Get those phones out!

Using in class polling on a large scale postgraduate law course

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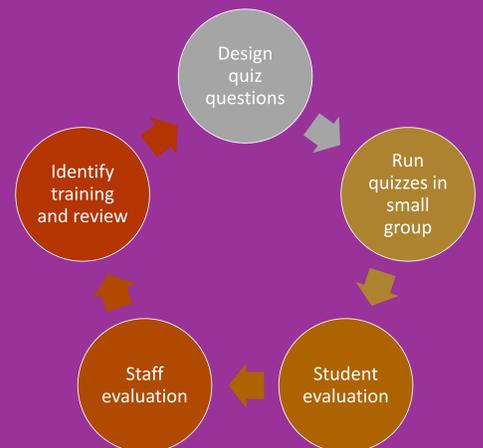
Who are we and what do we teach?

The Bar Professional Training Course is a postgraduate course to prepare law graduates for practise as barristers, done after a law degree or equivalent. We have 300+ students studying this 1 year course. One subject is civil litigation or "how to sue people". Our "textbook" is a two volume hardback book, with each volume having 2,500 pages (really!) and we have to prepare our students for a gruelling 3 hour, 75 question "single best answer" exam, with 4 options for each question. The material is technical, complex and unintuitive. Students must gain a pass mark of at least 60%. The course is delivered with 13 LG and 10 SG sessions. The students are told at the outset that they need to ensure that they cover the whole syllabus and that the SG sessions are to help them understand.

Why "in class polling" and why Poll Everywhere?

- To attempt to increase attendance, attention, anonymity, participation and engagement through use of in class polling (clickers or BYOD) (Kay & LeSage, 2009).
- To overcome reticence, as not all students are willing to participate in small group activities (Fritschner, 2000)
- To encourage greater and different participation in class with questions in a similar format to the assessment questions, though of a simpler level.
- To aid active learning (Sarason & Banbury, 2004).
- To create an anonymous environment for in-class testing (Graham et al., 2007).
- To try and get *all* students to answer the questions
- To use mobiles/laptops which the students use so much of the rest of their lives
- To encourage greater levels of preparation and an appreciation of the need for continuous learning/ongoing revision
- Voting followed by peer discussion with subsequent re-polling found to enhance understanding (Smith et al, 2009)
- On a practical level PE suitable because City has full access, with a number of advantages; BYOD, text, online and app functionality, ability to incorporate into PowerPoint presentation, can "mark" questions as correct.

Recommended types of questions to consider are one best answer (AKA single best answer questions), student perspective questions, misconception questions, peer assessment questions (Bruff, 2009).

What did students like?

- Anonymisation
- SBA/MCQ/exam practice
- Breaks the class up
- Is less threatening than direct questioning
- Don't get influenced by other people
- Realise that your guess (informed or not) may be right
- See that others think like you: increases confidence
- Helps the learning process
- Learned how to look for the small differences between the answers
- Understanding the right/wrong answers really helped
- Everyone has technology with them (easy to use it)
- Everyone uses technology; important that education not excluded from this.
- Would like more free texts (i.e. word clouds)
- Could easily be used in other knowledge based subjects
- If you were the sole correct voter, boost to confidence

Evaluation methodology

Design quiz questions → Run quizzes in small group → Student evaluation → Staff evaluation → Identify training and review →
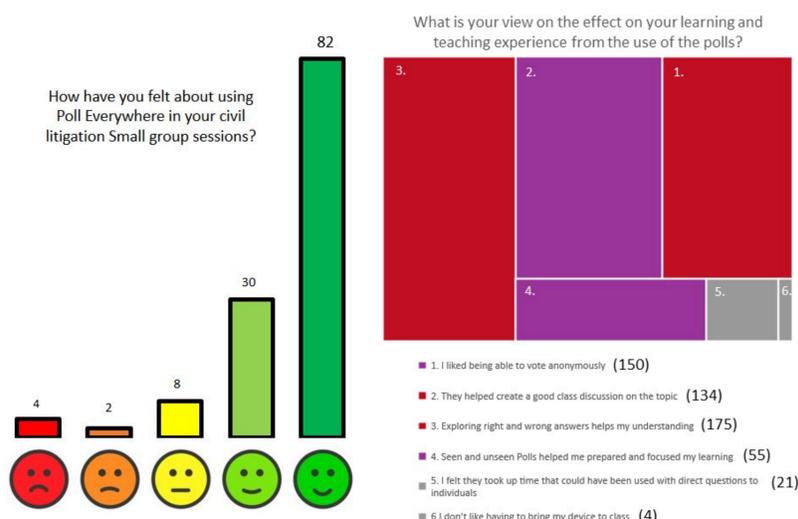
Staff impressions

Positive

- Students liked it generally
- Students really liked the anonymity
- Changes the pace of the class/gives the students a break
- Prompts a more animated discussion
- Makes CLS look forward thinking
- Engaged with technology
- Good opportunity to practice SBAs
- Forces students to commit/engage
- Students felt comfortable with it
- Added zest to the sessions
- Very positive for a student who was the only one who got the right answer
- Better tool for checking their understanding
- A positive experience
- The importance of ensuring students understood why the wrong answers were wrong
- All staff would recommend it to others and could see ways in which it could help make other SGs and LGs more innovative

Negative

- Set up – the technology didn't always work
- Inconsistency of the technology reliability was unsettling
- Fiddly to ensure it was downloaded so that always available from every teaching room.
- Can eat into the time if the tutor waits for everyone to answer
- Technology problems cost class time
- How to get all the students to engage.
- Need more training to overcome technical glitches
- Don't know which students are getting it right/wrong
- Some of the Staff body not convinced that it was a more effective teaching tool than a show of hands

How have you felt about using Poll Everywhere in your civil litigation Small group sessions?

What is your view on the effect on your learning and teaching experience from the use of the polls?

1. I liked being able to vote anonymously (150)
2. They helped create a good class discussion on the topic (134)
3. Exploring right and wrong answers helps my understanding (175)
4. Seen and unseen Polls helped me prepared and focused my learning (55)
5. I felt they took up time that could have been used with direct questions to individuals (21)
6. I don't like having to bring my device to class (4)

Good practice

- Good practice in the use of quizzes involves the quiz task being "integrated into the learning sequence" (Ally, 2008, p8).
- The rationale for the (online) teaching and learning should be clear and should be communicated to the students; "learners should be told why they should take the lesson" (Ally, 2008, p23).
- Habel & Stubbs give excellent advice on meaningful use of polling with active learning at the forefront (Habel & Stubbs, 2014)
- Quizzes are recommended as a method for linking theory to practice (Mason & Rennie, 2008, p49)
- The use of quizzes (as a form of testing) to scaffold new learning is recommended by Cognitivists who suggest the use of questions which "activate the requisite knowledge structure" to assist students in learning new material (Ally, 2008, p12).
- Students value anonymity of in class polling and report it encourages inclusivity (Kogan et al, 2015).
- Time management of the polling activities is important.
- Quizzes might be used as a tool to address the domination of in-class discussions by male students observed by Mitchell (Mitchell, 2018)

What to avoid

- Ensure you are teaching in a room with WiFi signal, mobile coverage and you can run PE. (Don't forget you can use PE in PowerPoint, via the website or app, making use of computer, smartphone or tablet possible). Check your battery is not about to die!
- A "contingency plan" in case technology fails is recommended (Ayres, in Ed Fry et al, 2015)
- Don't allow students to shout out the answer while polling, or peer influence/pressure takes hold
- Avoid facetious distractor questions when setting multiple choice questions for in class polling (Biggs & Tang, 2011), this displays cynicism which adversely affects the learning climate.

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