

Flipped Classrooms 101

The education community is buzzing lately about a new paradigm in learning known as the flipped classroom model. During the past few months alone, articles on flipped classrooms have appeared in *USA Today*, *The Economist*, and *The Washington Post*. Educators have appeared on CBS' 60 Minutes to endorse the concept. So, what's all the hype about—and could it work in your school?



A flipped classroom model uses technology—most commonly teacher-created videos—to leverage learning in a classroom so a teacher can spend more time interacting with students instead of lecturing. It is called the “flipped” model because the whole classroom/homework paradigm is flipped. In its simplest form, what used to be classwork (the lecture) is done at home via teacher-created videos, and what used to be homework (assigned problems) is now done in class. Advocates of the flipped model believe that having students spend class time listening to a lecture may not be the best way for them to learn difficult topics. The flipped model allows teachers to have a permanent archive of lectures, while freeing class time for more cooperative, constructivist, inquiry-based learning.

A few years ago, the process of flipping instruction with teacher-created

videos would have seemed like a daunting task to be approached only by the most technologically savvy. Today, free online programs, such as Jing and Screencast-O-Matic, make video production as easy as pressing “record,” clicking “stop,” and distributing a URL of the video.

Though the use of technology is a hallmark of flipped classrooms, the unofficial mantra of flipping teachers is, “It’s not about the videos!” It’s the change in classroom interactions that is most important.

“[Flipped videos are] a part of a comprehensive instructional model that includes direct instruction, inquiry, practice, formative and summative assessment and much more,” write eight advocates for the model in *The Flipped Manifesto*. “It also allows teachers to reflect on and develop quality and engaging learning opportunities and options for internalization,

creation, and application of content rather than just fluff or time filling assignments.”

So far, the flipped model has gained traction in the upper high school grades and in college-level classes. The model has proved most popular in science, mathematics, and foreign language classes, where content is usually more technical and linear. But, while a student taking AP calculus might be expected to watch a 15-minute video of complex mathematics, we can’t expect the same of a fifth grader. Is the flipped model appropriate for K-8 education?

It’s a question with which advocates of the model are grappling. The model itself is constantly evolving, as the authors of *The Flipped Manifesto* explain: “Practitioners of the various flipped classroom models are constantly tweaking, changing, rejecting, adding to, and generally trying to improve the model through direct experience with how effective it is for kids.”

So, the answer to whether a flipped model would work in your school is: It depends. Just like every classroom is different, every flipped classroom is different. Only you know your teachers and students and if a flipped model would be right for your school. Are your teachers generally open to new technology? Do your students have access to view online videos, either at home or in a computer lab before or after school?

The best way for teachers to see how their students and their own teaching style will mesh with flipped learning is to test out the process. Encourage your most “technologically courageous” teachers to try a few flipped processes. Once other teachers see how easy and effective flipping can be, other teachers can jump on board. Here are some ways for educators to ease into flipping:

- Create short videos that explicitly explain classroom policies and procedures. For example, create a video that shows how students

should enter the building and where students should put their coats or get their supplies. These can be viewed by students and parents before the first day of school, and can be clearer and more effective for young learners than complicated forms or lists of rules.

- Nervous about management of a field trip? Make a video on expectations and procedures and have students watch as homework.
- Create short videos that are solutions to homework or exam problems. Students can use these to catch up and prepare for future exams.
- Record the last 10 minutes of class to wrap up or review the day. This is a great way to create an archive of the lesson and keep a class focused at the end of the day.
- Teachers don't need to reinvent the wheel for every lesson. Chances are, if someone is teaching it, a video lesson has already been recorded. Educators can search online for an existing video that can be assigned for students to watch as homework and complete a worksheet on.
- You probably have students who could train your teachers on how to make these videos. Flipping can open doors for students to engage differently with technology, too, through, for instance, peer tutoring videos. Assign upper elementary or middle school students to create video lessons. Other students can

Principal ONLINE

Access the following Web resources by visiting *Principal* magazine online:

www.naesp.org/SeptOct12




The nonprofit **Flipped Learning Network** offers a wealth of resources, including a video library, online publications, and blogs by educators using the flipped method.



Jerry Overmyer maintains **Vodcasting and the Flipped Classroom**, a site with detailed instructions on vodcasting, information on workshops and training, and ways to network with educators.

then review these outside of class—students love seeing their peers as teachers.

As a principal, you know it's never prudent to adopt a new pedagogical approach just based on hype. But, with advances in technology and the push for 21st century skills such as collaboration, the flipped model and the use of online instructional videos are here to stay. Students are “digital

natives,” and technology-enhanced learning, as the flipped model facilitates, will soon be ubiquitous. With a little experimentation, the model can be adapted for any classroom. 

Jerry Overmyer is the outreach coordinator for the Mathematics and Science Teaching Institute at the University of Northern Colorado and creator of the Flipped Classroom Network.

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