



## A New Approach to Language Instruction— FLIPPING THE CLASSROOM

BY KAREN MULDROW



*FAR LEFT: Linda Santiago of Lakewood High School (FL) and her Spanish 4 students discuss a project.*

*LEFT: A seventh grade student in Esther Gonzalez-Wright's class at Hopkins Middle School shows off her "Dali-style" moustache while working on a project before a visit to the museum.*

The “flipped classroom” has generated a lot of media buzz recently. Online learning initiatives such as the nonprofit Kahn Academy ([www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org)) have attracted the interest of Wall Street, academia, and the public—so much so that the flipped model is routinely defined as students watching prerecorded lectures online. However, that oversimplification misses the fundamental premise of the new paradigm: that the learning environment be student-centered rather than teacher-centered. In the student-centered classroom, students share responsibility for their learning and become more engaged in the learning process. This typically means that students are introduced to content prior to/ outside of class in order to then practice what they have learned in a guided setting.

The popularity of the flipped, blended, or hybrid classroom has grown rapidly in recent years, due in part to the understanding that traditional methods of instruction are not always the most successful. Although teachers in traditional classrooms often work to differentiate lessons for students of varying levels of interest and ability, it is difficult to help every individual student find

his or her way. So, whether out of curiosity or exasperation, a teacher's first experience flipping the classroom often originates from his or her inability to help all students reach their goals.

Describing her experiences teaching Spanish under a traditional model, Heather Witten, of Elizabeth High School in Elizabeth, CO, recalls, “Some kids never seemed to get it; some kids were always way ahead.” She was struggling to differentiate when she came to realize that she could “teach everyone—just not all in the traditional classroom.”

Pam Benton of Pinellas County (FL) Schools experienced the same frustration, with a twist: Her French and Spanish high school students are homebound, and she meets with most classes online just twice weekly. “I needed to find a way to maximize the time students spend speaking [in the online setting],” she says. While neither educator worked at schools with flipped classrooms, they each began to look for new ways to address the needs of their students.

Henny Chen of Moreau Catholic High School in Hayward, CA, was challenged to help her Chinese language students reach a

level of competency comparable to students taking other languages. She cites research that to reach the same level of proficiency in all modes, a student in Chinese may require more time than a student in Spanish.

“The issue of time [speaking with students] is a big concern for me,” notes Chen. Additionally, with class sizes of 30 students, the ability to address student needs one-on-one was limited. Armed with a Master's Degree in Educational Technology, Chen was primed to find a solution, and gravitated toward discussions of flipped classrooms. Even so, her first experiences were with recorded videos of traditional lectures. “This seemed very old-fashioned to me,” she noted. It wasn't until she participated in a conference with Eric Shepherd of the University of South Florida, and later attended a workshop by flipped class pioneer Jon Bergmann, that she found a system that worked for her.

### Does Flipping Work?

While not every flipped classroom looks exactly the same, many follow a formula that requires students to view a video or PowerPoint presentation in preparation for follow-

up activities in class. This doesn't work for everyone; students in some communities may have limited access to technology, and many have concerns about increasing screen time, especially for young learners. However, the concept of the flipped classroom is gaining increased attention for its distinct advantages: Students can view and review material at their own pace and according to their own needs; teachers can structure class time to optimize individualized attention to students; and students have the opportunity to make use of the material they are learning in a reinforced setting. Language educators are often able to repurpose time to incorporate activities that didn't previously fit within the time constraints of the curriculum.

"Research has identified the effectiveness of the online environment for mechanical tasks. In fact, it is both feasible and desirable to complete low-level tasks online," says University of Delaware Spanish Professor Jorge Cubillos.

Given the excitement surrounding the potential of flipping in language learning, Cubillos was interested in comparing traditional and flipped (hybrid) language classrooms and wanted to learn whether there was a difference in learning for students who received content online in preparation for interactive activities in class.

After a single semester evaluating two traditional and two hybrid sections of a Spanish I course, the University of Delaware study has found that students were no more or less proficient after attending class four times a week than they were with two days of online instruction and two days of in class work. [See "The Connection Between Self-Regulated Learning and Student Success in a Hybrid Course" by Kevin R. Guidy, Jorge Cubillos, Kathleen L. Pusecker at [www.mistakengoal.com/docs/Self-regulated\\_learning\\_hybrid\\_course.pdf](http://www.mistakengoal.com/docs/Self-regulated_learning_hybrid_course.pdf).]

"While we haven't seen statistical differences between student groups thus far, the teachers perceived higher confidence levels for the hybrid group during oral assessments," reports Cubillos. Students responded positively to the flipped structure, he says, although they said that they felt it was "more work" than a traditional class.

"Interestingly, we calculated the same amount of time for the two courses," notes Cubillos. "This suggests to us that having a student in front of you doesn't mean that they are engaged with the content!" Cubillos will continue to follow the two groups over the second and third semesters of Spanish instruction.

### How Do I Flip?

Whether at the university level or in a K-12 environment, the transition from the traditional to the flipped classroom requires significant adaptations by both students and teachers. For many new flippers, that means developing a support system to see them through the process.

Before beginning to use the flipped model, Pinellas County teachers Pam Benton, Esther Gonzalez-Wright, Linda Santiago, Marlene Ricalde, and Jane Cato came together as a professional learning community (PLC).

"We began by reading the book *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day* (2012) by Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams," Santiago explains. "Everything we have done started from our discussions about that book." Their weekly meetings evolved into a time to support and educate one another. "We've become flipped learners as well as teachers," she says.

With the challenges to adopting this philosophical shift consistent across academic disciplines, academic level, and teacher experience, new flippers can find support on websites such as [flippedlearning.org](http://flippedlearning.org), which offers flipped resources as well as a discussion forum focusing on flipping the foreign language classroom. There is no shortage of information for someone who wants to learn, especially given a flipping community that is tech savvy and motivated to support and collaborate with colleagues.

But while an overall change in mentality is key, a quick glance at flipped learning discussions shows that many teachers' initial concerns center on developing video content for a flipped classroom.

"Keep in mind that flipping the classroom is not the delivery of a lecture on video," advises Spanish teacher Sebastian Gluzman of the Greenhill School in Dallas, TX. "A video

of a boring lecture is a boring video that doesn't enhance the learning experience." Finding or creating effective content for a flipped classroom is the first step in thinking outside the box.

Many language teachers initially turn to existing resources for their flipped classroom. While textbooks often take a back seat in a blended learning environment, publishers are increasingly providing video content in the online versions of language textbooks. Cubillos notes that (at least at the university level) as demand increases, some publishers are developing textbooks designed specifically for the hybrid or flipped environment. The hybrid classes in the Delaware study used Prentice Hall's new *Unidos* textbook. That said, online textbook resources do not tend to be the primary source of video content for flipped foreign language educators. Instead, most content comes from the Internet.

"We didn't make our own videos," Benton says of the teachers in her PLC. "We really like BBC Mundo ([www.bbc.co.uk/mundo](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo)), YouTube content ([www.youtube.com/education](http://www.youtube.com/education)) and Sr. Jordan ([www.senorjordan.com](http://www.senorjordan.com)) videos from the web. And we found it was really important not to rely on one source. Our students want a variety of presentation styles. They loved Sr. Jordan, but if we used three of those videos in a row they would turn off."

Sophia Aron, of Critical Language Service in California, has a language institute that teaches Arabic to students around the world via point-to-point video conference. She trains teachers to flip their classrooms, helps them find useful sources, and creates a significant amount of the institute's "flipped" classroom videos. She has used Quia Books ([books.quia.com](http://books.quia.com)) as an option for high school students because it supports the textbook and includes interactive options for both students and teachers.

"However, I had to make my own videos [because the grammar explanations in the books were not always clear]. A lot of people drop out of Arabic class because they find it confusing. Through videos I am able to offer clear, thorough, and standardized [grammar] explanations." She uses other people's videos for younger students. "For third through

## Thinking About Flipping? Looking for Support or Inspiration?

Start online:

**Flipped Learning Network**

[flippedlearning.org](http://flippedlearning.org)

Its mission is to provide educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources to successfully implement flipped learning.

**Flipped Learning Network Ning**

[flippedclassroom.org](http://flippedclassroom.org)

A professional learning community for teachers using screencasting in education. This site includes a group focused on flipping the foreign language classroom: [flippedclassroom.org/group/foreign-language-teachers](http://flippedclassroom.org/group/foreign-language-teachers).

**Jon Bergmann's Blog**

[jonbergmann.com/blog/](http://jonbergmann.com/blog/)

Try these tools:

- **Dropbox** ([www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)) – Store and share materials safely. Teachers can create a classroom folder for students to use in retrieving content or turning in homework.
- **Edmodo** ([www.edmodo.com](http://www.edmodo.com)) – Set up your classroom, invite students to join, deliver assignments (including watching videos), and track student progress. You can also create quizzes and attach Google Apps to your class.
- **Educreations** ([www.educreations.com](http://www.educreations.com)) – Create content using a virtual whiteboard, or have students do the same.
- **Glogster Edu** ([edu.glogster.com](http://edu.glogster.com)) – Create and share educational content in the form of a “glog” (an interactive poster) using text, audio, video, images, graphics, drawings, and data. Teachers can set up private virtual classrooms and monitor student activity in a safe environment.
- **Screencast** ([www.screencast.com](http://www.screencast.com)) – Capture output from your computer screen as video. With an audio narration, Screencast is a simple way for teachers or students to record thoughts or explanations.
- **Socrative** ([www.socrative.com](http://www.socrative.com)) – Create and deliver real-time quizzes online. Define short answer or multiple choice questions to get immediate feedback on a classroom activity, or to stimulate conversation.
- **Teaching Channel** (<https://teachingchannel.org>) – Watch videos of inspiring and effective teaching practices in America's schools.
- **Twitter** ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) – Anyone can build their own personalized learning network. Try creating a PLN for your language class. Or, get support for flipped language learning on the Twitter chat #langchat, Thursdays at 8:00 p.m., EST.
- **YouTube** ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com); [www.youtube.com/education](http://www.youtube.com/education)) – Find existing videos to use for your flip. Not everything is educational, but there is a surprising amount of good content. Don't forget to take a look at YouTube EDU!

**“Keep in mind that flipping the classroom is not the delivery of a lecture on video. A video of a boring lecture is a boring video that doesn't enhance the learning experience.”—Sebastian Gluzman**

fifth grade students, I use other people's educational cartoons and apps for their flipped classroom homework.”

Like Arabic, Chinese is a written language that lends itself well to video. Henny Chen introduces vocabulary in a video so students can see the word and hear the pronunciation. “I don't want to spend time in class asking students to copy me,” she says. Chen makes clear that she isn't flipping her class because it is a popular new trend, saying, “I don't care about big theories. I just want to make sure my students have time to really work on their language.”

Chen creates her own video content using an iPad application called Educreations ([www.educreations.com](http://www.educreations.com)). She then loads it on Edmodo for her students to watch. By drawing on a slide while she reads or instructs, she can keep student attention. “Doing reading comprehension online is great because I can use the target language almost 100%,” says Chen. She highlights words that students might not know to help them see that they can understand the passages even though they might not be able to translate every word. Chen uses *mcq* (a script used with Google Forms) to administer quizzes that help ensure that her students have watched the videos. [See video: [tinyurl.com/youtube-chen-flipped](http://tinyurl.com/youtube-chen-flipped).]

### Getting Students Involved

The final step—engaging the cooperation of students—is critical to the success of the flipped classroom. As the Pinellas County PLC began planning their flipped courses, the teachers realized that they needed to spend the first few class periods getting their students ready for this new way of learning. Students would need to prepare for class before they met and take responsibility for their learning in a way that they hadn't before. To ensure that students watched the assigned material, the teachers decided to place a great deal of weight on notes that the students would take while watching the assigned material. They taught their students to take “real” notes using the Cornell note-taking system ([lsc.cornell.edu/LSC\\_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf](http://lsc.cornell.edu/LSC_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf)). The teachers modeled note taking and used class time to practice note taking in a group and with partners before having students do it on their own. They all agreed that student preparation was essential to the success of their flipped classrooms.

“Note taking was a skill they had to learn,” Benton explains. “But they are happy to not be expected to do something at home that they aren't able to do correctly [as might happen in the traditional homework model], and where they may not have the support of someone who can explain it to them. If a student doesn't have someone that can help, they can rewatch the material. And they really like the individual attention that flipping allows.”

“My middle school students struggled a little bit [at first],” says Gonzalez-Wright. “They thought that note taking was synonymous with copying the PowerPoint. But they came to like having the notes and finding that they could apply them to what we did in class.” When asked what they thought of the flipped classroom the students realized that they felt empowered to be in charge of their own learning—and to enjoy it.

“Class time is really enjoyable now,” Gonzalez-Wright says. “They are speaking together and working together. The kids in both middle and high school perceive the learning as more fun than they did before.”

Witten has flipped her classes for three years, and says that she’s not sure how to describe what her classroom looks like now. “Today is different than it was two years ago; I’ll always be learning and growing. My classroom now allows students to differentiate, for themselves; to get what they need to learn from the material. I provide clear goals about the objectives for the unit, and I provide online resources. But if a student finds something that works better for them and can provide notes that meet the goal, they have the option to use that resource.”

With valuable classroom hours freed up, how do educators most effectively use this time? These teachers typically say that they never had enough time to do all they wanted to do before, but acknowledge that making effective use of repurposed time takes thought and preparation. Witten likes to use class time for mock conversations, conversation circles, and other interactive activities.

“I have had to restructure how I plan,” she says. “I still never seem to get to everything, but by using the flipped model I can make sure we hit all modes of communication every week.”

Chen explains that adopting the flipped classroom keeps certain questions fresh for her: “How can I use class time wisely? How can I make sure students understand the material clearly and also give students a chance to talk about something they want to talk about? With the flipped classroom, I have the potential to help more students fulfill their dreams of communicating in Chinese.”

Cubillos points out that although there is no lecture, class time should still contain structure. “We found that students needed a clear signal for the beginning and end of class. Everyone was most comfortable when classes included a warm-up activity, an occasional quick review of new material, a clear statement of the goals for the class period, and a wrap-up.”

The flipped classroom can clearly be a successful model, and as teachers and students become more comfortable with the concept, it may become a standard. But Witten points out that while she has flipped her Spanish classroom, she has a colleague who chooses to refer students to grammar videos only for refreshers or if they have missed a class.

## Learn More in Orlando

Check out one or more of these sessions at the 2013 ACTFL Convention in Orlando, FL, where educators mentioned in this article will share about flipping the classroom:

### Best of SCOLT: The Flipped Foreign Language Classroom

PRESENTERS: Pam Benton, Linda Santiago, Esther Gonzalez-Wright  
Friday, November 22, 3:45 p.m.–4:45 p.m., W108A

### Flipping My Chinese Classroom

PRESENTERS: Henny Chen, Haiyan Fu  
Friday, November 22, 3:45 p.m.–4:45 p.m., W105B

### Flipping the Traditional Language Classroom

PRESENTER: Jorge Cubillos  
Saturday, November 23, 10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m., W308C

### Flipped for Fluency—The Flipped Class in the Foreign Language Classroom

PRESENTER: Heather Witten  
Saturday, November 23, 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m., W304B

### Flipping the Foreign Language Class

PRESENTER: Sebastian Gluzman  
Sunday, November 24, 8:00 a.m.–9:00 a.m., W307D

*Note: All of these sessions will be held in the Orange County Convention Center.*

“We cover the same material,” she says, “We don’t get there the same way, but we both have the same high standards for our students. It’s important that you use the method that you feel is the most effective for you and your students.”

Chen says the biggest challenge for her was taking the risk to try something new to help students feel successful speaking Mandarin Chinese.

“When people ask me whether they should totally flip their language classrooms, I say that they should find the balance,” she advises. “Sometimes students can learn independently, and sometimes you will need to take time to explain something in class. For me it is about meeting the students’ needs.”

*Karen Muldrow is a Spanish teacher at Cincinnati Country Day School, Cincinnati, Ohio.*

**“Research has identified the effectiveness of the online environment for mechanical tasks. In fact, it is both feasible and desirable to complete low-level tasks online.”**  
—Jorge Cubillos