Flipped but Totally Flopped: The Do-NOTS of Flipped Classroom and the Emergence of Compact Experiential Learning

Amy L. Mehaffey
Stephen F. Austin State University
Department of Management and Marketing
PO Box 13070, SFA Station, Nacogdoches, TX 75962
936-468-1802
Amy.Mehaffey@sfasu.edu

John Michael Mehaffey
Stephen F. Austin State University
Department of Agriculture
PO Box 13000, SFA Station, Nacogdoches, TX 75962
936-468-4319
mehaffeyjm@sfasu.edu

Introduction

Historically, flipped classrooms, otherwise known as inverted classrooms, have emerged as powerful and popular classroom structures. This inverted model—widely associated with Bergmann and Sams (2012a, 2012b), was designed to help reimagine the classroom by shifting traditional lecture formats into asynchronous work before class, leaving class time open for deeper discussion and hands-on activities. Although the flipped classroom is not new, the insights and the ensuing adaptation of "compact experiential learning" can benefit educators across disciplines. The key takeaway from the following flipped classroom failure is that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work with all populations, but by capturing the spirit of the flipped classroom, educators can implement quick, compact, experiential learning methods across their teachings. This is especially true for post-secondary educators as they compete for students' attention and engagement in an ever-growing technological world (Daniel et al., 2024). The following analysis aims to outline the initial flipped classroom structure and provide an overview of the innovative adaptation that emerged in response to the initial failure.

Methodology

The setbacks and challenges were gleaned from two separate disciplines-Animal Science and Marketing-and showcase how classroom setbacks can lead to new, more effective instructional strategies. The implementation was conducted over two semesters-one before and one after COVID-19. This serves as a valuable starting point for educators considering how to best engage their students through flipped learning.

Structure for Animal Science Course: This course traditionally has a population of students who are agricultural majors but do not have a rich agricultural background. In this case, the flipped model was designed to manage the large volume of information required of students and help enhance their learning, given they had little frame of reference to many of the topics in the course. The lectures were pre-recorded and uploaded on the university's Learning Management System (LMS), and students were subsequently required to complete an online quiz before attending class each week. Class time was intended to enhance discussion, answer questions, and explore real-world case studies and the concepts' applications. Like many of its kind, this course also had a hands-on application built-in with a one-hour lab taken in conjunction with the 3-hour course. Topics such as animal nutrition, reproduction. and general livestock species husbandry were covered in the online lectures and quizzes. The classroom discussions were then based on the lecture's high points, questions, and industry application. For example, one week the course covered common feedstuffs and the classroom discussion was based around the real – world application of feed ingredients and we passed around examples. Students were also required as part of the course to complete traditional in-class exams, write four papers over a topic related to a breed of livestock; its nutritional needs; common reproductive practices; general rearing practices; and give a presentation over the four sections at the end of the semester as part of their overall grade.

Structure for Marketing Course: Similarly, the Principles of Marketing course traditionally attracts not only College of Business majors, but students needing an elective from Agricultural Business, Hospitality, and Communications. Although students often have no marketing background, as consumers, their knowledge of branding, consumer behavior, and advertising is a bit stronger than compared to the agriculture majors in the aforementioned animal science course. As such, the flipped model was thought to allow students to engage with foundational

marketing concepts before class, using pre-recorded lectures and quizzes given through the university's LMS at the beginning of each class. Throughout the semester, students learned various core marketing concepts, such as branding strategies, consumer behavior, advertising techniques, and public relations. As an example, the Public Relations unit, timed the week before Thanksgiving, allowed the class to participate in a group activity analyzing the role of commodity groups' public relations strategies (such as turkey producers and the cranberry association) to highlight how public relations can influence consumer perception and holiday purchasing behaviors. The semester long class also participated in discussing real-world challenges with clients via guest speakers and explored non-profit marketing alongside a service-learning project.

Results to date

Despite this approach being taken with two different disciplines and student populations, both implementations faced similar challenges with student engagement. A key issue that emerged was a lack of pre-class preparation, which directly impacted students' ability to participate meaningfully in discussions and hands-on activities. Many students bypassed the online lectures, leading to weak foundational knowledge reflected in lower quiz scores and diminished classroom engagement. Recognizing these challenges, both instructors made mid-semester adjustments to prevent long-term negative impacts on student learning. The Animal Science course opted to return to more traditional-style lectures, still requiring the papers and presentation. In the Marketing course, the instructor retained hands-on activities but replaced in-class quiz time with shorter, structured lectures at the start of each class. This shift marked the emergence of what we now call "compact experiential learning," an approach designed to preserve the collaborative and applied aspects of the flipped classroom while incorporating essential instructional elements to enhance student comprehension.

Future Plans & Advice To Others

The mid-semester adaptations proved successful, and the refined approach has continued, demonstrating the value of integrating structured instructional elements with experiential learning. While the flipped classroom can be an effective model, it may not be universally applicable-particularly in disciplines requiring strong foundational knowledge or predominantly underclassmen. Instead, a blended approach has yielded better results, balancing concise lectures with interactive, application-based learning. This model now includes shorter lectures, structured pre-class checkpoints to ensure engagement and retrieval exercises to reinforce key concepts at the beginning of class. Educators seeking to implement a flipped model should remain adaptable, prioritizing student engagement and learning outcomes over rigid adherence to format. Additionally, gathering real-time student feedback and continuously assessing performance metrics, such as quiz scores and participation levels, is crucial to identifying areas for improvement for any instructor looking to adapt and adjust their courses. Ultimately, a willingness to refine instructional strategies mid-semester, as demonstrated in these courses, fosters a more effective and engaging learning environment for students. We redefined what an effective "flipped classroom" can look like and continue to explore the ideas of compact experiential learning. This work not only challenges the notion that flipping a classroom is an all-or-nothing approach but also provides a replicable framework for educators striving to maximize engagement, retention, and overall student success.

Costs

The only costs associated were the salary of professors teaching the courses and additional time to assess not only the assigned coursework, but also the program effectiveness.

References

Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012a). Before you flip, consider this. *Phi Delta Kappan, 94*(2), 25. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171209400206

Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012b). *Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day*. Washington, DC: International Society for Technology in Education.

Daniel, K., Msambwa, M. M., Antony, F., & Wan, X. (2024). Motivate students for better academic achievement: A systematic review of blended innovative teaching and its impact on learning. *Computer Applications in Engineering Education, 32*(4), e22733. https://doi.org/10.1002/cae.22733