Based on this submission, I presented results of my research at the Special Track: Teaching International Business of the Academy of International Business Annual Meeting in Istanbul, Turkey on 6 July 2013.

Title: Encouraging and assessing Chinese students’ class participation

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Presenter: Dr. Dirk C. Moosmayer is an assistant professor of marketing at the Nottingham University Business School China. Dirk’s educational expertise covers value influences in management education with related publications in Higher Education, the International Journal of Management Education and the Academy of Management Learning & Education (a publication which he also serves as an editorial board member). He further contributes to his school’s attempts to better engage students in interactive teaching formats and to assess students’ contributions in this context. His related project “Assessing Active Class Participation in a Sino-British Context” is supported by Individual Teaching Development Grant GENTDG155 from the UK Higher Education Academy.

Abstract: Understanding stereotypically silent Chinese students is an important prerequisite for integrating them into interactive learning environments in business schools around the globe. I present experiences from introducing the assessment of students’ class participation and discuss challenges and good practices with the audience.

Acknowledgement: Parts of the presented results have been produced in joint research with my colleagues Daniel Borgia, Thomas Man, and Gary Schwarz at NUBS China.
**Presentation goals**

- Consider challenges and present good practices of how Chinese students can be encouraged to contribute to the classroom experience.
- Discuss how assessment of class participation can be used increase students’ learning.

**Specific pedagogical topic to be addressed**

*The Chinese learner:* Globalization of the higher education sector together with the increasing affluence of Chinese learners leads to rising numbers of Chinese students in classrooms around the globe (e.g. Fazackerley 2007). However, existing research and conventional wisdom suggest that Chinese students are often silent in class and are particularly reluctant to participate in interactive teaching formats. The hierarchical structure of Confucian teacher-learner relationships and the need to save face are the cultural characteristics that are usually discussed as the sources of silent behaviors.

Chinese students are further distinguished by their preferred learning style: Instead of following surface or deep learning, they typically pursue an achievement-oriented learning style and only engage in educational activities that are linked directly to desired outcomes, i.e. usually to their marks. The negative consequence of such behavior – that students do not attend non-assessed classes and do not engage in ungraded tasks – can be used in a constructive way: Students are quite willing to engage in any activity that is graded. Student involvement in class can thus be increased by marking class participation.

Considering Chinese culture and the perceptions and behaviors of Chinese students also has a special relevance in the context of interactive teaching methods and active class participation.
as cultural factors interact with perceptions of active class participation (ACP) (Chu and Kim 1999). Chinese students are usually found to demonstrate low levels of participation in class discussions (Biggs, 1991). At the same time it has been found that Chinese students usually do not apply deep learning strategies but instead focus on achievement-oriented approaches in which they apply strategies favoring those activities that allow them to achieve better results (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Biggs, 1996; Samuelowicz, 1987; Volet & Tan-Quigley, 1999). Interestingly, it has been shown that learning through the achievement-oriented approach is as strong as that gained through deep learning (Watkins and Biggs 1996). Hence, assessing students’ active class participation (ACP) as a part of their course mark, which has generally been shown to encourage class participation (Dallimore et al., 2006), becomes even more important when teaching Chinese students.

*Effects of participatory learning.* The focus of management education research has shifted from teaching to learning (Bok, 1988). Accordingly, students take a central role in educational activity and their active participation has become a desirable process aim in this context. This is based on the assumption that participation in discussions facilitates student learning (Elmore, 1991). Davis (1993: 63) summarizes the practical relevance of class discussions as gaining “practice in thinking through problems and organizing concepts, formulating arguments and counter arguments, testing (…) ideas in a public setting, evaluating the evidence for their own and others’ positions.” Acquiring such soft skills is particularly relevant for business students who in their future role as managers need to “think through problems, organize concepts, analyze information, formulate arguments, synthesize
and evaluate evidence, and respond to diverse points of view” (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2010: 615).

**Impact and benefits for instructors and students**

The positive impacts of interactive class teaching and the assessment of class participation are manifold. In-class discussions allow students to have greater control over their learning experience (Wilson, Pollock, & Hamann, 2007), and multiple positive effects have been identified: Students acquire more content (Weaver & Qi, 2005) and generally perform better in traditional assessments (Bonwell & Eisen, 1991). Less quantifiable effects include increased knowledge sharing among students, better retention of learned information (Ewens, 2000), and development of independent learning skills (Sivan, Leung, Woon, & Kember, 2000).

**Outline of topics to be covered in the presentation**

After an introduction to the topic, I will present the lessons we learned when we introduced the assessment of class participation at Nottingham University Business School China, a Sino-British Higher Education Institution with staff from more than 25 countries and a approximately 90 % Chinese student body. We accompanied the introduction of this new assessment method with multiple qualitative and quantitative research projects among students and faculty. In the presentation, I plan to focus on the three key results presented in the following and to supplement each result of the NUBS case with 1-2 experiences collected from the audience.
Shyness as barrier.

**Empirical basis:** In the first semester when we started assessing class participation (ACP), we surveyed 300 students.

**Findings:** In the Chinese context, students’ shyness and English skills were most explanatory for in-class grades.

**Reflection:** How can and should we account for student personality?

What do we actually assess?

**Empirical basis:** Grades from traditional and participation evaluation of 700 students.

**Finding:** Participation grades correlate by only 0.178 with traditional evaluation (essays and exams).

**Reflection:** When assessing class participation, do we want to assess different student competences; or traditional competences differently?

Consider structural impediments.

**Empirical basis:** Qualitative interviews with 20 UG students after the first semester, and with a PG cohort of 12 students before and after a marketing module I taught.

**Finding:** Opportunities to participate in a class of 60 students are perceived as being limited and assessment as unfair.

**Reflection:** How can we balance pedagogical necessity and structural impediments?
What makes an outstanding contribution?

**EMPIRICAL BASIS:** Five qualitative interviews with faculty who taught ACP.

**FINDING:** As assessment method has recently been introduced, faculty has little experience with grading class participation. It is thus unclear what an outstanding contribution would be.

**REFLECTION:** What should a grading rubric look like? Can a “stupid” answer or comment make a major contribution to peer learning?

**Access to and use of presentation materials**

The key value of this session is not in learning a new tool or technique, but in stimulating reflection by sharing – good and bad – experiences. In a traditional session format, I will provide the participants with a 1-page handout that gathers my key findings of what works and what challenges should be anticipated and prepared for.

I will be happy to respond flexibly to the participants’ needs and wishes. If the setting is suitable for a more workshop-type of session rather than a presentation, I will gladly respond to this, e.g. by using the four mentioned result areas as stimuli for table discussions that could be collected to produce a set of applicable take-aways at the end of the session. A related take-away in this context would be a bulletin board filled with ideas on how to address a set of different practical problems.

These aspects may be expanded based on experiences in the spring semester, when I will teach the same content to three small groups. Moreover, depending on available settings, the findings could also be used as inputs to a broader workshop.
Equipment needed to deliver the presentation

- Bulletin board
- Cards for bulletin board
- Markers in three colors

REFERENCES


