

## Use Novel Techniques to Evaluate Your Teaching

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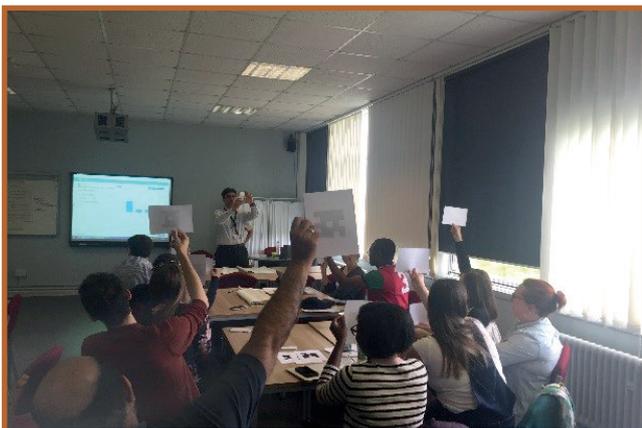
Evaluation of teaching plays an integral part in providing feedback for teachers, identifying areas for improvement and establishing if learners' needs were met. The most commonly used evaluation method in classroom sessions are surveys that include Likert scale questions sometimes combined with space for free text. This approach has often been criticised for survey fatigue (Porter 2004), raising concerns over the quality of the data obtained and difficulty in analysing the data and gaining meaningful insights (Jamieson 2004). The purpose of this How To is to provide a summary of novel techniques for evaluation in a classroom that may help overcome some of these shortcomings.

### Using technology

Applying technology for evaluation provides great opportunities for teachers to obtain immediate and interactive feedback from learners. It may also help reduce emotional and social barriers such as being shy to express opinions, low motivation for engagement, fear of making mistakes, and limitations of seating arrangement and equipment. Plickers™ is one application for gathering learners' real-time information (Box 1). A laptop, smart phone and paper QR code cards are required. This method gives immediate feedback and provides real-time insight.

#### Box 1 – Plickers (see link in reference list):

- ▶ Open Plickers on the internet before the session begins. Set up your class on the webpage and write your questions.
- ▶ Hand QR code card to each learner. Each code card has four orientations and each orientation represents one answer.
- ▶ Using Plickers, project the evaluation questions on a screen.
- ▶ Each learner lifts their QR code card according to the response they want to give.
- ▶ Using the mobile application scan the room for the QR codes with a mobile phone.
- ▶ Plickers will collate the responses and project a representative bar graph.



The collated responses can be analysed and the quantitative data can be accessed immediately so you can reflect on your teaching very quickly. Bear in mind that the use of this method and its success depends greatly on the reliability of IT-equipment and internet connection. Other technology tools such as TodaysMeet™, WhatsApp™, and Google Sites™ can also gather real-time feedback from learners and can increase learners' engagement in the evaluation exercises (Zou and Lambert 2017).

### Group activities

Using group activities can make the evaluation process more fun by energising the learners. Here we outline two potential group activities for classroom feedback. It is important to note that these activities do take more time to explain and perform than the survey method and thus require planning.

The first activity is the "Human Line" (Box 2), which is a way of getting learners to rate how much they agree or disagree with statements related to the teaching session by moving along an imaginary likert scale. In our practice, we find it best if the teacher stands at the back of the line to limit the bias. Following the same principles of rating scales, you are likely to create more interactivity if you ask questions in different ways throughout the session (i.e. some positively worded and some negatively worded) as it creates more movement along the line.

#### Box 2 Human-line Activity:

- ▶ Clear space in the classroom.
- ▶ Place your learners in a single-file line in the middle of the room.
- ▶ Put a sign saying either "agree" or "disagree" on each side of the line the students are facing.
- ▶ Read out a statement and learners move sideways to stand in a place that reflects how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement.
- ▶ Learners move back to the middle of the room to prepare for the next statement.

The main advantage of this activity is that it is fun and social. It gives the teacher an immediate visual impression of how the session went. You can also encourage learners to explain their rating and why they positioned themselves at a certain point on the scale to gain some meaningful qualitative data. There are some drawbacks, however, to this. The main one is that it is not confidential. To overcome this you may want to consider asking a student or colleague to facilitate the activity and you can leave the room. Some learners may also find it difficult to go against the majority. If you have good health and safety, you might consider blindfolding the learners to eliminate this particular problem. Recording the human line poses a challenge and the best way to deal with this is to take a photo with the permission of the participants. You can also give learners markers or chalk to place on the ground and take a photo of their locations.

The second activity is called the “Round-Robin” (Box 3). From this activity you will have a piece of written feedback from every learner, as well as how much their peers agree or disagree with that feedback. If you wish, you can give learners two sheets to make one positive and one negative comment.

### Box 3 “Round-Robin” Activity:

- ▶ Give each learner a piece of paper or card.
- ▶ Ask each learner to write one piece of feedback on their card.
- ▶ Each card is then passed to the person next to them.
- ▶ Next person reads the comment and votes on the card whether they agree or disagree with the comment.
- ▶ Continue passing and voting until each learner has their original comment back.

The “Round-Robin” takes a constructivist approach to feedback so the comments are generated by the learners. It is also confidential and a record is produced by the process. However, because the comments are learner generated, the power to ask specific questions about aspects of your teaching you may be particularly interested in is lost.

## Post-it Notes

Using Post-it notes as a form of feedback collection has many advantages. The feedback collected tends to be of higher quality, providing insightful and meaningful suggestions or constructive feedback, which can then be built upon. Furthermore, this type of low-tech feedback tends to be anonymous, which is an important consideration in order to encourage participants to freely voice their opinions and not feel they will be penalised.

Another advantage of the Post-it notes method is that the feedback can be provided at any point in the session, allowing users to document their thoughts as and when they happen, thus making comments more relevant. Prior to the commencement of the session, learners should be made aware of the option to provide feedback in this manner, along with a dedicated space for them to stick the Post-it notes, emphasising that this is not compulsory, but it is highly valuable to improving course content. There is no limit on how many Post-it notes each learner can write throughout the session.

### Box 4 Post-it notes Activity:

- ▶ Select dedicated space to place Post-it notes (for example a flip chart, wall or door).
- ▶ Hand out Post-it notes to each learner.
- ▶ Encourage learners to write feedback on Post-it notes throughout the session.
- ▶ Collect feedback at the end.

Thought should be given to where this dedicated space for providing feedback is, for example, inside or outside the classroom, as this could influence the anonymity of the exercise and the willingness to participate. The space needs to be easily accessible to the learners; the back of the classroom might be an ideal location. If you have specific aspects you would like to evaluate, you may want to put headings on the board or wall so learners can place the post-it notes accordingly (i.e., the learning environment, the teacher, the teaching materials etc). Give space for ‘other’ to allow for the learners to give you feedback they might have on any other aspects of the teaching.

## Conclusion

Novel methods of evaluation have been outlined, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. Using a variety of methods may increase learners’ engagement and improve the quality of the collected feedback. One needs to consider the size of the group and resources available including space, time, and access to technology as well as data analysis when deciding the most appropriate method in a given setting.

## References and Further Reading

- Jamieson, S. 2004.** Likert scales: how to (ab)use them. *Medical Education*. 38, 1212-1218.
- Porter, S.R., Whitcomb, M.E., Weitzer, W.H. 2004.** Multiple surveys of students and survey fatigue. *New Directions for Institutional Research*. 121, 63-73.
- Zou, D., Lambert, J. 2017.** Feedback methods for student voice in the digital age. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. 48(5), 1081-1091.

### Further Information

*How to Use Live View – Plickers*. [online] Available at: [http://plickers.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/217799028?mobile\\_site=true](http://plickers.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/217799028?mobile_site=true) [Accessed 15 Jun.2018].

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