

## Class participation in a teacher training college: What is it and what factors influence it?

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‘There must ‘ave been ‘undreds of us in this lecture hall but when the professor finished ‘is lecture and asked if anyone ‘ad any questions, I stood up, honest to God, I stood up, and everyone’s looking at me. I don’t know what possessed me, I was going to sit down again but ‘undreds of people ‘ad seen me stand up so I did it, I asked ‘im a question...(...)...you couldn’ keep me down after that. I’ve been asking questions all week, mostly about Chekhov because, as you know, I’m dead familiar with Chekhov now’  
[‘Educating Rita’ (1983). Dir. Lewis Gilbert, with Michael Caine and Julie Walters. Columbia Pictures.]

### Introduction

There is a general agreement among teachers and applied linguists that the positivist, knowledge-centred view which pervaded education for many years has now been superseded by a person-centred paradigm. Within this new framework and with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching in the realm of teaching English as a foreign language, students’ oral skills and their active participation in class activities have come to take on added importance. Teachers with a communicative orientation are anxious to ‘get their students to talk as much as possible’ in their classes. Studies on what constitutes a ‘good language learner’ have found that ‘learners who raised their hands more and more often responded to teacher elicitation did better on tests than other learners’ (Naiman et al. 1978, cited in Breen 2001: 121). Moreover, research has shown that willingness to actively participate in class will not only influence the view teachers have of their students at school level, but also how tutors will assess teacher trainees at college, and even on how graduate teachers will be perceived by their own students and colleagues (Richmond and McCroskey 1998).

In the case of EFL teacher training courses, overt participation is considered essential, not only for the pre-service teacher trainees’ development of their speaking skills, including an improvement of their diction and pronunciation, but also as a necessary preparation for their future role as teachers themselves. This article describes a research project carried out at an English teacher training programme at a state university in Argentina in the year 2006, which originated from

a considerable concern voiced among teacher trainers and confirmed by pre-service teacher trainees about trainees’ low level of overt participation in various classes, which was especially evident during the first years of the course of studies. The present project focused on the subject called ‘Oral Discourse I’ since it is particularly appropriate for two reasons: its main objective is to foster the teacher trainees’ listening and speaking skills, and it is one of the first subjects encountered in the course. Three main objectives have driven the present project: to establish a common ground definition of what is understood by class participation by both teacher trainers and pre-service teacher trainees in this specific context; to identify the factors which trainees and/or trainers consider determinant in influencing class participation; and to explore, compare, and contrast trainees’ and trainers’ ‘voices’ regarding this question. It was this researcher’s hope that, on fulfilling these objectives, what Geertz refers to as a ‘thick description of a particular situation’ (Spielmann and Radnofsky 2001: 260) would emerge, thereby enhancing both teachers’ and trainees’ understanding of this topic, and that this in turn would lead to an improvement in the quality of students’ class participation within this particular context.

### How the research project originated

This research project arose from the need to address a problem which was initially identified through naïve observation. For several years previous to the study, several of my colleagues and

I had experienced and expressed a growing concern over trainees' evident reticence in participating actively in various classes in the English language teacher training programme where we worked. This reticence included an evident lack of volunteers even to read aloud questions or short passages in class, and was particularly noticeable in lockstep activities, i.e. in cases where the teacher addressed the class as a whole. Trainees' low level of participation was repeatedly discussed at teacher trainers' meetings. Another informal source of information about the problem concerning class participation came from the trainee students themselves. In the year 2005, a pilot study was carried out to test some of these perceptions, in which some of the students of 'Oral Discourse I' volunteered to keep diaries commenting on their level of participation in all the lessons within that subject, on their feelings about and on their reasons for their participation or non-participation in class. In their diaries, many students admitted that they avoided participation in class for a number of reasons. One of the students' entries is particularly enlightening and shows the many possible dimensions of the problem.

I particularly like participating in class because I believe it is the best way to practise my use of the language... (...)... I see many students who want to participate, but are reluctant to do so because they fear making mistakes or being corrected. This is one of the key factors that cause anxiety in students. Many of the students prefer participating passively in class by taking in their classmates' comments/answers instead of risking their own answers. I believe students need to understand and be conscious of the fact that 'nobody is perfect' and that they are in class to learn from their mistakes. Some students sometimes feel intimidated by certain teachers who perhaps are very picky (about pronunciation, language/grammar errors). It is with these teachers that students do not dare participate because they are sure to be corrected or criticized... (...)... Another factor that causes anxiety in students is the failure to complete homework tasks. When this is the case, students tend to participate passively in class because they do not have much to contribute to the topic. (Margaret, Diary, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2005)

It is worth pointing out that the researcher considers that lack of overt participation is not, in itself, negative; the problem occurs when students *want* to participate overtly in class but do not feel comfortable or confident enough to do so. As Breen (2001: 112) claims,

Overt participation may appear relatively scarce or constrained in many teacher-fronted classrooms and it may need certain kinds of interaction to 'push' it to the surface, but most

learners in these circumstances *are* continually participating. [emphasis in original]

### Participants

28 pre-service teacher trainees from the teacher training college volunteered to participate in this project. These volunteers were recruited during the first class of 'Oral Discourse I' and with the permission of the chaired professor of the subject. I knew most of the participants since they had been my students in the first term or during previous years. Moreover, I had voiced my concern about students' reticence to participate in class and had discussed the issue with students on previous occasions, so many of them were already acquainted and involved with the topic.

24 female and 4 male students participated in the study. They were all Argentine native speakers of Spanish, aged between 19 and 28 (age average: 21). Although students who enter the teacher training programme are supposed to have already acquired a certain proficiency in the foreign language, a high degree of inhibition and anxiety is not surprising since students probably believe that very high standards of language production will be expected of them as future teaching professionals. However, students are also possibly aware that as they are training to be teachers, they will need to overcome their inhibitions regarding speaking in front of large classes. Thus, a great deal of pressure and internal conflict can be predicted in these college students, which will certainly have an impact on their levels of anxiety in their language classes. This, in turn, will affect their willingness or reticence to speak in class.

The total number of students who started studying the subject when the research took place was 43, so the sample constitutes 65% of the students in the class though representing only a small sample of the total population of EFL teacher trainees at the teacher training college. This sample can be claimed to be representative of trainees at this college and possibly of other training colleges in Argentina, though no claim is made for its generalisability to other contexts.

As regards the teachers who collaborated with the project, the three tutors of the subject under study and an assistant teacher agreed to be observed during all their classes, to answer a semi-structured questionnaire and to be interviewed. In addition, the same questionnaire was sent to 41 teachers via e-mail, of whom 20 teachers answered, representing 49% of the total teacher population who were consulted.

### Data collection and analysis

The research project under consideration was qualitative, linear and cross-sectional in nature. It was carried out during the second term of the 2006 academic year at the teacher training college, over a period of three months. The following research methods were used: trainee demographic information was elicited through a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix 1); qualitative data was obtained from the trainees through learner diaries and open-ended questionnaires (Appendices 2 and 3); qualitative data from teacher trainers at the college was gleaned by means of a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix 4); and, finally, relevant data was obtained from the tutors of the subject under study through semi-structured interviews (Appendix 5). In addition, the researcher observed a total of 20 one-hour classes given by the three teachers who taught the subject. Each of the participant trainees was provided with a diary and instructed to write an entry for every class of "Oral Discourse I" they attended following a list of guiding questions. The trainees were asked to keep their diaries in their mother tongue because it was considered that it was the language in which they would feel more comfortable expressing their feelings, and in which they would have more linguistic range to express them accurately. Conditions of informed consent, anonymity and ethical approval were met.

What follows is a description of the way in which each of the research instruments was analysed. Answers to the first questionnaire presented to the teacher trainees were compared and tabulated in order to produce statistical information on the demographic profile of the participants. The collection and analysis of learner diaries followed the guidelines set out by Allwright and Bailey (1991) and the descriptions presented by Bailey and Ochsner (1983). The analysis of the diaries was inductive and consisted of three readings made at different times over a period of a month by me and an independent rater. During this process, a number of clear categories of factors influencing class participation were found. Priority of these categories was determined by **frequency of mention** ("the number of times a given topic is identified in the diary entries"), and by **distribution of mention** ("the number of different people who mention a given topic") (Allwright and Bailey 1991: 193). Answers to questions in the open-ended student questionnaire served to complement and expand information extracted from the learner diaries. Information derived from the teacher trainer questionnaires and interviews were compared to those obtained

from the teacher trainees, providing a more global picture of the question under consideration.

### Results 1: Towards a definition of the construct 'participation'

The first objective of the research was to explore the particular way in which students and teachers viewed class participation at the English language teaching programme. Students' answers coincided in defining class participation as the act of being involved in the class. This involvement was construed by the students in two ways: an active intervention by providing either spontaneous or unsolicited contributions, such as giving opinions, answering questions, making comments, talking about a topic, participating in group discussions, reading, and asking questions; and a second type of involvement consisting in showing interest, following classes with attention, and listening to others. In this way, according to the students' views, a dialogue or interaction is established between students and teachers which can help to 'make' the class (for a complete list of the concepts mentioned in the students' definitions, refer to Appendix 6). The four teachers who answered the question on how class participation could be defined also highlighted the aspect of student involvement in class activities by interacting freely with classmates and with the teacher, expressing themselves without inhibitions, completing teachers' thoughts, answering or asking questions, and responding to comments or instructions. Answers varied in the degree of autonomy teachers considered students should be given in co-constructing the text of the class (for a transcription of the four definitions presented by the teachers of the subject in the interviews, refer to Appendix 7).

### Results 2: Trainees' perception of factors influencing class participation

The student diaries were one of the most productive sources of information for the identification of factors influencing class participation, which was the second broad objective of the study. The questions and suggestions provided at the beginning of each diary helped to keep the students focused and eager to write at length. It was found that most students felt they wanted to participate in class and were satisfied when they were able to do so. In addition, most students were aware of their sources of inhibition or reticence, and regretted not having participated more when this inhibition occurred. As the researcher and the independent

rater analysed the diaries and the open-ended questionnaires, clear categories of factors influencing class participation emerged – both factors that inhibited and factors that encouraged participation in class.

In the interest of clarity, I will list and discuss the most important categories that emerged as influencing class participation in order of **distribution of mention**. This means that categories are listed starting by those mentioned by most students and proceeding to those mentioned by few participants (for a complete list of factors mentioned by students in the student diaries, refer to Appendix 8). All the comments I include as examples were in the teacher trainees' mother tongue so they are all my translations. To assure anonymity students were numbered.

**Knowledge of content or topic and self-confidence** ranked highest in the list of most frequent factors mentioned as influencing students' participation. The two factors often went hand in hand since students were reticent to participate if they were not sure that their ideas were correct. For instance, one teacher trainee explained: *'I try to participate when I feel sure since I know what I want to say'*, (Student 5, Diary, 06/09/06) and another learner claimed: *'I didn't participate because at no moment did I feel sure of my answers, of my ideas. Many times I felt like participating, but out of insecurity I didn't'*. (Student 18, Diary, 24/08/06). In other cases, though the students did know the answers, they did not dare to speak up for lack of confidence. Sometimes students reported that they had either not read enough about the content of the class or did not have enough experience concerning the topic.

The third most mentioned factor bearing upon participation in class was **class size**. In the first place, for practical reasons, if there were a lot of students in the class there were fewer opportunities for each to speak. Secondly, students reported that the greater the number of students in the class, the more inhibiting it was for them, and that reduced groups gave them a greater feeling of intimacy and confidence to speak. One student explains this situation clearly:

What I realize happens (and it doesn't only happen to me) is that in the other classes we participate more than in these. This could be because in this class we are all together and we are a lot and in the other groups we are divided into three groups. The fact that we are all together and are a lot can create some type of fear to talk. And for those who already feel ashamed in a small group in this group it must be worse for them. (Student 12, Diary, 06/09/06)

**Fear of negative evaluation** is the next factor most students mentioned as inhibiting their participation in class. This is one of the components of foreign language anxiety according to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1991). Defined by these authors as 'apprehension about others' evaluation, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively' (1991: 31), comments regarding fear of evaluation by both teacher and peers in class have been included in this category, as well as fear of making mistakes in front of the class. Although, it might be tempting to try to divide this category into three, it has been, in fact, almost impossible since most students' comments in their diaries do not specify whose evaluation they fear, and no clear distinction between fear of making mistakes and fear of being judged because of them is made in most students' remarks. A clear example is the following comment:

Many times I feel a little nervous at the moment of participating because I feel that everybody is listening to me and evaluating how I express myself, how I pronounce, my vocabulary, etc. (Student 2, Diary, 25/08/06)

Fear of peer evaluation is very noticeable and much more frequent in the sample than fear of teacher evaluation. This is clear in the following comment:

I discovered that I don't feel afraid of what the teacher thinks or if she would correct me or not, the real problem is what the other students in the class think or listen to... And this I think is important to point out because fear of exposure seems to be above fear of the teacher, at least from my perspective. (Student 18, Diary, 31/08/06)

**Task type** was the next factor mentioned by the students as influencing their participation in class. Students mentioned different tasks as either fostering or inhibiting their contributions to the class. Role-plays, for instance, encouraged participation for some students, who expressed the following comments: *'it was fun and it became an integrating activity that helped to lose fear of ridicule'*. (Student 7, Diary, 07/09/06) On the other hand, other students found role-plays inhibiting, such as the following student:

We also practised Role-Play which was not very fruitful for me because I am not good at that, I can't think of things to say and I end up repeating the same thing a thousand times. In addition, it's difficult for me to act naturally in these activities, it's as if my posture and my way

of talking is not very spontaneous. (Student 9, diary, 06/08/06)

The next factors identified by the students as significant with reference to their participation were their **attitude towards the topic** and their **L2 competence**. Those students who mentioned the former factor admitted that their like or dislike for the topic dealt with in class has an influence on their willingness to participate in class. Problems in L2 competence which were acknowledged as hindering participation included vocabulary problems (not finding the right words to express themselves), problems in understanding (either the teacher's instructions or corrections, or the material to be read or listened to), or problems in pronunciation. It is interesting to notice in the commentaries how problems in competence have an immediate effect on the student's emotional state.

I didn't have many problems to express myself in English but I notice that if I'm talking and I don't find the word to express what I think, that is when I'm inhibited and I don't know how to continue. What makes me angry is that perhaps I know that word or phrase but at the moment of saying it, it doesn't come out. Could it be that I get anxious? (Student 5, Diary, 31/08/06)

The next two factors were categorized as **perceived value of participation** and student **learning style**. Although most students admitted certain degrees of inhibition in class, a great number of them acknowledged the importance of participation in their classes on the teacher training course and expressed a need to overcome their reticence. The students gave four main reasons why they considered their participation important: a) to practise and develop their foreign language skills; b) to contribute to the 'text' of the lesson; c) to get feedback; d) to lose their inhibitions as future teachers (expressed as a personal goal). As regards the second factor, most students were fully aware of why they chose to intervene or not in class and claimed that their behaviour responded to their individual learning style.

**Class procedures** such as the use of pair or group work, or direct nomination of students by the teacher had an impact on the ways in which students participated. In general, students felt more comfortable participating in pairs and groups than in lockstep form. Only one student reported feeling tense within her group but did not describe this as an effect of the group but rather as an effect of her anticipation of an exam situation. Teacher nomination of students to speak usually was reported as anxiety-provoking.

Personally I think that, on the one hand, it is OK that the teacher be the one that chooses so that

everyone speaks; but on the other hand it is uncomfortable for the students because maybe things that are difficult to explain are asked, or you do not have clear ideas to do so. Students are ashamed of talking and find themselves in a situation in which they do not know what to say they get more nervous, they hesitate and that makes them always feel afraid of talking in class. (Student 12, Diary, 25/08/06)

Many students reported their **comparison with other students** as affecting their willingness to contribute to the class. This is another component of foreign language anxiety. This factor was also identified by Bailey, who found a relationship between foreign language anxiety and competitiveness among students (Price 1991). Students commented on feeling inhibited by other students whom they believed to be better foreign language speakers than themselves.

One feels a kind of inferiority regarding the rest of the class, for example in relation to knowledge about something in particular. That is to say insecurity sometimes, at least in my case, leads me to believe that I know less than the rest, and maybe it is not like that. Sometimes I feel intimidated by the rest of the class. (Student 18, Diary, 07/09/06)

This comparison with others is related to the next factor mentioned by students, **self-concept**. The term self-concept is used by Williams and Burden (1997: 97) as a combination of a person's perceptions and conceptions about him/herself which gives rise to his/her sense of personal identity. These authors explain that people whose sense of value and worth seems threatened by competition will purposefully withhold their contributions to the class in order to 'save face'. One way of temporarily overcoming this threat is by adopting a new identity or language ego. Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001: 259) found that a positive learning experience would result from a satisfactory development of an emerging L2 self or 'mask'. While this emergent personality was found to be pleasant for some learners, it could be unhelpful and stress-provoking for others. This is clear in the following remarks which two students made regarding this factor.

During the class we practised role-plays, so I talked quite a bit more than on other occasions. I felt much better and could get into the role of the character I had to interpret. (Student 6, Diary, 18/09/06)

However, role-plays actually increase the sense of threat in other cases. Student 7, for instance, explained that with fictitious or 'unnatural' situations such as these he felt strongly inhibited to speak and associated this with low self-esteem.

**Knowing peers** was the next factor mentioned by students as essential in giving them confidence to speak up in class and lose their sense of shame. Student 22 proposed making a kind of presentation class at the beginning of the term so that people could loosen up. The **teacher's attitude** and **the atmosphere the teacher set up in class** were also important for an equal number of students.

One of the most difficult concepts to label was what the researcher and independent rater finally agreed to call **sensitivity to others**. Under this term were included comments referring to respect towards others, an understanding of others' wish to speak, a sense of fairness and companionship, group spirit, etc. An example included in this category is the following remark: *'Every now and then it is fair to let my other classmates participate and not always be the one who participates. This is a symbol of good companionship'*. (Student 16, Diary, 31/08/06)

**Results 3: A comparison between trainers' and trainees' views**

The results obtained from the questionnaires and interviews answered by the teacher trainers helped establish a comparison between the most relevant factors identified by the trainees and by the trainers. It also allowed for a clearer distinction between inhibiting and motivating factors.

While trainees mostly mentioned class size, fear of making mistakes, fear of saying the wrong answer, fear of negative evaluation by both teacher and peers, lack of interest in topic and/or knowledge about topic, perceived low level of L2 competence, and teacher's attitude as the main factors inhibiting them; trainers mostly mentioned not being prepared for class, personality factors, low L2 competence, lack of motivation and interest, types of activities, and teacher's attitude as factors affecting students' willingness to participate.

Surprisingly, though most trainees mentioned large class size as an inhibiting factor, one of the trainers, Ana, explained in her interview that the unusually small number of students in her class was a drawback for those students who were shy and didn't like taking risks. She said:

I think that the key factor this year was personality because the group was rather small, there were only ten students in the group and basically everyone had the chance to be heard, to say something but especially at the beginning probably that was a drawback. The small number of students sometimes inhibited them from participating from saying something because they were kind of 'OK I am on spotlight if I say something'.

With reference to factors that were considered as motivating participation in class, trainees mostly mentioned **knowledge of and interest in topic, teacher's positive feedback, personal objectives** (including overcoming insecurity and anxiety, wanting to give a good image, and a desire to learn and practise), **small class size**, and **class procedures** (including classes complemented with videos and/or music, provision of theoretical material, and debates with other peers and group work). Trainers believed **students' knowledge and interest in topic, being prepared for class, pair and group work, students' freedom of expression without fear of negative evaluation, and a relaxed atmosphere and good rapport with teacher and/or peers** to be the principal factors encouraging trainees to participate in class. It is evident that there is quite a degree of agreement between trainers' and trainees' views, but it is quite obvious that, while teacher trainers have not considered the number of students per class as an important factor, it is crucial as far as trainees are concerned. It is also clear that trainers give great importance to trainees' preparation for class, whereas the latter do not mention this factor. The following table helps to visualize the differences between trainers' and trainees' views regarding the relative importance of factors influencing class participation.

INHIBITING FACTORS	MOTIVATING FACTORS
<p><u>Students</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class size</li> <li>• Fear of Negative Evaluation</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge about and/or interest in topic</li> <li>• Perceived Low Level of L2 Competence</li> <li>• Teacher's attitude</li> </ul> <p><u>Teachers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not Being Prepared for Class</li> <li>• Personality Factors</li> <li>• L2 Competence</li> <li>• Lack of Motivation and Interest</li> <li>• Types of Activities</li> <li>• Teacher's Attitude</li> </ul>	<p><u>Students</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of and Interest in Topic</li> <li>• Teacher's Positive feedback</li> <li>• Personal Objectives</li> <li>• Class size (few students)</li> <li>• Class procedures</li> </ul> <p><u>Teachers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and Interest in Topic</li> <li>• Being prepared for Class (includes having time to prepare for class)</li> <li>• Working in Pairs or Groups</li> <li>• Freedom of Expression without Fear of Negative Evaluation</li> <li>• Relaxed atmosphere and rapport with teacher and/or peers</li> </ul>

Table1: Most frequently mentioned factors by both teachers and students as inhibiting and motivating students' class participation

### Implications of this research for practice

The findings in this research project confirm the special need to encourage students' participation in class, especially in first- and second-year subjects at the teacher training college. The challenge for teachers in this context seems to be to find ways of reducing the number of students per class, to create opportunities for students to get to know all their peers, to foster an atmosphere of tolerance of mistakes and/or acceptance of a variety of ideas, to encourage and accept all contributions to the class as important, to understand that remaining silent might be a purposeful choice, to provide students with strategies to overcome their fear of speaking in front of the whole class, and to make a constant effort to relate class topics to the students' own experience.

### Personal appreciation of the research

Savater (1991) views teaching as an art rather than as a science. As such, this activity requires great intuition and sensitivity on the part of the teacher to understand the multiplicity of factors which will influence the creation of every single class, on every single day of the year. Thus, teachers and students could be considered co-creators of their lessons through their interactions and involvement in each class. In fact, being *involved* is one of the key words that echoed in many of the voices that participated in this research. The word derives from Latin and was originally used to mean 'rolled or wrapped round'. In fact, this is the sense it keeps in the Spanish word 'envolver', meaning wrapping up a present. This idea is also evident in some of the metaphors used by the students to define participation in class such as 'seguir el hilo de la clase', meaning to follow the thread of the class, or 'ayudar a la profesora a "hacer" su clase', which means 'helping the teacher to "make" her class'. My findings in this research have led me to believe that it is the perfect word to define students' participation in class since, according to the concepts presented in this research, this requires students to be completely wrapped up in the class. The term, then, seems to be much more comprehensive than just speaking in class. In this appreciation, I coincide with Black (1995: 14) who defines participation as 'the student being engaged in a meaningful way with the subject matter in order to gain a better understanding of it. Participation also requires the student to be present physically and mentally in the learning situation'. Needless to say, this might include body posture, movement, drawing, and even silence.

Under the teacher's guidance, a web or network of strands is woven in each class, and every thread is important in obtaining the final pattern of the lesson. The way in which each participant in this weaving process interacts with others will depend on a number of factors – of cognitive, affective, and social nature – that will determine how firm, loose, or entangled the web will become. But there will always be another class to start the process again. It is the teacher's task to become aware of the factors which are inhibiting or encouraging for students to contribute their individual strand and to keep in mind how important each contribution is. The fragility or strength of each web depends on how each of the strands is taken care of and how factors which affect the weavers can be addressed.

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## APPENDIX 1

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

Please answer the following questionnaire as completely and honestly as you can, following the instructions provided in each part.

#### **Fill in the following:**

- a. Name and contact e-mail address:
- b. Age:
- c. Previous Studies:
- d. Number of years you studied English before studying at the Teacher Training College UNMDP:
- e. Did you study English with other students, with a private teacher, or by yourself?
- f. Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country? Yes/No For how long?
- g. Reason/s for studying at the Teacher Training College UNMDP:
- h. Number of years you have studied at the Teacher Training College UNMDP:
- i. Have you sat for this subject before? Yes/No
- j. Which other subjects are you sitting for this term? Please write the name of the subject, and days and timetables when you attend classes.

## APPENDIX 2

Hello! ☺ Welcome to your diary! You are going to participate in a research project which will help you with your language learning. As you write about what you think and feel as a language learner, you will understand yourself and your experience better. In addition, you will help me discover some interesting facts about your learning experience, which will be useful to improve our classes at 'Discurso Oral 1'. Your identity and the identity of others you may write about will be unknown (unless you wish it otherwise) to anyone except the researchers. If the content of your diaries is quoted directly in the research project, your name will be changed.

I would like you to write your diaries in SPANISH. Remember that you will not be evaluated on any of your answers. The Dates for handing in your diaries are **14th September - 5<sup>th</sup> October**

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#### **Suggestions:**

- Use one section at the back of your diaries to take random notes DURING your class. You can use these notes for your diary entries.
- Set aside a regular time and place for each day in which to write in your diary. For each entry, write clearly the date of the class and the name of the teacher.
- Keep your diary in a safe, secure place so you will feel free to write whatever you wish.
- Do not worry about your style, grammar, or organization.
- As much as possible support your ideas with examples. When you write something down, ask yourself, "Why do I feel that is important"?
- Try to answer all the questions I give you for every diary entry.
- At the end of each diary entry, note any additional thoughts or questions that have occurred to you. You can consider these in more detail later.

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#### **DIARY ENTRY**

DATE AND TIME OF CLASS:



## TEACHER:

- 1) How many times did you participate in class? Why did you participate?
- 2) Did you speak at length (3, 4 sentences or more) or was it just a short answer (like: "Yes, I agree")?
- 3) How did you feel when you participated?
- 4) Were there times when you wanted to participate and you didn't? How many times in the whole class approximately?
- 5) Why didn't you participate?
- 6) How did you feel about not participating?

OTHER COMMENTS:

**APPENDIX 3****QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS**

*This questionnaire was carried out in Spanish. Each question has been translated below.*

Por favor contesten las siguientes preguntas de manera espontánea.

*Please answer the following questions in a spontaneous way.*

Nombre del encuestado:

Name

1- Podés definir brevemente qué entendés por "participación en clase" en tus propias palabras?

*1- Can you define briefly what you understand by "class participation" in your own words?*

2- Cuales son, en tu opinión, los 5 factores más importantes que inhiben tu participación en clase de "Discurso Oral 1", es decir que no te dan ganas de participar?

*2- Which are, in your opinion, the 5 most important factors that inhibit your participation in class in "Oral Discourse 1", i.e. that make you not feel like participating?*

3- Cuales son, en tu opinión, los 5 factores más importantes que motivan tu participación en clase de "Discurso Oral 1", es decir que te dan ganas de participar?

*3- Which are, in your opinion, the 5 most important factors that motivate your participation in class in "Oral discourse 1", i.e. that make you feel like participating?*

4- Por favor mencioná, si los hay, qué otros factores inhiben tu participación en otras clases del Profesorado de Inglés (es decir en otras materias que cursás o has cursado).

*4- Please mention, if there are, what other factors inhibit your participation in other classes of the Teacher Training college (i.e. in other subjects that you are taking or have taken)*

5- Por favor mencioná, si los hay, qué otros factores motivan tu participación en otras clases del Profesorado de Inglés (es decir en otras materias que cursás o has cursado).

*5- Please mention, if there are, what other factors motivate your participation in other classes of the Teacher Training college (i.e. in other subjects that you are taking or have taken)*

6- Creés que tu nivel de participación en clases anteriores que tuviste en el colegio (EGB, Polimodal) fue más alto, más o menos igual, o más bajo que en el Profesorado de Inglés?

*6- Do you think your level of participation in previous classes you had at school (EGB, Polimodal stand for primary and secondary classes) was higher, more or less similar, or lower than at the teacher training college?*

7- Creés que hay alguna diferencia entre tu nivel de participación en clases en tu lengua materna y tu nivel de participación en clases en la lengua extranjera? Si la hay, podrías explicar la diferencia?

*7- Do you think there is any difference between your level of participation in classes in your mother tongue and your level of participation in classes in a foreign language? If there is, could you explain the difference?*

**APPENDIX 4****QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS**

Please answer the following questions related to your classes at the Teacher Training Programme, UNMDP, as fully and honestly as possible. Your answers will provide an invaluable source of information for my research.

Before filling in this questionnaire I would like to clarify what I mean by “class participation”. “Class participation” is any verbal communication between the teacher and the students and between one or more students regarding topics of the course. This includes, but is not limited to, presentation of information, statements of opinion, questions posed, and questions answered” (Christensen et al 1995: 2).

Subjects you teach (please specify which year each subject corresponds to in the course of studies).

Subject 1:

Subject 2:

Subject 3:

Subject 4:

Please indicate if you consider the level of participation of students in your classes in the last two years: (1) Extremely low, (2) Low, (3) Neither markedly low nor high, (4) High, or (5) Extremely high. Indicate this level for each of the subjects you teach.

Subject 1:

Subject 2:

Subject 3:

Subject 4:

List the five most important factors which you think influence students’ level of participation in your classes.

- 1-
- 2-
- 3-
- 4-
- 5-

In what situations are students most willing to participate in your classes?

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **INTERVIEWS**

The following are the base questions I asked in the semi-structured interviews with the tutors of the subject “Oral Discourse 1”. As each interview progressed, further questions were asked.

- 1- Please define in your own words what you understand by class participation.
- 2- What main factors do you think inhibited students from participating in your classes of “Discurso Oral” this year?
- 3- What main factors do you think encouraged students to participate in your classes of “Discurso Oral” this year?

## **APPENDIX 6**

The first question in the student questionnaire (Questions 1- QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS, APPENDIX 3) explored students’ beliefs concerning what class participation is. The following elements were identified in the students’ definitions.

Participation means:

Giving opinions (16 students)

Answering questions (11 students)

Making a commentary (9 students)

Making a spontaneous and unsolicited contribution (4 students)  
Asking questions (4 students)  
Having a dialogue between teacher and students and/or between students (3 students)  
Following classes with attention (3 students)  
Being involved in the class (3 students)  
Listening to others (3 students)  
Helping teacher to “make her class” (2 students)  
An attitude a student adopts in class (2 students)  
Talking about a topic (2 students)  
Showing interest  
Reading  
Participating in group discussions  
Making a thought public  
Making an intervention

## APPENDIX 7

In the semi-structured interviews, the teachers provided definitions of what each understood by class participation. In this sense it is worth quoting the definitions provided. Each quote has been edited, eliding pauses, hesitation interjections and repetition of words. Pseudonyms are used for the purpose of confidentiality.

Ana gave the following definition:

“I believe that class participation is when students are willing to say something, to interact with their class mates, with the teacher, without being forced to do it. Yes, basically, it's involvement in class activities, responses to comments, instructions, yeah basically that would be it.”

When asked what she understood by class participation, Marcela said it was:

“active involvement, basically and mainly on the part of the students.”

María explained:

“Well, I understand that students must be motivated by the topics that are used in class and maybe they must feel that they can express themselves without inhibition, without doubts, but it is something that the teachers, the group of teachers of the subject, has to foster in students. That is, the kind of participation is very related to the way the teachers foster this kind of expression in class.”

Daniela provided this definition:

“I imagine that the student interacts with the teacher when the teacher is developing a kind of discourse on a certain topic and the student can complete a sentence, complete a thought, maybe answer on the spot, the question that the teacher puts forward, in the sense that maybe the teacher is talking about something and wants the student to participate, makes a question...the student is ready on the spot, ready to participate. That would be one of the ideas that I have. Then, spontaneously, when the students want to make questions and they don't dare to make the question when they are together with their classmates but they make the question when the class is over that would be lack of participation. What I understand by participation is making the question in class.”

Marcela said the following:

“Well, I understand that students must be motivated by the topics that are used in class and maybe they must feel that they can express themselves without inhibition, without doubts, but it is something that the teachers, the group of teachers of the subject have to foster in students. That is, the kind of participation is very related to the way that the teachers foster this kind of expression in class.”

**APPENDIX 8**

Factors influencing class participation described by the students in their diaries and ordered by distribution of mention.

<b>Categories of Factors</b>	<b>Number of students (percentage)</b>
Knowledge of topic	22 (78.5 %)
Self-confidence or sense of security	22 (78.5 %)
Class size	18 (64.2 %)
Fear of negative evaluation	18 (64.2 %)
Task type	17 (60.7 %)
Attitude to topic (i.e. liking or disliking topic)	14 (50 %)
L2 competence	14 (50 %)
Perceived value of participation	13 (46.4 %)
Learning style	13 (46.4 %)
Class procedures (lockstep, group work, nomination, etc)	12 (42.8 %)
Comparison with other peers	10 (35.7 %)
Self-concept	9 (32.1 %)
Knowledge of peers	9 (32.1 %)
Teacher's attitude	9 (32.1 %)
Sensitivity to others (i.e. letting others speak, etc.)	8 (28.5 %)
Risk-taking	7 (25 %)
Physical and emotional state	6 (21 %)
Teacher's instructions	6 (21 %)
Fear of speaking in front of the whole class	6 (21 %)
Teacher's feedback	6 (21 %)
Anticipation of tests	5 (17.8 %)
Motivation	5 (17.8 %)
Extroversion/Introversion	4 (14.2 %)
Perfectionism	4 (14.2 %)
Teacher's image	3 (10.7 %)
Class time (i.e. when the class took place)	3 (10.7 %)
Knowledge of teacher	2 (7.1 %)
Teacher's correction techniques	2 (7.1 %)
Locus of control	2 (7.1 %)
Prior learning experiences	2 (7.1 %)
Memory problems	1 (3.5 %)