

PRIOR AUDIENCE POLLING AS AN INSTRUMENT TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN AND ACADEMIC QUALITY OF RESPONSE MEETINGS

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Focus: Improving participation and quality of education using classroom technology.

Introduction: At Leiden Medical School, a week of education is often concluded by a response meeting. In this meeting students are offered the opportunity to bring unresolved problems or not understood concepts into discussion. In practice students hardly prepare for this kind of meetings and merely attend to listen to other persons questions. If no questions arise, teachers often fall into the trap of presenting capita selecta of their own lectures again.

Setup: In spring 2006 we introduced an audience polling session just prior to the response meetings of the class of Heart & Circulation. The poll was supplied through the course module in Blackboard and consisted of multiple choice questions with 4 alternatives. The questions were related to the subjects that were discussed in the preceding week of education. Students did not get feedback on their answers. The poll was open for 24 hours and closed just one hour before the response meeting started. At the meeting, each question was presented. For each alternative the percentage of students who selected that alternative was shown. This information was used as a basis for the discussion between students and teacher. Basically only incorrectly answered questions (questions that were answered wrong by a majority of the students and questions where the student's answers were uniformly distributed over more alternatives) were discussed.

Results: The first result of the experiment was a clearly increased attendance of the response meetings in relation to the years before. Because students were offered a poll of questions, they were curious about their own answering and that of others and therefore came to the meeting. Secondly, the response meeting clearly gained depth and became more attractive to students to join because only those questions and subjects were discussed which were relevant to discuss. Finally, during the sessions students became more open to discuss their own wrong answers in public, because they experienced that discussion about wrong answers or wrong thinking can be very instructive.

Conclusions: Audience polling in advance of a discussion meeting has proven to be a great instrument to involve students more in the meeting and to improve the academic quality of the session by discussing in more depth exactly those items students have not enough knowledge about. As a continuation of this pilot, polling will be introduced in many more classes in the future.

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