

## Participation in the Classroom: Classification and Assessment Techniques

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### Recommended Citation

Wright, Jessey () "Participation in the Classroom: Classification and Assessment Techniques," *Teaching Innovation Projects*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3.

Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/tips/vol4/iss1/3>

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# Participation in the Classroom: Classification and Assessment Techniques

## Summary

Class participation and active engagement are both critical components for student success in a variety of classroom settings. This is especially true in philosophy classrooms where students are expected to develop and refine their ability to critically and productively engage with the literature being studied while also participating in conversations with their peers. Including participation expectations in classes is a common strategy, used by teachers, for developing and honing important skills in students. In requiring participation in their respective courses, teachers seek to refine and cultivate critical thinking and communication skills in their students. This workshop begins with an overview of research that, on the one hand, examines different strategies for effectively encouraging student participation and, on the other, also provides recommendations for broadening our definition of student participation in the classroom. Following the literature review, I will provide an active learning, self-assessment tool for evaluating course participation (this tool can be adapted to larger classroom settings and contexts, as well) that, I suggest, will be of benefit to teachers and students alike.

## Keywords

class participation, evaluation, assessment, students

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## **Participation in the Classroom: Classification and Assessment Techniques**

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### **SUMMARY**

Class participation and active engagement are both critical components for student success in a variety of classroom settings. This is especially true in philosophy classrooms where students are expected to develop and refine their ability to critically and productively engage with the literature being studied while also participating in conversations with their peers. Including participation expectations in classes is a common strategy, used by teachers, for developing and honing important skills in students. In requiring participation in their respective courses, teachers seek to refine and cultivate critical thinking and communication skills in their students. This workshop begins with an overview of research that, on the one hand, examines different strategies for effectively encouraging student participation and, on the other, also provides recommendations for broadening our definition of student participation in the classroom. Following the literature review, I will provide an active learning, self-assessment tool for evaluating course participation (this tool can be adapted to larger classroom settings and contexts, as well) that, I suggest, will be of benefit to teachers and students alike.

**KEYWORDS:** class participation, evaluation, assessment, students

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:

- elaborate on the differences between traditional, class participation and course participation;
- evaluate the benefits and pitfalls of using a broad range of techniques for assessing student participation; and
- use an active learning self-assessment tool that engages learners with their own participation.

### **REFERENCE SUMMARIES**

Czekanski, K. E. & Wolf, Z. R. (2013). "Encouraging and Evaluating Class Participation." *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 10(1), 1-13.

This article provides a comprehensive review of the literature and studies on class participation. This paper provides an important background for this workshop's aims so familiarity with this article is important for the instructors who lead this workshop. Czekanski and Wolf begin their study by discussing different themes related to class participation, students' attitudes towards traditional modes of class participation, and general research results regarding class participation. For example, they cite research showing that traditional methods of evaluating class participation (such as taking attendance or asking questions during lecture) disadvantage less vocal students and those from different cultural backgrounds and / or minorities.

Seeking to implement only these kinds of specific participation strategies and practices, Czekanski and Wolf argue, can lead to increased classroom anxiety in students

who are not comfortable with participating in these specific ways. Their article's section on rubrics and evaluation stresses the importance of teachers establishing clear guidelines for evaluating class participation—especially in light of its perceived subjectivity. A rubric and guidelines for assessment provide students with a clear understanding of how their participation mark is determined. Rubrics and guidelines also help instructors because they provide concrete metrics for evaluation. Czekanski and Wolf also offer a brief discussion of the value of providing students with frequent feedback and of staggering grades throughout the course's duration so that students can improve throughout the term.

Peterson, R. M. (2001). "Course participation: An active learning approach employing student documentation." *Journal of Marketing Education*, 23(3), 187-194.

In this article, Peterson presents and reviews an active learning approach to evaluating student participation. Promoting the use of this active learning evaluation, and appreciating the distinction between class and course participation that Peterson proposes, are two of the primary goals of this workshop. Class participation captures the traditional notion of participation which involves being vocal and active within the classroom by answering and asking questions and by participating in class discussions and activities. "Course participation may include readily speaking, thinking, reading, role taking, risk taking, and engaging oneself and others, and it may occur inside or outside the classroom confines" (p. 187). In light of Czekanski's and Wolf's article, it is clear that evaluating students on course participation could help offset the bias towards vocal and culturally confident students since it expands the valid modes of participation beyond the standard methods typically used. Expanding the notion of participation to include active engagement with course material outside the classroom is only an effective teaching strategy, however, if there is an assessment component.

To evaluate their participation in the course, Peterson required his students to submit self-assessments of their participation throughout his class; in these self-assessments they were required to persuade faculty that they had learned class material and actively participated in the process. This form of self-evaluation requires students to become actively engaged in their own participation and to seek opportunities to engage with the course material while also encouraging them to think about the course beyond the classroom. In fact, the self-evaluation component seems so effective that even students, who would rather not be involved at all, feel more compelled to participate in some way because they know they have to account for their behavior. For instance, Peterson notes that in one self-evaluation, a (disgruntled) student noted: "... I actually thought about this class (the materials, myself, and other players) much more than I would prefer at times. The professor has been exceedingly annoying and made me very aware of myself in the process" (p. 193). While this growth in self-knowledge, in the classroom setting, was viewed as bothersome by this particular student, it is actually the desired outcome and aim of encouraging students to evaluate their own levels and ways of participating.

## CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Duration (min.)	Subject	Activity	Purpose
5	Introduction	Presenter introduces himself / herself and the workshop schedule.	To establish a warm and friendly atmosphere.
10	What is Class Participation?	<p>Drawing on the work of Czekanski and Wolf (2013), the presenter should outline the traditional models of class participation (such as attendance, asking and answering questions and class discussion) and its usual modes of evaluation (which include considering subjective assessments, tracking student participation and attendance and considering the quality of the questions asked by students etc.).</p> <p>The presenter should also identify the associated pitfalls with this model and its usual modes of evaluation—which involve, among other possibilities, disadvantaging quiet students, non-native speakers and those with different cultural backgrounds. The presenter should also note how traditional models of class participation can contribute to increasing anxiety levels in various students as well as how it can underscore, and possibly enhance, potential tensions stemming from classroom gender dynamics.</p>	To makes participants familiar with the relevant background literature and research as well as to stimulate critical discussion about class participation and its traditional models.
15	Activity: Group Discussion	<p>Part One (five minutes): Divide participants into small groups of three to five people. Each group will then be given a handout (see Appendix A). One group member should record responses.</p> <p>Part Two (ten minutes): The speaker of each group will present his / her</p>	To get participants thinking critically about the material just presented and to encourage them to become collectively engaged in forming brainstorming solutions for identified problems

		<p>group’s discussion question and response. The workshop facilitator should engage with the different responses, and encourage other groups to do the same.</p>	<p>with the traditional models of classroom participation.</p> <p>This workshop activity requires participants to reflect and recall the material just presented, and to also expand upon it and relate it to their own experiences.</p>
10	What is Course Participation?	<p>To give context to this part of the workshop, the presenter / instructor should explain Peterson’s distinction between class participation and course participation.</p> <p>The instructor should also identify ways in which the notion of course participation has the potential to alleviate some of the concerns regarding student comfort in the classroom—especially in relation to encouraging student participation. It should also be noted, for instance, that instructors should put their students in charge of engaging with course material and participating in the course in the manner that best accommodates their comfort zones. In particular, presenters should stress, to workshop participants, that course participation includes class participation.</p> <p>The workshop facilitator should conclude this section by identifying how the strategies that participants discussed during the group activity fall into the two fundamental categories of “class” versus “course.”</p> <p>Invite participants to identify examples of course participation that are not class participation (it may be helpful to provide a few examples,</p>	<p>After the second half of the lecture, participants should be familiar with the traditional model of class participation, the new concept of course participation and how these two attitudes towards student participation differ.</p> <p>With these concepts in mind, this portion of the workshop will help participants reflect on how the two traditional models may differ with respect to assessment during the next activity.</p>

		such as writing notes on readings before class, organizing study groups and using concepts and information from experiences in the world that are outside of the classroom's specific environment (volunteer work could be an example)).	
15	Activity: Assessing Participation	<p>Part One (five minutes): Divide participants into a series of small, roughly even groups. Half of the groups should be designated as "Observer Groups" and the remaining groups should be termed "Discussion Groups."</p> <p>The Discussion groups should be given a handout with a discussion topic on it (see Appendix B). The Observer groups should sit or stand near their Discussion groups so that they can observe and overhear the conversations being had.</p> <p>The Discussion groups will have five minutes to discuss and brainstorm answers to the question put to them on the provided handout (from Appendix B).</p> <p>Part Two (five minutes): The Discussion groups and Observer groups should switch places and the Observer group will, this time, be given their Discussion group's handout; they will also receive five minutes to answer their discussion question in light of the answers provided by the Discussion group that they observed.</p> <p>Part Three (five minutes): A representative from each observation team and each discussion team will have a chance to put forth their group's observations and responses to the handout questions.</p>	<p>This active learning activity requires discussion groups to build on the material covered so far, throughout the workshop, and to generate a class context in which participation marks will be awarded.</p> <p>Observation and discussion groups alike must identify several modes of participation that they think will be critical for holistic assessment.</p> <p>The observation groups have to build on the class assessment knowledge that has been discussed, thus far, throughout the workshop. From the knowledge they have gained, they will need to generate, and apply, evaluation criteria for critical modes of student participation.</p> <p>This activity will illustrate the difficulty in assessing both class and course participation; in so doing, this segment of the workshop prepares all participants for the</p>

		<p>The instructor should engage with the various groups' answers and encourage further discussions between the groups.</p> <p>Take this time in the workshop as a fruitful opportunity to review the importance of providing clear, well defined guidelines for evaluations of participation.</p>	<p>next stage in the workshop's program.</p>
10	Self-Assessment for Evaluation of Participation	<p>Describe the self-assessment tool used in Peterson (2001). Discuss his class models and some of his examples to illustrate examples of some student responses as well as to discuss the benefits and pitfalls of the self-assessment tool (the response of the disgruntled student, for example is particularly informative, especially in light of Peterson's own reaction to the situation).</p> <p>The instructor should stress the importance of providing clear guidelines (such as a rubric) to students for their self-evaluation. It should also be underscored how important it is to explain to students what the purpose of the self-assessment is as well as the value of their course participation for their development.</p> <p>It is also important to note that this kind of self-evaluation can be used alongside other active learning techniques in the classroom. The use of active learning will give students opportunities to participate in different ways—which can only help to alleviate the biases outlined at the outset of the workshop.</p>	<p>This lecture will provide workshop participants with the information and tools required to use course participation as a model for student participation in their own courses; it also prepares them for the final workshop activity.</p>
15	Activity: Self-Assessment of	<p>Part One (five minutes): Each participant should be given a copy of the handout from Appendix C. The</p>	<p>This activity requires participants to perform</p>



	Workshop Participation	<p>instructor should ask each student to identify, and justify, how they have actively participated in the workshop. Explain to participants that this handout will be graded according to the rubric found at the bottom of Appendix C.</p> <p>Part Two (five minutes): Following their evaluation of their own participation in the workshop, participants should pass their answer one seat clockwise; they will then read and grade the handouts they receive from their fellow participants by circling the most appropriate boxes on the rubric.</p> <p>Part Three (five minutes): Participants return their handouts to the author. Invite participants to share their answers, the grades that they were given and to discuss their experiences with this assessment. Some example questions for guiding reflection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did this experience improve their understanding of the workshop material?</li> <li>• Was the reflective process helpful?</li> <li>• How difficult was it to evaluate one's personal classroom contributions?</li> </ul>	<p>the self-assessment that was just discussed. This activity will provide them with a way of seeing, first-hand, how this assessment correlates with the experience of students who are required to perform this self-assessment.</p> <p>This activity, as well as the experience of grading this kind of assignment according to the offered rubric, is a helpful way to assist participants in seeing how this whole process of reviewing and evaluating student participation can unfold in a classroom setting.</p>
5	Summary and Questions	Review the main points of the workshop and provide participants with the opportunity to ask questions, if they wish.	The summary is intended to help participants remember the key points of the workshop.
5	Seminar Evaluation	Provide participants with feedback forms to evaluate the workshop.	To gather feedback on the workshop and its various components so as to improve it, if necessary, in the event that it is offered again.
<b>Total Time: 90 minutes</b>			

## PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

This workshop has been designed to incorporate assessment techniques and active learning strategies that both encourage class participation as well as recognize the various ways in which participation can be facilitated and further explored. Given the cumulative nature of this workshop, it should be conducted with the final activity in mind. In addition, given that participation is at the heart of this workshop's theory and practice, the instructor should be prepared to incorporate examples developed by the workshop participants into parts of the outlined lectures and activities. This incorporation will help solidify, for the participants, the value of integrated participation; it will also assist participants in performing the final workshop activity.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Stevens, D. D., & Levi, A. J. (2005). *Introduction to rubrics: An assessment tool to save grading time, convey effective feedback, and promote student learning*. Virginia: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

This text provides a comprehensive overview of the benefits of using rubrics for evaluation and also outlines effective strategies for developing and using rubrics in the classroom. Rubrics for the evaluation of student participation are included as additional resources, in the text, for presenters and participants who are interested in learning more about rubrics and how to use them.

## LIST OF APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Small Group Discussion Handouts

Appendix B: Second Discussion Handout

Appendix C: Self-Evaluation of Participation

## APPENDIX A: Small Group Discussion Handouts

Considering the lecture on class participation and your own experience as a student and instructor with class participation, answer the following questions collaboratively, as a group:

1. What are some effective techniques for encouraging class participation?

2. Given the pitfalls of class participation evaluation, what makes your suggested techniques effective?

## APPENDIX B: Second Discussion Handout

Discussion Group: Think either of a class you might teach in the future or of one that you have recently taught and consider, in the context of either scenario, which kinds of factors would be important when considering evaluating class participation.

Following this consideration, identify and list three different types of participation that students could engage in which you think would be critical to assess—while making these identifications, consider kinds of student participation that are present in the classroom and, also, kinds that are outside of it.

1.

2.

3.

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*Observation Group: Using the Discussion Group's three critical modes of participation that they identified, discuss and isolate one possible way to evaluate, or assess, students' use of these suggested forms of participation.*

## APPENDIX C: Self-Evaluation of Participation

Reflecting on your participation in this workshop, answer the following two questions. These questions will be graded according to the rubric at the bottom of the page.

1. List up to two ways that you have actively participated in this workshop:

2. Explain how your ways of participating have helped you learn the material covered in the workshop (point form is acceptable).

Evaluate the above answers according to the following rubric (circle the best description). Consider only the answers as written above, not your interactions with the instructor during the workshop.

	A	B
Participation	My modes of participation are all appropriate.	My modes of participation are mostly appropriate
Contribution	My participation was relevant, constructive, and contributed to the workshop.	My participation was relevant to the workshop.
Justification	My above descriptions of evidence and explanations strongly support my claims to have participated positively in this workshop.	The evidence and explanations I offered, above, are adequate and relevant to the examples I gave to describe my participation during the workshop.