Chapter 20
Flipping the Composition Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Research gathered from approximately 179 students over five semesters demonstrates how using the flipped classroom to teach composition in a face-to-face classroom improves students' writing. Included is the contrast between student learning via the traditional model versus the flipped model, and a theoretical basis for why the flipped classroom model is successful is established. The author champions the many advantages of the flipped classroom but concedes it is not without its challenges. These challenges are explored and strategies for creating and using screencasts effectively are recommended so that other instructors may successfully flip their own classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Computer innovator and philanthropist Bill Gates has called it "the future of education" (Khan, 2011). TED Talk presenter Salman Khan (2011) has declared it will "reinvent education." And Science NOW columnist Jeffrey Mervis (2011) has argued that it is a "better way to teach." This highly touted approach is the flipped classroom, a classroom in which the traditional model is reversed: students instead learn course material through video lectures for homework, and class time is devoted to helping them assimilate and apply their knowledge.[1] The concept of the flipped classroom originated in 2000 with an article in the *Journal of Economic Education* by Maureen Lage, Glenn Platt, and Michael Treglia; but the idea received little attention until Aaron Sams and Jonathan Bergman's 2012 publication of *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day* and Khan's 2011 TED Talk, wherein he shared how the Khan Academy—an online source of free instructional videos in math, science, and history—is revolutionizing education around the world. Most of the research on and resources for the flipped classroom are for the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines; examinations of the effectiveness of this model in other disciplines are scarce.

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In recent years, researchers in composition studies have begun exploring the role of technology in the writing classroom (Clyde & Delohery, 2005; Hicks 2013; Herrington, Hodgson, & Moran, 2009), but most resources analyze the rhetoric created by technology (Cushman, 2010; Selber, 2010; Worsham, 2008); explore the use of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms in the classroom (Brown et al., 2012; Fraiberg, 2010; Handa, 2009; Palmeri, 2012); or consider how technology can increase accessibility for students with disabilities (Engstrom, 2005; MacArthur, 2009). There is an increasing interest in multimodality, the various ways in which we encounter and create texts in a technological world, but there is very little research on the flipped composition classroom. Both Bretzman (2013) and Cockrum (2014) offer suggestions for how to flip a high school English class, but they both focus on teaching literature rather than composition, and they offer suggestions for lesson plans, rather than quantitative evidence that the method words. There is a clear need for further investigation as to the methodology and effectiveness of the flipped composition classroom, and the research described in this article, gathered from approximately 179 students over five semesters, seeks to fill that gap.

An analysis of the data in this study demonstrates that the use of the flipped model improved students' writing. Furthermore, an explanation is offered as to why the flipped classroom is successful: the focused atmosphere of the classroom space allows students to engage in deep learning without the distractions of multitasking; in this structure, shallow learning happens outside the classroom, and the deep learning that accompanies understanding the concepts enough to identify and to apply them happens in a "protected" space, a classroom without the many distractions of modern college life.

The flipped classroom offers many advantages, but it is not without its challenges: among other things, it requires a reconceptualization of the learning process both for the instructor and students, and it requires a careful consideration of how to construct class time to promote learning. Experiences with these challenges are shared and strategies are recommended for helping the process go smoothly so that other instructors may successfully flip their own classrooms.

In short, this chapter advocates for the use of the flipped model in composition classrooms and proposes best practices for doing so. Additionally, a theoretical model is proposed for why the flipped classroom helps students learn.

BACKGROUND

Few studies have been conducted regarding the effectiveness of the flipped classroom, unfortunately, but the studies that have been done show that the method has promise. Researchers have measured the extent to which students view content outside of class and the extent to which students feel like the method helps them learn. Lage, Platt, and Treglia (2000), for example, showed that the majority of their economics students a) preferred the flipped format and b) felt it enhanced their learning, as they rated both items as a 3.9 on a 5.0 scale. Likewise, Foertsch, Moses, Strikwerda, and Litzkow (2002) found that their computer science students rated the flipped class more highly than the traditional format, with a majority indicating they preferred the flipped model for the ability to take notes more easily and for the flexibility it offered with regards to their busy schedules (66% and 78%, respectively).

Research has also shown that students perform better in a flipped classroom. McFarlin (2007) found that compared to students in an exercise physiology class taught in a traditional format, the students in the same course taught in the flipped format performed an average of 14% better on exams and earned final course grades that were 9.9% higher. Kurtz, Fenwick, Jr., and Ellsworth (2007), as well as Day and