

## Facilitating for Equity

### What does it mean to facilitate for equity?

Facilitating for equity means that we pay attention to historic and contemporary experiences of marginalization and how they manifest in our classrooms, and we work to actively combat patterns where people from non-dominant groups are less likely to participate equitably because of the ways we have designed our class time, space and dynamics.

Equity is about creating conditions in which disadvantaged students (whether it be racialized, disabled, English Language Learners, women, trans students, etc.) are able to participate as well as privileged students. This means that we must devise diverse ways of student participation that disrupt normalized participation dynamics that reinforce the privilege of some of our students, and exclude others.

### Why should we facilitate for equity?

There is ample research that shows that from an early age, boys and men raise their hands more quickly and more often, are called on more, and receive more affirmation and encouragement from their teachers. The same is true for White people vis a vis racialized and Indigenous people. This is often because of implicit bias, rather than a teacher intentionally preferring men in class. It also is about the ways that people perform gender and race, where cisgender boys, for example, are encouraged to speak up often, and thus continue to speak often in class as they age, while cisgender girls become less and less likely to speak in class as they age.

It's really easy to call on people who raise their hands most, fastest. As teachers, we often want to reward participation, as it helps us move more quickly through material, and it avoids that awkward pause. But there is a cost to calling on those who are always eager to speak— it means that other students are likely to feel that you don't care about their ideas and that their ideas are less valid than those who speak first and fastest.

To facilitate for equity, you have to think about designing around this but planning your tutorials with equity in mind. Build a community where people feel safe, by designing lots of different ways to participate such as giving people opportunities to write and develop their ideas individually before moving to pairs/small groups/large groups, as well as organizing lessons so all of your time is not large group activities. There are lots of ways to design for this, and these interventions often help disabled students and ELL students participate as well, while giving you a more productive environment where more students are thinking, practicing, and speaking in class.

### What are some strategies for facilitating for equity?

- **Set a standard of inclusion.** Articulate why all student contributions to class discussions—a variety of voices and perspectives—are important. Model the valuing of diverse voice. For example, when planning your tutorial, make sure to elevate historically marginalized voices.
- **Don't call on the first hand raised.** Pay attention to who has spoken and how often, and try to notice how groups of people (men, for example), may be overrepresented in the queue. Let your students know that you may see your hand and not call on them, and it's not about them or their ideas, but about engendering a more equitable space. Give people time to think and raise their hands more slowly.



- **Keep track of who has spoken.** If you have data, you can look for patterns in turn taking. Is one group overrepresented as first/most frequent speakers? Is another group missing from the discussion? Pay attention to if/how often your English Language Learner students speak.
- **Create different ways to participate.** Speaking is only one way, as we discuss in many of the TATP active learning workshops. The more you can diversify methods of participation to work against gendered and racialized turn-taking dynamics, the better you can include all students and evaluate their ideas, not just their willingness to speak out.
- **Consider using pair and shares.** Pair and shares give everyone an opportunity to talk, and while true that gendered and racialized dynamics persist in pairs, this activity is designed to allow both people to speak and can create more space for non-dominant students to speak.
- **Consider using go-arounds (or circle of voices).** A go-around allows you to hear from every member of the class, which demonstrates your desire to hear from everyone, and changes some of the dynamic where individual students assume that their ideas are not as good as their peers'. Ask everyone to speak, one at a time, in a circle around the room. This is a time-consuming activity, so it is not always appropriate, but it can be very fruitful in hearing from students who are less likely to speak in other contexts.
- **Invite student assessment (and/or self-assessment) of participation.** This will give students an opportunity to reflect on participation dynamic in your classroom.

### Can equitable facilitation affect timing?

Equitable facilitation will take longer! It requires you to slow down your process so that students have longer to think before speaking, or have time to write before they pair up, or pair and share before group take-up. But this time benefits all students, allowing them to more thoroughly formulate their ideas, thus the quality of your conversations is likely to improve. Further, the diversity of perspectives and ideas will enrich your discussion and lead to more nuanced understanding of your course materials.

### Interested in exploring further resources?

Kumashiro, K. K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 25-53.

Orenstein, P. (2013). *Schoolgirls: Young women, self esteem, and the confidence gap*. Anchor.

Smith, E. (2011). Women into science and engineering? Gendered participation in higher education STEM subjects. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(6), 993-1014.

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