

Tools To Reach the Student in the Corner

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Some colleges make class participation a percentage of students' final grade. To determine the actions necessary for class participation, students need clear performance objectives. The Participation Card System and Progress Record Sheet introduce students to systematic ways of participating in class. This paper presents specific measures that foster confidence building and self-determination for students who like to hide in the corners. Through this system, educators aid the process of cultivating life-long learning attitudes.

ある大学では、学生の成績の一部に授業参加点が含まれる。学生が学習参加点で高得点を得る為には、教師は学生が何をするべきか、ということを示さなければならない。教室の片隅にいる、内気な学生に手を差し伸べる方法として筆者が紹介する学習態度カードと上達記録シートは、学生がどの様に授業に参加するべきか、ということ順序だてて表しているだけでなく、普段内気な学生も、自信を持って、積極的に参加できるようなしくみになっている。このシステムによって、学習者が今後の人生において積極的に勉強する態度を培う助けになれば、と筆者は願っている。

Class participation is a powerful tool for cultivating active learning. Richard Felder (2003) said that students who do tasks successfully “own the knowledge in a way listening to a lecture will never do” (p. 282-283). Since class participation helps students achieve learning goals, teachers allot a percentage of course grades towards it. While teaching false beginners at one engineering university, the authors observed that some students gravitated to the “corners” of the classroom. The term *student in the corner* in this paper describes the passive behavior of students who tend to be on the periphery of the classroom and learning activities. These are students who are not necessarily shy but just reluctant to take risks and prefer not to speak out in class for reasons such as fear of making mistakes, not knowing what to say or do, not knowing when to speak or act, and not acknowledging class participation as necessary for learning. The behavior varies from student to student and may be evident periodically, thereby making their performance erratic. Passivity makes peer work and communicative activities difficult to perform. As a result, not only is the students' progress in language learning affected in classrooms where interaction is valued, but the students also feel devalued. Being frustrated by the outcomes of students' reticence to speak up in class, the authors introduced some tools, the Class Participation Card and the Progress Record Sheet, to train passive students to become active learners now, and to show them ways to be successful in interactive environments in the future. Having encountered students in the corner so many times in their classes, the authors asked the following question:

Can the use of two tools—the Class Participation Card and the Progress Record Sheet—motivate passive students to become consistent, active participants in the language learning classroom?

Class Participation Tools and Their Background

The idea of using a card to facilitate classroom participation came from a method suggested to foster positive classroom management. Breeden & Egan (1997) stated that the tool they created, the Name Tag system, is a powerful symbol of responsibility and self-esteem. When students share responsibility, they are committed to showing respect for expectations (p. 18).

The initial Class Participation Card system that we implemented in Fall, 2002, used cards that had a front side with the student name and a blank backside for marking participation points. Its initial purpose was to replace a time-consuming student roll call and to reward participation. When students entered the classroom, they located and took their cards from a pile at the front of the class. The teacher collected any remaining cards and noted who was absent. When students spoke or participated in activities, they received a point. While it proved a good record for students' participation points and it generated a game-like atmosphere, class participation proved difficult to monitor, maintain, and measure. Hadley (1997) and Jeffery (2003) with a similar Participation Point system used varying rewards such as poker chips and marbles to reward class participation. They also found their system rewarding and fun filled. Nevertheless, Jeffery (2003) conceded that running around and giving out rewards gave him an extensive physical workout.

Likewise we found a few drawbacks and made several revisions. When students reached the desired points, some stopped participating. Also, there were no clear requirements of how many points students were expected to earn every day. Eager students reached the maximum points for a semester without difficulty, but passive students stayed passive which negatively affected their overall grades. Prichard (2003) stated that even though students in Japan know that they are expected to participate, they are uncomfortable doing it. But class participation does not mean only giving the right answers to the teacher. Richards (1994) stated that student perceptions of teaching, learning and their role may impact their decision to remain quiet (1994). Lile (1983), quoting Krashen, noted that a “high affective filter” caused by stress and fear experienced by second language learners when they have to speak out can have a negative impact. Nevertheless, Krashen found that a mild level of anxiety or “low affective filter” keeps students intrinsically motivated (Lile, 1983). Similarly, Harris (1991) noted that people (learners) will continue to repeat a behavior when a reward is given because they like feeling a sense of accomplishment and recognition.

Tool 1: The Class Participation Card

In Winter 2002, the second Participation Card (Figure 1) was created and introduced to students. It was postcard size and incorporated numerous changes. A simple structure was added to the card to ensure that students would consistently participate throughout the course. The activities were pre-planned and put on the card. They provided daily objectives so that students could make small steps toward becoming

successful learners. Also, students could participate individually, in pairs or in small groups to earn points.

Figure 1 is a Class Participation Card used for a listening-speaking course. Students write their names and class numbers. This card is used during the class and returned to the teacher at the end of each class. It shows the category weight of 20% for measuring student participation in the course overall. The teacher explains that participation affects the students' overall grade in the course. Although Day 1 is the introduction of the class, students also start participating right away (P). Instead of lengthy explanations, teachers immediately give points to students who speak up in class on the first day, thereby letting them experience how the system works. For example, in a question response session, the teacher asks a question regarding a dialog to which students just listened. The teacher walks over to the student who answers the question and writes a number in the appropriate box (P), rewarding the student for participating before asking another question for the other students. Points can be awarded for activities such as practicing and enacting a dialog in pairs, asking and answering questions about a reading passage, and asking the teacher questions about their in-class activities. The possibilities of earning participation points are endless and the activities, which result in earning points, should be left up to the needs of the class and the students. Importantly, the student is given positive feedback immediately, fostering an immediate sense of accomplishment (Jeffery, 2003). The Center for Instructional Development and Research (2004) noted that "student engagement in class is greatly influenced by the expectations that instructors set for classroom behavior, teaching

strategies that are employed, and ways student interactions are structured during class" (p. 2). These things should be evident at the outset. Making them so helps approximate the students' expectations with the teacher's to ensure that students know their participation is valued.

Class Participation 20%

Complete Homework (HW) = 1 point Vocabulary Sheet (VS) = 1 point

Participation Points (P) = 1 point CD Rom (CDR) Points = 3 points

Bonus Points = 10 points = Bring your writing assignment (Portfolio)

INTRO	P	HW	P	HW	P
DAY 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 7	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 13	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW VS P		HW VS CDR		HW VS P
DAY 2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 8	<input type="checkbox"/> x2 <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 14	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW P BP		P		HW P
DAY 3	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 9	<input type="checkbox"/> TEST 1	DAY 15	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW VS CDR		HW VS P		HW VS P BP
DAY 4	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 10	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 16	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW P		HW P BP		HW CDR
DAY 5	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 11	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 17	<input type="checkbox"/> x2 <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW VS P		HW VS CDR		
DAY 6	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 12	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 18	TEST 2

Figure 1. Class Participation Card

Students are also rewarded for preparation for class. Jeanne Briggs (1996), who says she was an introvert and concerned about giving right answers, strongly suggests that teachers allow students to prepare ahead of time so that passive students can feel secure when participating. So, for example on Day 2, the class participation activities are completing vocabulary sheets (VS) which allow students to check words in the text in advance, presenting homework (HW), and bringing materials necessary to participate in the

next class. Homework and vocabulary sheets are checked at the beginning of each class.

Although the focus for this course is on listening and speaking, extra bonus point (BP) writing exercises are assigned for homework three times a semester (BP on Day 3, 11, and 16). Students write three essays with a theme and the key vocabulary introduced in the textbook. The points for the essays are rated on a scale of one to ten, which are added to the class participation points. Bonwell & Eison (1991) point to research which shows that students must do more than just listen. Chickering & Gamson (1987) say that students must also read, discuss, and write. Writing, especially, promotes active learning because it allows students to express concepts in their own words (Smith, 1997). Students also receive points for doing interactive CD-ROM activities in pairs for extra listening practice at the end of a unit.

The percentages of students who achieved 60% or more for participation, before and after the implementation of Class Participation Card, were compared. Before introducing the system, the authors had students speak up in class voluntarily for participation points until they reached the maximum points for a semester. As can be seen in Table 1, participation increased dramatically after the system was put into practice.

Table 1. Percentage of students who achieved 60% or more for participation

Before implementation (Fall, 2002)	65% (108/167 students)
After implementation (Fall, 2004)	88% (171/194 students)

Tool 2: The Progress Record Sheet

The Progress Record Sheet is the second tool, which students keep and take home as opposed to the Class Participation Card, which is only used in class and collected by the teacher at the end of class. The most important feature of this sheet is that it serves as a self-evaluation tool for students (see Figure 2).

Progress Record Sheet

Name _____ Class number _____

Class Participation 20%

Complete Homework (HW) = 1 point Vocabulary Sheet (VS) = 1 point

Participation Points (P) = 1 point CD Rom (CDR) Points = 3 points

Bonus Points = 10 points = Bring your writing assignment (Portfolio)

INTRO	P	HW	P	HW	P
DAY 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 7	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 13	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW VS P		HW VS CDR		HW VS P
DAY 2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 8	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 14	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW P BP		P		HW P
DAY 3	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 9	<input type="checkbox"/> TEST 1	DAY 15	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW VS CDR		HW VS P		HW VS P BP
DAY 4	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 10	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 16	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW P		HW P BP		HW CDR
DAY 5	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 11	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 17	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	HW VS P		HW VS CDR		
DAY 6	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 12	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	DAY 18	TEST 2

Daily Quizzes 40%

QUIZ 1 ___/10	QUIZ 5 ___/10	QUIZ 9 ___/10	QUIZ 13 ___/10
QUIZ 2 ___/10	QUIZ 6 ___/10	QUIZ 10 ___/10	QUIZ 14 ___/10
QUIZ 3 ___/10	QUIZ 7 ___/10	QUIZ 11 ___/10	QUIZ 15 ___/10
QUIZ 4 ___/10	QUIZ 8 ___/10	QUIZ 12 ___/10	

Quiz Total ___/150 --40%

TESTS 40%

TEST 1 _____ + TEST 2 _____ = _____ Test Total ___/40%

Grand Total _____/100%

Figure 2. Progress Record Sheet

The Progress Record Sheet, an A4 sheet, is given to students on the first day of class. Its features include a place for student name and number, the category weight-test (40%), quizzes (40%), and participation (20%)—which make up students’ overall grades. On the sheet students are expected to keep a personal record of their class participation points, quiz scores, and test scores. Providing the Progress Record Sheet enables students are able to see the big picture of how everything falls into forming their grades from the beginning of a semester. They can also calculate their grades anytime they wish during the course, and they are aware of their progress throughout the semester.

Awareness is helpful because students cannot claim ignorance of their progress as a reason for failing. In the past some students, unaware of their progress and failure, often expressed anger toward their teachers because they believed that teachers deliberately failed them. With this system, students can clearly understand how and why they achieve their respective grades. By using this sheet students in the corner can *diagnose* in which area they should make more effort. Also, as they progress throughout the course they can *review* their progress and set goals for themselves. This tool is beneficial because students can *use* it as a guide to prepare for class everyday as well as *predict* their overall grades throughout the course.

The Combination Card

A combined Class participation / Progress Record Sheet is an alternative to having two separate sheets. This card is also postcard size. This tool helps students see how they are doing overall at one glance.

Class Participation 20%

- Complete Homework (HW) = 1 point Vocabulary Sheet (VS) = 1 point
- Participation Points (P) = 1 point CD Rom (CDR) Points = 3 points
- Bonus Points = 10 points = Bring your writing assignment (Portfolio)

INTRO	P					HW	P	Quiz 6		HW	P	Quiz 11				
DAY 1	<input type="checkbox"/>					DAY 7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	DAY 13	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10			
	HW	VS	P	Quiz 1		HW	VS	CDR	Quiz 7		HW	VS	P	Quiz 12		
DAY 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	DAY 8	<input type="checkbox"/>	x2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	DAY 14	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10
	HW	P	BP	Quiz 2			P				HW	P	Quiz 13			
DAY 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10		DAY 9	<input type="checkbox"/>	TEST 1			DAY 15	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10		
	HW	VS	CDR	Quiz 3			HW	VS	P	Quiz 8		HW	VS	P	BP	Quiz 14
DAY 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10		DAY 10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	DAY 16	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10
	HW	P		Quiz 4			HW	P	BP	Quiz 9		HW	CDR	Quiz 15		
DAY 5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		/10		DAY 11	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	DAY 17	<input type="checkbox"/>	x2	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10	
	HW	VS	P	Quiz 5			HW	VS	CDR	Quiz 10		DAY 18	TEST 2			
DAY 6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10		DAY 12	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	/10						

Figure 3. Class Participation and Progress Record Sheet combined

Effectiveness of Class Participation Cards and Progress Record Sheets

We wanted to see whether the use of these tools resulted in an increased sense of participation among our students, and decided that, among the available tools for gathering information, a survey (group-administered questionnaire) would be the most effective way of doing so. Brown (2001) suggests that the best way to find out what people think about any aspect of a language program is to ask them directly in an interview or on a questionnaire. We followed the survey development steps suggested by Brown (2001) to create a questionnaire:

1. Brainstorm to decide question items to be given
2. Draft a preliminary version
3. Get feedback on the questionnaire
4. Incorporate the feedback into a final version of the questionnaire.

In following the third step, a pilot study was conducted with 122 students in Winter, 2003. A revised version of the survey developed by Hadley (1997) was used. With the results and feedback, the final version of the questionnaire was created. Numerical rating scales were used as the rating continuum can be easily turned into semantic differential scales (Dörnyei, 2003). A convenience sampling procedure (Dörnyei, 2003) was adopted for the reason that the participants were taught by the authors and shared similar personal backgrounds.

Participants

The participants of this study were 194 Japanese students majoring in engineering at a university in northwestern Japan. The survey was conducted in Fall, 2004. The ages ranged from 18 to 20. Over 95% of the group was male. Most of the students came from a high school with a strong focus on engineering subjects, which offered very little English education. Most of the students came from middle-class families. The questionnaire was distributed in classrooms and the students completed the questionnaire during the last 10 minutes of a 60-minute English class. The number of participants in each group ranged from 17 to 20.

Student Survey Results

We conducted a survey of the above 194 participants in Fall, 2004. The following figures show the extent of agreement with the statements in the survey (see Appendix).

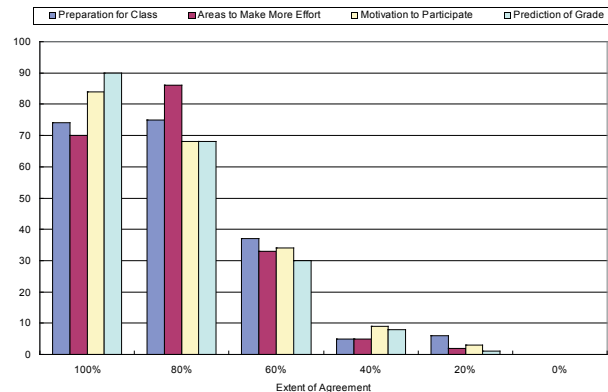


Figure 4. Survey Questions 1 to 4

The *prepare for class* question asked students if the card helped them to see how to prepare for class, such as by doing homework and checking vocabulary in advance. One hundred and eight-six out of 194 students (96%) agreed to an extent of 60% or more. When asked if the card helped students understand the areas in which they should *make more effort* during the course, 189 students (96%) agreed to an extent of 60% or more. When asked if the card motivated students to *participate in class* by seeing exactly how many

points can be earned each class, 186 students (96%) agreed to an extent of 60% or more. When asked if the card helped students *predict their grades* throughout the course, 188 students (96%) stated that they agreed to an extent of 60% or more.

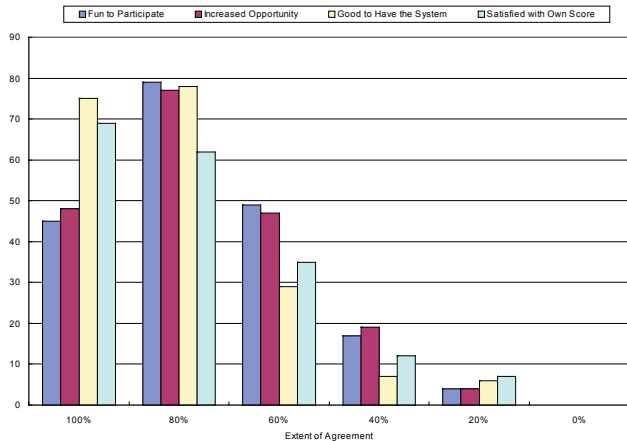


Figure 5. Survey Questions 5 to 8

When asked if this system made it *fun to participate* in class, 173 students (90%) agreed to an extent of 60% or more. Compared to other questions, the number of students who agreed 100% was lower. This might indicate that doing homework everyday or gathering courage to raise a hand in class was not always “fun”. When asked if the tools *increased their opportunity* to participate in class, 172 students (89%) agreed to an extent of 60% or more. The

rest of the students may be the ones who did not see this as a useful tool, or the ones who would actively participate regardless of the system. Some students were very eager to succeed and they were difficult to keep quiet. One hundred and eighty-two students (93%) agreed to an extent of 60% or more that it is *good to have the system*. One hundred and sixty-six students (90%) agreed to an extent of 60% or more that they were *satisfied with their own participation scores* and felt rewarded for their efforts.

Students' Comments

The written comments below were included in their responses to the Class Participation system:

“Participation cards helped me see my progress.”

“It was good to know that I would be evaluated not only by test scores but also by my participation in class.”

“I should have put more effort in participating in class.”

“It was challenging to seek opportunities to raise my hand.”

“I would have failed if there were no participation points.”

“I didn’t like to do homework at first but I realize it was important part of participation.”

“It was fun to be able to see the participation points accumulated every class.”

Limitations

One of the limitations in this study is that the participants were not randomly selected. They were convenience samples drawn from a university with which the authors work. However, it allowed the authors to access respondent groups of similar age, gender, ethnicity, educational background, academic capability, social class, and socioeconomic status. Another limitation with regard to the survey was that the responses were elicited by means of a questionnaire using numerical rating scales. Thus, the responses were only approximate to the percentages given. Thirdly, one limitation mentioned by both Hadley (1997) and Jeffrey (2003) was that the use of tools to foster class participation is behavioristic. Though the Class Participation Card system has its limitations, it optimizes opportunities for the students in the corner.

Discussion and Conclusions

Over a two-year period, using the participation card helped students in the corner define and examine their roles in participating in the classroom. Students' participation definitely improved their overall performance in class. Non self-starters had a chance to observe how to participate. Also, they could see and use opportunities in a supportive environment. As a result, more risk taking occurred; students talked more. They seemed to appreciate pair work more as it was valued as much as individual work. A dynamic classroom emerged, where students seemed to enjoy participating.

The student survey indicated that approximately 10% of the students were dissatisfied with their own participation points. The Participation Point System is set so that if some students absolutely refuse to speak up in class, other alternative ways of participation such as doing homework and completing tasks in class can be counted for 60-84% of their Participation Points. If some students fail to do any of the tasks required to pass the course and show dissatisfaction with their grades, hopefully, this system tells them the areas they should put more effort into for the next courses or other learning opportunities that arise.

As for the students who agreed to the effectiveness of the tools to 40% or less, there is no way of knowing if all of them were students in the corner, since the students in the corner can be different for each task given in class. However, the percentage of students who received low participation points dropped dramatically as the system changed from the time when students were only given instructions to speak up a certain number of times in class. Hence, the authors of this article would no longer conduct a class without the Class Participation Card system.

Unlike Jeffery (2003), who found awarding points for participation physically exhausting, the authors of this article did not find it strenuous at all. Writing a number in a box does not take more than one second as long as the content of the cards is organized so that the points are given systematically. One of the issues that arose with the Participation Point Card system was that it does not stop active students from raising their hands even when they have received the maximum participation points for the day or the semester. It is natural for teachers to gravitate toward active

students, but opportunities for points that students in the corner can earn should not be wasted.

Beginning Winter, 2004, we introduced a new way for students to indicate participation in order to have equitable system. They indicate by a raised index finger if they already spoke once in class and two fingers if they did twice. Although the tools were designed to help students in the corner adopt active roles when learning English, their implementation caused us to carefully select and use tasks that facilitated student participation. We sought meaningful activities and tasks for students and carefully considered what should be appropriate scores or rewards for them. We also tried to be consistent in rewarding students and to make the activities appealing and suitable. Students responded better when they had meaningful tasks and activities.

Practicing consistent active learning will lead learners to develop active life long learning attitudes. However, since participation is not always spontaneous, teachers must plan ahead to cultivate environments for active learning (Center for Instructional Development and Research, 2004). The tools introduced in this article definitely help students monitor their learning. Learning continues throughout, life and hopefully students will become more aware when learning and will transfer those skills of monitoring their progress to learning other things in life.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on Class Participation Card (English Version)

Please answer the following questions regarding the Class Participation Card.

What extent do you agree on the following questions?

a. 100% b. 80% c. 60% d. 40% e. 20% f. 0%

1. The card helped me see how to prepare for class, such as doing homework and checking vocabulary.
2. This system helped me understand the areas in which I should make more effort during the course.
3. The card motivated me to participate in class because it clearly shows how many points I have to achieve every class.
4. The card helped me predict my grade throughout the course.
5. It was fun to see the attitude score points accumulate every class for the effort I put in.
6. The system increased the opportunities to speak English in class.
7. It is good to have attitude points.
8. I am satisfied with the attitude points I earned.

Please write comments if you have any.
