

5: Using Electronic Voting Systems (EVS) to encourage reading around the topic

Name and role

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Background

This is a post 92 institution with 50 years of teacher training history. The secondary education cohort is small (TDA allow us 19 places each year) and this study describes an optional session. There were only 9 students in total in the group for Health & Nutrition. The students in this option group had an average mark of 44% compared to 60% for those choosing Energy and Machines. Therefore this is not a high achieving group and they require motivating.

Intended outcome(s)

To increase the student engagement with module material and student participation in the sessions. To try and prevent the students from being passive learners.

The challenge

It had been observed that the students do not engage with further reading around the subject after the session unless it is directly associated with their assignment. Also as part of the in-house professional development programme, the Post-graduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE) a peer had observed my practice and noted that these particular students 'seemed to want to be passive learners'.

Established practice

I tended to provide post-session reading for the students, but I changed this to pre-session reading as used by Mazur (1997). I wanted to ensure that the students were engaging with the relevant course material.

The e/blended-learning/ICT advantage

The students were told that the session would be used to assess their understanding of the reading undertaken before the session. I used the EVS equipment available within the institution by prior booking. The handsets work with TurningPoint. I created a presentation in which a variety of question types were used.

Some of the questions were straightforward multiple choice questions. The students use the voting handsets to select their answers and then the slides displayed the numbers of students choosing each answer. The slides do not say what the correct answer is. The answers from individuals are anonymised. I was able to ask someone who had the answer correct to explain

their answer to other students. I was also able to ask the students to justify to each other their answer where there was a clear split over the answers. By having these discussions the students truly engaged with the material being taught and demonstrated their understanding (or lack of it). Where there were misunderstandings the discussion generated was seen to clear these up for some students.

Some of the questions were deliberately set to elicit opinions and therefore a variety of answers which again generated discussion in a lecture session.

Key points for effective practice

Variety is known to be an important feature of effective teaching and, as with any teaching method, a tutor should take care to use EVS only where appropriate. I have found EVS useful for plenaries and where an assessment utilises multiple choice questions, EVS make for good revision/practice. I think overuse will bring about a degree of boredom.

Conclusions and recommendations

One student commented unprompted that the EVS session had been good and had 'made her think'.

The results in terms of coursework marks were not conclusive, not all the students improved their performance, however this was a small group and some students suffered personal problems which reduced their attendance. The average mark was 47.5% compared to the 44% on the previous module.

As we know there are far too many variables within teaching and learning to draw a simple cause and effect. Using EVS was just one part of a battery of active learning strategies employed for this group. However, my personal, professional view is that it is useful and does help to engage students with their own learning.