Promoting student participation in teaching: Starting points and suggestions for teachers and students

Licence note

What is the purpose of this collection in teaching?

This document provides teachers and students with concrete starting points for how student participation in teaching can look. Specifically, it addresses the following topics in relation to the collaboration between teachers and students in teaching events**: (1) framework and conditions, (2) shared responsibility for the success of teaching, (3) feedback and error culture, and (4) openness and dialogue between teachers and students**. This collection offers inspiration and examples for all four areas that teachers and students can use as a guide. They can jointly agree on individual priorities, which suggestions are appropriate for the respective setting, and what they would like to try out. Student participation can take various forms, both on the part of teachers and students. This collection therefore addresses what teachers and students can do in detail to achieve this. It includes ideas and practical tips that you can reflect on together (or individually) and from which you can choose what suits you best. It is not a matter of implementing everything, and in this respect, these are always suggestions and by no means expectations of teachers and students or criteria that must be met. The aim should be for teachers and students to use this collection as a starting point for dialogue, where student participation can be enriching for both sides. To this end, we would like to pose the following key question: How can courses become a joint project in which both teachers and students can contribute their perspectives and take responsibility for successful collaboration?

If teachers and students want to record their ideas for a course together, they can use **the text modules** at the end of this collection. These can be included in the syllabus (course concept). Typically, **a syllabus** contains information about: Organizational matters (teacher, contact details, e.g., office hours, title, room, and time of the course), learning objectives and competencies, structure and sequence of topics and learning activities within the course, explanations of coursework and examinations (with assessment criteria, if applicable), bibliography, and, if applicable, rules for collaboration (e.g., mutual expectations). The text modules serve as suggestions for additions to the syllabus, including **collaboration in the course.**

This compilation is based in particular on exchanges within the BiLinked project (Bielefeld teaching innovations for the collaborative development of digital teaching and learning formats, in German: Bielefelder Lehrinnovationen für kollaborative Entwicklung digitaler Lehr-Lernformate). Various examples of good practice from Bielefeld teaching have also been included.

Teachers and students clarify the framework and conditions for the course

Establishing mutual obligations

- Teacher provides a **written syllabus** for the course (digital)
- Students read and supplement the written syllabus carefully
- Teachers communicate **their availability** (e.g., office hours, emails, open door policy, absences) in the syllabus, for example, and students adhere to it
- Students and instructors formulate **mutual expectations** for the design of the course in a teaching-learning agreement and a participation agreement
- Students and teachers discuss **formal learning objectives**, and students have the opportunity to set personal learning goals for themselves

Defining communication rules

- Students and teachers jointly agree on a set of **netiquette rules that can be viewed at any time**, which set out the rules for communicating with each other, and discuss what will happen in the event of non-compliance with these agreements. Students also set out rules for communicating with each other (e.g., for group work)
- Students decide which **channels and platforms** they will use to communicate with each other and with the teacher

Discussing negotiation and co-determination frameworks

- Students and teachers discuss **what has been decided** (e.g., exam topics and dates), **what can be influenced** (e.g., literature selection, meetings), and how (e.g., questions, keynote speeches). Accessibility (e.g., digital offerings) **and adaptation of participation formats to study progress are taken into account**
- Students and teachers **negotiate the framework conditions for constructive cooperation** in an open discussion. For example, students can use a survey at the beginning of the course to make suggestions for shaping the learning and working atmosphere, such as ensuring that there is plenty of room for student participation

Asking about needs and taking them into account

- There is a brief exchange about contacts**, points of contact, and contact persons within the university** (e.g., student counseling, mentoring systems)
- Before or at the start of the course, the instructor anonymously asks the students about **their needs** (tools, language, physical/social/digital barriers, approach, capacities, and prior knowledge), e.g., via a survey. The students participate in this survey

Teachers and students share responsibility for the success of the course

Viewing the course as a joint project

- Teachers and students reflect on how students can become active and **take joint responsibility for the success of the course**
- Teachers give students the opportunity to plan and conduct a session in consultation with and taking into account the capacities of students, either alone or together with the teacher (**co-teaching**). Students take advantage of this offer based on their resources and coordinate closely with the teacher

Creating freedom

- Students can contribute their own ideas for seminars, both in terms of content and format, and do so in consultation with the instructor (e.g., **joint development of the syllabus**, literature and discussion requests)
- Instructors take the opportunity to try out **new formats** (with an open mind) and students are receptive to this. Students provide early feedback on any adjustments that may be necessary
- If module requirements allow, **ungraded exams** provide an opportunity to try things out and take risks, and students can learn a lot from feedback from teachers
- **Alternative study and examination requirements** (e.g., portfolios, learning diaries, blog posts, panel discussions, poster sessions) are tried out wherever possible

Enabling skills and talent development

- Teachers and students discuss which **subject-specific skills are helpful for the success of the course** and which **interdisciplinary offerings** can support students (e.g., SKILLS offerings on writing and presenting from the Center for Teaching and Learning)
- Students can contribute skills they have **acquired outside the university** (e.g., volunteer work, part-time jobs, service learning) to the course (e.g., through micro-teaching, peer formats: passing on knowledge to other students). Teachers and students can make suggestions for this

Promoting autonomy

- Students can help shape their **learning path and learning methods** during (asynchronous) work phases and contact their teachers if necessary
- Where possible, students can help determine their **exam topic** within the scope of the course topic and with the support of the teacher

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Teachers and students shape their feedback and error culture

Establishing an error-friendly culture: creating space for experimentation and failure

- Students and teachers deal with **their own mistakes in the course openly** and constructively, demonstrating that anyone can make mistakes. In doing so, they ensure that their (non)verbal reactions are appreciative. Mistakes may provide an opportunity to investigate the causes: together, they reflect on why something is not (yet) working and how they can find a solution together
- Students make an effort to contribute even when they are not entirely sure. Teachers also signal where they may have uncertainties

Making the purpose and use of feedback transparent

- Before feedback activities (both giving and receiving feedback), the teacher explains **the purpose of the feedback** (e.g., written vs. oral feedback within the course or online evaluations) and **how this feedback will be used**

Creating a culture of appreciative feedback

- Feedback is given in an **appreciative, constructive, and specific manner**
- Students and teachers **take each other's feedback seriously**, and teachers adapt their courses to meet the needs of students. Students reflect on how they meet the expectations of teachers
- Teachers give students feedback, and students can also **take the initiative and indicate** when they would like to give or receive feedback (e.g., feedback on content or on the course of the class)

Offering different types of feedback

- Teachers offer **anonymous feedback options** on the design of the course (e.g., on Moodle) as well as **verbal feedback rounds in the seminar context**, possibly also formats for interim evaluation (e.g., teaching analysis poll in the middle of the semester). Students participate and can make their own suggestions for suitable formats (e.g., with regard to individual student needs and accessibility).
- Teachers **provide formative** (regular, process-oriented, timely) **feedback** themselves and also create space for (guided) **peer feedback** so that students can give each other (formative) feedback (e.g., on exercises in the course or in the context of term paper conferences and writing workshops).
- Students and teachers can decide to use the last few minutes at the end of a session to reflect on the session **together in a plenary session** and consider what should be done differently in the next session (written alternative: one-minute paper, possibly with anonymous submission at the end of the session).

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Teachers and students promote openness and dialogue

Disclosing the understanding of roles and expectations

- Teachers and students reflect on their own understanding of teaching and learning and disclose this in order to **make mutual expectations transparent**
- Teachers and students reflect (for teachers: critical of power) on **their own roles** within the hierarchically organized university structures and how these affect the relationship between teachers and students
- Students recognize that teachers have **other responsibilities besides teaching**. Teachers allocate adequate time to teaching and reflect together with students on the relationship between research and teaching
- Teachers are aware that students have **other commitments besides their studies**. Students fulfill their obligations in their studies
- Mutual concrete expectations are recorded (e.g., in the **syllabus**)

Discussing concerns and uncertainties together

- Teachers and students try to deal with their own uncertainties transparently and, where possible, address them with each other in a **protected setting**
- With regard to forms of student participation, teachers seek exchange with other teachers and students with other students in order to obtain **further suggestions** and make use of **continuing education formats**

Making decision-making processes transparent

- Teachers explain how decisions about the course are made and, if possible, consider **alternative decisions** with students. Students consider what questions and suggestions they can contribute to the decision-making process
- Teachers announce **upcoming decisions** about the course and involve students where possible

Coordinating opportunities for student participation

- Students actively participate according to their individual abilities. Teachers use **low-threshold methods for exchange** between students (e.g., think-pair-share) and supplement these with written formats (e.g., in forums)
- Teachers and students jointly decide **on participatory teaching and learning methods** and recognize that student participation arises from cooperation between students and teachers and must be an active decision on both sides. Discussions are held with each other about this
- Teachers review their own teaching plans for potential in terms of **enabling and valuing student participation**, and students realistically assess where and how they want to get involved with regard to their own study plans

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Text modules for the syllabus (for individual adaptation):

The following text modules can be used for various sections of a course syllabus. They serve as examples and **need to be adapted to the specific context**, as not all content is suitable for every course. As supplementary suggestions for **joint coordination** between teachers and students, the text modules offer an opportunity to **continue working on the syllabus in a participatory manner**.

Summary: Contents of the syllabus
As a teacher, I provided the students with the syllabus, and we, the students, read it thoroughly and took note of it. As a student, I asked my questions and made my suggestions. The syllabus states ☐ how best to contact the teacher ☐ and how quickly a response can be expected, ☐ what learning objectives are to be achieved through the course, ☐ how the content of the course is planned, ☐ all dates and deadlines relevant to the course, ☐ what students must do for an exam or coursework, ☐ when feedback for the course will be collected.
I, the teacher, provided the students with the syllabus (in digital form) and gave them the opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions.
We, the students, read the syllabus thoroughly and took note of it, asked our questions, and made our suggestions.

Competemcies and learning objectives

We, the students,
 	
are expected to achieve the following goals through this course:
    ☐ [xxx]
 	
must do the following to achieve these goals:
    ☐ [xxx]
 	
have formulated personal learning goals that we would like to achieve through this course :
    ☐ [xxx]
 	
would also like to achieve the following learning goals as a group:
    ☐ [xxx]

I, the teacher, must do the following to support students in achieving the goals formulated in the group: ☐ [xxx]

Basics of cooperation between teachers and students

Clarify the framework conditions for the course

We, the students,

- ☐ attend the courses and independently inform ourselves about the content afterwards if we are unable to attend,
- ☐ prepare for the session with the materials,
- ☐ can organize our asynchronous work phases ourselves and contact the instructor if
- ☐ necessary,
- ☐ complete our assignments on time and if we are unable to meet a deadline, we inform the instructor X days in advance,
- ☐ decide by X whether or not to take an exam, and if we
- ☐ are to choose or agree on a topic ourselves, we do so by X,
- ☐ expect from the instructor:
  - o [xxx]
- ☐ expect from each other:
  - o [xxx]
- ☐ [xxx]

I, the teacher,

- ☐ Inform students (if possible) at least X hours in advance via X if a session is canceled, and communicate afterwards how this canceled session will be handled.
- ☐ Make materials available X days in advance to prepare for the sessions.
- ☐ Make materials available X days after the sessions to follow up on them.
- ☐ Accompany students' asynchronous work phases and be available.
- ☐ Accompany students during asynchronous work phases and be available,
- ☐ Have already determined the following things for the course:
  - o [xxx]
- ☐ expect the following from students:
  - o [xxx]
- ☐ [xxx]

We, the teacher and the students, have discussed communication rules and agreed on the following arrangements:

- ☐ In plenary:

- ☐ In group work:

Sharing responsibility for the success of the course

We, the students,

- ☐ can actively participate in organizing the following meetings:
  - o [xxx]

☐ need the following support to participate in organizing:
  o [xxx]
☐ can organize the following sessions themselves:
  o [xxx]
☐ need the following support to organize sessions themselves:
  o [xxx]
☐ [xxx]

I, the teacher,

☐ support students in helping to shape sessions as follows:
  o [xxx]
☐ support students in self-organizing sessions as follows:
  o [xxx]
☐ [xxx]

We, the instructor and the students, view this course as our joint project and are considerate of each other's capacities.

Shaping a culture of feedback and error management

We, the students,

☐ have the opportunity to provide feedback on the course in the following ways and at the following times:
  o [xxx]
☐ inform the instructor if we would like to provide feedback in between these times,
☐ view mistakes as learning opportunities and discuss them respectfully and constructively
☐ [xxx]

I, the teacher,

☐ give students the opportunity to receive content-related feedback from me and from each other (peer feedback) in the following ways:
  o [xxx]
☐ can give students process-related feedback on how I experience our
☐ collaboration in the course,
☐ provide students with feedback on the content of their work no later than X weeks after they have submitted it,
☐ [xxx]

We, the teacher and the students, discussed feedback rules and agreed on the following arrangements:

☐ [xxx]

Would we like to sign our agreement?

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