Chapter 1
Participation and Learning: Developing Perspectives on Education and the Environment, Health and Sustainability

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1.1   Introduction

Participation and Learning emerged out of a loose set of interests and events that have brought the collection's contributors together at a series of formal conferences and informal workshops since 2003 as the *Research in Participatory Education Network* (RIPEN). RIPEN's work proceeds from the view that current discourses on participatory approaches to education have become increasingly diverse and contested in both theoretical and practical terms, as assumptions and activities have been analysed and tested in general education as well as in the contributors' fields of interest and expertise. While this has resulted in a range of tensions and challenges for practitioners and researchers, it is exactly in exploring and unravelling the methodological and pedagogical knots that have emerged, that we believe the potential value of participatory approaches to education is found.

As noted in the Preface, the contributors to this collection are scholars, practitioners, and researchers who share a common interest in understanding what works *in* and *as* participatory education in both formal and lifelong learning settings. The book is grounded in wide-ranging discussions of the features and operations of various participatory approaches to education that focus on environmental, health,

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and sustainability-related themes and challenges, and chapters draw on a broad base of experience and research data to illustrate a range of critical and self-critical reflections on these themes.

Hart (Chapter 2), amongst others, argues that participatory approaches to education are best viewed as tools for developing and sharing knowledge, skills, and experiences that ideally lead to cognitive gains, action competence, and community building (see also Chapter 9 by Læssøe, Chapter 15 by Dyment, and Chapter 17 by Schusler and Krasny). Another commonly voiced expectation is that participatory approaches afford the co-determination of educational processes and outcomes through the sustained social engagement and interaction of teachers and learners in planning and negotiating the focus and modes of their learning and teaching (see Schnack, Chapter 11). Closely associated with empowerment, these kinds of activities often promote bottom-up over top-down processes, and a distrust of external or state-imposed ways of doing things, particularly those that have historically excluded or ignored the marginal, powerless, or weaker members of society. Participatory approaches then can offer participants redress and opportunities on a variety of fronts; most positively, with citizens both young and old exercising their democratic rights to participate in civil society, and in decision-making and actions that promote justice, equality, and well-being for all.

1.2 Complicating the Field

Mindful of these potential contributions, we would like to take the opportunity this collection presents to highlight some of the productive tensions that can constitute such work.

To begin, we recognise that there are a number of concerns around the rhetoric of participation being used to legitimise particular educational practices to the exclusion of alternatives. In this collection, this is exemplified by the emergence of a 'culture of participatory workshops' in education and training, and the marginalisation of critical perspectives on the focus and content of professional development initiatives (see Lotz-Sisitika and O'Donoghue, Chapter 7). Related to this is unease about participatory practices that assume a lack of capacity, motivation, or engagement represents 'deficits' in learners, in contrast to alternatives in learning and social theory which suggest more productive starting points in operationalising participatory imperatives in education (e g. situative and constructivist perspectives, as discussed by Reid and Nikel, Chapter 3). Other concerns have been expressed about the ways that children's participation is managed (often only by adults, rather than with or by youth themselves, see Barratt and Barratt Hacking, Chapter 18); and about participatory projects that proceed as though importing a solution to a problem that the expert or outsider has diagnosed is the most appropriate *modus vivendi*, even if the participant or insider might not experience this as culturally appropriate or valuable (see Vare, Chapter 8). At the other extreme are situations in which it is assumed that the less interference by professionals or outsiders and the more autonomy and participation of the target group, the better.

With these concerns being taken up within the theorising, planning, and evaluation of environmental, sustainability, and health education, new debates have emerged. They include whether to assess participation primarily in terms of the membership of a project (e.g. access-focused participation), and how to evaluate the degrees and kinds of participation in selecting a topic, investigating themes, taking action, assessing processes and outcomes, and so forth (e.g. process-focused participation) (Jensen 2000). As earlier work in the Research Programme for Environmental and Health Education at the Danish School of Education has shown, it cannot be assumed that the contributions from participating in different phases of an environmental, health, or sustainability education project are of equal value in terms of learning outcomes, particularly if in action-orientated initiatives, the actions are to some extent prescribed, such as in raising levels of health, improving the environment, or demonstrating that sustainable development is taking place (see Simovska, Chapter 4). Setting aside the methodological challenges of demonstrating the outputs and outcomes of such learning for one moment (though see Scott and Gough 2003:31–43 for a discussion), while at some levels participation might be quite genuine and real, if the action is 'necessary' owing to donor, funder, or other politically grounded requirements, one must ask whether at that point participation is anything other than tokenistic?

This problematical situation reminds us to consider the risks associated with any project that valorises or privileges some constituencies in participatory approaches over others, even if 'local' or 'indigenous' forms of knowledge are at play (see Hart, Chapter 2; Reid and Nikel, Chapter 3; Vare, Chapter 8). For example, Bühler (2002) argues that, be it about non-participation, the 'participation deficit', or the processes or goals of participation, the notion that whatever local people or children have to say is valid can be as patronising as its opposite. Rather, the challenge is, being able to work through where overdetermination by particular voices and positions ends, and genuinely participatory co-determination begins.

Hart in Chapters 12 and 14, and Carlsson and Sanders in Chapter 20 accentuate the challenge, arguing that some participatory approaches have been built on naïve understandings. Most prominent amongst these is that structural barriers are automatically overcome by increasing stakeholder participation or the participation of the marginalised. Power is often described in such circumstances in unidimensional terms: as the powerful versus the powerless, with reallocation of power as the primary objective of participatory approaches. However, shifting the relative proportions of power-holding and power-sharing may do little more than reinvent or reinforce these barriers. As Heck (Chapter 16) suggests, there can be persistent gaps between a rhetoric of democracy and its practice in education, and given the various instances of patronage and paternalism in the localised governance and management of participatory processes, it may well be the case that a participatory approach is not necessarily intrinsically better than previous or alternative forms of leadership in attempting to foster inclusionary practices or processes (see Vare, Chapter 8; and Læssøe, Chapter 9, on different interpretations of democracy and intervention in participatory projects).

Given these tensions, a key issue for participatory approaches to education is the degree to which facilitators of participation and participants can both cede control

and offer transparency in their working arrangements and practices in participatory teaching and learning situations (see Breiting, Chapter 10; and Schnack, Chapter 11). Understanding social power and cultural capital as circulating, rather than as simply tied to the pedagogical, political, or economic structures of educational systems, alerts us to the possibility that control can (continue to) be exercised (held or withheld) in less obviously apparent ways in participatory approaches to learning and teaching. For example, in response to the apparent diversity and inequality of the target group for the participatory work, some local knowledge and expertise might be excluded as much as others is included within the project framework or by the facilitators of participation (see, e.g. Shallcross and Robinson, Chapter 19, on the 'truths' and 'untruths' of 'communities of practice' in participatory approaches to environmental and sustainability education).

Similar outcomes and hence, tensions, can arise when the negotiation and discussion of alternative goals and processes in participation focuses on securing consensus rather than on pursuing dialogue about the project's terms of reference and its ongoing degree of fixity. Typically, this might occur when participation becomes the 'recipe' of the facilitator, rather than a stimulus to developing or reconfiguring processes, situations, and relationships in teaching and learning, with one eye on local circumstances and the other on transformational possibilities (Simovska, Chapter 4). Indeed, questions about the sources, circulation, and exercise of power in participatory approaches arise quite readily when the actions and outcomes are not 'benevolent' but rather lead to hostility and conflict – be it cognitive, among peers or stakeholders, or with the wider community (Scott and Gough, Chapter 5).

Acknowledging that inequalities and discord might increase during participation or as a result of it, suggests that practitioners and researchers should take account of the range of motivations and efforts of the members of the target group, and their various capacities to participate and learn, individually and together. In addition, addressing the potential extension of inequity and dispute during or after participation becomes doubly important when the lines between the 'objects' and 'subjects' of participation become blurred, as when participatory approaches and techniques become institutionalised within educational practices and systems, or when the 'researched' become the 'researcher', as in participatory action research. According to Lotz-Sisitka and O'Donoghue (Chapter 7), such participatory approaches are now prevalent and an embedded 'apparatus' of teaching and learning in South Africa, as well as in research and professional development. The situation gives prominence to some 'subjectivities of participation' at the expense of others, most notably in terms of the differing degrees of participant, researcher, or practitioner passivity and activity expected and practised, among a diverse range of stakeholders. Barrett (Chapter 13) also explores this issue, considering the marginalisation of the subaltern in participatory approaches to education, that is, what might be done *about* or perhaps better, *by*, those who are rendered without agency in participatory processes by their social status. The issue and its difficulties raise a key question for participatory approaches: what are the theoretical and practical grounds for resisting the structures of dominance of 'more acceptable' mainstream positions and discourses about participatory education?

In response, and as these initial comments suggest, even as pedagogical tools it is our view that we should not regard participatory approaches as either neutral or automatically beneficial to any form of education that focuses on environmental, health, and sustainability-related themes and issues. Participatory approaches mobilise particular world views and visions of society and its interactions while obviating others, perhaps most strikingly when non-participation is not deemed an acceptable option. Attending to such broader questions of the purpose and context for their use foregrounds the growing need for pedagogical and research work that explores and potentially resolves the tensions between, on the one hand, the so-called 'tyranny of participatory methods', and on the other, the 'tyranny of cultural appropriateness', in choosing and implementing a participatory approach successfully (cf. Chawla, Chapter 6; and Lotz-Sisitka and O'Donoghue, Chapter 7). In the following section, we introduce how the contributors have sought to address such matters before concluding the chapter with reflections on this particular landscape of research and commentary.

1.3   Overview of the Chapters

The basis for the grouping and ordering of the material in this book is the nature of a chapter's contribution to the overall themes, tensions, and questions that underpin the collection. Across the course of *Participation and Learning*, chapters shift in focus from providing commentary on conceptual and analytical themes and models, to descriptive and interpretive reports based on empirical research and case studies. Chapters 2–5 discuss current approaches and evaluative tools for participatory practice and offer new heuristics and frameworks for developing and critiquing participatory education. Chapters 6–11 focus on examining examples of educational and institutional practices and discourses of participation, and identify issues for further debate. Chapters 12–16 concentrate on researching participatory education and participatory research methods with educators, learners, and curriculum materials. Chapters 17–20 focus on case examples (mainly in the area of children and youth participation in curriculum development and school and community development) and offer critical perspectives on participatory education and the community, science, civics, school councils, and institutional development.

In Chapter 2, Roger Hart, a researcher synonymous with work on participatory approaches with children, reflects on the genesis and reception of the 'Ladder of Participation' (Hart 1992). Since its development in the 1980s, the Ladder (Figure 2.1) has become a well-used model in planning, discussing, and evaluating approaches to child and youth participation in community-based projects. The Ladder illustrates different degrees and categories of participatory approaches, some of which Hart considers to be tokenistic, decorative, or manipulative forms of participation (the lowest rungs). Hart traces the model's development and early success to its ability to bridge rather disparate conceptual work and discussion in the area about children's involvement in the initiation of participatory projects, as well as

consultation, decision-making, and directing the work with and without adult involvement. He then reviews the positive debates the model has engendered in education and community work, as well as what he sees as the misinterpretations and subsequent misuse of the Ladder, as, for example, in cases where there has been disregard for its metaphorical underpinnings or where work has taken place without due regard to, or with faulty assumptions about, the power and rights of children living and learning in diverse educational and social contexts. Drawing on examples from community development initiatives in low-income countries, Hart recommends further discussion of participatory approaches and the development and synthesis of new models that address current issues in youth participation work in these places. These include further research and development on children's informal learning in their communities and their play with peers, addressing cultural difference in community participation settings, and working in and across contexts with children living within individualist or collectivist subcultures and societies.

Alan Reid and Jutta Nikel (Chapter 3) highlight the necessity of taking a critical perspective on conceptions and practices of participatory approaches in the field of education, through a discussion of three major perspectives on learning: behaviourist, cognitive, and situative, focusing on how these perspectives inform alternative (and perhaps, competing) framings of participation in environmental learning. They also suggest an evaluative framework of questions to help interrogate ideas about, and examples of, participation in environmental learning. Their questions include: *Who defines what is called participation? What degree of freedom does the participant have to participate? What are the criteria for being a participant? Participation in what? How important is the participants' participation within the complete process? And, how is the participation justified, if at all?* Reid and Nikel illustrate the ways in which such a heuristic framework can be helpful in thinking about the phenomena of participatory education and for ordering the diverse material on participation, revealing both patterns and tensions. Through a close reading of German policy documents concerned with participation and education for sustainable development, they argue attention be paid to the theoretical, ideological, and pedagogic positions from which questions are asked about participatory education. In so doing, key issues emerge for participatory approaches regarding: the practicalities of engaging in participatory education; the conceptualisation of participation in terms of epistemological, pedagogical, and ideological theories; and the understandings of reality, power, and discourse structures in environmental education, health education, and sustainability education.

In Chapter 4, Venka Simovska introduces a model that differentiates between two different qualities of participation, the 'token' and the 'genuine'. Simovska argues that what counts as 'genuine' or 'token' student participation can be distinguished by: (a) the focus of the learning activities in which the student participate, (b) the expected outcomes of those activities, and (c) the target of change for the participation. Her model builds on two sets of theoretical concepts, drawing on work on a democratic approach to health-promoting schools, and a sociocultural perspective on learning. Taken together, Simovska highlights how learning involves a shared process of seeking and constructing meanings about socially important

concepts and practices, such as health and health promotion. The 'genuine' and 'token' qualities of participation inform the main analytical framework in a case study of *Young Minds*, a cross-cultural project involving schools from countries belonging to the European Network of Health Promoting Schools. Students' involvement in teaching and learning can often be dominated by a behaviouristic paradigm, focusing primarily on individual students and the modification of their personal lifestyles. However, in drawing on the model, case study and analytical framework, Simovska argues that student participation can be a broader transformative process. For example, taking action should be a deliberate part of learning about health and can be an important indicator of transformation, particularly when participatory approaches encourage wider dialogue and reflexivity about what constitutes health promotion and health education in schools, the community and society.

In the first part of Chapter 5, William Scott and Steve Gough highlight the variety of forms in which environmental learning is promoted and initiated by teachers, environmental interpreters, field study officers, conservation/heritage scientists, environmental activists, sociobiologists, Gaianists, and educational researchers. They explore the sources of this diversity in relation to the widely differing assumptions that people who promote or encourage environmental learning hold about learners and purpose and process in participation, including the aims of the learning of participants and any social action they might take. In other words, these groups have different concerns and interests in promoting participatory forms of environmental learning. Scott and Gough differentiate their analysis over nine categories of interest (ranging from 'those interested in sharing the joy and fulfilment derived from nature', to 'those advocating/promoting individual behaviour change', to 'those interested in the study of environmental learning' amongst others), and they also relate the categories to corresponding modes of participation in learning. The second part of their chapter explores what this might mean in an organisational context (via a case report of a membership environmental non-governmental organisation (NGO) with a remit to enhance biodiversity), and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the tensions that can arise when the interests, values, goals, and organisational imperatives of educators and participants collide.

In Chapter 6, Louise Chawla discusses young people's (mostly voluntary) participation in local environmental initiatives and the precursors to participatory activity understood as children's engagement with the world and their interest in making a mark on that world. Chawla takes up two questions essential to action-oriented participatory environmental education: *What experiences prepare children to be aware of their environment and to take action on its behalf?* And, *how can communities support children's environmental learning and action?* The chapter begins by introducing her conceptual framework, which draws on an ecological approach to psychology (as developed by James and Eleanor Gibson) and elements of social constructivism. Chawla argues for conceptualising environmental learning and participation from an ecological psychology perspective since it can generate new perspectives on children's agency, and the environmental contexts of action, by placing children and environment in a shared sphere of interest. Key concepts at

work here include action (as a means of staying in touch with the environment's significant properties), the functional significance of environmental aspects, the properties of objects, affordance (Gibson 1979), and behaviour settings (Barker 1968). Participation is central, as 'people flourish more fully when they have a rich range of opportunities to realise their capabilities, and their capabilities include seeing the environment accurately and knowing how to take effective action in response (p. 101). The chapter also discusses four conditions for supporting the development of children's environmental awareness and competence and their implications for participatory forms of environmental education: (a) affordances that promote discovery and responsive person/environment relationships, (b) access and mobility to engage with those affordances, (c) perceptual learning to notice and value the environment, and (d) opportunities to take responsible roles in the community. These conditions are illustrated with examples from research on the significant life experiences of adults committed to environmental education and action, showing how their concern can be understood within the framework and in terms of the four conditions, and how this might refocus current educational initiatives with young people.

The goal of Chapter 7, by Heila Lotz-Sisitka and Rob O'Donoghue, is to contextualise contemporary idealisations of participatory education and training within wider 'socio-political projects'. The appearance and uptake of a participation discourse in South African society has elevated citizen participation to mandatory status, particularly in promoting the rights and responsibilities of individuals in a democracy. While this might be viewed as social discourse caught up in a global drive for participation, spearheaded for example by UN-related agencies and other donor organisations, Lotz-Sisitka and O'Donoghue analyse the institutional context for social and pedagogical participation within the overarching intentions of expanding the liberation of the oppressed and democratising social life in a post-apartheid state. Their chapter offers both a theoretical exploration and data-driven investigation of how participatory education has more recently developed as an idealised and 'techniqued logic of practice', and how and why this has become increasingly self-referential, chiefly within its operations as an imperative for training and education within a South African environmental education context. Their conclusions illustrate how the emergence of participatory education can be historically and sociologically understood, as both a central feature of, and a contested terrain of ambivalence within, the developing landscape of environmental education theory and practice.

In Chapter 8, Paul Vare reviews participation in the context of his involvement in developing, running, and evaluating rural communication programmes throughout Africa. The main feature of Chapter 8 is how Vare brings his practical experience in these programmes into conversation with concepts of participation and learning, from the perspective of how a 'practitioner might look at theory'. The chapter starts with an autobiographical account of his experiences in creating communication programmes within sustainable development projects in rural Africa (mainly in Uganda). He then charts the evolution of a participatory approach within the projects before reflecting on the way people learn in such settings. Vare

summarises his views in this regard as learning being 'a complex process of dialogue', relying primarily on known and trusted sources. He is also quick to acknowledge that accounts of the projects largely used self-reported empirical data and they lacked theoretical underpinnings. Consequently, the second part of the chapter explores his response to these shortcomings, within the twin context of investigating how one might: (a) build a durable legacy in terms of learning, and (b) secure further donor funding. Starting from an analysis of different approaches to learning, Vare considers the relevance of such concepts as the 'zone of proximal development' and 'legitimate peripheral participation' to the project experiences. He continues by tackling possible limitations in these approaches and considering the value of cultural–historical activity theory (CHAT). In conclusion, Vare argues that the principles of situated learning and activity theory resonate strongly with real-world examples of participatory 'education for sustainable development' (ESD), and as well as raising critical issues in planning, managing, and reporting on participatory education, there might be direct benefits to learners and funders if CHAT and ESD were to become more closely aligned.

Chapter 9 by Jeppe Læssøe contributes to the debate about how public participative processes for sustainable development are planned conceptually and carried out. His particular focus is the emergence of a new kind of professional agent – the mediator – in Danish civil society, who is charged with implementing such participative processes. Læssøe argues for a transgression of narrow and static fixations on top-down versus bottom-up approaches to public or civic participation, as these have led some environmental sociologists to turn their criticism of the former into an idealisation of the latter. Moreover, when confronted with the quest for sustainable development, an emancipatory conception of participatory forms of learning can neglect the tensions that can emerge between participation as a defence of democratic rights ('listening to the voices of people'), and participation as a tool for promoting learning processes that aim to replace limited project framework interests with a broader and collective responsibility for securing a sustainable future. With this in mind, Læssøe takes a closer look at the relationships between the key concepts – participation and sustainable development – analysing dominant conceptions of their relationship as they have developed in the political discourse and in environmental sociology since the 1970s. His discussion focuses on participation as part of a social emancipation process, the professionalisation of public debate about environmental issues, and issues raised by the mandatory participation of citizens with the overarching aim of reaching consensus. Alongside such developments has been the emergence of the 'mediator', a role that can be differentiated into 'networkers', 'interpreters', and 'facilitators'. Drawing on examples from Denmark, Læssøe outlines four dilemmas with which these 'change agents' have had to cope and the qualitative differences between them. These are summarised as 'Populism versus paternalism', 'Local settings versus global scope', 'Environment-centredness versus cultural orientation', and 'Independence versus involvement'. Læssøe concludes by arguing that instead of simply opposing top-down approaches with an idealised bottom-up process, the focus should now be on the high-level education of mediators, and how this qualifies and enables them to cope with

the dilemmas their tasks and roles demand in both fostering and harnessing participation in sustainable development and social learning.

In Chapter 10, Søren Breiting provides an alternative perspective to the preceding chapters on what we might mean and understand as 'genuine participation'. He reconfigures existing conceptualisations of the 'ownership of participation' to unpack the specific qualities that make participation genuine, drawing on his professional experience in educational development initiatives in a number of countries around the world (mainly Thailand, Namibia, and Denmark) over the last decade. Breiting makes the case that the level of 'mental ownership' that a participatory initiative is able to generate among participants, corresponds with the experienced quality of the participatory approach. He then traces how his conceptions of mental ownership in education have evolved over recent years, starting from an environmental education project in Namibia and how this has influenced a large-scale curriculum and professional development project in Thailand, by highlighting the need for participants to be able to find their 'fingerprint' in the final outcome, or receive some form of recognition for their contribution to the participatory process. Breiting also argues that generating mental ownership through participatory approaches to professional development and curriculum development processes improves the quality of innovations in education, and requires attention to a range of issues raised by democratic views of education, cooperation, and empowerment. Doing so repositions arguments about mental ownership towards engaging wider debates on the need to democratise participatory forms of environmental education and ESD, and the need to foster deliberations about educational goals for young people and adults in terms of societal adaptation or emancipation (e.g. Hellesnes 1982).

Chapter 11 by Karsten Schnack also addresses the crucial question of how to foster deeper and more meaningful participation in education. Schnack's chapter pursues its line of investigation through educational philosophy, exploring how practice grounded in a humanistic view of education or driven by a shared ideal of improving the world in which we live can make a difference to participatory education. He then unpacks the relevance of general education to 'adjectival educations' (such as environmental education, health education, and ESD), and vice versa, arguing that adjectival educations still promote efforts to educate pupils in a broader, humanistic sense in the face of increasing vocationalisation and instrumentalism of general and adjectival education policy. The main part of the chapter explores the implications of a Klafkian understanding of the key didactics concept, *Bildung*, in curriculum and school examples from Denmark. Schnack illustrates the challenges and tensions that surround attempts to increase student participation through legislation, alongside issues related to enforcement and resistance in schools within a democratic educational system, for general education, environmental education, and ESD. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research implications in relation to studies of decision-making *about* and *in* the classroom (e.g. in terms of what takes place there, and the phases and phasing of teaching and learning processes), coupled with the need for research that focuses on the tensions between, on the one hand, standardised and objectified curricula and an intensified culture of educational assessment, and on the other, participatory, open-ended approaches to education.

In Chapter 12, Paul Hart examines why teachers come to participate in environmental education at all, in contrast to say, participation in conservation, social justice initiatives, or other matters of concern. Central to his perspective is the need to probe our understandings of agency, identity building, discursive practices, teachers' stories, and the impact of teaching, as well as the relevance of such themes to explaining teachers' practices and their drivers. Hart's research interests focus on the assumptions and predispositions that underlie teachers' notions of what counts as participatory learning within the genealogies of the contexts for their environmental education activities. This involves examining teachers' stories of their actions within their personal and professional theories of that context. The first part of the chapter outlines changes within the last two decades to understandings of narrative and epistemology to research on teacher thinking. Hart argues that story-based research methodologies can attempt to explore teachers' theory/practice connections as genealogical tracings of those pedagogical ideas that appear to have helped them reflect on the origins of their participatory practices in environmental education, as sociocultural dimensions of their own learning (see Gutiérrez and Rogoff 2003). The second part of the chapter focuses on the notion of 'telling identities' and how these stories, 'even if individually told, are products of collective story telling' (Sfard and Prusak 2005:10). Excerpts from an ongoing project illustrate how a university professor and three former students' interactions generated lasting meaning for each of their lives as teachers. The chapter ends by emphasising the importance of active participation for both surfacing and understanding deeply held values, as well as for inquiring into and understanding teachers' thinking and practice from within this perspective.

Whilst beginning with an acknowledgment of the advantages of participatory approaches to research and pedagogy in initiating change and providing space for marginalised voices, Mary Jeanne Barrett (Chapter 13) goes on to argue that despite the best of intentions to promote open and collaborative processes, participatory approaches can 'still impose agendas that support particular versions of what is appropriate thought, behaviour and action' (p. 212) and do not 'give open access to non-dominant and counter-hegemonic discourses' (p. 214). Barrett draws on feminist post-structuralist analysis (of power) to support her arguments, applying this to a critical examination of students' accounts of participatory encounters in classroom interactions. Drawing on key ideas related to identity, discourse, power, hegemony, and subject positioning, alongside two studies that draw on feminist and post-structural theories (Barron 1995; McKenzie 2004), Barrett argues for a different focus in interpreting teacher and pupil difficulties in taking up particular subject positions around environmental issues and activism. Rather than pointing to individual failings, lack of interest, or inability or discouragement to taking up unpopular positionings of the self or individual, Barrett discusses these phenomena in terms of: (a) the ways in which the subject positions available to students and teachers primarily reflect the discourses in the school and the broader community and not those of the individual, and (b) how through speech and action, teachers and research can circumscribe and (re)position students' lives and subjectivities. Thus, Barrett argues, what is marked as normal or aberrant in relation to participation

clearly favours the conservative and safe, rather than the transgressive or radical, in terms of one's contributions to and grounds for environmental activism through participatory environmental learning.

Paul Hart picks up on some of these themes in Chapter 14 in this collection, again through exploring why educators come to participate in environmental education. While Hart continues to trace the ideas, structures, or events that work as precursors or barriers to participatory activity, Chapter 14 is more a methodological deliberation than a report of findings, in that Hart arranges his material around the question of *what it means to inquire* into the precursors to participation. Concepts such as agency, identity, and self-consciousness are again important here, particularly in terms of how we come to understand participatory education relationally, in the sense that participation is formed in and through relationship. Thus, Hart considers how 'strong narratives of participation' with people and places may also constitute an invitation to participate in an ecological consciousness vicariously. But the work of research in this area does not end there. Rather, Hart illustrates a shift from narrative-based (autobiographic work) to genealogical inquiry. This foregrounds the need to examine notions of self, identity, and agency in the inquiry process, and necessitates researchers finding ways to support and interact with educators in going beneath the surface of anecdote to examine motives, implications, and connections, whilst also encouraging individuals to look at themselves as agents and how they are formed as subjects – both as teachers and inquirers (Meadmore *et al*. 2000). The chapter concludes by addressing issues of general methodological interest such as authentic representation of experience and the interpretation and critical appraisal of authenticity, with Hart arguing the need to maintain rather than suspend suspicion of the self-evidency of self-expression, and the changes and challenges to the role of the researcher in such work.

In Chapter 15, Janet Dyment focuses on the nature and context of children's participation within school-ground greening initiatives. Interest in these initiatives is growing given the rise of 'whole school approaches' to participation (see also Chapter 19), and the hope that such initiatives allow young people to acquire environment-based skills, including those of participation, that can be extended or transferred to other contexts for democracy and civic participation. Dyment presents the key findings of a study of youth participation in Canadian school-ground greening initiatives, focusing on student involvement in problem identification, visioning and planning, actual greening, and maintenance. The chapter contains Dyment's methodological reflections on the research process, the turning points in her thinking and learning about participation and methodology, and the strength and limitations of the chosen mixed-method approach to the research. This involves engaging the broader debate about whether participatory action research should be seen as *one* or the *only* way to research participation, and besides traditionally grounded modes of inquiry, the chapter also considers the possible contributions of post-positivist approaches to understandings the role and identity of research about participation, and disseminating research findings to diverse audiences for research.

The focus of Chapter 16 by Debbie Heck is not yet typical of research on participation. Heck asks how the various forms and features of individual and civic participation are presented in curriculum resources, and in the context of Australian citizenship materials, the types of citizenship advocated within the forms of citizenship education they seek to promote or hamper. While the chapter provides an overview of different approaches to citizenship education, such as a 'legal status' view of citizenship or a 'public practice' perspective, it mostly focuses on critical discourse analysis as a research methodology appropriate to this focus for research about participation. Heck recounts how she aimed to: (a) deconstruct the core concepts and senses of citizenship implied by the texts (federally distributed citizenship material considered for national distribution), (b) identify how to reconstruct the process of the text development, dissemination, and consumption, and (c) analyse the view of participation and the power relationships that influenced the type of participation evident in the materials. Key challenges in such work include developing a theoretical frame which deliberately operates from within a critical paradigm, at the same time as developing a rigorous, non-partisan approach that would be acceptable to bureaucrat funders who tend to favour quantitative forms of research. Heck's preference for Fairclough's (1992) approach to critical discourse analysis is discussed, with particular consideration given to rigour and credibility in research. The chapter concludes with recommendations for researchers using critical discourse analysis to explore participation, and identifies possible future directions for research regarding curriculum materials and participatory educational programmes, such as the match between documents and the curriculum-in-use; educators' interpretations of the curriculum documents and dominant perspectives on participation; and cross-national, comparative work to examine similar or different social processes and understandings of participation within socioecological and sustainability processes.

In Chapter 17, Tania Schusler and Marianne Krasny review youth participation in local environmental action initiatives. The authors argue that science education and civics education can be integrated meaningfully in such projects as they create opportunities for young people to participate in local decision-making and action in relation to environmental issues. The key premise here is that, if the projects are appropriately organised, young people can develop their understanding of environmental science and political processes, and develop skills in scientific enquiry and civic engagement, and – most importantly, for Schusler and Krasny – these can all be experienced and learned at the same time. Drawing on the literatures of civic engagement, science education, and youth development, they suggest six guiding principles for youth participation in local environmental action. These include addressing issues such as adult perceptions of young people: (a) exercising democracy, (b) engaging in deliberate action, (c) generating scientific knowledge, and (d) undertaking critical reflection on processes and outcomes. The six principles are discussed within a comparative analysis of three environmental action programmes in the USA: the Earth Force programme, the Seneca Falls Landfill Project programme, and the Garden Mosaic Programme. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further work on science, civics, and participatory education; the

adequacy and scope of the principles of youth environmental action; and how the practices, contexts, and characteristics of educators create opportunities for youth participation in local environmental action.

Chapter 18 by Robert Barratt and Elisabeth Barratt-Hacking focuses on children's participation in curriculum development. The chapter introduces a school-based participatory research project undertaken in England, which inquired into how children's everyday experiences could be defined, understood, and shaped by a school curriculum that foregrounds local community action and community development. The underlying assumptions of the project team highlight the importance of children being able to make sense of the relationship between home, school, and the local environment for identity-formation processes. As part of this, children's confidence and security at a local scale is seen as critical to developing broader understandings of, for example, their place, role, and contribution in the wider community, now, and for the future. Conceptually, the project is strongly informed by Baacke's model of four 'ecological zones' and by Neale's differentiation between children's participation in society as either 'welfare dependants' or 'young citizens'. In the school, learning was contextualised in relation to children's community experience, but at the same time, it aimed at initiating actions towards community development. Consequently, the project was designed to entail 'researching collaboratively with children' (Garbarino *et al.* 1989), using a grounded theory approach to the data analysis to ensure awareness of 'pupil voice' in the outcomes. The authors conclude from the project that the children often lacked a forum in the school and in the community for participating in curriculum decision-making and community development. The children also recommend the establishment of a 'school environment curriculum council', and outlined the features of the changed role of the school in light of fundamental prerequisites for their participation in curriculum and community development, based on the outcomes of the data analysis and its processes. These include: creating structures and processes within school, which recognise children's contributions and supports children's decision-making; appreciating that children want to bring about community change; and recognising the apparent discord between children's personal aspirations and their opportunity to effect local action.

Chapter 19 is a commentary on whole-school approaches and their intrinsic association with participatory education. Drawing on ideas about 'whole school action-focused learning' (Lave and Wenger 1991) and 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1999), Tony Shallcross and John Robinson argue for whole-school approaches on the basis that they enable an action focus to environmental education and influence the lifestyles of children, adults, and the community. They suggest that the main advantage that a situated, whole-school action-focused learning approach offers over behaviourist or cognitive/constructivist approaches to learning is that they not only generate sustainable actions by individuals, but also support changes towards sustainable lifestyles at a broader, societal scale. The authors set out the underlying concepts and theoretical frameworks for their work and then present examples and evidence about the impact of whole-school approaches from a pan-European project, *Sustainability Education in European Primary Schools* (SEEPS), funded by the

European Commission. The chapter then raises the question of how to analyse and evaluate such approaches. Here, Shallcross and Robinson are particularly concerned with how to deal with: (a) the possibility of results revealing a high discrepancy between existing practice and the desired, ideal state, (b) the lack of research and evaluation into the impact and processes of whole-school approaches, and (c) associated research ethics. Like Barratt and Barratt Hacking, Shallcross and Robinson also raise concerns about the quality and quantity of student 'voices' and about student contributions to research and conceptual development in this area; that is how the developments of our understandings of participation might better address the perspectives and insights of participants themselves.

Finally, in Chapter 20, Monica Carlsson and Dawn Sanders examine pupil participation in collaborative environmental education projects between schools and external organisations. Their two case examples are the Danish Eco School project and the school grounds development projects (Learning Through Landscapes) in England. Carlsson and Sanders begin their chapter by discussing pupil participation and non-participation within school councils and environmental councils, from a perspective that explicitly addresses issues of power. They define collaboration as a process that involves the sharing of an area or field of action – an arena *of* and *for* power (based on the work of Katzenelson 1994 and Fink 1989). This leads to questioning the roles of pupils, teachers, and outside actors in collaborative projects, and the different, and sometimes inconsistent, understandings of school councils as arenas for collaboration and participation. Regarding the latter point, the authors draw on Micheletti's work on 'everyday makers' to highlight that the processes and purposes of collaborative projects run via such councils raise a series of key issues. These include: whether the collaborative projects aim to produce individualised collective action, individualised political participation, or students' ownership and engagement; and, working across these categories, whether the projects favour liberal or direct representational notions of democracy.

1.5   Concluding Comments

Given our expressed intention that this collection fosters critical awareness and debate about participatory approaches in environmental, health, and sustainability education, we conclude this chapter by selecting four themes for further work and consideration, drawing across our grouping of the aforementioned chapters in the book.

First, in probing what counts as participation in education and the preconditions to participatory forms of education, a recurring theme across the chapters that suggests a focus for further work, is the range and scope of views, understandings and assumptions about *childhood, youth*, and *adulthood*, and how at different life stages, one is understood to participate in social life. Recent childhood research (Christensen and James 2000), for example, with its postulate that 'children are social actors, with a part to play in their own representation', stands to enrich our historical and contemporary appreciation of participatory education in these areas,

and in particular, what it means to be a participant in different contexts, settings, and life trajectories, in that like Barratt and Barratt Hacking (Chapter 18), and Shallcross and Robinson (Chapter 19), it draws attention to the 'student voice movement' (see Ruddock and McIntyre 2007). This movement blurs the positioning of children as passive objects of research with that of active subjects. Children can and are expected to speak for themselves and report valid views and experiences about teaching and learning reliably, they are capable of engaging in research conversations with adult researchers, and they have the right to do so (see Farrell 2005). In the context of this collection, the movement also highlights the challenge to researchers and practitioners of participatory education of addressing power relations and differentials, rather than assuming they can be eliminated, particularly if researching the theory and practice of participatory approaches to education becomes a part of the ongoing, day-to-day encounters of teachers and learners in practising participatory forms of teaching and learning.

Second, again on the preconditions to participatory approaches to education but also in relation to the processes that they might involve or require, in order to enable and allow genuine participation, it is clear that what is required is more than just the people and the task to be in place. Many of the chapters call into question the role of the facilitator in the *mediation* of participation, particularly when the participatory process is novel for the participants but not for the facilitator as this can exacerbate rather than reduce the power gradient. Similar outcomes may occur when the prior experience and capabilities of the project's initiators are discounted in order to create the impression of a 'level playing field' (see Vare, Chapter 8), or past approaches to participation are preferred over the possibility of devising new ones that are perhaps better aligned to current capabilities or future needs of the participants, or that offer new routes for social, ecological, or personal transformation. A key challenge here is to better appreciate and understand the benefits and drawbacks of the time and effort put into clarifying and working with an existing or newly organised and structured protocol for participatory engagement, how much can be presumed on the part of participants and facilitators, and how often this all needs to be reviewed or even abandoned, given the exigencies of local circumstances and developments.

Third, while the contributors clearly emphasise that working within the participatory task is in itself a learning challenge, the broader question this feeds into is, are the outcomes or consequences that it might lead to always worthwhile? More specifically, we can ask how does a participatory approach enhance teaching and learning directly rather than incidentally, and relatedly, why do people 'do participation' in its various forms, and at its various stages? Working across the case studies and examples, a clear research challenge is to quantify and qualify the *reasoning and rationales for participating in participatory approaches*, such as in relation to perceptions and experiences of ownership, and the role of well-being-related, ethical, or pragmatically based logics of practice for participatory environmental education, health education, or ESD. An additional challenge is to supplement this by tracing out the lines and bodies of evidence that link rationales with outcomes, as Roger Hart seeks in Chapter 2, and Reid and Nikel, in Chapter 3.

A fourth theme for further work and consideration is to ask, why do teachers and learners engage in diverse forms of *joint participatory actions*, some of which support and others challenge the status quo, and to consider what their effects, strengths, and drawbacks are within and for education, particularly in the case of trans-institutional work, and across formal and lifelong learning settings. These kinds of inquiry might be pursued in the context of an analysis of how the diverse lifeworlds of students and teachers (e.g. their homelife and worklife) are shaped and constituted, alongside an analysis of the inscriptions in discourse (be that in education or participation) that focus participation on voluntaristic or personalistic responses to the issues, rather than, say, situating them in relation to broader cultural, historical, or economic contexts, arrangements and trajectories (e.g. as these relate to the boundaries and dynamics of family, community, nation, and so forth). Thus, while we can recognise that much participation takes place within the context of responding to programmes and initiatives originating from outside schools (e.g. as a result of the work of NGOs or government agencies), because participation invariably involves working *for* some goals for teaching and learning and *against* others, a key area for future research is to understand the framings, linkages, and dynamics of locally initiated, 'autonomous' participatory projects, in contrast to those that are either voluntarily taken part in, or legislated for by others working in or through the education field.

To conclude and reflect back on this introduction, these four areas suggest to us a wider need in education to engage with the metaquestion of where our examples and inquiries come from regarding participatory education, why they are currently constituted so, and what alternatives or new horizons should be pursued in relation to the environment, health, and sustainability. A key test for networks and interests such as those of RIPEN is to be able to continue the conversation and debate about participatory approaches, in order to further uncover and analyse what experience, scholarship, and research have to say about these issues, and develop better, genuine, and more sustainable forms of participation. Put otherwise, and to reframe the core focus of the tensions and challenges that underpin this book, our key questions for participatory education could now be expressed as:

- Why should participation continue to count in education?
- How will we know what processes participatory education should involve or require?
- How can the preconditions to participatory forms of education be enabled?
- How will worthwhile outcomes or consequences of participation be ensured?

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