Chapter 68

How Students in a First–Year Composition Course Respond to the Flipped Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative pilot study investigated how 19 students enrolled in an entry-level college writing course responded to the use of video technology to supplement and flip class curriculum. Students were provided 10 video podcasts to augment course content and flip four class lessons. Collected through six student surveys and video download data, the results, including students' podcast viewership behaviors and attitudes toward the videos, are presented. The data revealed the college writing students involved in this study were generally satisfied with the flipped classroom and preferred it over the traditional lecture format. Download patterns indicated, however, less than half of the students watched the podcasts. Despite low viewership, the results suggest that the incorporation of video technology brings writing teachers opportunities to optimize class time by delving deeper into course content and by expanding the number of course assignments.

INTRODUCTION

The use of audio and video technology to enhance classrooms has gained increased momentum in the past 20 years. In addition to incorporating audio and video podcasts to supplement course curriculum, teachers have more recently used videos to flip their class lessons. In essence, experimenters of this flipped technique swap lectures and skills practice and report a number of positive results, including improved learner performance, increased guided learning opportunities, maximized classroom time, and enhanced engagement among teachers and students.

While the majority of flippers in higher education are instructors in the STEM disciplines, the flip has potential positive pedagogical implications for students enrolled in other areas of the academy such as rhetoric and composition. Though not typically taught as a large-enrollment, lecture-driven course

like those in the STEM fields, composition provides introductory and theoretical information that could be delivered more effectively by moving it from inside to outside the classroom. Additionally, with the recent calls to expand course writing assignments to include rhetorical discussions and productions of multimodal compositions, writing teachers have raised concerns about how to best manage class time. They have voiced their worries of balancing the teaching of writing and rhetoric with those digital composing technologies used to create these multimodal texts. By shifting the teaching of functional computer literacy skills to video podcasts, writing teachers should be able to focus class time on the rhetorical considerations necessary to create effective discourse.

This chapter describes a qualitative pilot study I conducted in one section of my first year-composition class. I aimed to learn how the incorporation of video podcasts to both supplement and flip the composition classroom would impact my writing students and the course curriculum design, specifically the integration of multimodal projects. The answers to the following four research questions are offered, along with pedagogical strategies for overcoming some of the challenges experienced:

- Will I be able to free up class time to incorporate multimodal composition assignments without sacrificing the necessary coverage of print-based literacies?
- Will students actually watch the video podcasts?
- What are students' perceptions of the video podcasts?
- Do students prefer the flipped model to the traditional one?

BACKGROUND

The flipped learning classroom, which is known by a variety of names—reversed classroom, backwards classroom, upside down classroom, and inverted classroom—is very broadly defined as the practice of flipping the delivery and application of information. Teachers free up class time by moving the transmission of course concepts from the classroom to video or audio podcasts students watch or listen to as homework. Class time is then used to apply and to explore further, through discussion and skills-based activities, those concepts. Though there are a variety of approaches to the flipped classroom, a key characteristic of this pedagogical practice is students taking ownership of the initial consumption of new information outside of class so the classroom learning space is used to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate that information.

This flipped phenomenon is generally credited to Salman Khan, the founder of the Khan Academy, and high school chemistry teachers Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, who in 2007, started prerecording all of their lectures and assigning them for homework. Though Khan, Bergmann, and Sams have recently popularized this technique in secondary classrooms and in the media, instructors in higher education have been flipping their classrooms as early as the late 1990s. In 1996, accounting professors at Miami University introduced what they called the inverted classroom to 189 students enrolled in five sections of their microeconomics course (Lage et al.). In an attempt to appeal to more learning styles despite time constraints in the classroom, Lage et al. shifted all lectures to video podcasts. This way, they could offer both the theoretical concepts and the application and practice of those concepts. Traditionally, teachers sacrifice the assimilation of content for the delivery of that content via a lecture. Lage et al., however, disrupted that practice by asking students to watch the videotaped lectures at home. Class time then became a space where students participated in interactive labs designed to reinforce the economics material

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