

## Flipped the Classroom for Service-Learning

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### 1. ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

Serving the Community through Teaching English is one of the approved Service-Learning subjects offered by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Students taking the subject are required to render English reading classes for underserved children. In the course of running the subject, one of the major challenges encountered has been inadequate teaching time. With a view of expanding students' learning time and learning space, a flipped classroom approach has recently been integrated into the subject curriculum and a 4-part video series, together with relevant online interactive activities, were developed. A two-year study has shown that students were generally receptive to the flipped classroom approach. The successful implementation of the approach, however, may be dependent on a number of factors, including the video presentation style and levels of teachers' support. This paper also attempts to discuss whether these video inputs have impacted students' output quality.

Keywords: Teaching English, Flipped classroom, Service-learning

### 2. Introduction and objectives

Serving the Community through Teaching English is a service-learning (SL) subject offered by the English Language Centre at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The subject has, over the past few years, offered opportunities for PolyU students to experience teaching English language to underserved elementary school children in Hong Kong, China Mainland, Taiwan and Cambodia. In the course of running the subject, a major challenge encountered has been inadequate teaching time. Within the limited classroom input hours, extensive teaching content needs to be covered, including the basics of English language teaching skills, and the design of a teaching kit for service recipients, which are skills notably challenging to university students with no or little teaching experience.

To address the challenge, the teaching team has integrated a flipped classroom approach into the subject curriculum since 2017. To facilitate this approach, a 4-part video series were produced and presented to students. These videos were entitled Giving Instructions, Writing your Story, Telling your Story and Teaching your Story. These videos were meant to provide a more efficient means of instructions. By viewing key subject input outside of the classroom, students would be able to spend more of the limited class time practising the skills that are necessary for carrying out their service, thus obtaining both input and sufficient practice more effectively. With more time devoted to application of the skills introduced in the videos, and feedback from subject teachers on such application, it was anticipated that students would be able to better achieve the subject intended learning outcomes, and as a result, provide higher quality of service to the service recipients.

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The working objectives of this study were to evaluate the effectiveness of integrating the flipped classroom approach into the subject and in specific to:

- determine if the approach has served its set purpose of extending students' learning time and learning space for the subject
- evaluate the suitability and relevance of the learning content of individual videos
- examine if the video series help enhance students' output quality.

### **3. Theoretical framework/literature review**

Alongside the rise of educational technology, there has been a growing popularity of the flipped classroom approach. Bergman and Sams (2012) define a flipped classroom as a setting where that “which is traditionally done in class is now done at home, and that which is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class”. This reverse of learning sequence is usually made feasible by supplementing or integrating instructional videos (Garrison and Vaughan 2008). While the video provides the input, Basal (2015) stresses a successful flipped classroom lies on how the class time is effectively used. Activities such as post-viewing discussion, clarification of difficult concepts, or hands-on practice can be conducted during class time, converting the classroom into an avenue where active learning occurs.

The literature has in general reported the educational value of the flipped classroom approach in relation to students' enhanced preparation, increased class interactivity, and even improved grades of students (for example Flumerfelt and Green 2013). However, a flip classroom emphasises students' preparation before class. How students perceive the approach and types of video input preferred, specially in the context of SL, have been relatively less discussed. In this vein, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of students attending the subject *Serving the Community through Teaching English* on flipped classrooms.

### **4. Methods/analysis**

A multi-method approach was used employing qualitative and quantitative data. The following research tools were used:

1. A 16-question paper questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale was completed by 38 SL students. The questionnaire included comment boxes for deeper responses.
2. A focus group meeting was hosted with 12 students.
3. The output quality of the pre-flipped group (2015-16 cohort) and the post-flipped group (2016-17 cohort) was compared and analysed. The two chosen outputs were students' storytelling videos, which were one of the assessed assignments, and their teaching kits produced, which were group deliverables for the service but were not assessed.

### **5. Results and Discussion**

*Extending students' learning time and learning space*

The objectives of extending students' learning time and space might have been largely achieved (see details in Appendix 1). Half of the respondents (n=38) have watched all the four recommended videos as required. The vast majority of students tended to watch each video 1-2 times. Notably, Telling your story, had slightly more views, with nearly 30% of the students watching it at least three times. Regarding the viewing time, 2/5 of the respondents preferred watching the videos before class. One of the benefits of these videos over traditional lecture/classroom setting, as pointed out by the focus group students, was that videos could be rewound and played over and over again (which cannot happen in a classroom). When asked about their preferred viewing time, the focus group members unanimously voted for pre-class views as the videos enabled them to have more in depth discussion in class. Students, however, did point out that if subject teachers repeated contents of the video instead of extending them, students would be bored. This comment well corresponds to Basal's emphasis (2015) on the importance of how class time is used.

*Students' preferred video types*

The questionnaire survey also required students to comment on the usefulness of and their preference on the four videos. The great majority (>90%) of the respondents perceived the videos as useful or very useful. Telling your story and Teaching your story have slightly more votes as very useful. Telling your Story was students' favourite video out of the four, with about 2/3 of respondents choosing it as their preferred video.

The above findings seem to suggest that students, at least in the context of SL, prefer videos that showed authentic, real-life, visual, actual demonstration of tasks that they would do in their service. Perhaps because of this they liked Telling your story best as this is an authentic task they would do when rendering teaching service. Another possible reason for the popularity of this video is that it is directly relevant to students' first assessed assignment, which requires them to tell a story of their own choice. It is not surprising to note that this video is also the most frequently viewed one.

Teaching your story, although considered useful/very useful by students who were undergoing a process of teaching kit development, was regrettably not as popular as it was supposed to be. The video provided essential theoretical input about lesson planning and teaching kit design, which apparently put off some students. According to the focus group members, the video just contained narrators/teachers explaining how to plan a lesson and a teaching kit. The information presented was not any more effective than viewing them on conventional power point slides or even in lecture. Having seen videos that showed service in action or actual demonstration of tasks, students favoured video lectures less.

*Enhancement of students' output quality*

To investigate if the video input helped enhance students' output quality, we compared the number of students obtaining a letter grade "A" in the storytelling

assessment. As shown in Appendix 2, an additional 10% of the post –flipped cohort (16.1% as opposed to 6.7%) obtained grade “A” for this assessment. This finding well corresponds to the feedback from both students and subject teachers. Students liked Telling your story best and viewed it most frequently. Subject teachers also found the video helpful in illustrating what good storytelling skills constitute. The finding suggests that videos presenting imitable input might have a more direct impact on students’ performance.

The quality of students’ teaching kits, on the other hand, does not seem to have enhanced significantly after the launch of the videos (see Appendix 3 for details). Teachers’ experience in the subject interestingly seems to play a more important factor in determining the quality of students’ teaching kits. Teaching kits that obtained the highest scores in our evaluation were developed by students coached by the most experienced teaching team members. This finding is not difficult to comprehend. Developing a teaching kit requires students to process the input provided, integrate the learnt skills, and apply them in their own situations. The process is far more complicated than imitating some visual input, and therefore requires feedback and advice from experienced teachers. In short, the videos may serve to provide input but cannot replace the advisory role of a teacher.

## **6. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice**

This study suggests that students taking the present SL subject demonstrate a receptive attitude to the flipped classroom approach. The majority of them are ready to prepare before class, enabling the extension of students’ learning time and learning space. However, successful implementation of a flipped classroom, at least in the context of SL, lies on a few factors: a) in-class activities should build on and extend the learning contents of the videos rather than repeating them, b) videos that showcase real-life demonstration or service in action are more preferable to “lectures”. With regard to the impact on students’ learning, videos that present imitable skills might have a more direct impact on students’ performance. But for tasks that require students to perform higher order thinking, teachers’ feedback and advice still play an integral role in the learning process.

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**Questionnaires results from students**

Number of students: 46

Number of completed questionnaires: 38

Response rate: 83%

**Table 1**

How many videos did you view?

One	5%
Two	19%
Three	26%
<b>Four</b>	<b>50%</b>

**Table 2**

Do you prefer watching the videos before or after the lecture on the relevant topic?

Before	<b>42.1%</b>
After	21.1%
No response	36.8%

**Table 3**

How many times did you watch each video?

	0 times	1-2 times	3-4 times	>4 times	N/A
Giving Instructions	5%	<b>82%</b>	10%	3%	-
Writing your Story	13%	<b>74%</b>	13%	-	-
Telling your Story	2.5%	<b>66%</b>	29%	-	2.5%
Teaching your Story	18%	<b>64%</b>	18%	-	-

Table 4

How useful was each video in providing advice on your teaching kit?

	Not useful	Useful	Very Useful	N/A
Giving Instructions	-	<b>79%</b>	16%	5%
Writing your Story	3%	<b>76%</b>	21%	-
Telling your Story	-	<b>68%</b>	<b>32%</b>	-
Teaching your Story	5%	<b>58%</b>	<b>29%</b>	8%

Table 5

Which is your favourite video out of the 4?

Giving Instructions	13.2%
Writing your Story	2.6%
Telling your Story	<b>65.7%</b>
Teaching your Story	5.3%
No response	13.2%

## Storytelling assessment: Grades of 2015-16, 2016-17 cohorts

2015-16 (Pre-flipped cohort)		2016-17 (Post-flipped cohort)	
Score	Number of students (%)	Score	Number of students (%)
A+	0	A+	0
A	3 (6.7)	A	10 (16.1)
B+	20 (44.4)	B+	27 (43.5)
B	17 (37.8)	B	17 (27.5)
C+	5 (11.1)	C+	5 (8)
C	0	C	3 (4.9)
D+ or below	0	D+ or below	0
	n= 45		n= 62

## Appendix 3

Evaluation of teaching kits developed by  
pre-flipped cohort (2015-16) and post-flipped cohort (2016-17)

		Story: message (10)	Story: structure (10)	Story: SS (10)	Story: Vocabulary (10)	Teaching kit: Objectives	Teaching kit: Activities function	Teaching kit: Objectives achieved	Teaching kit: coherence
2015-16 cohort	Story 1	8	8	7	7	19	17.66	19	6
	Story 2	7	5	5	4	17	18.3	20	6
	Story 3	6	6	5	6	18	10.5	11	5
2016-17 cohort	Story 1	7	7	7	6	11	11.33	9	6
	Story 2	5	4	6	3	20	18.3	18	7
	Story 3	7	6	6	7	12	15	17	6