Using CPS in Masterworks of British Literature

Imagine experiencing the sounds and sights of Elizabethan England through verse, song, period artwork, and film. This learning environment is created during each class period in Masterworks of British Literature taught by Dr. Elizabeth Cullingford. Beginning this fall, she is further enhancing her class by asking students to use wireless response pads, much like TV remotes, to promote active learning.

The technology she is using, the Classroom Performance System, allows the instructor to know immediately whether students understand the course material and grasp complex concepts. Learners also get instant feedback after they respond to their instructor’s questions with wireless key pads. The class’s responses are displayed on-screen in a graph with the correct answer identified, allowing each student to see how they stand relative to the rest of the class. They then know where they need further study.

Dr. Cullingford uses a hierarchy of educational objectives in her instruction. The questions she asks the class using CPS, which initially tested only knowledge of the material, have evolved to address comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Fact questions (Iambic pentameter is a term used to describe ...) have been supplemented with analysis questions which require students to read and understand sections of the literature of Shakespeare, Milton, and the like.

For example, she offers students several contrasting readings of Hamlet’s statement “To be or not to be,” and asks them which they consider to be the best interpretation. She asks them whether they think the marriage of Charlotte Lucas (in Pride and Prejudice) is mercenary, prudent, or tantamount to legal prostitution. The fact that there is no “right” answer to this question challenges students to discover their own responses to the text, rather than to accept the professor’s word as law. These opinion questions, which she asks every day, are meant to prompt debate and discussion, which requires higher-order thinking.

The Classroom Performance System has been successfully used in the College of Natural Science and the College of Engineering during the past two years. Students using the system consistently report that it was a positive addition to their class, that it helped them learn the material, and that it improved their likelihood of attending class.

Dr. Cullingford’s multimodal approach is supported by learning theory which indicates there are three main learning styles: auditory, visual and kinaesthetic. Auditory learners relate most effectively to sounds and the spoken word. Visual learners understand best from written information, notes, diagrams, and pictures. Kinaesthetic learners learn effectively through touch and movement and space, learning skills by imitation and practice. Enhanced learning is maximized when information is presented so it can be processed by these three modalities (i.e. hearing, seeing, and doing).