Reflections on using technology to "enhance" learning activities
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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Abstract

Background

The last decade has seen the emergence of a dizzying array of computer and web-based technologies. This new "frontier" of medical education can be difficult to navigate due to swiftness of change and the lack of published evaluation of these new tools and methods. Although learners often report preferring e-learning, sound pedagogy appears to be more important than technology in determining satisfaction and learning outcomes. The use of new technologies in the learning environment is both an opportunity and a challenge for medical educators.

Objective

To describe a range of technology enhanced teaching methods trialled and piloted by the authors in learning activities for medical students in their primary care (general practice) rotation at the University of New South Wales.

Approach

Brief descriptions of each technology enhanced teaching method, its implementation and evaluation data will be given. We will cover: "Prezi" as a presentation platform, "Google Drive" to facilitate three types of group work, "backchannel" real-time conversations during learning activities, "Poll Anywhere" for real-time SMS-based voting, and the use of "KeePad clickers" for real-time script concordance tests.

Findings

The "good" methods were easy to use, integrated well with the learning activity, and enhanced learner interactivity. The "bad" methods tended to be distracting, seen as separate to the core learning activity, or were confusing to use. And lastly, the "ugly" – some methods were prone to embarrassing technical glitches during delivery.

Discussion

Most of the described technology enhanced teaching methods were well received by learners, but engagement with new technologies varied and not all methods were useful. We found it unwise to assume that students were "digital natives" and thus accepting of, and fluent with using computer technologies. Each described method has advantages and disadvantages and medical educators should consider their specific context before implementation.

YouTube video: http://tiny.cc/tam-gpet13a