



Connection Reflection

Response Systems—A Teaching Solution?

Immediate feedback . . . short, frequent assessments . . . reteaching . . . spot testing . . . we've heard these over and over again. It may have been from an administrator or a speaker during a teacher institute day. Usually, we went away questioning how this would be implemented. Why? Would we need to give up more class time to test? Would we need to teach to the tests? Would we be monitored more closely? Would our special education students EVER get it? Personal or Student response systems, better known as "clickers" are providing part of the solution to more closely monitoring students to know if the lesson has been effective. This issue is an attempt to give you additional information on this technology along with ideas on how "clickers" could serve as a valuable tool for feedback and time savings in the classroom.

Maybe, just maybe you will have the opportunity to use them in your classroom!

Providing Feedback—Still a Difficult Task

By: **Dr. Henry Thiele**
President

There has been a lot of talk about Web 2.0 and the changes in technology that have been taking place in our world. Tools like Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, and Google, just to name a few,



Dr. Henry Thiele

have forever changed the way we interact with information and people. In many ways the world is still absorbing and trying to understand this shift in society that is having a global impact.

To understand what is happening we must look back at how we got here. Before 2003 the world on the internet was a much different place. It focused on one-way communication of information and transmission of information. The top websites visited before 2003 were search engines and

content providers like Yahoo, MSN, and AOL. Today search engines like Google and Yahoo are still on top, but the new breed of sites have risen into the top ten. They have arrived there because of a key change: two-way communication.



Quizdom Audience Response Systems
(www.quizdom.com)

The read/write web, the one that allows us to interact with it rather than just view it, has become a game changer. What can we learn from the history of the changing web as educators?

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Special points of interest:

- DOING trumps Viewing!
- Student-centered classrooms are about success.
- Interactive lesson draw more attention.
- Are you a GOOD teacher? Check out the ten points on Page 4.

Gather Feedback, Address the Needs of Special Ed Students

By: **Judy Okazaki**
Executive Director



Judy Okazaki

Of course teachers want to know if their lessons are reaching all of their students. We ask questions to get feedback from individuals. We look at body language. We try to read facial expressions. Yet, this only gives us a sampling.

But, there is a technology tool that gives us better feedback.

"Clickers" more formally known as (classroom, student or personal) response systems allow us to receive immediate feedback on each student. These systems are useful in many ways. They help to let us know whether or not a student or group of students is following the class. They provide an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the lesson, to see where improvement is necessary in the instructional process and allow for immediate changes. They can help to facilitate dialogue based on responses. They allow for surveying experiences and then group sharing of the responses. These systems offer a way to get input from shy or hesitant students. They can also allow students to provide anonymous input on controversial topics. They can be used to collect answers to be reviewed and to be used for later discussion. Answers may also be collected and used for grading and planning. All of this feedback helps to make lessons more effective.

As Professor Ian Beatty from the University of Massachusetts says, "Classroom response systems can serve as catalysts for creating a more interactive student centered classroom . . . they not only make it

easier to engage students in learning activities but also enhance the communication among students and between the students and the instructor. This enhanced communication assists the students and the instructor in assessing understanding

during class time and affords the instructor the opportunity to devise instructional interventions that target students' needs as they arise." While the implications of the usefulness of these devices apply to all students, I'd like to focus on the special education student.

Response systems provide a way for a general education teacher to monitor special education students more closely without taking away from class time of other students. The teacher is able to identify and review material that is misunderstood or found to be difficult at the time the problem occurs. This allows students a better chance at leaving class with a good understanding of the lesson and thus able to stay caught up. Additionally, the teacher will have a more realistic picture at the end of class, as to the progress of the special education students. And response systems are practical in the amount of time it takes to incorporate them into the daily schedule.

Response systems can provide feedback to be used to report progress and problems to resource teachers along

with suggestions for improving comprehension through specific recommendations for remedial exercises. Teachers can support the special education students by emailing notes and materials to both students and resource teachers based on responses to the daily lessons, which are known because of the clicker responses. This feedback is also helpful between school and home to communicate suggestions so parents can quickly zero in on problems to support their children.

The devices can be helpful in addressing different needs of the special education students. The devices can be helpful for students who can't read as well as

for students who have difficulties with fine motor skills.

The activity of using the response systems helps to keep students engaged and, therefore, more apt to pay attention. The multisensory involvement also helps in retention of material. Special education students pay better attention because of the immediate feedback they receive when their responses appear on a

screen at the front of the room under their private and personal id. This is instantly helpful to the teacher who can track responses on a fixed or portable screen.

Student response systems offer us one more tool to allow us to do a better job in supporting our special education students.



Student Response Systems
from iRespond
(www.iRespond.com)

Welcome back!

We hope 2009-10 is your best year ever!

Student Response Systems—Worth the Time and Money?

By: **Alice Schmitz**

Director of Education and Professional Development



Alice Schmitz

Student Response Systems. H-m-m-m. Where do I stand on these?

Well, they excited me enough to purchase three sets five years ago for teacher use in my school. In my eyes, that was quite an expenditure knowing that there were many teachers wanting many other things. Was it a good expenditure? Not sure! It seemed that unless a teacher had them in their possession and could count on them whenever they wanted them, they weren't used. Did they affect instruction? I would say they did not—under the system I created.

Fast forward to the present. I was SO excited when I had the opportunity to accompany my son to his college bookstore—yes, he allowed me in the building; no, he didn't talk to me while I was there—college, too cool! While he was off purchasing specific texts, I wandered the aisles. Wow! Here I am in Aisle 1, and I see student response systems. Oh, maybe he will be able to take this class, and he'll have a professor who will use the "clicker." Then I got to Aisle 4 and again, "clickers" are a required item for another class. Wow, he can take both of these classes. No wait, it is another kind of "clicker." And, so my journey went through the bookstore. By the end of the aisles, I saw four different response systems required for four different classes. At first that put me off—you know the price of textbooks

and now students have to buy "clickers" too. Why couldn't this university figure out a standard. Then, I was elated. These professors care . . . they want to know if my student (out of the 300+ in his lecture)

gets it! They want to tailor their instruction to the class! Pretty cool.

If my leap of faith from the cost to the caring is correct, I'm excited. And, that is exactly where I stand on student response systems. I'm a fan of anything that can help teachers help students.

What will you do if you are fortunate to have a set of "clickers". Here's what I'm thinking:

- Immediately check for understanding—make sure students are following class material. You can then make changes to your presentation immediately.
- Use them during a class to review material—maybe for a quiz or test. You would know where to spend more time in the review process, and it would be fun for the students.
- Find out where improvement is needed in a lesson so you can reteach the next day.
- Gather honest answers on controversial topics—it is sure to facilitate dialog.

- Poll the class as you introduce a unit. Then save answers for later discussion. This becomes a "What do you know" and then you can see how it changes after you teach the unit.
- Get responses from the quiet students (those who do not dominate the class) without divulging who they are.
- Break up a lecture with "fun" interactive materials and make the class period fly.

I'm sure there are many more creative ideas out there.

Now, how will you fund one or more response systems? There are textbooks which include materials to support a classroom response system. Occasionally, there is even a textbook representative willing to work with you on the cost of the system. I know some schools that have gotten them free with large textbook orders. What about asking your school's parent group for funding? When is the next opportunity to ask for technology funding in your district? Hopefully one of these is an option for you. I think a classroom response system is a viable technology tool for any classroom



CPS System from eInstruction (www.eInstruction.com)

that will have a positive impact on your students!

Do you have access to a classroom response system? If so, we'd love to hear your thoughts and applications. Email us at: info@SETConnections.org.

Search the Internet for More Information on Classroom Response Systems

There are many different systems available. Searching the Internet for student response systems or audience response systems or classroom response systems will show you many possibilities. The captions below the illustrations in

this newsletter show websites for three popular systems.

Additionally, there are many articles that cite use and best practices. Here are two you may want to check out:

http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cft/resources/teaching_resources/technology/crs_biblio.htm

http://www4.uwm.edu/ltc/srs/faculty/best_practices.cfm

SET Connections

PO Box 3872
Barrington, IL 60010

Phone: 847-732-3823
E-mail: info@setconnections.org

Connecting
Special Education and Technology

www.setconnections.org

Good Teaching: The Top Ten Requirements

By Richard Leblanc, York University, Ontario

Good Teaching is :

1. as much about passion as it is about reason.
 2. about substance and treating students as consumers of knowledge.
 3. about listening, questioning, being responsive, and remembering that each student and class is different.
 4. not always having a fixed agenda and being rigid, but being flexible, fluid, experimenting, and having the confidence to react and adjust to changing circumstances.
 5. about style. Should good teaching be entertaining? You bet!
 6. about humor.
 7. about caring, nurturing, and developing minds and talents.
 8. supported by strong and visionary leadership, and very tangible institutional support--resources, personnel, and funds.
 9. about mentoring between senior and junior faculty, teamwork, and being recognized and promoted by one's peers.
 10. about having fun, experiencing pleasure and intrinsic rewards ... like locking eyes with a student in the back row and seeing the synapses and neurons connecting, thoughts being formed, the person becoming better, and a smile cracking across a face as learning all of a sudden happens.
- Good teachers practice their craft not for the money or because they have to, but because they truly enjoy it and because they want to. Good teachers couldn't imagine doing anything else.*

Read more on these ten requirements at:
<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/topten.htm>

Technology Tools Help Us Recognize Contributions and Needs

(Continued from page 1)

1. Information is powerful: look at how fast the internet exploded.
2. Doing trumps viewing: the sites that are taking the lead allow visitors to contribute (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.).
3. Those that contribute items valued by the internet community are rewarded with positive feedback.

I believe our classrooms can take something from this lesson.

1. Provide information that is valuable to our students.
2. Involve students as active participants.
3. Provide feedback.

As teachers we are all trained on how to achieve No. 1: providing content. We are becoming better at No. 2 through strategies like cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and project-based learning. I believe that of all these steps, No. 3 is the hardest. I struggled with that greatly in the classroom, not because rewarding positive contributions is difficult, but because recognizing it in a timely manner is hard to do with our limited classroom time.

To solve this problem we can reach for tools that allow us to "create time" in the classroom. Technology tools like classroom response systems that give us real-time feedback of progress can be helpful. I reached for a more traditional solution and used journaling with my kids. I added a technology spin to it and collected journals

electronically, which sped up the process, but the goal could have been accomplished on paper. I used student journals as a medium for two-way communication. This allowed for feedback in both directions: from the student to me, and from the teacher to the student. We had a read/write classroom with real-time feedback. I did it through a "geeky" interface that I designed (you can see it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pmJ4DrudIY>), but you could do it just by sending emails back and forth with your students, a Wiki page, or through a shared Google Document. This is one of those times where the tool doesn't matter, what you do with it does.

Have a great school year by making a difference in a student's life (don't stop with just one).