

**Communication and Gender: Using the i>clicker to Generate Critical Thinking**  
**Dr. Mary Z. Ashlock, Department of Communication**  
**University of Louisville**

**Overview of the Course for Which Clickers Were Used: Communication and Gender**

The course for which I use clickers is entitled, “Communication and Gender” and is listed as both a Communication and Women and Gender Studies course. This class is taught at a 300 course level and includes a maximum of 50 undergraduate students from primarily communication and women and gender studies majors. The course is organized around students becoming familiar with social science and humanities perspectives on gender and communication. One goal of the course is to improve critical thinking skills when addressing gender and communication in the U.S. and other cultures. Another goal is to develop an understanding of the connections between gender and other areas of social life -- race, religion, ethnicity, power, and culture. The lecture format includes student groups participating in discussing and summarizing certain parts of the assigned readings from two texts. Additionally, students view 5 different videos throughout the semester to which they individually respond in both written and small group formats as well as the overall class discussion. Students take 3 exams throughout the semester and participate in 1 group research project. i>clickers are used to “quiz” students on the materials in each section and generate discussion. Clicker slides are also posted online in Blackboard for future student reference and review.

**Motivation for Using Clickers**

University professors strive to actively involve students in their learning. Clickers support this notion of informed teaching—students themselves are being regularly informed about their learning process using open dialogue facilitated through technology (Cutts *et al.*, 2004). The majority of students in my Communication and Gender class agreed that the use of clickers made them feel more engaged, increased participation, and helped them pay more attention (Kaleta & Joosten, 2007). Most importantly, students need to feel comfortable engaging in dialogue with sensitive topics and like the anonymity that clickers provide (Caldwell, 2007). A number of students actually incorporated clickers into their research projects and presentations.

## **Implementation**

### Grading Policy

We awarded students participation points for voting with clickers during class. In a term, students could earn up to 50 points out of a 500-point scale. In addition, 2/3 of every exam (100 points each) contained questions directly related to the clicker questions posed in class. Clickers were used every 2 weeks to either introduce (Zhu, 2007) or summarize material from approximately 3 to 5 textbook chapters. In total, we asked about 15 questions for instruction (Beatty, 2004) or review.

### Types of Questions Asked

Primarily, we asked students definitional/factual questions, a number of which were drawn from or adapted from publisher-created materials. Examples are included below.

Gender is:

- A. Learned
- B. Stable
- C. Social
- D. A and C
- E. A, B, and C

(Answer: D: A&C – Gender is learned and social)

Speakers socialized in a masculine speech community tend to speak in general, abstract terms.

- A. True
- B. False

(Answer: True)

Students individually responded, although at times the class would become so involved and engaged, students would begin to consult with one another and discuss options. A number of students stated that they enjoyed finding out both how their classmates voted and receiving feedback on how well they individually knew the material (Barnett, 2006).

## **Results and Conclusions**

1. The clickers increased overall class participation as students were completely focused during i>clicker voting sessions. The students were engaged in discussions surrounding the reasoning behind their answers and comparing them to the class results and the correct answers.
2. Clickers helped solve some of the problems inherent in the course in trying to gauge learning throughout the semester using the course materials (videos, textbook, additional readings). Because of the ongoing formative assessment for me, I could spend additional time on areas where students were not scoring well.
3. The clicker required additional time (always a challenge) to learn the technology—as a novice clicker user, I needed to allot extra time to learn and set up the technology for class. The key to making things go so well is preparation and a willingness to try out a new technology.
4. The clicker addressed many of my pedagogical goals—namely, to further engage students in the learning process. One professor’s quote from a Disney seminar at the beginning of the semester sums it up best: “Tell me, I hear you...Show me, I see...Involve me, I understand.”
5. For faculty who are new to using clickers, I suggest trying it on a smaller scale; gradually incorporate it into a class, and have a technical resource person to assist you ahead of time. Another suggestion is to present it to students as a “fun” learning tool.
6. The only unanticipated outcomes were the overwhelming positive feedback from students. The use of clickers did increase students’ enthusiasm for learning. A qualitative summary of student feedback from both the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 semesters and a summary of students’ feedback from a student research presentation group lists the following:

**Student Comments for Communications 301/WGST 391 using the i>clicker:**

***Fall 2007***

- I found the class both informative and engaging
- I really enjoyed the texts and the materials covered through the course
- I really liked how the course was set up
- Very interesting topics covered and discussions in class

***Spring 2008***

- Very informative
- Enjoyable
- Lots of great information, well used
- Interesting and fun

**Comm. 301/WGST 391:**

**Group Research Presentation: Family Structure and the Influence on Children**

**Student Comments Regarding i>clickers**

- Kept class involved with questions and clickers
- Good pictures, tied clicker questions into presentation well
- Fun starting off with i>clicker
- Liked the i>clicker questions
- Great introduction with the i>clicker, really a neat interactive way to do it
- Good use of i>clickers
- i>clickers and personal experiences allowed audience to relate to the topic
- Allowed audience to get involved by using i>clicker
- I like the use of i>clickers –never saw this done before
- I liked the i>clicker! It was my favorite!
- Really liked the i>clicker opening!
- Used results from i>clicker to address audience
- Good clicker questions
- i>clicker got my attention
- Liked i>clicker introduction
- It was great to use the clickers

- Liked the use of i>clicker
- i>clicker was a good idea
- Good idea opening up topic and presentation with an i>clicker question
- i>clicker was a nice touch
- i>clicker and group discussions good!
- Used i>clicker to involve the class and display stats within our class –engaged the audience
- Audience participation and activity with i>clickers
- I liked the use of the i>clickers
- The PowerPoint and i>clickers exercise were very well thought out. Especially the gendered bedroom
- Liked the use of i>clickers
- The utilization of the i>clicker was a great idea! It forced everyone to pay attention right away!
- Good way to start presentation with i>clickers
- I liked how they used the i>clicker; it got us involved in their topic. Then after they knew our family situation, they wanted us to relate to the topic they were talking about

**References:**

Barnett, J. (2006). Implementation of personal response units in very large lecture classes: Student perceptions. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 22(4), pp. 474-494.

Beatty, I. (2004). Transforming student learning with classroom communication systems. *EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research, Research Bulletin*, Volume 2004, Issue 3.

Caldwell, J.E. (2007). Clickers in the large classroom: Current research and best-practice tips. *Life Sciences Education*, 6(1), pp. 9-20.

Cutts, Q., Kennedy, G., Mitchell, M., & Draper, S. (2004). Maximising dialogue in lectures using group response systems. *Proceedings of the 7th IASTED International Conference on Computers and Advanced Technology in Education*.

Kaletka, R., Joosten, T. (2007). "Student response systems: A University of Wisconsin study of clickers." *EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research, Research Bulletin*, Volume 2007, Issue 10.

Zhu, E. (2007). Teaching with clickers. *Center for Research on Learning and Teaching Occasional Papers*, University of Michigan, No. 22.