June 2017

Flipped Classroom: Overcoming Fear of the Flip

Saundra Shillingstad
University of Nebraska at Omaha, sshillingstad@unomaha.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ctlle

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Secondary Education Commons

FLIPPED CLASSROOM: OVERCOMING FEAR OF THE 'FLIP'

Saundra L. Shillingstad
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Abstract: *When asked to teach an undergraduate Human Growth and Learning (HGL) course with a practicum experience in a four- week summer session I had one question: How could the instructor cover a semester's worth of content and engage the students in a field practicum experience in four weeks? I asked our College of Education Innovation, Design, Experience, Activities & Synergy (IDEAS) director Wendy the above question. Her immediate response was: "flip your classroom". This paper will discuss the professor's experience and satisfaction with the flipped classroom design and the results of students' evaluation of the HGL flipped course.*

I had heard of the flipped pedagogical model of instruction prior to my conversation with Wendy. She noted to me that there was no single model for the flipped classroom. She armed me with several articles and online videos to review to assist me in determining whether 'flipping' my course would be viable for my summer 2015 courses. I went into the summer session knowing that my class sizes were going to be small; Section 1 had ten students enrolled, and Section 2 had six students enrolled. Wendy assured me that the 'flip' would be seamless as all of the course materials could be uploaded into Blackboard (learning management system). She suggested that I upload all of the materials and encouraged me to open the access to the Human Growth and Learning course in Blackboard before the spring session ended to inform the students of the pedagogical model of instruction that would be used during the summer course.

I walked out of Wendy's office armed with materials and great suggestions, and I began my research on the flipped classroom. I learned that the flipped classroom is also known as the inverted classroom and it is grounded in the premise that students begin learning prior to entering the classroom. The flipped classroom inverts the traditional lecture classroom so that what was once done during class time (lecture) is now assigned outside of class, and what was often done outside of class (learner-centered engagement activities) is now accomplished during class time (Lage, Platt & Treglia, 2000; Heyborne & Perrett, 2016).

Across the research it was noted that moving to a flipped classroom requires a change in mindset for the instructor, as well as the student. Instead of the instructor being the *director* of the learning environment, the instructor moves into the role of *facilitator*. In the flipped model of instruction, the students must complete assignments outside of class and come to class prepared for in-class discussions and collaborative activities.

Flipping the classroom repurposes traditional classroom time (lecture, presentation, demonstrations) into a student-centered collaborative learning time (Fawley, 2014). In the flipped classroom objectives and assignments for class sessions are posted in advance so that when the students reach the classroom they have knowledge of what will be discussed in class.

As I reviewed the literature, I noted that access to technology can define the success or failure of flipped classrooms. Our College of Education (COE) students have access to technology (digital and print resources) and collaborative learning spaces in our IDEAS Room (Innovation, Design, Experiences, Activities, Synergy). The IDEAS Room had operating hours during the summer school sessions, therefore I did not need to worry about technology access.

F = Fear of the Flip

I armed myself with knowledge of best practice, strategies and ideas from others who had flipped their classrooms. As I made the course outline (see Table 1), fear began to set in. My greatest fear was whether or not the students would complete the assigned readings and assignments and be prepared for in-class activities. In an effort to overcome my fear I decided to send an email to each candidate enrolled in the summer session before the spring semester ended via Blackboard (learning management system) email. The course syllabus, course outline,

presentations, and videos were made available in Blackboard two weeks before the spring semester ended. The email requested that the candidates review the course syllabus/outline, read the first chapter, watch the posted videos on 'flipped classrooms,' and come to class on the first day with their textbook in hand. Each candidate was asked to send me an email that they had received the information. All students enrolled in the two sections responded within one week of the email noting that they had received the information.

For the course to be successful I had to trust that the students would complete the activities and assignments outside of class. Noted in Table 1 are the content and activities/assignments for the four-week session. The course assignments included 4 examinations, 6 field observation reports, and in-class activities.

Table 1: Course Outline

Week 1	Topics – Flipped Content Available via Blackboard	In-Class Activities
Monday: Chapter 1	Introduction Status of the Profession	Rapport Building Activity Case Study-Teaching Profession Think-Jot-Share Exit Slip
Tuesday: Chapter 2	Biological Foundations	Thinking Critically Video Analysis Applying Your Knowledge Exit Slip
Wednesday: Chapter 3	Cognitive Foundations	Demonstration Lecture Launcher Modeling Learning Illustrated
Thursday Chapter 4	Socioemotional Foundations	Applying Your Knowledge Think-Jot-Share Share: Learning Illustrated
Week 2		
Monday: Exam 1 (Chapters 1-4) Chapter 5 Field Preparation (Middle School)	Gender	Case Study: Gender Video Analysis
Tuesday: Chapter 5, continued Field Observations (Middle School) Debriefing	Gender	Lecture Launcher Think-Jot-Share Debrief Exit Slip
Wednesday: Chapter 8 Field Observations (Middle School) Debriefing	Friends & Peers	Lecture Launcher Think-Jot-Share Debrief Exit Slip
Thursday: Chapter 8 Field Observations (Middle School)	Friends & Peers	Lecture Launcher Think-Jot-Share Debrief Exit Slip
Week 3		
Monday: Exam 2 (Chapters 5 & 8) Chapter 7 Field Preparation (High School)	Family Relationships	Case Study: Family Video Analysis
Tuesday: Chapter 7 Field Observations	Family Relationships	Lecture Launcher Think-Jot-Share Debrief Exit Slip
Wednesday: Chapter 10 Field Observations	School	Lecture Launcher Think-Jot-Share Debrief

		Exit Slip
Thursday: Chapter 10 Field Observations	School	Lecture Launcher Think-Jot-Share Debrief Exit Slip
Week 4		
Monday: Exam 3 (Chapters 7 & 10) Chapter 13	Problems & Resilience	Thinking Critically Video Analysis Applying Your Knowledge Exit Slip
Tuesday: Chapter 13	Problems & Resilience	Case Study: Problems & Resilience Video Analysis Applying Your Knowledge Exit Slip
Wednesday: Work Day	Special Education	Case Study: Special Education Video Analysis Applying Your Knowledge Exit Slip
Thursday: Special Education	Exam	

L = Learning Inside and Outside of the Classroom

As I reviewed course outlines and syllabi used in past summer semesters, I agonized over whether or not the freshman/sophomores would be successful in a "flipped" model of instruction. Human Growth and Learning is the first in the sequence of five professional education courses for students admitted into the College of Education. All that is covered in a traditional academic semester is covered during the four-week summer school session.

The summer sessions were scheduled to meet 2.25 hours per day, four days per week over four weeks. The course was held on campus during week one. During weeks two and three the course was flipped to the field as the students were required to participate in a secondary field experience. During week two the class met off campus at Lewis and Clark Middle School, then moved to Bellevue West High School for week three. Both the middle school and the high school offered us a learning space in their buildings. Having a learning space at each of the schools permitted us to meet and discuss assignments, prepare for the observations, observe, then come back together for a debriefing of their observations. During the fourth week the class was flipped back to campus.

I = Introduce and Engage

After completing the course outline, I identified immediately that flipping a course required a great deal of preparation and planning. Having sent out the email, I had to hope that when the students arrived on the first day of class that we could begin with a quick review of the syllabus and move directly into content on the first day of class.

During the first class session, the course syllabus, expectations, and course outline were reviewed. I reviewed my role and the candidates' role. I informed the candidates that I would be giving up the 'traditional role' of lecturer and instead of the traditional 'sit-and-get' lecture, our classroom would be guided by a series of interactive activities. It was stressed that the in-class activities were designed to promote cooperation, collaboration, and interaction during class time. I modeled and demonstrated each of the activities that would guide the in-class time: "thinking critically" questions, "applying your knowledge" scenarios, "think-jot-share" demonstrations, "lecture launchers," "learning illustrated," video analysis, and case studies.

P = Prepare to Promote Independence

A new perspective had to be adopted in an effort to break out of the traditional lecture centered pedagogy I was familiar with using. Westermann (2014) noted, "In essence, the 'flipped' paradigm introduces information to the student prior to his/her attendance in the classroom, but perhaps more importantly initiates collaboration between the students themselves and the instructor prior to the presentation of the materials with a corresponding expectation that the information presented will focus on higher level cognitive processes such as analysis, evaluation, and comparison" (p. 44).

During the first week of class, the four foundation chapters that guide the remainder of the course were covered. I provided the students with the chapter objectives and an outline of each chapter and I included the in-class activities that would be covered each day on the course outline (materials were available on Blackboard). Students were asked to download the resources that were available on Blackboard and come to class with the activities completed.

P = Promoting Independence

I readily recognized that having the course materials posted and available at the start of the course was a critical component to active participation during in-class time. During week two I modified the chapter outline and embedded the in-class activities for each day. I embedded the "thinking critically" questions and the "applying your knowledge" scenario questions into the chapter outline. Higher level questions were posed that would require the student to engage in a higher levels of cognitive work. I focused the questions on Bloom's revised taxonomy (2001). The questions required the students to move beyond the knowledge and comprehension level to application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation.

E = Explore and Engage

Moving from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom, at first, was a challenge. For sixteen years I had been the 'director' of the learning environment. Stepping into the role of 'facilitator' at first felt awkward. When I began to trust that my students had completed the work and come to class prepared, I was amazed at how well the groups interacted, challenged one another, questioned each other's ideas, and did what was asked of them. Each class period, I formed groups and presented the 3-4 pre-planned activities. I found the key to active participation hinged upon them knowing what the expectations were for each class session.

D = Debriefing

The summer session flew by. As I was grading the final assignments, Wendy stopped by my office and asked how everything went with the flipped classroom. I do believe I smiled and replied, "Wow! That was a lot of work." I was highly satisfied with the results of the course. Despite my reservations and the fear about the flipped learning paradigm, the end result was more than I had anticipated. The planning, organizing, uploading, creating and delivering of the content moved me out of the mindset of *director* of the learning environment, and the backward design of flipped pedagogy allowed me to become the *facilitator*. As I reflected on the summer session I felt great satisfaction that I could devise strategies and engage students in activities that promoted a student-centered environment.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha utilizes the Automated Course Evaluation (ACE) system for collecting and managing course evaluations. The ACE generates results in nine areas of competency: Learning, Enthusiasm, Organization, Group Interaction, Individual Rapport, Breadth, Assessment & Evaluation, Assignments, and Overall score.

The report disaggregates in five measures: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree. A mean score is reported for each of the competencies. The response rate was 100% for both class sections.

Table 2: ACE Results

Competency	Section 1: Course Mean	Section 2: Course Mean
Learning	4.78	4.88
Enthusiasm	4.85	4.88
Organization	4.75	4.75
Group Interaction	4.60	4.88
Individual Rapport		
Breadth	4.55	4.79
Assessment & Evaluation	4.53	5.00
Assignments	4.55	4.42
Overall	4.55	4.83

Conclusion

When the ACE arrived in my email inbox, fear gripped me again. I was hesitant to review the students' evaluations. What if my scores were horrible? What if my perceptions of the courses were different than the students? My fear dissipated when I reviewed the results.

As I analyzed the results, I was pleased that the students had an overall positive learning experience. The four competency areas that I reviewed closely were: Learning, Organization, Group Interaction, and Assignments. My goal each semester is for my students walk away feeling that they learned something that they consider valuable, that the course was organized and provided opportunities to participate, and that the assignments aligned with the course objectives.

The competency areas of Learning, Organization, and Group Interaction include four questions, and the Assignments competency includes two questions. The questions in the Learning competency are: (1) I found this course intellectually challenging and stimulating, (2) I learned something that I consider valuable, (3) My interest in the subject increased as a result of this course, and (4) I learned and understood the subject materials of this course. In both of my sections, 100% of the students selected "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" for each of the four questions.

The questions in the Organization competency are: (1) Instructor's explanations were clear, (2) Instructor's materials were well prepared and carefully explained, (3) Proposed objectives agree with those actually taught so I knew where the course was going, and (4) Instructor's presentation facilitated my organization of content. In Section 1, 100% of the students selected Agree or Strongly Agree on questions 1 and 2. In Section 2, one student selected Neutral, and one student selected Disagree on questions 1 and 3, while the remaining students selected Agree or Strongly Agree.

The four questions in the Group Interaction competency are (1) Students were encouraged to participate in course discussions, (2) Students were invited to share their ideas and knowledge, (3) Students were encouraged to ask questions and were given meaningful answers, and (4) Students were encouraged to express their own ideas and/or question the instructor. In Section 1, 100% of the students selected Agree or Strongly Agree on questions 1-3 and one student selected Neutral. In Section 2, 100% of the students selected Agree or Strongly Agree on questions 1-4.

The last area that I scrutinized closely was the Assignments competency, where the two questions are (1) Required reading/texts were valuable, and (2) Readings, homework, laboratories contributed to the appreciation and understanding of the subject. For question 1, one student in Section 1 selected Neutral. In Section 2, one student selected Disagree. In sections 1 and 2, 100% of the students selected Agree or Strongly Agree on question 2.

Based on the positive course evaluations, I will be replicating the course during the summer of 2016. The positive student feedback has motivated me to continue using the flipped model of instruction. At the end of the ACE students are given the opportunity to provide anecdotal feedback to the following question: Which characteristics of this instructor or course have been most valuable to your learning experience? One of the students responded: "The fact that the instructor was very passionate about her job and the information she was giving us helped the most. I would recommend this class and her as a professor to anyone. This is by far my favorite class that I have had at UNO. I loved how the course was instructed and how the instructor taught us. We covered a lot of information in a fun way." When I read this comment it affirmed in my mind that moving from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach is worth the hard work, time, effort and energy required to flip a course.

References

Fawley, N. (2014). Flipped classrooms: Turning the tables on traditional library instruction. *American Libraries*, September/October, *19*.

Heyborne, W.H. & Perrett, J.J. (2016). To Flip or not to flip? Analysis of a flipped classroom pedagogy in a general biology course. *Journal of College Science Teaching, 45*(4), 31-37.

Lage, M.J., Platt, G.J., & Treglia, M. (2000). Inverting the classroom: A gateway to creating an inclusive learning environment. *The Journal of Economic Education*, *31*, 30-43.

Westermann, E.B. (2014). A half-flipped classroom or an alternative approach? Primary sources and blended learning. *Education Research Quarterly*, *38*(2), 43-57.

Dr. Saundra L. Shillingstad (sshillingstad@unomaha.edu) is a **Professor of Teacher Education** at the **University of Nebraska at Omaha** with a focus on social studies and educational foundations. She holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Kansas State University, with a background in teacher development, induction programs and assessment.