Learning from the self-evaluation of participation

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This article introduces the participation card, a tool used by students at the end of each class to evaluate their own participation. We have found that making our expectations clear to the students in Japanese from the beginning eliminated many problems as the gap between what we thought of as the students' role in class and their own thoughts regarding their role narrowed. However, through the weekly examination of participation both students and teachers had gained much more. We noticed many students working more positively to be active, effective learners of English and fewer exhibiting behaviors that would impede their learning. At the beginning of second semester, designing their own participation cards allowed the students to consider further how they should spend their learning time. Eventually, we hope students will apply the idea that monitoring their efforts and attitude can lead to more effective learning far beyond the confines of the English classroom.

　本稿は、毎回の授業後に学生が自身の授業への参加について評価する、"参加カード"についての調査である。カードの使用にあたり、我々の期待を学生に日本語で明確に示すことにより、我々教師が考える教室における学生の果たす役割と、学生自身が考えているものとの間の溝が埋まるといった様々な問題が解消された。一方、毎週の授業で行われた学生と教師双方の参加による評価を通し、多くの成果も得られた。例えば、以前に比べ多くの学生がより有効的且つ活動的に英語を学ぶことに積極的になり、学習を妨害するような行動をとる者は少なくなったことが分かった。また、学期の初めに彼等に参加カードを作らせることで、授業時間をどう使うべきか、より一層彼ら自身に考えさせることができた。最終的に我々は学生に対し、自身の努力や態度を観察することで、より効果的な学習を導くことができるという概念を、英語の学習のみならず広く応用してくれることを望んでいる。

JALT2006 — Community, Identity, Motivation

A brief glance into a Japanese university classroom can shed light on why English language students in university settings often don't participate as western teachers expect. In many classes, all the students must do in the line of participation is show up to class. The cell phones and snores do nothing to detract from their grades. This was literally true as we walked around our university and looked in a few windows one day. In the first classroom we passed there were five or six students chatting in the back row, several pressing buttons on their cell phones and a few taking relaxing post-lunch naps. The professor was engrossed in his notes, lecturing away.

Some English students seem to toil endlessly to find little progress at the end of their efforts. One of Fujii's former students stayed up late every night memorizing the dictionary. If he ever got to "Z" in the 20 years since, the "A's" are surely waiting to greet him again. No one wondered why he never seemed to pass to the next level in the conversation school. However, little was done to equip him with the strategies he needed to get there.

Every student cannot somehow magically know how he should go about this process of learning English. By making clear how we expect students to participate in class, we have found not only fewer students acting out, but many also working more positively to be active, effective learners of English.

In the beginning, we told our students, "Participation is important." Although our students nodded in agreement, nothing seemed to change. Then it dawned on us that neither we nor our students had actually thought about what participation actually was. At first, many *don'ts* came into focus. "Don't talk when I'm talking," "Don't use your cell phone in class," and "Don't just sit there when you are supposed to be practicing." We took on the task of making little checks and notations about cell phones, forgotten books, and talking out. Some pluses eventually crept into the evaluation for those who asked questions or shined in a given day's class. Though the focus did gradually change from problems to desirable behavior, the job of trying to monitor large numbers of students in every class made us feel more like police officers than teachers. Shapiro & Cole (1994) assert that "although potentially valuable in the short-term management of disruptive actions, external punishment procedures, when used as the major mode of intervention, do not actively teach students the skills necessary for long-term behavior change" (p. 4). It was time to use another method that would serve the students beyond the classroom and into the future.

Literature

Many teachers have designed class participation rubrics. Gage (2004) designed a participation rubric specific to the English language classroom to make her expectations clear and deal with motivational issues she observed in her Japanese university students. She gave her students a copy of her participation rubric and a letter explaining her evaluation system in both English and Japanese. She rated the students eight to ten times throughout the semester and they rated themselves at midterm on their group, pair and individual work as well as punctuality and discipline.

Jeffrey (2004) wrote about a Participation Points System (PPS) designed by Hadley (1997) in which he rewarded

students by giving them one-point discs for standard participation such as a one-word or short answers and a marble for more difficult answers. At the end of class, students count their points and report to the teacher and class. When using the system, he found his students put in more effort, and they generally get better at what they are doing, which in turn sustains their motivation.

Using self-evaluation of participation

In our context to return our focus to teaching instead of policing, we decided that the students should evaluate the quality of their own participation in class. In our own experiences as second language learners as well as in other contexts, the practice of evaluating ourselves has been valuable as we strove to learn and improve. For example, Trovela's experience of playing on the university volleyball team greatly influenced her thinking of self-evaluation. Occasionally the coach would stop practice and ask the players to rate themselves on different things (effort, enthusiasm, positive attitude, etc.) out loud on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being best. This practice of regularly evaluating performance and attitude taught the players a way to be in charge of their own learning and progress.

Through our experiences as learners, we realized the value of self-evaluation. It serves as a valuable learning tool. We wanted to teach our students such a learning method. This approach is supported by Wenden's findings. "Wenden (1987) reported that providing students with a checklist of criteria to evaluate their own oral production resulted in successful use of self-evaluation as a learning strategy" (as cited in Kinoshita, 2003).

Trying to define participation

After we decided on our approach, designing the goals came into focus. Once again, looking at behavior problems was an easy start. However, we felt asking students to perform positive behaviors merely to contradict negative behaviors was just the start of an on-going discussion. Returning to the student who was attempting to memorize the dictionary, he showed no behavior problems and was extremely motivated. Still he was not progressing. He needed to employ more effective strategies. We began our attempt to design participation goals that model how the students should go about learning in the weekly, 90-minute English class, in such a way that those goals would extend far outside the confines of that particular class.

The first and current versions of the participation cards are listed in the appendix. Basically, the categories designed to eliminate problem behaviors include points for the students being on time, bringing materials, doing the in-class practices and listening. Even these developed in the process. For example, at first, asking the students to bring materials was meant to help students understand that it is not okay to come to class without a pencil, paper, homework or a text. This led us to the broader category of "Were you prepared today?" In and outside of class we had discussions of what it is to be prepared for class, that to really learn something the student must meet the subject matter many times, review, question and expand. In class, we tried to make this clear for the students by having them rate themselves immediately following an activity. For example, instead of checking homework at the beginning of a class we asked, "Did you prepare your answers to the conversation questions

enough that you were able to talk for the full two minutes?" immediately after the students had the conversation. Thus, coming prepared to class became more than just bringing materials. In the same way, the definition of listening changed from "not talking" to concentrating enough on what people are saying to question, comment and teach them.

Other categories reflect our beliefs about learning. The *active, continued practice* category was designed to help students understand that they must make the class practices their own instead of just running blindly through them as fast as they can. Various categories were aimed at the students adjusting what the teacher presents to meet their own needs. Students discussed both strategies as seemingly simple as telling the teacher when they don't understand what to do during difficult practices, to giving longer answers or creating new questions when the practices seem too easy. This led us to realize the importance of setting specific and tangible learning goals for each class period as well as the semester and asking students to rate whether or not they achieved those goals. We attempt to break down the huge goal of mastering English into little salient bits that prove useful and show the students their progress. Hopefully our students will internalize this process and carry it out on their own.

Another aspect that we feel holds back many students is the idea of being "shy" and that speaking imperfect English is not cool. Goals for percent of spoken English, positive and active group and whole-class work were made to encourage students to talk in English even if it is not perfect English, if for no other reason than so they can give themselves points.

Procedure

On the very first day of class, the teacher-generated participation card (see appendix A and B) was handed out to the students and explained. The categories were written in English while the descriptions were written in Japanese so that the card could be clearly understood by all students.

Thereafter, in the last 5 or 10 minutes of every class meeting, the students were given time to reflect. After copying the lesson goals, they gave themselves points based on the quality of their participation. Finally, students handed them back in before leaving the class.

The card used in the first semester was teacher-generated to communicate clearly our expectations of good participation from day one. We wanted to bring them our ideas of good participation in a clear, positive manner in a way to help the students make the connection that quality participation can lead to an improvement in their English skills.

However, we also wanted our students to think about what constitutes good participation in class and to identify good learner behaviors. So in the first class of the second semester, students worked in small groups and discussed how they could spend their time in class more effectively and what things, or behaviors, they could do to help them learn more. Students were given a worksheet (see appendix C) where they wrote descriptions and categories in English and Japanese and assigned point values to each category according to its importance for a total of 10 points. Student feedback was combined with our ideas to create the new card for second semester.

At the end of the year, we gave the approximately 500 students who had spent the year using the participation card an anonymous survey. The survey included questions in English with a Japanese translation. The students could answer in either language. We asked the students what they thought of the participation cards: in general and its good and bad points. They wrote the effect the cards had on their participation, if any. We elicited suggestions for areas of improvement. Students used their cards as a reference to write their end of the term self-evaluations.

Grading

How we have used the points in the students' final grade has also varied. We give the students between 30 points of their 100-point semester grade for participation. We use an average participation grade weighted by attendance. Students get a zero for participation points on days they are absent. These 30 points come from the students' self-evaluation in combination with our own evaluations to make scores more reliable.

There are two methods we have employed to calculate points from the cards into the final participation grade. One method was based on points. Students calculated the final average of points from the total number of classes attended for the semester. This average would be combined with the teacher's evaluation average. Another method was more holistic. At the end of the semester students were given their cards to review and asked to think about their overall participation and effort. Then, on a separate piece of paper, the students wrote how many points they thought they deserved for participation and the reasons why. Fujii took it further by having students explain their points and reasoning in small groups. Finally, students were given feedback either through a short conference or through written comments to decide on a final grade.

There are several ways to incorporate the information from the cards in the students' final grades. Whatever method is employed, it is important that students' self-evaluations be combined with teacher evaluations and if possible, peer evaluations for a more reliable result.

Changes

Developments to the card

With each semester passing, developments and changes have been made to the card (see appendix D and E). One change was the addition of a space for student comments and teacher responses. Comment prompts such as, "I learned…", "I liked…", "I didn't like…", "I didn't understand…" and "I want to practice ….more" as suggested in Murphy (1993) were included to guide the students to writing more focused and useful comments about the lesson. Indeed, the comment feature allowed us to get immediate feedback from the students after each lesson and gave us another way to build rapport with each individually. In the following year, the space for comments was expanded. Another exciting turn to the comment section is that several students began to communicate their personal goals for future English classes.

- "I thought of practice more reactions and English."

- "Today I very enjoy conversation. Try to more English. Little Japanese."

- "Today quiet, next fight!" (direct quotes from students' written comments)

In later versions of the card, the photo box was removed as per student feedback. Students commented that they were embarrassed by their photos and didn't see the reason to have them on the cards. Most recently, a homework box was added so that students can also see how much of the required homework they have done.

Other interesting feedback we received from students is the category, "Did you enjoy class?" as a measure of their class participation. While initially this seemed to us not related to class participation, the fact that it pops up every year on feedback makes us think there is something there. We have tried to get at the meat of this question through using different categories like, "Were you actively involved in class?" but have not found a category that is just right.

Future developments

We are eager to try out new developments to future cards. We will keep the ten-point scale, but we will change those ten points into ten separate categories, influenced by a presentation on a similar topic by Deacon at the 2006 JALT International Conference. Before, we used seven categories giving more important categories more points. For example, last year's category of "listening well enough to help and give advice" worth two points will be changed to two one-point categories, "I listened." and "I helped make today's class good."

The other changes focus more on how we will use the card with the students and less on features of the card. Next year, we will focus on one category for each of the first ten classes to give the students a feel for what we are asking and to be more aware of learning strategies. Returning to the new

category on Fujii's card this year, "I helped make today's class good." will be introduced by brainstorming how students can contribute to class: such as asking questions or answering questions. Hopefully, through the discussion of some of the vaguer categories we can get at some of those qualities that are important but hard to point down.

Changes in class

Since our students have begun using participation cards, class seems more pleasant and the negative feeling of policing our students is fading. Students are much more aware of teacher expectations and tend to work hard to meet those expectations. The number of *problem students* has decreased markedly." It has made classroom management easier for us and the students seem more motivated. The table below shows what we noticed in our classes.

Voices of the students

The end of the year surveys look promising. The students' most frequent comment about the cards was that it helps them know how many times they have been absent. Others said, "It was easy to understand the way we were graded." About 1 or 2 students from each class wrote that the cards had no effect on their learning. However, the majority of comments from students have been favorable. Students wrote:

- Through self-evaluation, I was able to think that I want to work on this or that area next time.

- I was able to reflect.

Table 1. Some changes we observed

Before	After
Several students consistently coming to class without proper materials.	Rarely does a student come to class with nothing. A few students forget one thing or another.
Imbalance in small group work: several silent students, others dominant.	More balance: still leaders and followers, but most try to add something.
Frequent sleepers, at least before we woke them up.	Sleeping students are very few and far between.
Students often asking how many times they were absent or about their grades.	Students can see how many times they were absent on the card and how many homework assignments they have turned in (on the latest version of the card).
Lots of Japanese spoken in class.	More English spoken in class.
Many students sitting and doing nothing during practice time.	In general, an increase in participation. More students asking questions when they don't understand a practice; a few expanding on teacher-designed practices.

- I decided I wanted to make an effort.

- I understood how I should work in class (translated from Japanese by Fujii)

We observed that learners were speaking more, practicing more and in general were more positive in English class. In turn, these changes had a strong effect on our behavior as we were able to abandon negative methods to get our students to participate more. T. Chure states, "As a student you rarely consider how much impact you can have on your teachers. Your smile, a well-placed question, or a casual 'That's fun!' can mean so much. When you are a teacher, you realize how much students can influence the way teachers teach"

(as quoted in Murphey, 1998, p.79). The cards showed the students what we expected of them and how participation contributes to learning. In trying to meet those expectations, their behavior improved. We no longer had so many negative behaviors to hinder our teaching. We have become more positive, focused teachers which in turn made them still better students.

Areas for improvement

Unfortunately, participation cards are not a magic cure-all. We have encountered three main problems. One involves trying to create categories that measure learning behaviors that are awkward to measure. Another is the card's level of effectiveness in large-sized classes that have over 50 students. Last is the issue of accuracy, or honesty in students' assessment of themselves.

There are qualities and behaviors of good language learners that are difficult to measure, for example, risk taking and the willingness to make mistakes. Being willing to make mistakes gives the student freedom to speak imperfect English. The students found measuring that quality impossible. If it is made more concrete, it becomes trite. A "Did you make a mistake today?" category seems strange. Another problem category was "Did you ask a question?" A student who understands and has no questions on a given day has no need to ask questions. On the other hand, we very much want to encourage those who don't understand to ask questions. It is awkward for the card to include these categories, but it is important for the students to know that they are very important behaviors to advance their learning. Therefore, we use other methods to teach our students about these things.

In large classes with 50 students or more, we have encountered more drawbacks with using the cards. A number of students seemed to benefit from the cards while others seemed unaffected. The frequency of lower quality comments was higher in large classes. For example, there were vague comments, such as "I enjoyed"; irrelevant comments, such as, "It is rain today"; and copied comments, where students copied their own comments from the previous lesson, or copied another student's comments word for word. We addressed this problem by having quick meetings with those students after class or writing responses that redirected theirs.

Another problem with using the cards in large classes involved logistics. The large number of cards made distributing and collecting cards a disruptive time of class. To remedy this problem, Trovela divided the students into groups of 4. Then at the end of each lesson, one student from each group picked up the cards for the rest of the group and returned them after they were filled out.

Although larger classes present more problems with the cards, we will continue to use them for benefits still outweigh the drawbacks. Not only do they let us know our students more, they give large classes a clear and constant foundation by giving them the same categories to assess themselves. In large classes, students might find it easier to hide behind the numbers, but the cards make that less likely. We attribute that to the communication that goes on in the comments section and the clarity regarding their expectations. Not only can we write personalized messages to each student, but the kinds of comments that students write give us clues as to who the students are, which in turn can inform our teaching. When students cannot hide behind the numbers, they are accountable for participating and contributing to class.

Lastly, the problem cited most in every class in every survey was that it is quite possible to cheat. Many wrote of concerns that other students were rating themselves too high and a few admitted anonymously that they were not accurate with their self-evaluation. We have also noticed that some students have a tendency to evaluate themselves rather severely when compared to our assessment of their participation. There are simple measures we have taken to help get the students to evaluate more accurately. Just putting a question mark by an evaluation that seems off can help students understand we are checking their behavior too. In other questions our comments helped do the trick. For example, to students who gave themselves very low scores, we wrote comments such as, "You worked well in your group today. Good job! More points." Accuracy will always be in question, but trying many solutions can make it less of an issue.

Conclusion

"If learners are going to learn to manage their own learning, they need to develop two types of skills: the ability to stand back occasionally from the learning process, as it takes place during weeks, months, or possibly years; and to step back from actual tasks in order to plan, monitor or evaluate their own on-the-spot linguistic performance" (Ridley, 1997, p. 1). We have our students for only one year. Our total class time totals less than fifty hours. With participation cards, we hope to bring them a chance to step back and look at their learning and how they have affected it. Even the idea that

they can affect it is new to some. At the beginning of second semester when they revisit the card and give input on what they think the participation goals should be, they are given an opportunity to think more deeply about it.

We hope to make our participation goals in the future such that in the process of striving to achieve them, the students learn more about how to learn. As they look back at their completed cards, students will be able to consider their performance against the linguistic goals we set in each class, as well as participation goals. We, in turn, can take our focus off the forgotten pencils and cell phones to work on becoming better teachers. We can use fewer negative teaching methods and focus more on positive teaching.

In the end, it is only the students who have the ability to apply successful learning behaviors in their lives. No matter how many checks and minuses they get on today's chart or whether they get a grade of 60% or 90% in English conversation, it becomes meaningless in time. Because learning continues beyond the classroom, making students aware of ideas to aid their learning and letting them practice evaluating them will give them skills for a lifetime.

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Appendix A. Japanese version of original participation card

'05–'06 春

Your Photo

Name: _____
Student Number: _____
Class: _____

英会話の授業の時間を有効に使ったら、英語の上達が速くなります。
毎回、授業が終わってから、すぐ下の表に記入しなさい。休む時は、点数が0点になります。公欠の場合、日付けと (excused absence) だけを書きなさい。記入してから、返しなさい。

CLASS PARTICIPATION CARD																			
DATE 日付																			
ENGLISH PERCENT (/2) 授業の何パーセントを英語ではなしましたか。100%英語で話した人は、この列に2を記入しなさい。50%は1点、75%は1.5点となります。																			
ON TIME (/1) 授業が始まる前に来た人、1点もらいなさい。遅刻した人は0点。																			
MATERIALS (/1) 必要な物(ファイル、引き用具、カセットなど)全部持ってきた人は1点。何か忘れた人は0点。																			
ACTIVE, CONTINUED PRACTICE (/3) 一生懸命練習して、自分の能力に合わせて会話を変えたり長くしたりして、stopと言われるまで練習した人は3点。少し練習の回数か工夫が足りなかった人は2点。普通のレベルの練習した人は1点。もっと練習しないといけない人0点。																			
QUESTIONS (/1) 質問に答えたり、質問したりした人は1点。																			
ACTIVE LISTENING (/2) 生徒と講師の話しや発表などをどの位聴きましたか。手伝いとアドバイスできるぐらい聴いた人は2点。良く集中して聴いた人は1点。集中が足りなかった人は0点。																			
DAILY TOTAL (合計) (/10)																			

Appendix B. English version of original card

'05–'06 Spring

Your Photo

Name: _____
Student Number: _____
Class: _____

If you use your English class time wisely, your English will get better faster.
At the end of every class, fill out this chart right away. Whenever you're absent, your score is 0. When you have an excused absence, write the date and "excused absence" only. Return the card after you fill it out.

CLASS PARTICIPATION CARD

DATE 日付															
ENGLISH PERCENT (/2) If you spoke English 100% of class, give yourself 2 points. 75% of class = 1 point. 50% of class or less = 0 points															
ON TIME (/1) If you were in class before it started, give yourself 1 point. If you were late, 0 points.															
MATERIALS (/1) If you came to class with all necessary materials (file, cassette, text, etc), give yourself 1 point. If you don't have these things, 0 points.															
ACTIVE, CONTINUED PRACTICE (/3) 3 points if you practiced hard by adjusting the conversation according to your ability for example, making conversations longer and speaking for the entire practice time. 2 points if you should have practiced a little more. 1 point if you did a normal practice. 0 points if you should have practiced more.															
QUESTIONS (/1) If you asked or answered questions, give yourself 1 point. If not, 0 points.															
ACTIVE LISTENING (/2) If you listened to the teacher, classmates and demonstrations enough to give advice and help, give yourself 2 points. If you concentrated well and listened, 1 point. If you lacked concentration, 0 points.															
DAILY TOTAL (合計) (/10)															

Appendix C. Worksheet for student-generated card

Your Participation Card

Class _____

Group Members' Names _____
_____
_____
_____

I want to improve the participation cards. With your group, please write your own card.
What do you think is important in class partcipation? What do good students do
in class? Make at least five categories totaling 10 points. Write in both Japanese
and English.

Points

Category 1	
Japanese:	
English:	
Category 2	
Japanese:	
English:	
Category 3	
Japanese:	
English:	
Category 4	
Japanese:	
English:	
Category 5	
Japanese:	
English:	
Category 6	
Japanese:	
English:	
Category 7	
Japanese:	
English:	

10

Appendix D. Japanese version of current card

'06–'07 秋

NAME:_____ NUMBER:_____ CLASS: _____

PARTICIPATION CARD

英会話の授業に積極的に参加すれば、英語の上達が速くなります。
毎回、下の表に記入しなさい。正直な考えをお願いします。休んだ時は、0点になります。
公欠の場合、日付の下に「excused absence」と書きなさい。

DATE 日付	WERE YOU PREPARED TODAY?		WERE YOU AN ENGLISH SPEAKER TODAY?	DID YOU REACH TODAY'S GOAL?	WERE YOU AN ACTIVE LISTENER?	WERE YOU POSITIVE (積極的)?		WERE YOU ENGAGED IN CLASS	合計点数	
	/1	/1	/2	/1	/2	/1	/1	/1		Checked by:

Today's Lesson Goals:

Comments:

Appendix E. Top part of current card in English

06–'07 Fall
    NAME:_____ NUMBER:_____ CLASS: _____

PARTICIPATION CARD

If you are active and positive in class, your English will improve more quickly.
Fill in the chart below after each class. Please be honest. When you are absent, all the points are
zero. If you have an excused absence, write, "excused absence" on the chart the next week.

DATE 日付	WERE YOU PREPARED TODAY?		WERE YOU AN ENGLISH SPEAKER TODAY?	DID YOU REACH TODAY'S GOAL?	WERE YOU AN ACTIVE LISTENER?	WERE YOU POSITIVE (積極的)?		WERE YOU ENGAGED IN CLASS	合計点数	
	Did you review last week's lesson and prepare for today's lesson? 1 point	Did you bring class materials (homework, file, cassette, pencil, etc.)? 1 point	Were you an English speaker in today's class? Used more than 90% English = 2 points, 75% or more = 1 point Less than 50% = 0	Did you reach today's lesson goals? 1 point	Did you actively listen to your teacher and classmates? Yes, concentrated the whole class = 2. Most of the class = 1. Did not concentrate enough or talked with friends = 0.	Were you active and positive in whole class activities? 1 point	Were you active and positive in small group activities? 1 point	Were you engaged in class? 1 point		Checked by:
	/1	/1	/2	/1	/2	/1	/1	/1		Point check / Homework

Today's Lesson Goals:

Comments: