Use of micro-blogging technology to enhance student interaction in multi-site lectures

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Several barriers to student participation traditionally plague large lectures. The passive nature of student learning and the fear of asking questions in an open forum can inhibit the effectiveness of large group teaching. Enhancing student engagement is key to overcoming the limitations of the lecture experience and there is an increasing body of knowledge that suggest that such engagement can be enhanced through the use of social media in the classroom.

The Bachelor of Nursing Science course at JCU has students participating from five campuses across north Queensland in addition to external students. The first year subject 'Lifespan Development' has around 350 students enrolled each year. Two-hour lectures are video-conferenced to all sites, creating an environment in which it is difficult to engage students. Comments from students on recent subject surveys identified some of the difficulties students had in lecture, these include: "when questions are asked, not everyone can hear", "extremely hard to engage", "huge volume of information to cover" and "lectures were really difficult to concentrate".

A number of micro-blogging technologies are starting to be utilised in teaching situations to enhance student participation and engagement. Literature evaluating this strategy as yet is minimal and none existing in respect of nursing. This presentation describes a project that pilots a private backchannel program during lectures in a first year nursing subject. Backchannel programs enable students to post short questions throughout lectures (similar to a 'Twitter' feed). The aim of the research is to examine the effectiveness of this technology in promoting student participation and engagement. Outcomes of this study are expected to include the identification of actual value and potential applications of backchannel programs as a strategy to enhance teaching and learning in multi-site synchronous delivery.