A Participation Points System Good for Every Task

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Active participation is a must for every student; clearly communicating daily expectations is a must for every teacher. This participation points system combines these in a measurable, visual way. Each class activity is assigned a number of points that students can earn as they complete tasks. As students engage in the activities, they write on their grids the points they earn by participating. Just before class ends, students write their total for that day. These points can then be used for giving daily, weekly, or semester-long participation grades. The system is flexible enough to reflect spur-of-the-moment additions and to accommodate anything from completing ordinary textbook activities to practicing cultural behaviors. Changing assigned points daily helps to keep it fresh.

語学の授業では、学生全員が積極的に授業に参加することが求められます。積極的に授業へ参加することは、語学を習得する上で大切なことです。先生も同様に、その日の授業の中で学生に期待することを明確にしておかなくてはなりません。ここには、授業参加の評価システムについて書かれています。このシステムは、学生の授業参加度と、先生が学生に対して期待することの両方を目に見える形で評価するものです。先生は課題にポイントをつけます。学生は、課題をこなすことで、このポイントを得ることができます。一つの課題が終わるごとに、表に自分が獲得したポイントを書いていきます。学生は、日付、課題、獲得ポイント数を記入し、授業の最後に、その日のポイントの合計を記入します。先生は、このポイントを授業毎、週毎、もしくは学期に渡る学生の授業参加成績として使うことができます。また、このシステムは柔軟で、先生が課題リストに新しい項目を付け足すこともできますし、課題の内容については、教科書の中の問題に答えるというものから、文化的行動について考えることなどさまざまです。そして、先生が、ポイントにつながる課題の内容を毎日変えることで、常に評価システムを新鮮に保つことができます。

Introduction

Although many Japanese students may prefer to sit quietly and "shyly" in class (Doyon, 2000; Miller, 1995), we, as language teachers, insist that active participation is required in order to learn (Day, 1984; Lucus 1984; Doyon, 2000). Likewise, in order for students to know how to effectively participate,

a clear statement of expectations is required from the teacher (Wing, 1982). This participation points system combines both of these requirements in a visual and objectively measurable manner. The system works like this: During lesson planning, the teacher thinks about expected student behaviors—writing, speaking with partners, completing textbook exercises, listening, checking answers, finishing group tasks—and assigns to each task a number of points. Then, as students complete each activity, they earn the points assigned to that task. Before class, each task is written on the chalkboard, along with the assigned points. When the teacher explains or demonstrates each activity for the class, the bottom line—what the students are expected to do—is there on the board, clearly spelled out. As the class hour goes on, the teacher points out to the students the things they can do to earn points, and as students engage in class activities, they write on grids on the back of their class ID cards the points they earn by participating. (For an example grid, see Appendix A. For an explanation of the ID card, see Appendix B.) Just before class ends, students write their total points for that day. These point totals can then be used in calculating participation grades on a daily, weekly, or semester-long basis.

The beauty of this system is its flexibility. It accommodates both the mundane ("page 42 questions finished = 2 points each") and the exotic ("practice Moroccan-style greetings = 8 points each partner"). It is also flexible enough to reflect spontaneous additions that the class may need at the moment. For example, if students are spending too much time on a simple task, some competitive teamwork can be added to speed things up. Writing on the board, "First group finished = 8 points; Second group = 5 points; Third group = 2 points" speeds students up considerably, and by the time the third group has finished, the other groups are not far behind.

Ideas for Ways that Students can Earn Points

This participation points system does not use a set list of point-earning activities, giving it two advantages over systems with a set list. First, changing daily the tasks for which points are assigned prevents the system from becoming stale; students cannot get into the rut of assigning themselves the same number of points every day as they tend to do in a system where they merely check off their activities from a fixed list. Secondly, because the teacher changes the point-earning activities each day, the system dovetails easily with any activity, whether textbook exercises or less-structured communicative tasks.

Below are some examples of the kinds of point-earning activities that could be listed on the chalkboard, but the possibilities are limitless.

- ➢ Morning conversation = 1 each partner
- ➢ Gestures tried = 3 each
- ➢ Boxes finished = 1 each
- ➢ Test techniques = 3 each
- ➢ Help language = 2 each
- ➢ "Hand back" conversation = 1 each
- ➢ Lines of writing finished = 2 each
- ➢ Page 22 answers = 1 each
- ➢ Page 23 answers = 3 each
- ➢ Shared your answer with the class = 5
- ➢ American hugs = 10 each
- ➢ Brought textbook = 5
- ➢ Points from game = 0-20
- ➢ Answered a question = 3
- ➢ Help set up chairs before class = 5
- ➢ Volunteered an answer = 5
- ➢ No one was absent today = 10
- ➢ Paragraphs read = 4 each

- ➢ English only = 5 each partner
- ➢ Finished HW before class = 10
- ➢ Studied for test before today = 10
- ➢ Conversation techniques = 2 each
- ➢ Winning group = 10
- ➢ 1st group finished = 8
- ➢ 2nd group finished = 5
- ➢ 3rd group finished = 2
- ➢ Asked a student a question = 2
- ➢ Spoke when teacher was speaking = – 2
- ➢ Performed dialog for the class = 10
- ➢ Presentation steps done in group = 2 each

Explanations for Selected Activities:

Since the first six examples of point-earning activities listed above are not necessarily self-explanatory, below is a brief description of each one:

Morning conversation: Every morning, when students come into class, there is a brief greetings dialog on the overhead projector. Students practice this conversation with as many classmates as possible before class begins.

Gestures tried: In a unit on cultures, students were introduced to gestures from various countries. They needed to use some of the gestures in order to complete some of their tasks for the day.

Boxes finished: On many worksheets, there are boxes to fill in. Students can get points for each box they fill in.

Test techniques: Students have been taught strategies to use in test-taking (such as "Preview the entire test before writing answers") and can earn points when they use them during a test.

Help language: Students can get points each time they use "classroom expressions" such as "What does that mean?" or "Could you repeat that please?"

Hand back conversation: When there are papers to be handed back, students help and earn points by using an accompanying dialog.

Materials for Introducing the System to Students

On the chalkboard or a poster, write the date, class activities, and their assigned points, as shown in the example list below. Make overhead projector transparencies or posters of the grids in Figures 1 and 2 to show students some examples of the way their cards might look when filled in. When practical, make the points on the example match those used in class on the first day that the system is introduced.

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Morning conversation = 1 each partner
On time = 5
Late = – 5
Brought text & supplies = 5
Brought 2 pictures = 8
Only English = 5 each partner
1st group finished = 7
2nd group finished = 4
Boxes finished = 2 each
"Have a nice day" = 1 each partner

Day	Activities	Pts.
4 / 1	On time = 5 Text & supplies = 5 Only Eng = 15 Boxes = 8 Have a nice day = 3	36

Figure 1: Noriko's card

Day	Activities	Pts.
4 / 1	Late = - 5 Text & supplies = 5 2 pictures = 8 Only Eng = 5 1st group = 7 Boxes = 2 Have a nice day = 2	24

Figure 2: Kyohei's card

Pointers for Introducing the System:

➢ Have students write with small letters so that they use only 1 line per day.
➢ Teach students how to abbreviate activity titles.
➢ Be sure to check each of the students' cards for the first few days, to verify that they understand how to correctly record their points.
➢ In classes that meet more than once weekly, have students use a line to write a periodic total, for example, a weekly or monthly total.

Conclusion

By implementing the participation points system described above, teachers can have an easily managed method for ensuring that they clearly communicate the objectives of each activity to students, that students' on-task time is maximized, and that a measurable objectivity is the basis of what might otherwise be a rather subjective grade for participation. Further details, all of which are based on questions that teachers frequently ask after initially learning about this system, are included in Appendix B.

References

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Appendix A: Grid on Which Students Record Points

We have a larger version of this grid, with more columns and rows, copied onto the back of students' class cards.

Day	Activities	Pts.

Figure 3: Participation points grid

Appendix B: Other Considerations

➢ The "ID cards" that we use are B6 size (approximately 13cm by 18cm) cards. We ask students to make these cards at the beginning of the school year. The top section includes the student's photo, contact information, birthday, and family information. The bottom section is a free space that the students design to introduce themselves using drawings, stickers, and written information. The ID cards help the teacher learn students' names, form the basis for self-introduction activities at the beginning of the year, can be used to help the teacher in a variety of classroom management and record keeping tasks such as seating and grouping assignments and daily tracking of late and absent students, and continue to be used throughout the year as students write their participation points on the grid on the back of the cards.

➢ Although it does take some time (perhaps a total of two to three minutes per class, once students are used to the system) for the students to write the name of each activity on their cards, writing out the activity names also serves to remind students of the types of things they need to actively do in class in order to earn points. It is good positive reinforcement.

➢ We suggest not telling students in advance a total minimum points necessary for a certain participation grade for the semester (for example, 1000 points = A, 850 points = B, etc.) in order to retain the freedom, each day, to decide how many points to award for each activity, how many points total to offer for the day, and whether or not to add point-earning activities spontaneously. At the end of the semester, after students have found their total points for the whole semester, determining the participation component of students' course grade can be done in one of two ways. If you have kept a running total of the total number of points possible for the semester, you could base their participation grades on percentages of that total. Alternatively, you could sort their cards from highest to lowest points and grade them on a curve.

➢ If the teacher suspects that some students are inflating their scores (although we have found that this rarely happens), then selective monitoring should be implemented: Each day, the teacher should choose a few students to watch. At the end of class, those students' points should be checked. If the points the students recorded do not correspond to what the teacher observed, then those students should be confronted. The teacher should always reserve the right to make necessary "adjustments" to points earned.

➢ We have used this participation points system only with first-year university students in Japan; however, junior high and high school teachers who have seen our presentation have told us that they thought it could be used equally well at those age levels. Some teachers of young children envisioned adapting the system so that the points were earned collectively by the class rather than by individual students. Once the class reached a target point total, they could have a party.

➢ Depending on how many times the class meets during the semester, there may not be enough space on the back of students' ID cards to record activities and points for the entire semester. In that case, when

a student's card is full, a copy of the grid can be glued over top of the card (after forwarding the total from the first grid onto the new grid, of course!).

➢ The space problem could also be solved by having students keep their participation points record on a copied page instead of a card. This may be a good option for classes where students would not otherwise have ID cards. However, cards may be easier for the teacher to collect regularly than a copied page would be.

➢ In order to "save trees" and/or in order to fit an entire semester's worth of points onto a card, it would be possible to have students write on the backs of their cards only the number of points earned each day, not the names of the activities. However, then students do not receive the positive reinforcement mentioned above. In addition, it becomes impossible for the teacher to check that the point system is being understood and used correctly.