



NAVIGATION MENU

## The Flip: Why I Love It – How I Use It

*Posted by Shelley Wright on Jul 25, 2011 in Making The Shift, The How of 21st Century Teaching, Uncategorized, Voices | 7 comments*



I love the flip. I do. And I realize by saying this I'm making a controversial statement. I believe if used judiciously, in the right context, the flip can free up valuable class time and provide the background knowledge that is fundamental for students to then go forward and wrestle with higher order thinking.

The flip that I'm talking about is the flipped classroom or reverse instruction. It's called the flip because, essentially, it reverses traditional teaching. Instead of lectures occurring in the classroom and assignments being done at home, the opposite occurs. Lectures are viewed at home by students, via videos or podcasts, and class time is devoted to assignments or projects based on this knowledge. It's different from traditional homework because students know that we won't spend the next class period going over the content they've engaged with at home. Instead, we'll use it as a springboard into deeper discussion and activities. Brilliant.

As much as I like the flip, I don't believe that it's the savior of education (or the epitome of evil) as some would suggest. The point of the flip is to capture more of the time when teacher and students are together for deeper learning — to create more opportunities to apply knowledge and skills to challenging in-class assignments. Bottom line: it's not always the right instructional choice, it's only one tool in our educational repertoire. But it can be a powerful one.

Some believe that the flip is somehow designed to replace teachers. I think that's only possible if you think the most important, or sole, job that I perform in my classroom is content dispenser. I don't believe that at all.

As a teacher, my job is to facilitate my students' acquisition of skills and understanding. I do that using different kinds of content. I also challenge them, encourage them, believe in them, love them, and offer correction when necessary. The most important thing I do in my classroom is show students how to dig deep, solve problems, and reflect carefully on the constant stream of information that inundates us all. At the same time, I'm modelling important learning skills that they'll need for the rest of their lives.

I think the flip is only as good as the teacher who performs it. I suppose it's possible to abuse the flip, and use it to abdicate your responsibility as a teacher by assigning videos or podcasts every night. But my guess is that the same teachers who would do this are already showing an endless stream of videos to their classes anyway. That's a teacher problem, not a problem with the strategy itself. A great teacher knows how to use videos to augment student knowledge or rouse curiosity.

### How can we flip successfully?

So how can the flip be used successfully? I think in bite-sized chunks.

For me, inquiry learning is where it's



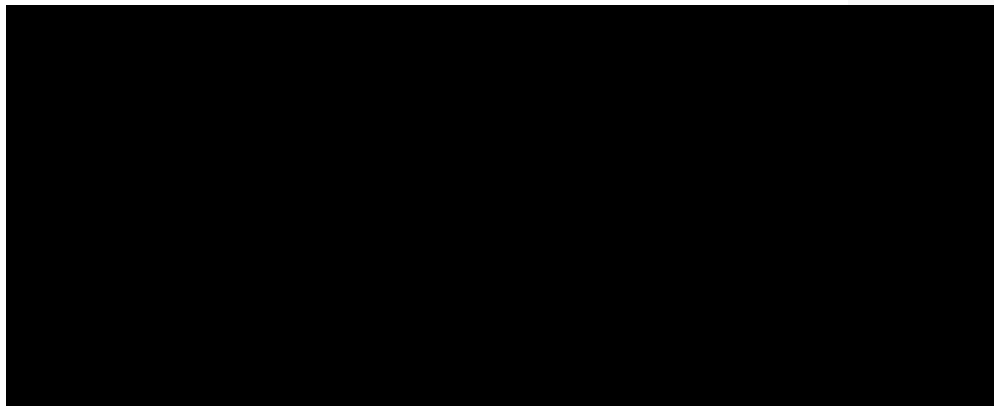
at. I don't believe in assigning videos every night as a substitute for my own lecturing. To me, that's simply the traditional classroom rearranged, not flipped. I use the flip when my students need to absorb a few chunks of new information to continue learning. I don't use it to front-load information at the beginning of a unit. I think that can rob students of the experience of authentically building knowledge and skills as they encounter new concepts.


My science classes are one place where I can, at times, introduce chunks of new information for home study and then use interactive labs and activities in class so that my students have to wrestle deeply with concepts they've just been introduced to. But not always. While I wish I taught in a world that allows my students to discover everything by inquiry, I don't. I teach chemistry and biology; both are classes that are content dense. Until that changes, there are times I need to teach concepts through direct instruction.

That said, many times the flip can help me keep up the pace in science classes by allowing students who are struggling with new material to watch and re-watch the parts of the concept outside of class. I've had students who are ecstatic because they can learn at their own pace at home. During class time I'm able to interact with every student, and target those who are *really* struggling with extra time, which is not something that happened when I taught in a more traditional way.

### How do I use the flip?

I use flip time to create curiosity in my students. This video is an example. When I assign it, I ask, "With the knowledge that you have, try to explain why you think this happened?"





You can see from the video why I don't hand out dollops of Cesium to my students! I find, especially in Chemistry, that my students come to the subject lacking much of the background knowledge essential to advance their learning. They're also often limited in their ability to create models and "talk" science.

Part of the way I help them learn requires me to determine their ability to construct a conceptual framework from their observations. After they've watched this video, and tried to create a plausible reason for why it occurred, we'll begin class the next day by discussing the theories they've come up with. (This gives me a lot of information about where each student is on the concept-creation continuum.) From their theories, we'll create models, through collaboration, that we can test.

I've also used the flip after we've spent class time learning through inquiry. I might assign a video that pulls together all that we've learned. Does every student need to watch it? Not necessarily. Students who thoroughly understand a concept can decide that for themselves. But those who are still struggling with the ideas, after we've examined them for an hour, can watch the video, take notes, and see if they can pull it all together. In the past I might have referred struggling students to a summary in the textbook for review at home. On their own time, they're much more likely to watch and benefit from a good visual demonstration.

My students also enjoy watching TED videos, so at times they're assigned a TED talk, often of a leading scientist or thinker, to expand their appreciation for how science or other knowledge is applied. Using the flip, I can target these to particular student interests and expose them to learning opportunities that I'd never have time to offer during our daily jam-packed class periods.

*None of this is passive learning.* My students are required to

interact with the knowledge that is being presented to them. The videos are posted on our wiki, which now serves as our digital textbook. Our wiki is custom-designed to support what we're learning. Students can then respond with either a blog post sharing their thoughts, or through interaction with their peers in a wiki discussion tab.

## Flipping school

While some are sounding the alarm, I think the flip makes good sense. It helps teachers make the most of class time to deeply engage our students *in community*. As Jonathon Martin states, "We know that collaboration is a critical skill set which can't be developed easily either on-line or at home alone – let's have students learn it with us in our classrooms. Let every classroom be a collaborative problem solving laboratory or studio."

So this fall, instead of your students returning to a traditional setting, flip your classroom. Create a collaborative problem solving studio for them to learn in. It will be a year they'll never forget.

*Photos: (surfing) [Mike Baird](#) (otter) [Ben Spark](#). Creative Commons.*

Some Flip Resources:

[Advancing the Flip](#) (Jonathon Martin)

[Reverse Instruction](#) (Jonathon Martin)

[The Flipped Classroom](#) (YouTube – Aaron Sams)



### About the author

Shelley Wright is a teacher and education blogger

living in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan in Canada. She teaches high school English, science and technology and works with other teachers interested in connected, inquiry-driven learning. Her passion is social justice and helping her students make the world a better place. She blogs at [Wright's Room](#). Follow her on Twitter at [@wrightsroom](#).



## 7 Visitor Comments



**Neel**

*July 25, 2011*

Great concept. What about students without web access at home?

Reply



**Shelley Wright**

*July 25, 2011*

Sometimes I have students without web access at home. If that's the case, we either download it to a USB or burn it to disk.

Reply



**Brad Newitt**

*August 4, 2011*

or sometimes my students without on-line access at home can watch the videos during their study hall at school

Reply



**Brad Newitt**

*August 4, 2011*

I have been using the flipped classroom in my high school level Physics class for a year now and it has allowed for me to create a much richer learning environment for my students.

If you are a teacher reading this blog I would strongly encourage you to give the flipped class a try even if it is only for a chapter or for a few weeks.

Reply



**Janet Ott**

*August 6, 2011*

Great concise reasoning the answers both the why and some of the how. I'm beginning to flip (have always done some of it, but am expanding now) and as I do more coordinated studies, I'm hoping it will help me deeper students understanding of science and history.

Reply



**seo**

*January 31, 2012*

Hey there! This post couldn't be written any better! Reading through this post reminds me of my previous room mate! He always kept chatting about this. I will forward this post to him. Fairly certain he will have a good read. Thank you for sharing!

Reply



**Julie Bredy**

*February 15, 2012*

Hi Shelley,

I have a passion to design my 7th grade humanities course in a flipped model. Interestingly, the increments I've taken toward greater student ownership and active learning in the classroom so far seem to take many students by surprise. While I believe that students will enjoy more autonomy in their learning, it is still more comfortable, on many days, for them to come and sit in their chairs and wait for their teacher to deliver the learning. It's interesting to watch their responses when they are asked to go learn, come back, and contribute.

Reply

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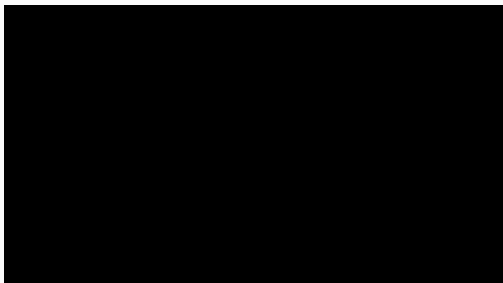
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- Mary Rearick, Professor at Eastern Michigan University

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