

The Flipped Classroom: It's Got to Be Done Right

Posted: 12/14/2012 10:41 am

As screen-savvy, digital-native Millennials reach college, a dynamic new teaching method is rising across America: the flipped classroom.

The premise of a flipped classroom is simple: Instead of lecturing in class and giving homework at home, flip it: give the lectures at home, and do the homework in class.

Lectures have been recorded for years, of course. But in 2007, high school teachers Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams pioneered a new movement when they recorded their PowerPoint presentations for students who missed class to watch on their portable music players. With help from the Internet, word grew of the flipped classroom. Teachers tried it. Today, there are [social networks](#), [blogs](#), [newspaper columns](#), [video contests](#), and [websites](#) to flatter flip fans, and flummox the flippan.

What's the flap about the flip? [Studies](#) say it's an effective way to engage students in learning. But in order for the flip not to flop, we need to step back. It is not a "one size fits all" model:

- Technology plays a big part in a successful flipped learning experience: while the majority of Bentley students have a smart phone or a laptop for at-home lecture listening, that is not the case at all universities, let alone public high schools. Critics point to the digital divide as a strike against flipping.
- Many students need an incentive to watch videos at home just like they need to be motivated to read their textbooks and do their homework. Not all students are motivated to learn on their own. If students aren't prepared, it makes it much harder to have a successful in-class experience. In my case, that incentive (read threat) is the possibility of a short quiz at the start of class.
- Teachers need the knowledge and the time to create or provide focused videos. We kept ours to a maximum of five minutes each. Even with free online tools such as [screencast-o-matic](#) or [present.me](#) to create the videos, it still takes time to get it right. Who knew that video production would be a requirement for college professors? Some faculty resort to [Khan Academy](#) for videos. I rely on the assistants at the [CIS Sandbox](#) to create the [videos](#) for teaching Excel that I used in IT101.
- This one is a biggie: some instructors need to put their egos aside as they shift from being the "sage on the stage" to becoming the "guide on side." Instead of wasting face time with long lectures to relay information, teachers interact with students as they grapple with course concepts.

In my flipped classroom, after an occasional quiz, students form small groups, and alternate roles of doer, reader, and checker as they make their way through an in-class, hands-on exercise. I roam around to see how they are doing, answering questions, and noting interesting problems or solutions for groups to share at the debriefing during the last 15 minutes of class.



Traditional lecture hall = students bored and distracted.

The first time I offered a flipped classroom activity, I asked students what they thought of the experience. One student said, "I finished the project. I learned more about Excel than I ever have in my life. To be honest, I hated it ... but it sure beat a lecture." It was as if the smoke was coming out of his ears, and the light bulb went off above his head. He and his teammates were actually thinking in class and talking to each other. They got to struggle with the material in a way that challenged them. And when they were done, they had a story to tell.

The flipped class = students alert and engaged.

A bonus out of all this flipping out? Teaching with this pedagogy models a business experience that prepares



students for their careers. The flip is moving into the corporate world. Instead of boring business meetings at work, [Forbes.com reports](#) that some companies are embracing the flipped business meeting. No more "Death by PowerPoint" meetings. Instead, professionals are watching short video briefings beforehand to take in all the information so they can spend time together discussing and acting on it.

I may be somewhat gripped by the power of technology (it's in my nature) but I am not advocating that online videos have the power to replace the instructor or the textbook. I do, advocate, however, that instructors create opportunities for active learning through discovery and involvement, rather than creating an environment where students are passive. When an instructor asks "Are there any questions?" and nobody raises their hand, that doesn't mean students understand everything. It means they have no idea what you're talking about.

Originator Aaron Sams writes that [there is no such thing as the flipped classroom](#), but rather, suggests it refers to any model where students are engaged in their learning. Judge for yourself. Look at the photos below. Which classroom would you rather be in?

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