Chapter XVII

The Trial of an Audience Response System to Facilitate Problem-Based Learning in Legal Education

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Abstract

This chapter provides a case study of how a lecturer in the School of Law at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) used an audience response system (ARS) in a lecture for a second-year, core, undergraduate law subject to facilitate problem-based learning. It identifies the positive student response to the use of an ARS, and explores the main benefits, for example, active engagement of students in the learning process, facilitation of formative assessment where the students develop initiative and peer relationships, and the provision of timely and worthwhile feedback. The chapter also identifies some of the problems that the author faced in the trial, and provides some suggested solutions and recommendations. The author hopes to encourage other lecturers to take advantage of an ARS to enhance student learning, and identifies some future ARS research opportunities.
Introduction

The QUT prides itself on being a university for the real world, and takes advantage of technology that enhances student learning. The ARS was used in a law lecture at the QUT to develop not only what students need to know, but also what they need to do in the real world (real-world learning). The ARS aided this by facilitating problem-based learning and developing the problem-solving skills of the law students.

Christensen and Kift (2000) claim that employer and student groups have strenuously driven the need for law schools to plan the curriculum to develop what lawyers need to do, rather than what they need to know. Further, the Australian Law Reform Commission (1997), in its issues paper entitled, “Rethinking the legal education and training,” has supported the notion that legal education should facilitate the development of generic and transferable skills so that law graduates can cope with the dynamic legal profession, and the fact that law graduates may frequently move across to other disciplines during their careers. According to Le Brun and Johnstone (1994), problem-solving skills are generic or transferable skills because they are relevant to graduates from all disciplines, and are not restricted to law graduates.

The author has previously published a refereed, scholarly journal article on this topic (Burton, 2004), and hopes to inspire lecturers in law schools, and in other disciplines, to use an ARS to facilitate the development of problem-solving skills in their lectures. In particular, this chapter:

1. Provides a case study on how an ARS was used in a law lecture in a core, second-year law undergraduate subject to facilitate problem-based learning, and to develop the problem solving skills of law students. It also recognizes the positive response from the law students involved in the trial.
2. Identifies some of the problems that the author faced when they trialled an ARS in their law lectures, and provides suggested solutions and recommendations.
3. Identifies some future ARS research opportunities.

Background

Problem-solving skills are entrenched in the law degree across all four-year levels at the QUT. The QUT Law School strives to use authentic problems, that is, problems that replicate real world scenarios, in its problem-based learning to reinforce its position as a university for the real world, and to better equip students for the transition from university to the workplace.

In early 2004, the author became aware that the QUT had purchased the necessary technology for an ARS, and attended a training session conducted at the QUT on how to use it. The author was aware that other faculties at the QUT had taken advantage of