

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES: CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE SYSTEM

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I. Classroom Performance System

- A. Classroom Performance System ("CPS") is a handheld, wireless, transmitter system which allows students to "vote" on a question and transmit their "vote" to the professor.
- B. The CPS software allows the professor to show a bar graph tally to the entire class of the percent of students that selected each answer and which answer was correct.
- C. CPS can be done on a completely anonymous basis; modified anonymous basis; or no anonymity whatsoever.

II. Demonstration

- A. I intend to replicate a class (with audience participation) that I taught concerning the case of *Pevsner v. Commissioner*, 628 F. 2d 467 (1980). In that case, the issue was whether clothing expenses were deductible business expenses.
- B. In *Pevsner*, the taxpayer worked as the manager of an Yves St. Laurent (YSL) Boutique. As manager, the taxpayer was expected to wear YSL clothes while at work. In addition to wearing them at work: (i) she wore them while commuting to and from work; (ii) at fashion shows sponsored by the boutique; and (iii) to business luncheons at which she represented the boutique.
- C. Taxpayer argued that although the clothing was worn for general purposes by the regular customers of the boutique, she did not wear the clothing for general purposes. She and her husband, who was partially disabled, led a simple life and their social activities were very limited and informal. As a result, she did not wear the clothes during off-work hours because they were too expensive for her everyday lifestyle.
- D. The court announces a test which it describes as objective, and makes no reference to the individual taxpayer's lifestyle or personal taste. The objective test that the court applied: No deduction will be allowed if the clothes are *generally accepted for ordinary street wear*. (emphasis added)
- E. My goal: Get the students to see that the test was not objective – that it merely substituted the court's personal taste for the taxpayer's. In the past, I've led a discussion about this and found that students aren't always convinced by my arguments. This semester I decided to let CPS make my arguments.
- F. Demonstration will follow.

III. CPS and Learning Theory

- A. CPS supports most, if not all, of the 7 principles of good practice in legal education.
- B. CPS allows me to test with True/False questions; multiple choice questions; spur of the moment questions as a result of puzzled looks on the students' faces; or their holding up their handheld devices to signal to me that they need me to ask a question.
- C. CPS involves the entire class in the learning process. While the Socratic method only engages one student directly, and the rest vicariously, CPS engages the whole class. CPS provides an

- opportunity for each student to respond to every question. In any subject where concepts build on understanding prior information, CPS is extremely useful. As one of my students pointed out "it gives Professor Brown a better idea of where the class is in relation to where she thinks we may be." By using CPS, I am signaling that I am interested in whether they comprehend the material.
- D. The questions that I ask require them to analyze, synthesize, and apply the information that they've read and discussed in class.
 - E. CPS provides prompt – and individual feedback. The students know instantly if they have gotten the correct answer. The students also know if they are with the mainstream or outside of it – for better or worse! A student who realizes that they're not getting the material that most of their classmates are will be put on notice that they need to do additional work.
 - F. Whenever CPS shows that a significant percentage of the class doesn't understand something, hands usually go up with follow-up questions. They will break their anonymity because they no longer fear "looking dumb" in front of their peers. This is a serious concern of students and should not be underestimated. Students love the anonymity that CPS can provide.
 - G. My final exam is a multiple choice exam. By asking the students multiple choice questions throughout the semester, I am providing the students with an opportunity to determine if their study techniques and course preparation is working. (I am also getting them used to the kinds of multiple choice questions that they can expect on the final exam.) If they're getting most of the multiple choice questions right, they can continue their current course of action. If they're getting most of the questions wrong, they are placed on notice that a mid-course correction is in order.
 - H. CPS enables me to demonstrate that I have high expectations for all of my students. When students get the wrong answer, I re-teach the material. In this way, I show that I believe all students can learn the material and am committed to teaching until they do. I adjust my teaching schedule accordingly. If the students are not following and processing the information, I don't move on. Alternatively, if virtually everyone gets a principle correct, I will spend less time than I planned on going over that concept and will move on to the next topic.
 - I. Because students learn differently, CPS is only one of several tools that I use to better teach my students.

IV. An Assessment of CPS: The Disadvantages

- A. CPS can slow down the coverage of the material. Once two thirds of the class has revealed to you that they don't understand what you've just taught, it's extremely difficult to ignore. Of course have you really taught your class if you've covered your entire syllabus, but the students haven't learned?
- B. You have to make a concerted effort to keep those who are getting the questions right engaged.
- C. CPS requires you to be prepared to be humbled.
- D. CPS requires you to be somewhat spontaneous. You may have prepared to cover certain material in class that day and after the results of the first question, realize that you need to change your focus.
- E. CPS places the burden on the instructor to anticipate areas where the students are unclear and create questions to test those areas.
- F. Students have told me that they've gotten the answer right but for the wrong reason. The professor needs to take care in drafting the questions to take this potential glitch into account.

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