

# Introduction

## *Why I Flipped*

On January 10, 2013, Stanford University’s campus newspaper, *The Stanford Daily*, ran a story on the front page titled “Flipped classroom gaining popularity among profs.” The author discussed professors at Stanford University who had adopted a flipped classroom teaching style. The article quoted professors who had already adopted the flipped model and discussed how they, for the most part, liked the change. The article continued to say that the model was growing in popularity and that instructors’ and students’ experiences improved. Instructors felt rejuvenated when they were teaching something they had been teaching for years, and students seemed to prefer this “new” way of teaching. Grant applications for flipped classroom support were submitted to the office of the Vice Provost for Online Learning, and nearly half received partial or full funding.

With flipped classrooms garnering attention and popularity at my own university, I conducted a quick online search and found that flipped classrooms extended well beyond the confines of my own university. I discovered that they were being used across the country in a variety of disciplines; it wasn’t something simply being adopted by one instructor at one university, which meant I probably needed to take notice. It also seemed to have a variety of aliases—such as reverse instruction, reverse teaching, or backwards teaching—and could be done several ways. Regardless of when, where, or how, and no matter what name you assign it, it seemed that this flipped classroom was the approach that many teachers were using and that its benefits were outweighing the drawbacks.

It was at this same time that I realized that, as a second language (L2) instructor at a university, I both needed and wanted to consider this flipped model in my L2 classes. Why? First, I needed to because a main objective of my teaching is to prepare students to succeed in their coursework at the university. If it was becoming necessary for students to succeed in flipped classrooms, then I was going to have to prepare them for such settings and that would require that I flip my own classroom to some degree. Second, I wanted to adopt the flipped classroom model because I had been teaching for a long time and related to flipped adopters who said that they had been

teaching the same course for many years and wanted to change things a bit. If my colleagues were feeling rejuvenated and their students were rejuvenated, why shouldn't I reap the same rewards and do the same for my students? Third, it simply sounded good. Interactive classes, a better relationship with students, more enjoyment in the classroom—these were all appealing.

### *Can the L2 Classroom Be Flipped?*

But how does one flip a classroom and, more specifically, how does one flip the ESL classroom? Most of what I had read described the basic process as follows: (1) instructors videotape their lectures, (2) students watch the lectures outside of class, and (3) class time is spent on discussion or activities related to the lecture content. But this process concerned me for two reasons. First, I had textbooks I liked using and didn't want to give them up. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking strategies and instruction, vocabulary and grammar content, and other textbook material were sound and consisted of what I needed students to learn and practice in order to move beyond the ESL classroom. Second, I had a fear of technology, at least of making my own technology, and the thought of videotaping myself was simply too daunting to consider. I've never liked myself in photographs, so I couldn't imagine trying to put myself in videos. Besides, what was I going to record? I didn't formally lecture much in my ESL classrooms. I presented the material in the textbook, and the closest thing I had to traditional lectures were the audio passages on CD that accompanied a listening textbook or were posted on various websites. Was I supposed to record myself talking about the strategies that were already presented so well in the textbooks? That didn't seem to make much sense to me. That's when I started thinking of other ways to flip and to do what I started calling a "semi-flip."

Every discipline has unique features and needs that others don't; to me, ESL is no different. Our needs and our students' needs sometimes don't fit the mold of other classes and other methods. So maybe our flipped model is different, too. I mentioned to my editor that it might be worth exploring the idea of a simple instructor's manual, for lack of a better term, for ESL teachers with a few ideas and some sources. I thought it might include things that had worked for me—ideas that are simple enough to implement, ideas that won't create a lot of extra work for the already busy ESL instructor, and ideas that use existing content (online and in texts) to help teachers apprehensive about implementing technology and who like the material that already exists. Hence, this short resource was born.

These ideas led me to flip my ESL classes; some are more flipped than others, but all are more interactive. I primarily teach listening, speaking, and writing courses at the university, but the courses also contain components of reading, vocabulary, and grammar. It seemed easiest, to me, to flip listening since much of the audio and visual was already provided and/or could be found online, so that's what I did. It took a bit more thought for me to implement a flipped learning model with other skills, such as speaking or reading, but I have found some ideas that work well.

The way we learn and the way we teach has changed. In looking back at my own experiences in the classroom as a student, I wasn't in a flipped classroom. It very often was me taking notes during a lecture and then going home and studying those notes and doing whatever homework was assigned. There were times I never really interacted with my peers and certainly not with the instructor. Might I have been more motivated if class time had included discussion about the lecture or chapter content?

### *Other Labels for a Flipped Classroom*

I decided to flip my classroom, but to do that in earnest, I wanted to know more about flipped learning as a concept. I discovered other terms—blended learning, mixed-mode learning, hybrid learning. Was one of these models better?

**Blended learning** is a combination of traditional classroom learning with online learning. It's not a distance education course or an online course because there is some face-to-face time. It replaces only some of the classroom time. Also sometimes referred to as **mixed-mode** learning or **hybrid** learning, it can be a reasonable alternative at institutions with student populations that cannot attend classes full-time since classroom time can be significantly less than what is considered traditional. This learning model does not reduce the amount of material that is covered, nor does it completely free students from the classroom; they are required to attend scheduled class meetings. With blended learning, a website of some sort is necessary as is the availability of and proficiency in technology for both the instructors and the learners. In many cases, course management systems serve the blended learning model well. Some people say flipped learning is a type of blended, mixed-mode, or hybrid learning with the blend of video, class time, and type of interaction in the classroom varying in each case. Although I was currently in a setting where technology availability and proficiency wasn't a problem for my students, I wasn't in a position to cut my face-to-face time in half, nor was I at a point where I was willing to sacrifice all of my text-

books, especially in cases where I had a textbook that was working well. I refocused my attention on flipped classrooms because I knew that my schedule would not change and that I would be required to have the same number of class meetings. I began to alter my thinking a little and started approaching this, not as a classroom model, but as a learning model. I started referring to what I was doing as **flipping the learning**, as opposed to teaching in a flipped classroom.

By focusing on the term **flipped learning**, I was able to dispel the myth that I had to record lectures for students to watch at home. According to the Flipped Learning Network website at [flippedlearning.org](http://flippedlearning.org), “Flipped learning occurs when direct instruction is moved from the group teaching space to the individual learning environment. Class time is then used for higher-order, active problem solving by students and one-to-one or small group interactions with the teacher.” Shifting my own views helped me see that flipped learning allowed me to focus on moving the higher-order skills, such as analysis, synthesis, or evaluation, into the classroom and asking students to work on lower-order skills, such as knowledge and comprehension, at home. I moved what used to be group work and/or homework outside of class and moved what used to be homework projects (group or individual) inside the classroom. This change shifted the emphasis from method to learning. Despite the shift, I could still decide how I was going to present content and I didn’t necessarily need to record lectures or videotape myself. Not having a flipped classroom in the traditional sense allowed me to keep all that worked well with my ESL classes—the materials, the methods, the face-to-face time—and better differentiate instruction and improve classroom dynamics to make my classroom just as important as the courses students took to earn a degree. This change allowed me even more time to interact with students outside of class during office hours or via email.

Flipped learning became my goal. Some of my flipping only required small changes to lesson plans and instruction. Other ideas were loftier, and I slowly started incorporating those into my ESL classroom and adapting them for ESL specifically. After all, I wanted my classroom to be effective. So far, I seem to be reaping some of the same rewards as instructors who had adopted the flipped model before me.