evaluation can enhance experiential learning. However, it can become a negative experience for some students if they are not given a reasonable amount of class time to work together, and if there are not thought-provoking prompts or a framework to work within.

Linking teaching and research can provide opportunities to use critical thinking, problem-solving, and practice research methodologies while entering new spaces beyond the classroom for learning (research facilities, such as labs or libraries). Integrating research and teaching goes hand-in-hand with Concordia's focus on doubling research.

Transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary approaches work together to encourage creative, versatile thinking through juxtaposition and blurring boundaries across and beyond disciplines to make connections and construct new knowledge (Klein, 2006).

Praxis is a transformative learning process that aims to address the complexities of real systemic issues through critical reflection, and building community to enact social change (Freire, 2005). Praxis also involves an emphasis on "agency and competence, using pedagogies guided by engaged, 'whole-person' and transformative approaches to learning" (Ryan & Tillbury, 2013, p.5).

Engaging Dialogue

Freire (2005) emphasizes that dialogue is an "indispensable component" within learning processes that "characterizes an epistemological relationship." (p.17). This indicates that dialogue cannot be confined to being solely an instructional technique or tactic (p.17). Learning through dialogue requires a commitment to allow time and space for learning to continue, which demands "unlearn[ing] the habit of stopping thought" and "cutting learning off" (Manning, 2015). Substantive, engaged dialogue is not "asking close-ended questions with one word or short answers" or when the professor self-answers (Egbo, 2009, p.113). When dialogue goes beyond looking for predetermined answers, it can become a medium that provokes exploration. Using prompts can be an effective method to stimulate student participation. Prompts that have enabling constraints, meaning that it provides a structure that is "oriented between the familiar and the uncertain" can guide students into a space where they can both connect with the question, while also challenging themselves (Castro, 2007, p.8).

Diverse Participation

Participation takes many forms, and vocal participation is only one way of recognizing student engagement. Diversifying the ways in which students can engage with others and the material, and in providing feedback to their professors, is essential to creating classrooms that are more inclusive and accessible. An example of this could be giving students time to reflect on questions through journaling or in small groups. Having class discussions and providing opportunities for written feedback from students on their learning styles and preferences of how they would like to engage with people and with the material can expand the possibilities of student engagement, agency and deepen learning. For many programs and courses across the university, this means acknowledging that students participate differently and rethinking how participation is evaluated. Furthermore, in fostering an environment in which students feel safe, included and encouraged to voice their opinions, educators need to be aware of the systemic inequalities that stratify our society (racism, ableism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ageism, etc.) and address these injustices that arise within the classroom and course materials.

Community/classroom Guidelines

Establishing community/classroom guidelines encourages respectful and open dialogue within a shared learning space. This involves the class having an explicit discussion about expectations, needs and boundaries of the professor, of the students, and of the class as a whole. This activity sets ground rules for shared decision-making that increases their responsibility and accountability in helping make the classroom a comfortable place to be and learn.

Shared Decision-making

Shared decision-making stands at the center of a reciprocal learning environment, in which all those participating have the opportunity to contribute equally, but not necessarily in the same ways (Marquis et al., 2018). It encourages and engages students as collaborators in teaching and learning, establishing working relationships based on reciprocity, mutual respect and shared responsibility. Students can provide unique insight from their experiences and backgrounds that inform and contribute to the practice and institution of policies, curriculum and syllabi that directly affect them. When students are treated as partners in higher education traditional assumptions about the identities and relationships of students and teachers are subverted (Matthews et al., 2018, p.11). Transforming students from a more passive role to becoming “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher”, involves the “teacher present[ing] material to the students for their consideration” (e.g. negotiating course syllabi) (Freire, 2005, p.81). This experience can become

transformative for both student and teacher, as it offers “alternative ways of being, knowing, speaking, relating, and feeling” (Shor, 1996, p.2).

Questioning Hierarchies

In order to critically reflect on the hierarchy of the institution, policies and teaching practices, it is vital to step back and question the purpose of these authorities. Since the role of the professor is part of a larger system of institutional authority, it becomes a complex undertaking to shift hierarchical roles in order to move towards developing a partnership role with students. Questions that arise from these considerations include: What is the underlying purpose of taking a role of authority? How can boundaries, responsibilities, and roles be established in nonauthoritative ways? Are there aspects of teaching where authority is essential or nonessential? In what ways can power be shared within the classroom? Freire (2005) sees the purpose of the authoritarian teacher as only a means in which it can bring more agency, that “authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it” (p.80). Ultimately, the development of reciprocal roles between professor and student means a shift, in which the professor is “no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught” and students “who in turn while being taught also teach” (p.80).

Case Studies of University Structures that Encourage Student Voice

We will be looking at two case studies that demonstrate approaches universities have taken to encourage student voice, participation and agency. These case studies illustrate, as stated earlier, that change needs to happen at macro, meso and micro levels. The first case study, Students as Partners demonstrates students taking part in decision-making within their faculties, involving institutional changes to incorporate students in the processes of curriculum and program design, which then impacts learning experiences in the classroom. The second case study, L’entente d’évaluation d’UQAM (UQAM’s evaluation agreement) demonstrates how students participate in classroom decision-making in regards to how they are evaluated, which is established within the university’s policies. The case studies showcase concrete possibilities of how to incorporate student voice and participation practices within institutional and course processes and decision-making.

***Students as Partners* in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**

Students as Partners (SaP) is a pedagogical approach recently implemented within many higher education institutions, predominantly in Canada, the US, the UK, and Australia (Kupatadze, 2017). SaP lays out a process of student engagement that positions students as co-creators and active collaborators with faculty, the institution and the curriculum. It is common for student participation to take the form of course evaluations and in departmental staff-student committees, “it is rarer for institutions to go beyond the voice and engage students as partners in designing the curriculum and giving pedagogic advice and consultancy.” (Healey et al., 2014, p.9). This approach challenges traditional educational structures use of non-democratic, hierarchical structures, predetermined learning outcomes, and its view student as client (Healey et al., 2014). SaP is “a process of engagement, not a product... [as] it is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself.” (p.7)

Partnership is not synonymous with consultation, involvement, and participation. Within the SaP framework, partnership goes beyond opportunities “to express individual opinions” (consultation), “tak[ing] a more active role” (involvement), and “decisions... taken by students to take part in activities” (participation) (p.16). Partnership is where students are engaged in a “joint ownership and decision-making over both the process and the outcome” (Porter, 2012, p.3).

McMaster University and Birmingham City School of Business are two examples of universities employing such programs since 2013 and 2010 respectively (MacPherson Institute, n.d.; Birmingham City University, n.d.). At McMaster, students involved in the SaP program contribute to the development and design of new courses, creating resources for both faculty and students, and collaborate with faculty on other teaching and learning projects (International Students as Partners Institute, n.d.). Under this program, any enrolled student can apply to become a partner and positions for students are paid (16/hour for undergraduates and 20/hour for graduate students) (MacPherson Institute, n.d.). Any student or staff member may submit a project for inclusion in the SaP program. At Birmingham City University, the SaP program has designed over 160 projects and employed over 400 students, “dramatically improving learning experiences across the university in a wide variety of areas” (Birmingham City University, n.d.). Receiving compensation of 10 pounds/hour, students are given the opportunity to gain valuable experience through practical research and one-on-one time working with staff members on an equal plane in a two-way practice. Elon University is another university who has embraced SaP within their Center for Engaged Learning. Their website has a thorough

explanation, as well as, resources to learn more about this pedagogical approach: <https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/doing-engaged-learning/students-as-partners/>

The Students as Partners approach demonstrates how universities can move towards doable, mutually beneficial goals that ignite relationship-building, partnerships and collaboration. This approach creates a valuable shift towards greater student involvement. Elisabeth Dunne (2011) writes:

There is a subtle, but extremely important, difference between an institution that 'listens' to students and responds accordingly, and an institution that gives students the opportunity to explore areas that they believe to be significant, to recommend solutions and to bring about the required changes. The concept of 'listening to the student voice' – implicitly if not deliberately – supports the perspective of student as 'consumer', whereas 'students as change agents' explicitly supports a view of the student as 'active collaborator' and 'co-producer', with the potential for transformation (p.4).

Here, Dunne articulates the difference between a customer-service-kind-of-listening that sees students as consumers within higher education, compared to the collaborative and empowering nature of partnership. Consultation can be a positive step forward, but it is a beginning. Student representation on committees can be a positive way for students to contribute, but it may also feel quite limiting, isolating and may also feel tokenistic at times. For instance, in situations where:

- A student sits as a minority in the room;
- When the rest of the committee seems to vote as a voting block that represents institutional (sometimes corporate) interests;
- When rhetoric, university structures and processes are complex, inaccessible and/or not explained;
- When there is a general reinforcement of established processes and discouragement of any changes to those processes;
- When there is not adequate time given for discussion on agenda points;
- When students are discouraged from speaking with other members outside of the committee.

In these situations, a student can feel that their voice and vote has a very minimal impact. In cases where students feel like they do have an impact, it can often be from hours of unpaid labour articulating and framing their perspective in a way that allows academics, staff and administrators to hear. Partnership offers a process in which people across the

university can work towards finding common ground.

L'Entente d'évaluation de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

UQAM's evaluation agreement provides an example of how democratic processes can take place within higher education classrooms by establishing institutional policies. This evaluation agreement happens through a negotiation process between the professor and the students in regards to the evaluation within course syllabus.

The negotiation process is laid out in UQAM's policy, Règlement numéro 5 (UQAM, 2019). Within this policy, it indicates that the amount, deadlines, and percentages of assignments within the course syllabus are up for discussion and need to be democratically agreed upon by both the professor and students. During the first two weeks of classes, this agreement contract must be signed by the professor and two students from the class. One limitation is in the case of a course being taught with multiple group sections, there cannot be large disparities between the various groups' assignments.

In the case of a dispute that inhibits the agreement to be signed, the academic affairs coordinator of l'association étudiante modulaire (Modular Student Association) or a faculty member can be contacted to act as a mediator (AMÉBES, n.d.). If there continues to be disagreement, the head of the department can decide on the agreement, which you can appeal through les conseils académiques (the academic council). After appeal, the decision is final. Under considerable circumstances (i.e. a strike, a teacher is ill, etc.), an amendment of the agreement can be reopened and modified if the professor agrees and at least two-thirds of the group are present. Finally, in exceptional circumstances, the Vice-Rector for Academic Life may allow, where appropriate, the adoption of changes to the evaluation agreement without having to file a notice.

There are different approaches that the professors and students can take to reach an agreement. Overall, professors come prepared either with a draft of the syllabus or provide a syllabus with choices. Some professors are open to modifying the form of assignment (e.g. exam or essay), even though that is not specified in the policy. The negotiation can happen in different ways. For instance, professors may leave the room to let the students discuss, while others stay during the conversation. Students can either decide through consensus or by majority vote if they agree with what the professor has prepared or if they want to propose a modification (AMÉBES, n.d.).

Two other noteworthy mentions within the policy is that exams cannot be worth more than

50% of the final grade of the course, and if the evaluation involves single quarterly work, the process of completing this work must be evaluated several times during the session (i.e. staged notation).

Discussion

Concordia and the CSU both want an accessible university that encourages student wellness, and fosters student academic achievement. The aim of this report is to bring attention to the voices of students who would like to be a part of the discussion and decision-making both within and beyond the classroom. Student inclusion across these spaces offers opportunities for students to learn, while students are also providing invaluable perspectives to professors, staff and administration at Concordia. As outlined in the Report, research shows that initiatives that encourage student voice, active participation and partnership bring a diverse array of benefits to the university community. These benefits include increased student attendance, academic achievement, cooperation, responsibility, creativity, confidence, and contributions to the academic community (Healey et al., 2014; Klein, 2006; Bennis, n.d.).

While the 2019 CSU survey findings show that most Concordia undergraduates would like to have a say in what they learn, how they learn, how they are evaluated, as well as, having a say in university decision-making and policy, a majority of students currently feel that they “never” or “hardly ever” have a say in these areas (Clark-Gardner & Idris, 2019, p.5-6). Student qualitative responses articulate their desire for more diverse teaching methods, such as, hands-on learning and more choice and variation in how they are evaluated (p.8). The survey reveals the importance of strengthening measures to address student health and well-being given that the majority of students felt financially stressed and that their studies negatively impact their mental health (p.20). Students can be a part of these conversations and solutions through collaborative student-university partnerships that emphasize respect, openness, and innovation. Together, Concordia and the CSU has a valuable role in making this happen.

Student voice is a particular importance given the normalization of corporate university culture that prioritizes productive efficiency and the quantification of success over the quality of life for students, faculty and staff. How can institutional expectations and processes align with faculty and student wellness? How can we establish a balanced approach between process and product, quality and quantity, and connectivity/productivity? Undergraduate students need to have a voice in how they are impacted by this market style culture and become key partners in creating learning environments where they can thrive.

The Student as Partners (see p.18) approach provides a valuable example of how universities can move towards doable, mutually beneficial goals that ignite relationship-building, partnerships and collaboration. UQAM's l'entente d'évaluation demonstrates how pedagogical processes can be implemented into university-wide policies as a way to legitimize student voice and participation within the classroom structures at the institution. Many Concordia professors are adapting their pedagogies through integrating practices that increase student participation and decision-making. These initiatives affirm the CSU survey and *Classroom Pedagogy: A Conversation Between Students and Teachers* findings on the importance of Concordia undergraduate students contributions to pedagogy, curriculum, evaluation and the institutional culture. The CSU undergraduate survey findings invite our Concordia community — students, faculty/instructors, staff and administrators — to critically reflect on our current understandings and enactments of student voice in the goal to deepen and expand the meaningful integration of student voice across all facets of our community.

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