Body Continuum Polling: A Dynamic Technique for Any Classroom

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Body Continuum Polling – What is it?

Students in any course appreciate being asked to share their opinion, usually using technology made for audience participation (such as PollEverywhere, Kahoot, Socrative), and designed to provide immediate feedback that can be seen by all participants.

These methods are fast and effective, and have the added benefit of capturing group analytics that can be used at a later time, but they are constrained by technological requirements and are still potentially passive approaches in which all students may not be engaging.

Body continuum polling is an active technique designed to engage students physically in the classroom space, by getting them move around the classroom to place themselves along a gradient (less to more, low to high, etc.) that spans the room. Students provide their opinion on a question or topic, combined with a kinesthetic approach that engages them with movement (Mobley & Fisher, 2014).

How is this practice beneficial?

Students in my ENV 101 (Introduction to Environmental Science; enrollments of 70-150), as a first day activity, were asked to place themselves along a room continuum (projected on the screen, Fig. 1) based on their opinion of the relative importance of pivotal issues in sustainability (e.g., population control, pollution, natural resource conservation).

For the end of course reflection assignment, (Fall 2017, Sect. 1001) students were asked to comment on an activity/practice from the semester that they enjoyed or learned from:

“One of the first activities we did, was creative and enjoyable. I thought as a first activity it brought engagement in a subtle way, even allowing use to get to converse to other students about their opinions as we ventured the room and were allowed to actively listen and answer your questions.” (Student M.R.)

“I really enjoyed being part of, it was a great way to start the semester and it made me see what people really thought about...our world, especially because it is not something that we would normally talk in our daily conversations unless we are in a class that deals with it.” (Student A.R.)

Where to find more information?

This technique was adapted from a special session of the Ecological Society of America annual meeting entitled Improv Your Science (August 2017, Portland OR).

From the book “Acting it out: Using drama to improve student engagement, reading and critical thinking” (Hart, Onuscheck, & Christel, 2017), the authors discuss debriefing from an “opinionaire”:

From “Ditching the Desks: Kinesthetic Learning in College Classrooms “ (Mobley & Fisher, 2014):

“College instructors at all levels should openly embrace kinesthetic learning as an everyday pedagogical tool…and all students can benefit from alternative instruction styles in their classes.”

How to use this practice in your classroom?

--This technique can be adapted for any course content, and for any sized classroom space, from large auditorium-style rooms with fixed seating to smaller classrooms with modular tables and chairs.

--Best to provide students with a prompt that is easily addressed on a continuum of responses (Likert-type scale), rather than binary choices of response (i.e., yes or no).

--To stimulate discussion, I will ask for volunteers or choose student representatives from each of the extremes and one from the middle, and ask them to comment on their selection.

--Students enjoy the opportunity to be active in the lecture classroom, and this approach not only gets students moving but it also encourages discussion as they do so. However, standing should be limited to 10-15 minutes to minimize tiredness and discourage restlessness.

References:
