

Did You Just Tell Us To Take Out Our Cell Phones?

"The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows." -- Sydney J. Harris

If students want to use their phones in class let them!

Many of you probably shook your heads and then reread the opening statement, but no need to do so. Engaging students with the use of technology is, when done well, a positive learning strategy in campus classrooms. In addition, we, as faculty, look to find new and exciting ways to engage our students to ensure they are acquiring, processing, and recalling new information in order to learn to think critically in the "professional world."

One of the ways I have integrated technology into the classroom is by using Poll Everywhere (<http://www.polleverywhere.com>), an "audience response system that uses mobile phones, Twitter, and the web." Students can use their cell phones and computers to respond to different types of questions developed by the instructor. The responses are recorded in real-time and students can see the results displayed when using a "smart classroom" set-up. Poll Everywhere can be used as a traditional "polling" tool where a question can be posed to the class with closed-ended questions (multiple choice, true/false) or they can respond to open-ended questions.

The courses that I have found to be the most challenging in which to engage students are our physical therapy seminar courses, which are designed to help students learn about professional issues in physical therapy, professional behaviors, and responsibilities as clinicians. In order to avoid being the "sage on the stage" while I offer my laundry list of clinical "do's and don'ts," I wanted to offer an interactive experience in the classroom; one that did not consist of making shadow puppets in the projector light. So, for the class in which I was explaining how to write clinical objectives (goals) for patients using the A-B-C-D method (audience, behavior, conditions, and degree), I decided to use Poll Everywhere. I simply set up the poll that said, "Send me your objective." The students grouped into pairs and responded by sending a text message of a patient-related therapeutic goal they developed to my PollEverywhere account number. These open-ended responses were visible on the screen and we were able to evaluate and modify each one as needed. The benefit of this tool is that students were not embarrassed if their goal required revising, as the responses are anonymous and it encouraged student interaction and reinforcement of material. Of course, there were some social text exchanges ("I love mermaids"), but that added a bit of levity to the activity.

I also use Poll Everywhere as a post-lecture evaluation tool to determine if students can recall important points about the lecture on professional roles and responsibilities in the clinical education setting. I set up this poll with "true and false" questions related to the topic. We were able to see the responses in real-time, which presented a great opportunity for discussion about why an answer was correct or incorrect.

My third and final application of Poll Everywhere was in a class where the students were divided into groups to debate three ethical issues in physical therapy practice. After each group debated the "pros and cons" of their respective issue before the class, the class was polled and asked which group

presented the stronger argument, once again offering opportunity for discussion about the strengths, weaknesses, and issues related to the topic.

Students report that they enjoy the integration of technology into the classroom, as it enhances communication with instructors and other students and provides them with immediate feedback on their performance. For instructors, we have a means of interactivity that allows us to assess student learning, but also allows us the occasion to reflect, in real time, on our teaching strategies and effectiveness.

Resources:

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