Differences between paper and online student surveys

There are lots of potential benefits for schools and colleges completing a survey online:

- Greater student access: All students in a year group can take part, not just a sample
- Instant access to results at the end of the survey period
- Facility for instant printing of results in different formats for presentations, e.g. graphs
- Own school and college figures can be compared with other similar institutions or whole regions
- It is an intelligent questionnaire, so that students only see questions relevant to them
- Graphics are more friendly
- Option for personal health feedback for students
- Websites links for students who finish early

There are also costs:
- Training time to ensure students understand how to log on and use the online survey
- Booking IT suites and organising classes to ensure there is less duplication when handing out booklets
- Technical problems and system crashes are easier to solve when using an online system

This all assumes that the answers will come out pretty much the same, regardless of which class fills in a paper or a web-based survey. We have looked at this in some detail during the last few years, and this assumption is well-supported. We have had many thousands of students complete parallel versions, and printed a list of significantly different items.

The most important differences found between the two variations are:

- Paper surveys require a more focused effort to ensure that all questions are asked.
- Online surveys rely more on computer-generated responses, which can be more accurate and consistent.

In conclusion, both methods have their advantages and disadvantages, and the choice between them should be based on the specific needs of the survey.

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Sexual Health Skills: A Learning Process

It is often said that everyone should spend ten things to do before they die. One of mine was to write down and publish what I have been teaching for most of my adult life. For many years I have been teaching about sexuality and relationships education to school students. I have had a number of publications, but I have always felt that I was missing something. Last year I decided to put together a full-length book on the subject, and I am pleased to say that it is now available.

The book, Sexual Health Skills: A Learning Process, is available from major bookstores and online retailers. It covers a wide range of topics, from the basics of human sexuality to more advanced concepts such as relationships and communication.

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AIDS Education

When HIV and AIDS became a major issue in the late 1980s, I was involved in managing the AIDS Education Unit in Cambridge. The challenges of management fascinated me, and I quickly recognized the links between sexual health and relationships training and people-management training. And so I have found myself managing a broad spectrum of sexual health and relationships courses, but also running management courses for people working on processes such as team-building, managing change and handling difficult situations.

In many of my training courses I run for managers, teachers and health professionals who are working with young people, I find myself discussing the importance of good communication and interpersonal skills.

Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to launch a new career as a speaker and writer, and I have been able to reach a wider audience with my messages.

References