

What's All This Flap About "Flipping" the Classroom?

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There's been a lot of buzz over the last few years about the "flipped" classroom—also called the "inverted" or "upside-down" classroom. Like most new trends, some are wild about it and others are skeptical. As a person who studies technology and learning, I find it intriguing, but I am closely following the literature for outcome reports. For now, I wanted to share some preliminary information on the subject as food for thought.

What Is It?

In essence, the flipped classroom moves delivery of foundational content to the cloud (the internet), maximizing classroom time for guided practice, debate, discussion, and problem solving. Learners are expected to view online material at their own convenience prior to the classroom session. The classroom time is primarily used for discussion and group activities that allow learners to practice the new knowledge and skills in a safe environment, with rapid feedback and support from the instructor and fellow classmates.

Potential Benefits

Done well, the flipped classroom maximizes the benefits of both online and classroom learning. One of the strengths of asynchronous (just-in-time) online learning, is its ability to deliver content consistently to a broad audience, and at the speed and time most convenient to each learner. Unlike with a live lecture, learners can pause, rewind, and fast forward content to meet their individual needs. They can view content multiple times or in multiple sittings to allow for reflection—or review it months later as a refresher.

The flipped classroom can maximize the benefits of both online and classroom learning.

One of the strengths of face-to-face classroom learning is its ability to foster communication, interactivity, relationships, and discussion. Moving lecture delivery to the cloud allows instructors to maximize on classroom strengths for skill building—thus increasing learner readiness to transfer knowledge and skill back on the job. Instead of practicing skills on their own—where errors may go undetected and questions unanswered—learners practice skills in the classroom and receive immediate constructive feedback on their performance.

Potential Pitfalls

Notice the benefits section started with the phrase "done well." Quality is the primary pitfall with the flipped classroom. Putting foundational content online doesn't mean simply recording a classroom lecture and throwing it on YouTube. It means condensing content down to its most salient points and compiling those into a stimulating presentation. Keep in mind, high quality

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doesn't have to mean high tech—online content can be delivered very effectively using fairly basic tools. But whether high tech or low tech in design, quality online learning should be both meaningful and concise, and—whenever possible—allow the learner to control the pace and depth of content.

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The flipped classroom isn't for every learner or every subject. To deliver flipped training effectively, you need to ensure your audience has the necessary technology and connectivity to access it. You also need to consider whether it works best for the subject matter you're training. While some would argue that any content can be delivered effectively online, most would agree that some content is just easier delivered and better digested in person. So, in that sense, if it isn't broken don't fix it. But, at the same time, just because it isn't broken doesn't mean that it can't be improved. Flipped learning might be a way to do that with some courses and some audiences.

Final Thoughts

What I like best about the flipped classroom is that it's a solid example of blended learning—meaning it incorporates both online and classroom delivery to maximize learning potential. And it's highly scalable—meaning you can try a little or a lot within a course to measure its impact. Not ready or interested in flipping a whole course--what about flipping a single chunk of content? Create a 10-minute pre-training or homework assignment to view online for later discussion in class. Or turn a useful classroom tool into an online learning module that users can view prior to class and then re-access as needed back on the job. There are scores of possibilities.

Learn More

If you're interested in learning more about the flipped classroom, here are some articles and sites to get you started:

- TED Talk (Salman Khan): http://www.ted.com/talks/salman_khan_let_s_use_video_to_reinvent_education.html
- The Flipped Classroom (Bill Tucker): <http://educationnext.org/the-flipped-classroom/>
- The Transformational Potential of Flipped Classrooms: http://educationnext.org/files/ednext_XIII_3_whatnext.pdf
- The Flipped Class Network: <http://vodcasting.ning.com/video/video/listForContributor?screenName=1vd2muf3elntt>
- Flipped Learning (Scott LaFee): <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=27490>
- The Flipped Classroom: What It Is and Is Not: <http://www.thedailyriff.com/articles/the-flipped-class-conversation-689.php>

If you're already using this technology or would like to brainstorm how to use it, contact me at ccarter@ihs-trainet.com. I'd love to hear about your experiences or discuss new ways to experiment.

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