



Making Room:

Improving Students' Opportunities for Participation

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Why Do We Need to Talk About Participation?

Firstly, we know through extensive research into teaching and learning, that activity is essential for a sustainable learning process

Secondly, education is situated in a cultural context, which shapes both the content we teach and the teaching methods we use.

Thirdly, higher education is an arena which reproduces and strengthens inequalities

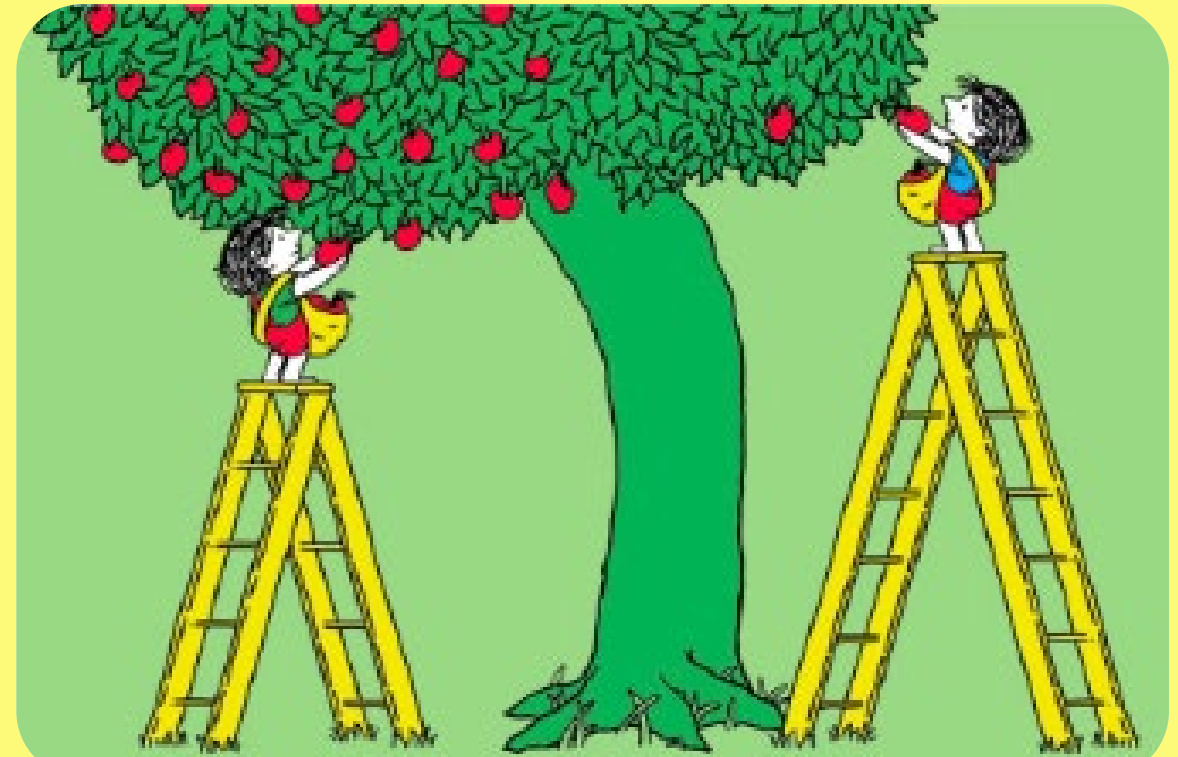
... And why *democratic* participation?

Democratic participation introduces another dimension to participation:

Participation describes students' active partaking in classroom activities, such as group work, discussions, presentations and so on...

... ***A democratic model of participation*** introduces a focus on creating the best possible opportunities for active participation for as many students as possible, and working to ensure, that students view their participation as legitimate and valued in the classroom

It's a question of equity, not equality!



The Inquiry (in broad strokes)



Theoretical Framework

Majority and minority dynamics

Rather than focusing on specific categorizations (such as gender, class, race), I choose an approach where I looked holistically on the classroom as a space where positions and privilege is negotiated by everyone

Sense of Belonging

Describing how students experience an integration at their study programmes/educational institution, and how this affects their position and opportunities for participation

Feminist perspective

Using a critical feminist perspective, I sought to gain insight in to how classroom dynamics and opportunities for participation are constructed through interactions and relations between students and teachers

What Did I Learn Through My Analysis?

1. Sense of belonging can have two aspects: a professional and a social aspect – and both influence students' position a lot
2. A student's position influences their motivation to participate – and students in more privileged positions gain influence on what goes on in the classroom through their participation
3. How we talk about knowledge is important – opportunities for participation are shaped depending on how we frame this

... And what are the implications of this?

1. Support Students' Sense of Belonging

By showing interest in your students, you can help them develop a stronger sense of belonging to their study programme and educational institution. This can boost their motivation and enable them to participate more actively.

Be creative: consider how to facilitate activities that can strengthen students' belonging

2. Use Variety

By using a variety of different teaching methods, the classroom dynamics change. Not only can it accommodate many different types of learners, it can also challenge social norms and positions in the classroom.

Through varying teaching methods, positions in the classroom can switch: normally quiet students can get a chance to speak up – louder students may be forced to be quiet and reflect.

3. Create Opportunities for Discussion and Reflection

Encouraging discussion and reflection helps students to develop critical thinking as well as their own perspectives on different materials – here it is also important to make students exchange thoughts and questions with each other to deepen their understanding

As teachers, you can make students present their perspectives, and also present multiple perspectives on something, in order to create an open forum for discussion of the material

4. Include Students in Decision-Making

When planning a lecture or a course (or even an entire study programme), letting students participate in shaping their education show them, that their perspectives are legitimate and have value, and it can help create a less hierarchical classroom.

Ask and listen to the students, so you can better scaffold their learning process.

Of course it is not so simple...

With all 4 four pedagogical initiatives, you have to consider:

What is possible with the conditions in the classroom and the working conditions of the teachers? What needs to change?

What is the responsibilities of teachers and administrators? Is there a limit?