How to Effectively Use ResponseWare in Asynchronous and Synchronous Environments to Meet the Needs of Digital Natives

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How to Effectively Use ResponseWare in Asynchronous and Synchronous Environments to Meet the Needs of Digital Natives

By Jalae Ulicki

I. Introduction

Imagine a world in which a society exists divided into two separate factions. One segment is the “teachers,” those who for 200 years have been the “keepers of the books.” In this segment of society, there exists a hierarchy, and movement within that hierarchy is dependent upon various rights-of-passage. Only those among them who strictly follow carefully laid down rules from the “ancestors” can move within the branches of that society or upward through the hierarchy of that society. Despite these divisional segments, the goal of the faction is clear: impart the “information in the books” to the other segment of their society the “learners” through the use of a methodology that has served the “keepers of the books” well for over 200 years. The “keepers of the books” have now gathered together to face a surmounting problem: Why does it appear that the information is not being absorbed by the “learners”—what is wrong with those “learners”?

Imagine further that through evolution, the society of the “keepers of the books” has remained much the same. Little change has been seen within this rigid society over its course of development. True, more and more books have been created with more and more information for the “keepers of the books” to pass on, but they have remained true to their accepted methodology of passing on that information. On the other hand, the “learners” are not constrained only to the knowledge that the “keepers of the books” have to impart. They have within their society seen the development of numerous sources of information that is being disseminated to them at a faster and faster rate. The “learners” have morphed through rapid changes over 200 years—adapting continuously to the changes within their environment and rapidly changing their internal receptors to accommodate the various sources of information that is available to them. Although they would like to join the society of “keeper of the books,” they can’t seem to absorb the information that the “keepers of the books” have to impart. What is wrong with those “keepers of the books” they ask?

Like the melting of the glaciers, the traditional methods utilized by law school professors in their approach to teaching is slowly beginning to melt, but the thaw is slow, much too slow to accommodate the changes that are facing them. Law schools can no longer rely on the natural erosion or evolution of their traditional and archaic approach to teaching law and hope that, through evolution or natural changes, the methodology will ultimately change to accommodate students. The climate of teaching has changed, because of the emergence of the digital natives. The sudden arrival of the digital age has had a meteoric impact. The arrival of this digital age has caused huge clouds of dust in teaching, blocking out traditional methods, and it has cleared the way for the evolution of teaching in the digital age. It is incumbent upon us as law school educators to squarely face the possibility of the extinction of the 200-year-old traditional law school professors and their methodology. The survival of law schools is now dependent upon a mass exodus from traditional methods of teaching and a giant leap into the future digital world to address the needs of the existing “digital natives,” signaling the change in the methodology of disseminating that
information to “digital natives” through the use of technology both in the classroom and in online courses.

Teaching 21st century learners denotes a shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning. It affords law professors the opportunity to reflect not only on their own teaching methodology but also on the changes and opportunities brought into the law school environment by technology. Active participation by digital learners marks the change in the evolution of teaching in law school. Using ResponseWare is one method that increases active engagement by students, affords the professor an opportunity to make immediate changes in the learning environment at the lesson level, and provides them with an opportunity to reflect and incorporate changes in the course level.

II. Designing Questions

With today’s technology, using ResponseWare is rather simple; a student purchases the license and can connect via an internet connection through a computer, a tablet, or even a cell phone. This program can be used in the classroom or in multiple remote locations and helps keep the remote audience engaged by displaying their input as well. PowerPoint polling has built in questions for multiple choice, short answer, numeric, true/false, essay, priority ranking, and likert. It also provides a number of visual displays and answers displays as well.

But learning to use ResponseWare effectively is another matter. As with most things, organization is the key. The first step is to consider building the questions. What type of questions do you want your students to answer? Categorizing your questions around your objectives clears the way to an engaging and focused class. There are as many types of questions as there are objectives, and you are only limited by your own imagination in reaching your classroom objectives through question design.

Questions to Start Discussion Topic

In this category starting with an “ice-breaker” question gets students actively engaged and looking forward to discussion on the topic even before the discussion begins. It actively engages the entire classroom and is a great alternative to cold-calling on students or asking for volunteers.

For example, in one of my family law classes I wanted the students to see that public awareness of intimate partner violence has changed considerably over the past fifty years. I intended to have the students look at surveys on stalking from the National Institute of Justice and to compare definitions contained in those surveys with those used in the Violence Against Women Act and their own state’s antistalking law. I intended to illustrate how difficult it is to use a subjective definition to create policy driven legislation.

The “ice-breaker” question:

![Question Image](image-url)
As soon as the results were up on the screen students started asking questions such as “How did the survey conducted define ‘stalking’?” That led to a lively discussion among the students on their own individual definition of stalking. As the discussion continued, students who were victims of stalking started sharing their own experiences. That was a real “ice-breaker.”

Using student definitions of stalking allows a natural segue to the class objective by transitioning into a discussion about the strong link between stalking and other forms of violence in intimate relationships. From there, students can make a smooth and almost imperceptible transition into critically thinking about the range of definitions of stalking and how that might be addressed in policy-making initiatives.

**Questions to Solicit an Opinion**

Studies have shown that valuing opinions enhances performance. In one class, the objective was to have the students be conversant with the rationale for mandating pre-marriage education classes before a marriage license is issued by a state. The discussion started with a slide soliciting their opinion and then led into a discussion where students had to voice the rationale for their opinion, accomplishing the ultimate objective:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should premarital education be mandatory?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Somewhat Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Somewhat Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Questions to Spot Check Students’ Grasp of Assigned Material**

One of the major uses of ResponseWare is that it allows the ability to modify classroom instruction at the lesson level. Spot-checking students’ grasp of assigned material allows the professor to emphasize material that wasn’t fully understood and to avoid wasting valuable class time on material that was thoroughly understood. In the following example, nearly half the class had chosen a wrong answer. Armed with such immediate statistics, I was able to immediately reinforce the topic during the class session. It also can serve as an indicator to modify that topic for the next semester, perhaps to change treatment of the material or the time devoted to that particular topic. A professor can decide, based upon individual classes and preferences, at what point correction might be needed:
Using questions to spot check students’ grasp of material being presented in class allows the professor to modify classroom instruction at the lesson level, to set the pace in the classroom, to revisit material not being thoroughly understood, or to move on if the material is being understood to keep the students attentive. For example, a professor may wish to ascertain whether students are fully grasping the material being presented right at that moment and to determine whether students were able to distinguish the presented content material from other topics previously covered in class.

Providing students with the data as a large visual picture to the response data serves multiple purposes. The students can compare their own performance against the entire class, reinforce their own preparation of that day’s topic, or recognize that they need to change their preparedness for future classes. It allows the professor to gauge whether to immediately change the presentation of the material and/or discussion. In the following example, 69% of the class got the question right. In this instance, a professor might conclude that the majority of students were grasping the material. The data would allow the professor to capitalize on the opportunity to explain why the incorrect answers were wrong and to direct students to relevant pages in their reading to review the information.
Questions to Start Practice Skills

To streamline effectiveness in process our society has become a society of forms. To make students aware of the multitude of forms in existence and their profound use in every segment of society, including business, courts, industry, and education, a professor might spend some time designing questions to infuse skills into the classroom and beyond. There is no doubt students will in fact be using forms in their future careers, so teaching them to critically think about those forms is a must. These types of questions might also be used to introduce students to an in-class practice exercise using teams or individual exercises.

How many family law related court forms are there on court websites?

A. 1,000  
B. 2,000  
C. 3,000  
D. 4,000

From this type of question an exercise could be created in which students locate a particular form that is relevant to the course. The professor can emphasize the topical material by using various sections of the form and having students understand and learn the significance of the information being requested in the form. It is a wonderful opportunity to teach students not to blindly fill out forms without understanding the ramifications that would result for their future clients.

Questions to Improve Future Performance

Often times students are unable to apply, analyze, and hypothesize information obtained from a previous topic to a new but similar situation. To help build those skills, professors can compare available data from two separate questions to generate a class discussion. For example, students could be asked questions like “What did you see differently in Answer 2 in Question 2 than you did in Answer 2 in Question 1?” This usually opens up the discussion on why they chose the particular answer and provides an opportunity to direct their analysis to reach the ultimate correct answer.
Armed with pre-designed questions and with a solid objective in mind, students’ engagement in the classroom increases, they look forward to participating, and their pre-class preparation increases and ultimately so does their retention of the material.

III. Data Collection

In addition to the variety of questions that can be asked to collect data, the use of ResponseWare allows the professor to collect and utilize the responses from the session for reflection on course management. Data can be collected as to each student’s individual performance on the questions asked; comparative results can be obtained comparing questions; results can be obtained with percentages as to each question answered in the category; and for those who are statistically inclined, question statistics can be obtained for the mean, median, variance, and standard deviations. The data report also presents a visual graph as has been depicted in the various questions.

IV. Summary

As law professors, we are embarking upon a journey of continuous improvement. The arrival of these digital natives has now required us to shed our cloak of comfort in traditional teaching and to look upon the horizon and embrace with enthusiasm the available technology that will benefit our students.

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Optimizing the Law School Classroom through the “Flipped” Classroom Model

By Angela Upchurch

If you are like me, you have several items on your teaching “wish list” that do not materialize every semester. Despite careful preparation, it is challenging to balance sufficient coverage of course content with legal skills training, multiple assessments, individualized feedback, and meaningful group work. The desire to make better use of my class time and provide students with more opportunities for active engagement with the course content drew me to the “flipped” classroom model. Regardless of your teaching style or your individual teaching “wish list,” you can use the “flipped” model to engage your students and accomplish more of your teaching goals.

What is the “Flipped” Classroom Model?

A flipped classroom turns the traditional teaching paradigm on its head – altering the roles of both the professor and the students during shared classroom time and during time outside of the