Exploring the Flipped Classroom Model: In Social Work Education

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Exploring the Flipped Classroom Model: In Social Work Education

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the use of a flipped classroom pedagogy in social work education. Flipped classroom pedagogy, a methodology which inverts the common instructional paradigm, has potential to offer an engaging framework for social work educators to implement in the classroom. The flipped pedagogical design provides a method in which to organize course content and promote innovative methods of student collaboration. In addition, the flipped classroom promotes an interactive learning process, in contrast to the passive learning environment of the traditional classroom. Currently, there is a lack of literature in social work regarding the implementation of this pedagogy into the social work classroom.

The first product of this banded dissertation is a conceptual paper which explores the extensive history of an interactive learning model in social work education and presents the utility of using the flipped classroom pedagogy as a current interactive modality for the modern-day social work classroom.

The second product of this banded dissertation is a qualitative research study of a master’s of social work policy course where the flipped classroom was implemented. In the study, I explored students’ perceptions of their experience in a course using the flipped design. The paper also contains a description of how the flipped classroom contributed to the students’ attainment of course material after the close of the semester.

The third product is an overview of a peer-reviewed presentation entitled *Using the Flipped Classroom Pedagogy in a Social Work Classroom*. The presentation was shared at the 39th annual Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors Conference (BPD), in Jacksonville, Florida on March 14, 2019. The presentation highlighted the long history of social work education, the utility of using the flipped design in social work education, and the students’
perception of their experience in a flipped course. The presentation also covered the instructor’s reflections in designing and implementing a flipped social work classroom.

*Key words:* flipped classroom, teaching method, pedagogy, interactive learning, curriculum design, social work education, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
Dedication

In loving memory of my dear cousin Bonnie Polych—So often during this process I wished I could call you and hear your words of encouragement. You were my mentor; even in death you are a guiding light.

To my husband Jeff Gonzalez, thank you for your endless support during this process. The three years were not easy; thank you for managing the family during three summer residencies, for reading countless papers, enduring conversations about social work history, social work curriculum, and allowing me to read Bertha Capen Reynolds out loud to you. To my children August and Felicia, thank you for your patience and love. I have missed three of Felicia’s birthdays because of summer residency. August, I have missed severely of your soccer games, basketball games, and you both know for three years I often have been too busy reading, writing, and making my deadlines for you to have my full undivided attention. I look forward to having my weekends and evenings to spend more time with you all.

To my parents, Jack and Beverley Hanrahan, and my brother, Michael Hanrahan, for all your love and support. Education has not always been an easy journey for me, but you always supported my passion for learning.
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Exploring the Flipped Classroom Model in Social Work Education

Social work education has a long history of interactive classrooms. Social work curriculum is designed for students to participate in role plays, group work, and an internship experience. The flipped pedagogy is an additional framework which can complement social work education’s commitment to interactive and social group learning models. The flipped classroom offers a structure for social work educators and social work students to engage in an active learning process. The inverted classroom removes the passive learning environment of the traditional lecture. The lecture is not eliminated but rather presented as “homework.” Students view the lecture outside of class time via prerecorded videos, podcasts, or PowerPoint presentations (Zaniuddin & Halil, 2016). Class time is then structured to facilitate engagement with course material through class discussions, completion of assignments, and student-led class presentations.

The flipped classroom design consists of three important elements: (a) before-class activity, (b) in-class activity, and (c) after-class activity (Giliboy, et al.; 2014, Unal & Unal, 2017; Vazquez & Chiang 2015). Incorporating all three components is key when implementing the flipped classroom design into social work courses. The flipped classroom model is often misunderstood as merely structuring class time around in-class group projects. Although the in-class activity is a key component of the pedagogy, it is important to structure the course with all three elements of the flipped classroom design. The before-class activity promotes student responsibility by awarding or subtracting points through preclass quizzes or preclass written responses. The completion of the preclass assignments encourages students to come to class prepared to actively engage in their learning. Students’ engagement with the preclass assigned readings, along with viewing the lectures or listening to the podcasts, is essential to the in-class
collaboration of the flipped classroom. The after-class activity can provide an opportunity for the instructor to review each student’s acquisition and understanding of course material. The after-class activity offers independent critical reflection for each student, and so provides another opportunity for the students to engage with course material.

The role of the instructor is also modified in the flipped classroom. Instructors must adapt how they deliver important course content and engage with students. Instructors engage in an active feedback process with students (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2013). The instructor’s role in the flipped classroom is to coach students through their learning process. When the students struggle or have difficulty with course material, the instructor is there to provide guidance to students and ask questions regarding their learning and thinking about course content. In the traditional classroom, where assignments are completed outside of the class time, learning is often completed in isolation and without the guidance of the instructor. Thus, each student’s feedback process with classmates and the instructor is essential to the active design of the flipped classroom.

In this dissertation, I examine the utility of replacing the traditional lecture with the three elements of the flipped pedagogy. The flipped classroom provides social work educators a model which structures in-class group work to incorporate a deliberate learning model. The model requires social work instructors to be thoughtful, engaged, and organized in the design of class time. In the flipped classroom, the instructor is also mindful of how students will interact with course material and implement critical reflection regarding the learning process. The flipped classroom is a new paradigm for both students and instructors, as it redistributes the delivery of course material in an interactive manner (Fisher, Ross, LaFerriere, & Maritz, 2017; Miles &
Foggett, 2016). Instructor reflection is also important to implement, for only through continued assessment and evaluation can the flipped pedagogy be successfully managed and applied.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this banded dissertation is aligned with the theoretical framework for the Community of Inquiry (Akyol & Garrison 2012; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer 2010). Garrison, Anderson, Archer, and Akyol’s development of the Community of Inquiry Theory (CoI) discussed the aspects needed in a learning environment for students to engage in an interactive learning process (Akyol & Garrison 2012; Garrison et al., 2010). CoI is a theory based in teaching and learning, and includes three important foundations to incorporate into the design of a course: (a) cognitive presence, (b) social presence, and (c) teaching presence (Garrison et al., 2010). In CoI critical thinking occurs within the cognitive presence. Social presence is the process of an agreed-upon social identity, or group cohesion. Facilitation of the group learning process is an important part of teaching presence, along with course content and course design (Shea et al., 2009).

The CoI theory was developed to explore teaching dynamics in the online environment. The flipped classroom’s preclass activity of prerecorded lectures incorporates the asynchronous, text-based technology CoI investigates in its theoretical framework. The CoI concept was applied due to the author’s belief that the efficacy of any interactive teaching model depends on the establishment of a dynamic learning community. The common misunderstanding of the flipped classroom, that it merely uses class time as an opportunity to complete in-class group projects, is further minimized when the flipped classroom is designed with the intent of establishing cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence.
The three professional products in this banded dissertation support the position that when an instructor provides opportunity for the class to form relationships (social presence), the flipped classroom pedagogy as an active learning model will be more successful. The inverted design of the flipped classroom depends on students completing work outside of the classroom. However, the relationships formed within the classroom through social presence can assist students’ investment in the course beyond a simple dedication to good grades. The commitment to develop a course with deliberate attention towards incorporating social presence can assist in manifesting students’ engagement with the learning community (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer 2010).

The instructor’s role in the flipped pedagogical framework is designed not only to assist students when they struggle with course content, but also to provide support for students in developing relationships with each other. The instructor must plan the course with the intention of developing classroom engagement and critical thinking of each student. CoI highlights the responsibility of students to contribute, participate, and interact with each other. Student responsibility is vital to the success of the flipped classroom because if students do not come to class prepared, the learning experience will not be as dynamic during the in-class activity. When an instructor designs a course to include all three elements of CoI, the creation of the learning community, along with the completed class projects, will create a richer learning experience.

An effective learning community is essential when encouraging students to participate in the required collaboration of the flipped classroom. CoI theory fits well when implementing the flipped classroom pedagogy because it provides an organized and structured framework for instructors to apply when creating assignments, along with activities which promote social group learning.
Summary of Scholarship Products

This banded dissertation consists of three professional products. The first product is a conceptual paper which provides an overview of the historical attention paid in social work education towards incorporating an interactive curriculum in the social work classroom. Examples from historical social work educators such as Sophonisba Breckinridge (1934), Mary Richmond (1922), and Hollis and Taylor (1951) are linked to the commitment of social work’s interactive curriculum. The paper provides a literature review of the flipped pedagogy and acknowledges the lack of social work literature in applying the flipped design. Community of Inquiry Theory (CoI) in the flipped classroom, its classroom engagement, and the implications for social work practice and social work educators are also discussed. A focus of the paper is on the utility of applying this flipped classroom pedagogical framework to the modern-day social work classroom.

The second product of this banded dissertation is a qualitative research study of a master’s of social work policy course where the flipped classroom was implemented. In this paper, I explore how implementation of the flipped pedagogy can be a meaningful learning experience for social work students and educators. Students’ perceptions of their experience in a course where the flipped design was implemented is a key element of the research. Students’ perceptions regarding how (or if) the flipped classroom promoted their engagement in MSW curriculum and their overall experiences in the flipped classroom are highlighted in the paper. I also provide considerations for educators when implementing the flipped pedagogy.

The third product is a professional presentation given at the 39th annual Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors Conference (BPD) held in Jacksonville, Florida in March of 2019. The presentation included information from the conceptual paper and the qualitative
research study focused on implementing the flipped pedagogy in the social work classroom, and considerations for those who may choose to use the flipped classroom pedagogy within their course.

**Discussion**

The flipped pedagogy restructures the use of class time and reforms the concept of completing assignments at home. Students engage in active learning and participation with course content in a manner that is not often found in the traditional lecture. The flipped structure, as outlined by Giliboy, et al. (2014), structures the class with three distinct activities for the student to participate with class content, which is critical to the success of this teaching model. All three components of Giliboy’s design should be incorporated in the flipped classroom. The before-class activity, during-class activity and the after-class activity all require the student to demonstrate responsibility within the course. This is where the restructuring from the traditional classroom is most evident.

Most students and instructors are new to the flipped classroom paradigm (Fisher, Ross, LaFerriere, & Maritz, 2017; Miles & Foggett, 2016). CoI framework can assist instructors in designing the course with a well-thought-out intention of creating a learning community. A course designed to highlight cognitive presences, social presences, and teaching presence will be helpful to the new paradigm of flipped pedagogy because collaborative and social learning experiences are a highlight of the teaching strategy. Students can be confused in the beginning of a flipped course; the unfamiliar format and the additional course responsibilities can be unsettling to students who are used to the lecture format of other courses (Fisher, Ross, LaFerriere, & Maritz, 2017; Miles & Foggett, 2016). As a result, instructors should take time to
explain the course structure, the instructors’ new role as a guide rather than a lecturer, and the students’ responsibilities within the course.

The social work classroom is often an active learning environment; however, it can lack in student enthusiasm. The flipped model aligns well with the goals of social work education by providing social work educators and students a framework which promotes motivation through critical thinking, student responsibility, and organization from the instructor and the student. The three professional products of this banded dissertation investigate the utility for social work educators to consider implementing flipped classroom pedagogy into social work courses.

**Implications for Social Work Education**

Social work education has a history of providing a student-centered educational experience. The flipped classroom can provide social work education and the social work profession with another tool to help prepare social work students. The collaborative design of the flipped classroom is a good fit for social work students because it provides a structure where students can have an opportunity to practice how to problem solve, work in teams, and complete projects collectively and cooperatively.

The second product of this banded dissertation explores using the flipped classroom structure in a masters of social work policy course. The flipped units designed for the policy course aligned with the current 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2015) competencies and behaviors (Competency 2, 3, and 5), and two of the units address The Social Work Grand Challenges Initiative (American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare, 2016). The flipped structure can provide social work educators an innovative manner to actively incorporate social work competencies and the Social Work Grand Challenges Initiative into assignments, class discussions, and curriculum.
The current lack of literature in social work regarding the incorporation of flipped pedagogy in social work education is important to mention. Although social work utilizes active learning models, it can still benefit from integrating new pedagogical frameworks into curricula.

**Implications for Research**

Additional studies concerning the use of the flipped classroom pedagogy in social work can help evaluate its potential fit and application to social work education. Due to the lack of literature around this pedagogy in social work, there are many potential implications for research. The three products in this dissertation provide support in using the flipped classroom pedagogy in social work courses. However, future research could investigate additional benefits and considerations when implementing the flipped methodology within a social work curriculum. Studies from different disciplines suggest the flipped classroom pedagogy encourages creative thinking, requires students to participate with course content with active participation, and may help improve retention of course content (Al-Zaharani, 2015; Baker & Hill 2017; Fisher et al. 2017).

Nonetheless, not all studies produce positive results. Literature also suggests that some students are confused with the format (Fisher, Ross, LaFerriere, & Martiz, 2017; Miles & Foggett, 2016), come to class unprepared (Burke & Fedorek 2017), and in a few studies students rated the professor’s role in the flipped classroom as unhelpful (Baker & Hill, 2017; Masland & Gizdarska, 2018). Instructors have indicated some dissatisfaction as well. Baker and Hill (2017) reported the design and implementation of a flipped course took a significant amount of preparation time compared to a traditional lecture.

The use of prerecorded lectures, podcasts, and Power Points may support students’ retention because students have the capability to stop lectures to take notes and repeat lectures.
when they feel they have missed something. However, additional research could investigate how the in-class activity was managed with different learning styles. Group work can be loud, distracting, and counterproductive to some individuals. An additional consideration of study could involve investigating the influence of class absences. The in-class activity depends largely on student participation and attendance. How can the flipped classroom accommodate to different learning styles and student absences? More research, particularly in social work education, can contribute to the successful integration of the flipped pedagogy for both student and educator.

**Conclusion**

Social work education has a history of incorporating active learning models within the classroom. The flipped classroom provides an additional methodology to provide social work educators with another tool for developing a dynamic learning environment. CoI may help strengthen how relationships are formed within the class. Strong student relationships could also promote student responsibility towards completing the course tasks required in the flipped classroom. This dissertation provides three professional products examining the utility of using the flipped classroom in social work. Additional scholarly contributions are needed to determine if the flipped classroom can contribute to students’ learning, retention of course content, and application to practice.
Comprehensive Reference List


The Flipped Classroom: A Deliberate Curricular Design for the Social Work Classroom

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Abstract

This conceptual paper explores the utility of applying the flipped classroom pedagogical framework within the social work classroom. The author evaluates the current flipped classroom literature and describes methods that translate well to the learning environment of the social work student. The paper also explores the long history of the interactive learning model in social work education, and discusses benefits of using flipped classroom pedagogy in the modern-day social work classroom. Although much of social work education remains student centered, the profession may benefit from integrating the flipped classroom in courses which tend to be lecture based. The author explores why the flipped classroom design is a good fit for social work students, and prepares them for a profession where they need to be problem solvers, collaborators, and community practitioners.

*Key words:* flipped classroom, pedagogy, interactive learning, curriculum design, social work education
The Flipped Classroom: A Deliberate Curricular Design for the Social Work Classroom

Should the social work classroom be flipped? The flipped classroom pedagogy is gaining momentum in many academic communities as a transformative, interactive, engaged classroom, but is this framework a good fit for social work education? Effective social work educators strive to create an engaging learning environment. Nevertheless, many teachers experience class discussions where students lack energy, have poor participation, and are disconnected from the material. Curriculum which engages students, and involves their investment in the learning process, is central to any classroom’s learning environment. As an educator, my personal goal is to have the students’ excitement go beyond their concern for good grades, and establish a passion for the process of learning and thinking. It is this passion which develops the foundation of a student’s confidence and competence and inspires engagement in his or her own education.

In this conceptual paper I explore the long history of the interactive learning model in social work education and present the utility of using the flipped classroom pedagogy as a current interactive modality for the modern-day social work classroom. The flipped classroom pedagogy, a methodology which inverts the common instructional paradigm, offers great potential to engage and motivate the social work student (as well as the social work educator) by manifesting an activity-based classroom environment (Giliboy, Heinerichs & Pazzagliz, 2014; Unal & Unal, 2017). The flipped classroom provides a pedagogical framework that offers students and social work educators an innovative method of collaboration and engagement in the social work curriculum. Thus, it is distinct from the traditional lecture format in higher education, which disseminates most of its content through direct instruction. Over time, the traditional lecture model has become dated as student engagement with course content and the speed of information have evolved (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013). In contrast to the in-class
lecture paradigm, material in most flipped classroom designs is recorded and posted online for students to view outside of the classroom (Zaniuddin & Halil, 2016). Because traditional lectures are no longer the focus when a classroom is flipped, class time is then used for interactive peer collaboration, which facilitates student comprehension and engagement (O’Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). This student-centered approach is important to social work education because it strives to provide an authentic learning community. Authentic learning is fostered in the flipped classroom because students can make mistakes, struggle with concepts, and interact with the instructor and other students during in-class activities. This is an experience which clearly contrasts to completing homework outside of the classroom.

The majority of articles addressing flipped classrooms are found in academic disciplines such as mathematics, health sciences, and economics, which means a lack of information on applications of this pedagogy in social work. The limited information regarding the flipped classroom in social work literature relates to the fact that elements of this pedagogy have been present since the inception of social work education. In the past, social work’s educational pioneers provided students with an interactive pedagogical model. At the turn of the 20th century, social work educators such as Sophonisba Breckinridge and Mary Richmond provided students with case examples designed for engagement in the classroom. Breckinridge’s (1924) historical text *Family Welfare Work in a Metropolitan Community* provided 44 case records to be used in the classroom. In this text, she offered students entire case records from the field. The students and class were guided through the case process and asked to critically consider how to improve outcomes.

Curricular design remains an active conversation in social work. The discussion regards the most effective design to teach fundamental skills, while addressing the study of social work
as something beyond the mere study of practice. Hollis and Taylor’s report entitled *Social Work Education in the United States* (1951) was instrumental in designing modern social work curricula. Hollis and Taylor identified the principles of “intellectual, emotional, and skill levels of learning” (p. 218) as the three critical elements of a social work curriculum. Hollis and Taylor saw the importance of education stretching further than the simple outcome of good grades and fitting into the employment market, stating that “education is not a matter of cramming him [the social work student] with the technical knowledge and skills of the profession” (p. 128). While there are still contemporary aspects of social work education which embrace interactive learning techniques, these are generally found in practice classes and field placement. In contrast, much of social work education today disseminates content through a lecture format, most notably in courses such as macro practice, research, and social policy. The flipped pedagogy has the opportunity to offer the social work classroom an updated model in executing the three critical elements Hollis and Taylor stated were so important to any social work curriculum.

The flipped format, which is an inverted and active learning method, does not remove the lecture format entirely. Instead, it redesigns classroom structure by placing students at the center of an active learning process which is reinforced by classroom activities. Students review a prerecorded lecture outside of class time (inverted) and use class time to complete assignments. This student-centered approach is interactive and requires extensive peer collaboration. The instructor becomes a guide, providing helpful insights to students and facilitating in-depth learning by asking about each student’s discovery (Van Sickle, 2016; Zaniuddon & Haili, 2016). The structure of in-class learning activities facilitates problem-solving and encourages students to apply class content and their knowledge of prerecorded lectures. In a traditional classroom paradigm, students’ problem-solving process is often done outside of the class as homework. An
advantage of flipped classrooms is that it affords students opportunities to struggle and make mistakes within the classroom as a group (collaborative learning). The instructor as a guide can correct and encourage students directly in their learning process (Van Sickle, 2016; Zaniuddon & Haili, 2016). The flipped classroom design would be a good fit for social work students because it prepares them for a profession where they need to be problem solvers and collaborators.

The flipped classroom is a pedagogical framework which encourages classroom engagement and critical thinking from the students. It also requires a thoroughly-planned direction from the professor. A flipped classroom pedagogical framework bears consideration by every social work educator. Although social work education is based in an interactive pedagogy, the social work educator should still be cautious of assumptions. In-class discussions/activities do not necessarily engender a structured learning environment. The flipped classroom pedagogy provides an organized structure for the interactive classroom, which has the potential to be effective in social work higher education. In the following section, I describe the framework for this conceptual paper.

**Community of Inquiry**

Community of Inquiry (CoI) is a theory based in teaching and learning which provides a methodology for understanding the quintessential aspects of any student’s educational experience. Garrison, Anderson, Archer, and Akoyl’s CoI theory offers aspects needed in a learning environment for students to engage in an interactive learning process (Akyol & Garrison 2012; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer 2010). CoI’s theory is based on the premise that students accept responsibility for their own learning, are motivated toward their own learning, and are reflective about their learning process (Akol & Garrison, 2012; Garrison et al., 2010).
CoI outlines three fundamental components of teaching and learning: (a) cognitive presence, (b) social presence, and (c) teaching presence (Garrison et al., 2010). The first component of CoI is cognitive presence, where critical thinking occurs. Critical thinking encompasses the process of reflection and acquisition of knowledge. The cognitive presence is a developmental stage where the student interacts with a dynamic curriculum and begins to explore, reflect, and question the content of the class.

The second component of CoI is social presence, which is comprised of an agreed-upon social identity, or group cohesion. In addition to a description of group identity, social presence also includes open communication and trust. The third and final component of CoI is teaching presence. Teaching presence is illustrated in course content, course design, and the facilitation of the group learning process (Shea et al., 2009). Teaching presence also functions to establish leadership in the course and a purpose for the course outcomes.

To effectively address teaching presence the instructor must take more time in the beginning and throughout the course for reflection and feedback loops with the class (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2013). The instructor’s role also includes time for relationships and guiding students through significant collaborative learning experiences and activities (van Niekerk, 2015). A feedback loop occurs when the instructor asks the class questions about what is working, where their challenges lie, and what they are learning (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2013). Technological skill and facility with all media being used in class are also important. The instructor should understand the technology available to students, and how to integrate it within the course effectually, which may aid in furthering social presence (Roehl et al, 2013).

The three concepts of CoI are significant in creating a learning environment. When applied, these concepts encourage students to engage with higher levels of thinking and for the
class to share responsibility toward educational goals (Weyant, 2013). In CoI learning, environment leadership is present along with communication (discourse), relationship (participation), agreed-upon social identity (group cohesion), and time (reflection; Garrison et al., 2010). These are all part of the course learning arc from beginning to end and manifest a profound learning environment which supports student learning and inclusion.

CoI in the Flipped Classroom

The CoI theory was developed to explore teaching dynamics in the online environment. Teaching and learning in a distance education (or online) learning environment has an important link to the flipped classroom pedagogy. Since part of the prerecorded lectures incorporate asynchronous, text-based technology, the theoretical framework of CoI works for a flipped classroom. The framework for successful implementation of the flipped classroom pedagogy is to promote the effectiveness of social group learning. CoI is well-suited for designing the flipped classroom pedagogy.

An understanding of the elements of CoI provides a framework for educators to understand the flipped classroom as much more than merely in-class group work, or an observation of prerecorded videos. The classroom must be designed with intention incorporating thoughtful activities before class, during class, and after class. The before-class, prerecorded lectures provide students with important content of the course, the during-class activities provide opportunity for problem solving and application of course objectives, and the after-class activity requires students to reflect on their learning. These activities engage students to not just complete a project, but create a community where cognitive, social, and teaching processes are all incorporated. The pedagogical framework of the flipped classroom thus encourages a thoroughly planned direction from the professor which facilitates classroom engagement and critical

The possibilities and technical advances of high-speed internet have challenged the concept of traditional classrooms. As a result, the conversation over educational standards ignited with new vigor as technology expanded the pedagogies underlying “brick and mortar” classrooms (Garrison et al., 2010; Roehl 2013). As the traditional classroom has adapted to technological advances, the traditional lecture format has changed as well. As a result, instructors must now compensate for students who intake information from a variety of multi-media sources, and must sequence and present course material in a way that simulates the current paradigm of information exchange. By looking at the principles of CoI, instructors of flipped classrooms can find a methodology which supports and engages students in an interactive learning model. The importance of human relationship, integrity, and competence are principles of CoI theory and social work standards.

**Literature Review**

Although there is limited research on the flipped classroom in social work, several studies have offered explorations of the pedagogical framework. O’Flaherty and Phillips (2015) conducted a study of 28 peer-reviewed articles from five different countries (United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Taiwan, and Malaysia), all of which focused on the flipped classroom pedagogy. Their findings indicated positive learning outcomes for students and teacher readiness. However, O’Flaherty and Phillips’ study also discovered the importance of instructor preparation for an effective flipped design. Social work educators must understand the flipped classroom pedagogy requires preclass work not only for the student, but also necessitates a thoughtful and well-developed design from the instructor.
Giliboy et al.’s (2014) study of student engagement described successful strategies for educators using the flipped classroom method. The study outlined the major components needed for the successful flipped classroom. These major components are a thoroughly planned pre-class activity, during-class activity, and after-class activity. Instructors should outline the students’ responsibility in the collaborative learning model, and clearly define the teacher’s role for students in the flipped classroom. This is done so students can differentiate between passive and active learning environments. In active learning environments, the role of the instructor is not to disseminate information during class time, but rather to facilitate students’ problem solving and encourage student comprehension of class content (Giliboy et al., 2014; & O’Flaherty & Phillips, 2015; Unal & Unal, 2017).

The successful strategies bear consideration because not all research on the flipped classroom pedagogy found positive student outcome results. For example, Burke and Fedorek’s (2017) study involved undergraduate crime control students. The researchers examined the use of the flipped pedagogy and investigated if the pedagogical model promoted a deeper understanding of class content. Their findings demonstrated students in flipped classrooms often did not come to class prepared, did not watch the pre-class lecture video, and read less than students in a traditional classroom (Burke & Fedorek, 2017). Their conclusion stated the flipped classroom design did not promote a deeper understanding of class content for students. This research highlighted how important it is for instructors to apply a thoughtful, well-organized class design. Other studies provided examples of a scaffold curriculum design in the flipped model classroom, which placed students in a collaborative learning process and promoted deeper understanding of class content (O’Flaherty & Phillips; 2015, Vazquez & Chiang 2015).
The importance of the design of the pedagogy related the efficacy of student engagement with the course and its content. Vazquez and Chiang (2015), researched the implementation of embedded questions in an economic classroom in pre-lecture videos. Embedded questions, or pre-class quizzes, were used to promote student responsibility and tested student understanding and retention of the pre-lecture video. Therefore, students were better prepared to engage in the second component of the flipped pedagogical design involving in-class interactive learning. In addition, an essential aspect of the in-class activity ensured students came to class prepared. In many studies assigning points, implementing embedded questions, and pre-class quizzes were also used to thoroughly plan and facilitate classroom engagement (Vazquez & Chiang, 2015). These methods all promoted a higher level of thinking from the students (Giliboy et al., 2014; Vazquez & Chiang, 2015). In the studies mentioned, embedded questions and pre-class quizzes exemplified the relationship between the social and teaching presence and assisted the cognitive presence, which allowed individuals to thrive in the learning community. These elements engaged the all-important reflective aspects critical to a successful flipped classroom.

**Classroom Engagement**

Curricular design which inspires students to actively engage in course content requires intent and reflection from the instructor. David Rigoni explored the importance of social group learning in his book *Teaching What Can’t be Taught* (2002). The collective process of students comprehending, exploring, and navigating assignments contributes to a deeper engagement with course content than a lecturing professor (Rigoni 2002). Each component of the flipped classroom should be designed with consideration of how students will interact with course material. The pre-class activity is planned with the intent to *provide* students with course content.
The in-class activity is meant for students to *engage* with course content. The after-class activity is designed to *reflect* upon course content.

Rigoni’s text also explored the philosophies of Donald Schön. Schön’s 1983 text, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* discusses the display of knowledge in how one acts (behaves), how one thinks (reflects) and how one learns (hypothesis testing; Schön 1983). The reflective aspect of Schön’s philosophy, of how knowledge is displayed, aligns with the scaffolding of the flipped classroom curriculum design. One of Rigoni’s summarizations of Schön states, “Teachers cannot make students see things; students need to learn to see things on their own” (p. 48). In comparison, the flipped classroom design embraces all three components of Schön’s reflective process: (a) how one acts (pre-class activity), (b) how one learns (in-class activity), and (c) how one thinks (after-class activity). The flipped classroom pedagogy is intentionally designed to engage students in the critical reflection process, which provides perspective to the meaning and content of the presented lesson, and once again links to social work education. Because reflection is a critical aspect of social work education, the flipped classroom design helps social work students evaluate their own learning and future practice.

CoI theory embraces the concept of “teachers cannot make students see things,” (Rigoni, 2002, p. 48) and identifies how the classroom, when constructed with purpose, creates a community where students can begin to learn with one another. A CoI-constructed learning community is not merely the instance of a teacher and students coming together, but rather each component is an equal element of the learning environment. In a CoI learning environment, leadership (purpose) is present along with communication (discourse), relationship (participation), agreed-upon social identity (group cohesion), and time (reflection; Garrison et
al., 2010). All of these elements help create what Rigoni would call “worldmaking” for the students, a shared vision that transforms the learning process of both students and instructor.

The flipped classroom design offers social work students an opportunity to develop, engage, and explore a multifaceted curriculum in a dynamic learning environment, as outlined by CoI theory, both in and out of the classroom. At present, the traditional lecture presents little opportunity for students to integrate and synthesize class content, which does not necessarily create a CoI-based learning environment. In contrast, a flipped classroom pedagogical framework offers an opportunity for both social work educators and students to engage in an active learning process and create an interconnected learning community.

Discussion

In this paper, I have provided examples of why the flipped classroom design is a good fit for social work education. The flipped classroom pedagogy is a transformative and interactive classroom. When implemented properly, it establishes an engaged classroom. The flipped classroom design is sometimes misunderstood as merely in-class group work or as an approach which simply restructures the role of the professor. Rather, the flipped classroom requires a thoroughly planned direction from the professor. Some researchers indicate that the significant time required from the instructor to prepare and record videos is a limitation of the model (Mok, 2014). However, the benefits of integrating this pedagogical framework into the social work classroom is more complex than in-class group work and adapting the role of the professor since it involves learning, comprehension, and application in a variety of modalities.

The dynamic structure of the flipped classroom pedagogical framework aligns well with the values in social work education. An interactive pedagogy has been an aspect of social work education since the turn of 20th century. Interactive case examples, role plays, and field education
are critical in developing student’s intellectual, emotional, and practice skill (Hollis & Taylor, 1952). As a result, the flipped classroom offers social work educators and students a modern interactive framework.

**Implications for Practice and Educators**

Research indicates that when implemented properly, this pedagogy can enhance a collaborative learning environment for both the instructor and student. It is important each component is designed correctly to realize the effectiveness of the flipped design. Social work educators interested in implementing the flipped classroom should understand that all three aforementioned components (as outlined by Gilboy et. al) are critical to the success of the learning environment. Each flipped social work class should be constructed with (a) before-class activity, (b) during-class activity, and (c) after-class activity. The use of embedded questions and preclass quizzes are also important elements required for the successful implementation of the flipped design (Giliboy, et al.; 2014, Unal & Unal, 2017; Vazquez & Chiang 2015).

CoI theory correlates well with the flipped classroom pedagogy. In this paper, I have presented CoI as a framework for social work educators to understand the flipped classroom as a community, and not merely as an inverted classroom. The establishment of a learning community is important because learning in the flipped classroom cannot be done in isolation. In the flipped classroom, class activities are used for students to interact with class content. The design allows students to grapple with concepts and make mistakes inside the classroom, rather than outside the class with homework. The instructor is present during the students’ challenges and can guide students in their discovery of contextually correct answers and better understanding of class concepts. When the flipped classroom is designed with the three elements of CoI theory, a collaborative learning environment will be established so the instructor is not the
only one who helps students gain confidence with class material. This displacement of power is another important aspect of why this pedagogical framework aligns so well with social work values, for as social workers we strive to disrupt power imbalances. Social work standards are aligned around core principles, such as the importance of human relationship, integrity, and competence, all of which lie at the center of CoI theory.

This interactive design and the intentional development of a learning community can be applied across the social work curriculum. Social work educators must be willing to share not only their knowledge of the course content and their passion for the material but also who they are outside of the classroom. This invitation to share a personal story lays the foundation for open communication and trust (social presence; Garrison et al., 2010).

**Conclusion**

The flipped classroom is an effective pedagogy and bears consideration for the social work educator. The flipped classroom pedagogy aligns particularly well with CoI theory when implementing an effective learning community. This approach encourages students to gain confidence with course material through multilevel collaboration, in contrast to a traditional lecture where students may be only encouraged to ask questions. The flipped classroom promotes interaction and dialog with one’s peers, a vital element to deep understanding and a profound learning experience across all demographics.
References


Social Work Students’ Perceptions of the Flipped Classroom

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Abstract
This paper discusses the use of the flipped classroom design, and how implementation of this pedagogy can be a meaningful learning experience for social work students and educators. A vital component of the discussion centers on students’ perceptions of their experience in a master’s level social work policy course where the flipped design was implemented. The paper also explores how the flipped classroom contributed to the students’ acquisition and knowledge of course material after the close of the semester. Finally, the discussion provides an evaluation of teaching and learning in the flipped classroom, and examines how the flipped pedagogical framework can help educators and students approach this new pedagogy.

Key words: flipped classroom, teaching method, pedagogy, interactive learning, curriculum design, social work education, scholarship of teaching and learning
Flipped Classroom Pedagogy

The flipped classroom pedagogical model is often described in academic literature as an inverted classroom (Al-Zahrani, 2015; Masland, & Gizdarska 2018; O’Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). In a flipped classroom, class time is used for interactive collaborative learning, rather than passive learning through a traditional lecture (O’Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). In this new paradigm, class lectures are viewed outside of the classroom, usually via prerecorded lectures or podcasts (Zaniuddin & Halil, 2016). In an inverted (flipped) classroom, learning is active, as students work collaboratively to complete assignments, participate in group discussion, and apply course knowledge (Unal & Unal, 2017). Class time becomes a place for students to discover, ponder, and question class content while the instructor is present. The instructor’s role in the flipped classroom is to encourage the learning process by asking students questions, providing feedback, and guiding students through their thinking and challenges with course material (Hwang, Lai, & Wang, 2015).

However, educators should understand this teaching method is more complex than simply using class time to complete in-class group work. The teaching method requires deliberate planning, intent, and active participation of the educator. The successful flipped classroom should include three critical aspects: (a) before-class activity, (b) in-class activity, and (c) after-class activity (Gilboy, Heninerichs and Pazzaglia, 2014, Unal & Unal, 2017). This paper explores students’ perceptions of their learning in a flipped classroom. A master of social work (MSW) social policy class was used to evaluate the effectiveness of this teaching method. My research answers the following questions: Did students feel that the collaborative structure was helpful in their learning? Did students understand the flipped structure of the classroom? Did students find the instructor’s role helpful? The evaluation of teaching and learning in a flipped
classroom can help evaluate if this pedagogical framework holds potential for further development and application in social work classes.

**Literature Review**

**Flipped Classroom in Social Work**

There is limited literature on the use of the flipped classroom in social work education, as only two research articles explicitly focus on the flipped pedagogy. Although aspects of the flipped classroom pedagogical framework are used in both studies, neither of the articles within social work literature incorporate all three critical aspects of the flipped classroom design. Sage and Sele (2015) conducted a study with 34 students in an undergraduate generalist practice course. The authors studied the use of reflective journaling as a flipped classroom technique. Sage and Sele (2015) assigned students to complete homework prior to class sessions. The reflective journal was used as a preclass activity to encourage student participation in completing outside-of-class assigned reading, and to improve participation during in-class discussion. Once students uploaded their reflective journals, the instructors reviewed the students’ work and designed a PowerPoint presentation based on common themes and questions that arose from student journals (Sage & Sele, 2015). The study indicated increased student participation in class discussion, and students reported completing more of the assigned reading compared to other courses.

Holmes, Tracy, Painter, Oestreich, and Park (2015) published an article investigating the use of technology for class activities (in-class activity). In the traditional classroom, only the instructor has access to the use of technology. To promote student engagement in active learning, the authors structured class activities around Google Documents, Google Drive, and Google Hangout. Students worked in groups using Google applications rather than flipcharts or
traditional white boards. The article presented the use of technology as the flipped aspect of the course. The use of technology provided many opportunities for flexibility, accessibility, and interaction. Google Documents was used during in-class group work, and students created notes that traditionally would be written on a flip chart or notebook. The instructor could view the document as it was being created and ask students questions within the document. The technology of Google Documents allowed students to review in-class work outside of class because it had been recorded via on-line documents. Google Hangout was used for guest speakers and provided flexibility for guest speakers who lived far from campus or in different regions of the state or country.

Holmes et al. (2015) identified a shift in power (in-class activity) as an important aspect of the flipped classroom design, and incorporating technology may foster a more equal power dynamic in the modern classroom. Students coming to class prepared, (before-class activity) as discussed by Sage and Sele (2015), offers another important aspect of the flipped classroom. Holmes et al. (2015) and Sage and Sele (2015) provided important contributions to social work literature. However, they did not investigate the implementation of all three critical elements of the flipped classroom. To my knowledge, there are no social work articles which investigate how to implement the three elements of the flipped classroom into a social work course.

**Flipped Classroom in Higher Education**

Despite the lack of literature in social work regarding the flipped classroom pedagogy, other disciplines have provided additional research. The literature on student perceptions has demonstrated mixed results regarding how students feel about their flipped classroom experience. Masland and Gizdarska (2018) conducted two studies regarding undergraduates’ perception of a flipped classroom model. The first study included 159 undergraduate students,
and the follow up study included 312 undergraduate psychology students. In both studies students did not participate in a flipped classroom, but were provided with two vignettes of a design of a course. An obvious limitation of the study is that students did not participate in a flipped classroom. However, Masland and Gizdarska’s findings provided insight into potential biases students may bring into a flipped classroom, and highlights the critical factor of an instructor’s design of the flipped course. How students perceive their best learning environment may provide important information when designing a course with a new pedagogical framework.

One vignette described a course designed in a traditional format, and the second course designed in a flipped format. The authors did not include the term traditional or flipped, only a description of the pedagogical frameworks was provided. Students were asked to evaluate the instructor, and which course they would prefer to enroll in. The last question was open ended to provide students an opportunity to explain why they chose the course they did (Masland & Gizdarska, 2018).

In the first study, 50.6% of the students chose the traditional classroom compared to 36.1% of the students who picked the flipped classroom, with 9% of the students marking no preference. Students’ open-ended responses indicated most students’ choice was based on their belief that they would learn more from a teacher-directed class (for those students who chose the traditional course), or a student-directed class (for those students who chose the flipped course). In their follow-up study, the description of the flipped classroom was expanded to include diverse methods of delivery of outside-class content, including pre-class lecture videos, documentaries, research, and traditional texts. This was compared to the first study, where only pre-class videos were used to describe how students would be exposed to class material. In the second study, 32.4% of the students chose the traditional classroom compared to 56.4% of the
students who chose the flipped classroom, with 11.2% of the students choosing no preference. Students clearly preferred having a variety of choices for the pre-class activity.

**Innovative Pedagogy**

Many students and instructors have no experience in a flipped classroom. The structure can be confusing to students unfamiliar with student-centered learning (Fisher, Ross, LaFerriere, & Maritz, 2017; Miles & Foggett, 2016). The flipped format requires a tremendous amount of planning from the instructor. When the instructor is no longer disseminating knowledge through the traditional format, some students will view the professor as unnecessary, not helpful in their learning, and lazy (Masland & Gizdarska, 2018). It seems important for an instructor to be explicit about the nature and design of the course, which may alleviate the students’ apprehension toward both the pedagogy and the instructional environment, which comprise a contemporary flipped classroom.

Students’ lack of familiarity with the flipped design can cause trepidation in various ways. The flipped classroom requires the student to prepare for class in a different manner than the traditional classroom. The active participation of the flipped classroom discourages a student from coming to class unprepared. In a passive learning environment, the student could listen to the lecture. However, the flipped classroom requires the student to effectively manage his or her time outside of class to ensure he or she comes to class prepared. The student will also be required to engage with other classmates in a different manner, and for some students the engagement and required collaboration redesign of the classroom structure will be uncomfortable (Fisher, Ross, LaFerriere & Maritz, 2017; Miles & Foggett, 2016).

Although the literature on students’ perceptions of the flipped classroom indicate that students in the beginning of the course are often confused with the format, unsure of the
teacher’s role, and find the flipped classroom requires more out-of-class time than the traditional classroom, the literature also indicates a measurable percentage enjoy the flipped classroom experience (Al-Zahrani, 2015; Baker & Hill, 2017; Miles & Foggett, 2016).

Al-Zahrani’s (2015) findings suggest flipped classrooms can increase students’ creative thinking, problem solving abilities, and overall experience with meaningful learning. Students report enjoying the self-paced viewing of video lectures and the ability to re-watch the tutorials. Students also reported the flipped format increased their overall understanding of the class content, contributed to their retention, and facilitated a semester-long engagement with course material rather than a simple regurgitation of facts (Al-Zaharani, 2015; Baker & Hill 2017; Fisher et al. 2017).

The challenges of the flipped design cannot be understated, as it requires a culture shift for both students and instructors. As a result, the instructor should be explicit about the expectations of the students in this new paradigm (Fisher et al., 2017). The successful flipped classroom is structured on students’ commitment to completing preclass activities. Therefore, the instructor may need to guide students in understanding new study habits required to be successful in the flipped classroom (Fisher et al, 2017). The instructor also needs to design the class time to ensure interactive learning. Class time should be used to complete in-class assignments, include time for discussion, and provide the opportunity for students to share feedback regarding their experience with the course and the course material (Miles & Foggett, 2016).

The review of the literature suggests that both the student and the instructor have much to learn about this teaching and learning method. Although incorporating the use of technology and utilizing collaborative student-centered learning does cause some confusion and dissatisfaction in
the short term, these elements may contribute to a more meaningful learning environment and an enjoyable class experience.

Methods

Sample Population

A master of social work (MSW) social policy course was used to evaluate the effectiveness of this teaching and learning method in social work. The MSW policy course was taught as an on-campus class at a public university in Northern California. There were 16 students enrolled in the course. The author designed and flipped three units during a 16-week semester course. Each unit was three weeks in duration, which includes two weeks of in-class research and one week for completing group presentations. Thus, nine weeks of a 16-week semester were flipped. The flipped units aligned with the current 2015 educational policy and accreditation standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2015) competencies and behaviors (Competencies 2, 3, and 5), and two of the units address the Social Work Grand Challenges Initiative (America Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare, 2016). The three units were Reversing Extreme Inequalities (Grand Challenge Initiative), Environmental Social Work (Grand Challenge Initiative), and the Immigration-Refugee Experience. In each flipped unit students were assigned to one of four topics to research. For Reversing Extreme Inequalities, students were randomly assigned to the subtopics of welfare reform, Earned Income tax credit, predatory lending, or unbanked and underbanked populations. In the Environmental Social Work unit, students were randomly assigned to climate refugee (displacement due to climate change), Flint water crisis (and additional polluted water communities in the United States), Dakota pipeline (and additional pipeline communities, and concern of sacred land protection), or food justice (exploring food sovereignty, slow food movement, and class and culture within the food justice
movement). For the last unit, the Immigration-Refugee Experience, students researched human trafficking, family violence, federal policy/state placement/case examples, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

**Data Collection**

I used observation notes and interviews with seven students out of the 16 who volunteered for a one-on-one interview (after grades were submitted). I also analyzed the completed semester assignments of all 16 students. The use of observation notes was not for individual students, but rather the overall class observation of participation in the flipped class. Observation notes assisted me to make adjustments to the curriculum as the class moved through subsequent flipped units. The use of reflection can be an important practice of evaluation in teaching. As Mishna and Bogo (2007) noted, “reflection may assist instructors to recognize and contain their feelings, which we suggest increases the likelihood that they will act in ways that foster the learning process” (p. 532).

The data collection design was used to answer the following research questions: Did students find the flipped classroom engaging? Did students feel that the collaborative structure was helpful in their learning? Did students feel that the before-class quiz helped them come to class more prepared compared to other classes which did not have a before-class activity? Did students understand the flipped structure of the classroom? Did students find the instructor’s role helpful? Did students find the reflective assignment (after-class activity) helpful? The assessment of teaching and learning in the flipped unit was also used to evaluate if the flipped classroom pedagogical framework shows promise for further development and application in social work courses in higher education.
The flipped unit is a relatively new pedagogical framework; therefore, most students have not had an opportunity to engage in a flipped class. Burke and Fedorek (2017) stated,

The flipped classroom is based on the foundation that students arrive to class prepared and ready to learn. Since ‘flipping’ the classroom relies on the agency of the students to participate in active learning and application, the student must have attempted to learn material prior to class time. (p. 21)

It was important to evaluate if students understood their responsibility in the flipped unit.

Data Analysis

After the semester’s grades were submitted, I conducted face-to-face interviews with seven student volunteers individually. Interviews were 30 minutes to one hour in length. Interviews were audio-recorded using Zoom. In addition, Zoom provided a transcription of the audio recording. The author reviewed and corrected the transcripts and coded interviews for recurring and important themes. The interview consisted of nine open-ended questions.

Participants received a 15-dollar Amazon gift card for participating in the interview process. Finally, I used the students’ completed culminating assignments as part of the evaluation.

Each unit consisted of three assignments to match the flipped unit design. Students took a quiz before the start of each unit (before in-class activity), then completed a 45-minute presentation in groups (in-class activity). Finally, at the close of each unit, students completed a reflection journal (after-class activity).

Protection of Human Participants

I received approval to conduct research from two university Institutional Research Boards (IRB), one from the Northern California public university (where the class was taught
and the author is employed), and the second from St. Catherine’s University in St. Paul, Minnesota (where the author was a current doctoral student).

Strengths and Limitations

A limitation of the study is the sample size. All of the 16 students agreed to participate in part of the research, and all students agreed for me to take observation notes and have their assignments used for analysis. However, only seven of the 16 were available for interviews once the semester ended. This may be in part that the interviews took place after grades had been submitted, and many students had left town for summer vacation. A strength of the research is it adds to the limited literature of social work educators implementing this new pedagogy into social work courses, and it does not rely solely on one-on-one interviews as the only method of evaluation.

Findings

Introduction

I used grounded theory as a method for analysis data. The fundamental process of open coding was used to discover themes (Böhm, 2004). Semester assignments and interviews were analyzed to discover categories of social work students’ experiences in the flipped classroom model.

Students’ understanding of the Flipped Classroom Model

For most students, this was their first experience in a flipped classroom. Only one of the 16 students had previously been in a classroom where flipped pedagogy was used. A theme that emerged early within the data revealed most students were confused regarding the flipped format. Although the format was explained in class and within the syllabus, students were unclear how homework was going to be completed during class time. In class discussions,
reflective assignments, and in after-semester interviews, some students stated they were confused and had mild anxiety regarding their unfamiliarity with the new structure. “When the class was presented with the flipped classroom at the beginning of the semester, I will say I was confused and anxious because the idea of not having any outside work was foreign to me and many other students” (Student Reflective Assignment, Unit 1). Students reported that as they moved through the flipped units, they had a better understanding of the class design and expectations.

When describing the flipped classroom, students tended not to describe either the pre-class or after-class structures of the pedagogy. In the interview process, three students identified the pre-class quiz as a helpful method of accountability. Students also noted their appreciation for the activity, although students did not differentiate the pre-class and after-class activities as being one of the differences of the flipped unit. Each of the 16 students completed the pre-class quiz for the first unit, and 15 out of the 16 students completed the pre-class quizzes before the second and third units. For each unit, all students completed the after-class activities.

Students’ understanding of the flipped unit was most often described in three ways: their experiences participating in the in-class activity, descriptions of the teacher’s role, and students’ experience in the learning process. To describe the structure of the flipped classroom, students stated that it was a “student-led learning” process (student interviews, students #1, #2, #3, #5, & #7). Students also identified the class structure as being “more democratic” (student interviews, students #4 & #5). Students identified the teacher as a facilitator and not necessarily the expert. “It changes the idea that the professor is at the front of the room just saying ‘this is the truth’ (Student interview, student #5). Students identified collaborative learning, teaching each other, and taking responsibility as part of their flipped classroom learning experience.
Flipped Classroom as Helpful in Engaging in MSW Curriculum

In the interview process, data demonstrated mixed results regarding if students felt that the flipped classroom pedagogy helped in engaging with master’s level social work curriculum. Three of the students interviewed clearly identified the flipped design as helpful in engaging with master’s level curriculum. Two students answered both yes and no, and two students stated that they felt the flipped classroom structure was not appropriate for master’s level social work students.

When students identified the flipped classroom as helpful in engaging in master’s level work, common themes were related to the self-directed learning structure, the required responsibility of engagement, and the required communication. For students who reported the flipped structure was not necessarily appropriate for master’s level work, common themes centered on the idea that class projects did not help the students understand policy, the class was less rigorous than other master’s level classes, and hence was less stressful compared to other master’s level courses.

When analyzing reflective papers from each unit (the after-class activity, Appendix A) students were able to clearly articulate the connections of each topic to social policy and social work practice. Nevertheless, in both class discussion and in the interviews, some students stated a lack of understanding policy design and attributed their lack of policy understanding to a weakness of implementing the flipped classroom design for a master’s level policy course.

While some students indicated the flipped design was not necessarily appropriate for master’s level students, other students reported the flipped design contributed to their understanding of class material in deep and meaningful ways. Students reported in the interview and in reflective assignments that the flipped units contributed to their learning. “I feel like I
have no issue recalling what I did in your class” (Student #5). A highlighted strength of the model for some students was being able to recall class material as well as a new motivation to research further into topics discussed in the course.

You know if someone asked me what I knew about the welfare model (before our class) I would have just shrugged and said, ‘yes.’ But I really wouldn’t have been able to have a conversation about welfare. So I think that is what has been the most valuable. (Student #4).

I hope to become an LCSW, and if working in therapy sessions with clients who are immigrants, refugees, or their families are mixed status. I think that being more informed about these policies will help me to create a more trusting and supportive relationship with these clients. (reflective assignment, Unit 2)

This unit has taught me so much about all of these very important issues facing us today, how they affect our clients, how they are related back to policy and how we as social workers can do something about them (reflective assignment, Unit 2).

**Overall Experiences in the Flipped Classroom**

Even among the students who reported their concerns regarding the applicability of the flipped classroom pedagogy for master’s level social work students, an overall enjoyable class experience was reported. The ability to use class time to complete work was described as “less of a burden, less stressful” (student interview, Student #3), “no scheduling headaches” (Student #4), and “in other classes the collaboration happens outside of the classroom” (Student #6). The role of the professor was also mentioned as helpful during in class-activities, “you were there to help us brainstorm” (Student #4). However, some students felt more accountability was necessary. While accountability was built into the implementation through student presentations,
many students reported they did not always use class time to stay on task. One student even reported that although the person enjoyed the teamwork, the student found it difficult to complete all the student’s work within the classroom because sometimes the classroom was “too loud.”

In class discussion, class assignments, and in student interviews, all 16 students offered positive feedback regarding their overall engagement with the course and the collaborative class design. “I feel really grateful that it was a different way of learning; I feel like I got a lot out of it” (Student #5). Students often referred to the class as providing a less stressful learning experience, a refreshing difference, and cited their appreciation for the opportunity to use class time to complete assignments.

**Discussion**

**Key Summary of Findings**

The evaluation of teaching and learning in a flipped MSW graduate policy classroom has much to offer the development, and further application, of this pedagogical framework for social work students and educators. The flipped pedagogy is a new framework for both educators and students; thus, additional research and studies of the implementation will contribute to the knowledge of social work education. Feedback from students in this study align with what has been demonstrated in other studies. At the outset, many students are often confused and concerned regarding the design of the course. As a result, instructors should consider spending considerable time at the beginning of a flipped course to explain the design of the class (Fisher, Ross, LaFerriere, & Maritz, 2017; Miles & Foggett, 2016). It is essential to allocate time in the first flipped unit to offer students more opportunity to ask questions and discuss concerns regarding course expectations. The instructor should take time to explain how class time will be
structured, the responsibility of completing pre-class activities, in-class activities, and after-class activities. In addition to redefining the professor’s role, such explanations may be helpful in engaging a class early in this new learning environment.

When an instructor is considering restructuring a course to a flipped design, he or she should consider a course he or she is likely to teach again. To incorporate a new pedagogical framework into any classroom requires the educator to conduct research, consider a redesign of course curriculum, conduct course planning, and engage in reflection. Due to the lack of literature around this pedagogy in social work, additional studies on implementation of the flipped classroom across social work curriculum will help evaluate its potential fit and application to social work education.

The MSW course used in this study will be redesigned to address the concerns students highlighted during the first implementation. Upon conclusion of this study, students did conclude their overall learning experience in the flipped units was enriching, memorable, and the use of class time to complete “homework” provided a less stressful experience with course material. However, some students may have associated a less stressful learning environment with a less rigorous learning environment. Feedback regarding lack of understanding social policy is also an important consideration when adjusting the course for the future. Although policy was a component of each group’s presentation, and an essential theme in individual reflective assignments, the author could have highlighted policy themes addressed within each unit more effectively. It is important to note the flipped pedagogy does not remove the role of the professor, but merely restructures it. As facilitator and guide, the instructor still needs to help students draw conclusions, demonstrate themes, and highlight learning outcomes.
Implications of the Literature

Similar to Al-Zahrani’s (2015) findings, this study found the flipped classroom increased students’ creative thinking, problem solving abilities, and overall experience with meaningful learning. Students also reported the classroom as “more democratic” and acknowledged that the power shift toward student-led learning in the classroom was motivating and refreshing. Students also discussed how the flipped classroom contributed to an increased retention of course material, and that their knowledge of course material was not a simple regurgitation of facts (Al-Zaharani, 2015; Baker & Hill 2017; Fisher et al. 2017). Furthermore, students discussed their ability to recall topics covered in the course, and how course content related to their future practice.

The intention of the flipped classroom pedagogy is to promote effective group learning. Student-centered collaboration is a central theme in social work practice and offers a reason why flipped pedagogy holds promise as an educational consideration. As practitioners, social workers are not only collaborating with clients and community members, but also with other professionals. Thus, it is vital for social work educators to build a foundation for students to develop effective skills around collaboration, engagement in group development, and effective communication within groups to complete group projects.

Strengths and Limitations

The study’s small sample size is an obvious limitation; an additional limitation was the fact that this flipped graduate policy class was the author’s first attempt to flip a course. Novice mistakes were made. The lack of experience implementing the flipped classroom is most notably linked to the explanation of the pedagogy to students. The author had theory-based experience, but lacked a practice-based foundation. Nonetheless, practice with implementing a pedagogical
framework built confidence for the instructor. This is why it may be important for an instructor to take into consideration the likelihood of teaching a course again when considering restructuring a course to a flipped design. Instructor experience in implementing a flipped course may assist in alleviating student apprehension regarding the merit of the redesign. An instructor’s experience may also help assist students in drawing conclusions, demonstrating themes, and highlighting course learning outcomes in a student-centered learning environment, without falling back on passive learning models or missing this important step altogether.

The strength of the study is found through its addition to social work literature regarding the implementation of a flipped pedagogy into a social work class. Although both Holmes et al. (2015) and Sage and Sele (2015) have conducted studies of the flipped classroom design, neither provided a complete integration of the flipped classroom pedagogical framework. An additional strength comes from the fact all students involved in the course reported an overall positive experience within the flipped units. It is important to continue to investigate whether this new paradigm could assist social work students in achieving higher confidence and retention of social work curriculum.

**Conclusion**

There is little literature on the use of the flipped classroom in social work education. This study adds to the literature and invites social work educators to consider the value of implementing a flipped design into their social work courses. The continued study of implementing this new framework into social work education can help add to our professional literature. Student-centered learning is a pedagogical focus of the flipped classroom. Class time in the flipped classroom is used for interactive peer collaboration, which facilitates student comprehension and engagement. Social work education has a long history of active learning.
environments. The use of role-play, group assignments, and case examples are common in social work education. It will be important to continue to investigate if the flipped classroom design has something to offer social work education. This study indicates the flipped pedagogy holds potential for further development and application in social work classes.
References


Appendix

This paper is 2/3 pages: reflect on your learning process.

Were you familiar with your topic before you began your reading and group process?

Did you learn anything new, surprising, or something you found particularly interesting?

How would you apply what you have learned to your social work practice? If you do not think you would apply any of the information, why not?

How would you explain how the Unit was relevant to social policy?

You may use resources from your group discussion, class readings, your research, and your group's presentation. You also may use information you learned from one of the other group's presentations.

Remember the paper is meant to be a reflection, rather than a report.

After-Class Activity: Critical reflection: The Critical reflection will be a guided short writing assignment that each student will complete upon the completion of a Flipped Classroom Model Unit. The critical reflection will be worth 100 points.

This assignment is worth 100 points. My grading will be focused on 3 criteria:

1. Thorough consideration and answering of each question and related bullet points;
2. Depth of the discussion concerning social policy (make sure you outline key concepts of the flipped unit and how policy informs social workers’ practice lens--at least 2/3 pages); and
3. Clear provision of evidence to make direct connections with the concepts contained in your readings and class discussions.
Using Flipped Classroom Pedagogy in a Social Work Classroom

Debbie Gonzalez

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Abstract

Instructors can find a methodology in the flipped classroom which supports and engages students. This presentation outlined the major components needed in the successful flipped classroom and the researcher’s reflections of implementing the flipped teaching method. Student-centered learning is a pedagogical focus of the flipped classroom. The restructure of class time allows for interactive peer collaboration, which facilitates student comprehension and engagement. The flipped units presented aligned with 2015 Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) Education Policy Accreditation Standards (EPAS) and featured two units addressing the Social Work Grand Challenges.

**Keywords:** flipped classroom pedagogy, social work education, student engagement, activity-based classroom environment
Using the Flipped Classroom Pedagogy in a Social Work Classroom

This oral presentation was accepted at the annual Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD) conference in Jacksonville, Florida in March 2019. The presentation covered the flipped classroom pedagogy and invited social work educators to consider the flipped classroom pedagogical framework as a method to structure a social work learning environment. The presentation was designed for participants to better understand the flipped classroom design as a more complex and dynamic learning paradigm than mere in-class group work. The presenter outlined the three major components that must be present in a successful design of the flipped classroom format. Examples of before-class activity, in-class activity, and the after-class activity from a social work policy class were provided to participants. The presentation also explained how to be well-organized and transparent regarding the structure and design of the class in order to achieve an environment where higher levels of cognition can occur.

The research results of a pilot study using this pedagogy in a social work policy class were presented and discussed. The presentation was a good fit for the BPD conference because social work faculty development was a major theme of the conference. Although social work education is based on an interactive pedagogy, the flipped classroom does have something to offer social work education. The organized structure and deliberate planning of flipped classes can provide social work educators and students a learning platform which offers an innovative method of collaboration and engagement in social work curriculum.
The Flipped Classroom Pedagogy: In A Social Work Classroom

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Agenda

- Major Components needed in the Successful Flipped Classroom (conceptual framework CoI)
- Provide examples from Research conducted in a Social Work Policy class
- Questions
The Flipped Classroom Design

– Inverted Classroom
– Interactive/Extensive Peer Collaboration
  – Flipped Classroom Design Includes
    – Before Class Activity
    – In-Class Activity
    – After Class Activity

The Flipped Design

– Students review a prerecorded lecture, podcast, or documentaries outside of class time (inverted)
– Encourages classroom engagement and critical thinking from the students.
– Requires a thoroughly planned direction from the professor.
– Educator should be cautious of assumptions; flipped classroom is not merely group work
– The flipped classroom pedagogy provides an organized structure for the interactive classroom
The three flipped classroom activities engage students not just to complete a project, but to create a community.

Course Experience

- Policy Social Work class
  - Three Flipped Units
    - Reversing Extreme Inequality (Welfare reform, Earned Income Tax Benefits, Predatory lending, Underbanked/ Unbanked)
    - Environmental Justice (Climate Refugee, Dakota Pipeline, Flint Water Crisis, Food Justice)
    - Immigration/ Refugee (DACA, Family Violence, State Placement Federal Policy, Human Trafficking)
  - Community Of Inquiry (framework)
    - Cognitive Presence, Social Presence, Teaching Presence
The Flipped Classroom Design

- Each component of the flipped classroom should be designed with consideration of how students will interact with course material.
- The preclass activity is planned with the intent to provide students with course content.
- The in-class activity is meant for students to engage with course content.
- The after-class activity is designed to reflect upon course content.

Before-Class Activity

- Embedded questions, or preclass quizzes are used to promote student responsibility and test student understanding and retention of the prelecture video.
- Students are better prepared to engage in the second component of the flipped design involving in-class interactive learning.
- In addition, an essential aspect of the preclass activity ensures students come to class prepared.
Before Class-Activity

- Students’ completion of preclass activity is graded
- Evidence of comprehension and ability to make direct connections with the concepts contained in class readings and discussions.
- Students listened to Basic Income Podcast from University of Buffalo School of Social Work and listened to a story on NPR on baby bond
- 4 journal articles

Example of Pre-Class Quiz

- Dr. Mulval provides several suggestions on why Basic Income concepts should be embraced by social workers. Name one of his suggestions (5 points).
- How does Basic Income relate to the Social Worker’s Grand Challenges of Reversing Extreme Inequality (5 points)?
In-Class Activity

- Use class time to complete assignments
- Student-centered approach is interactive and requires extensive peer collaboration
- The instructor becomes a guide, providing helpful insights to students and facilitating in-depth learning by asking about each student’s discovery (Van Sickle 2016; Zaniuddin & Halil, 2016)

- The structure of in-class learning activities facilitates problem-solving and encourages students to apply class content and their knowledge of prerecorded lectures
Example of In-class Activity

- In-class Discussion example from Environmental Justice Unit (hand-out)
- In-Class Research and Group Presentation

After-Class Activity

- Students are asked to reflect individually after the in-class activity
- The flipped classroom pedagogy is intentionally designed to engage students in the critical reflection process
- Activity provides perspective to the meaning and content of the presented lesson
- Students evaluate their own learning
Example of After-Class Activity

- **After-Class Activity:** Critical Reflection: The Critical Reflection will be a guided short writing assignment that each student will complete upon the completion of a Flipped Classroom Model Unit. The Critical Reflection will be worth 100 points:
  - My grading is focused on three criteria:
  - Thorough consideration and answering of each question and related bullet points;
  - Depth of the discussion concerning social policy (make sure you outline key concepts of the flipped unit and how policy informs social worker’s practice lens—at least 2/3 of a page); and
  - Make direct connections with the concepts contained in your readings and class discussions.

Example of After-Class Activity

- This paper is 2/3 page minimum in length: reflect on your learning process.
- Were you familiar with your topic before you began your reading and group process?
- Did you learn anything new, surprising, or something you found particularly interesting?
- How would you apply what you have learned to your social work practice? If you do not think you would apply any of the information, why not?
- How would you explain Unit 1’s relevance to social policy?
- You may use resources from your group discussion, class readings, your research, and your group’s presentation. You also may use information you learned from one of the other group’s presentations.
- Remember the paper is meant to be a reflection, rather than a report.
CoI is well-suited for designing the flipped classroom

- Promote the effectiveness of social group learning
- The successful strategies bear consideration because not all research on the flipped classroom pedagogy found positive student outcome results.
CoI outlines three fundamental components

- **Cognitive presence**
  - the process of reflection and acquisition of knowledge. Students interact with a dynamic curriculum and begin to explore, reflect, and question the content of the class.
CoI outlines three fundamentals components

– Social presence
  – Comprised of an agreed-upon social identity, or group cohesion. In addition to a description of group identity, social presence also includes open communication and trust.

CoI outlines three fundamental components (cont.)

– Teaching presence
  – Illustrated in course content, course design, and the facilitation of the group learning process (Shea, Hayes, Vickers, Gozza-Cohen, Uzuner, Mehta, Valchova & Rangan, 2009)
  – Teaching presence also establishes leadership in the course and a purpose for the course outcomes
Teaching Presence

– The instructor’s role also includes time for relationships and guiding students through significant collaborative learning experiences and activities (van Niekerk, 2015)
– A feedback loop occurs when the instructor asks the class questions about what is working, where their challenges lie, and what they are learning (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2013)

Teaching Presence

– Technological skill and facility with all media being used in class are also important
– The instructor should understand the technology available to students, and how to integrate it within the course effectually, which may aid in furthering social presence (Roehl, et. al, 2013)
Data Collection from Research

- Field Notes (Instructor reflection)
- Student Assignment
- Interview (after close of the semester)

Results of Study

- For most students this was their first experience in a flipped classroom.
- Only one of the 16 students had previously been in a classroom where flipped pedagogy was used.
- A theme that emerged early within the data was that most students were confused regarding the flipped format.
End of the semester interviews

- Students also identified the class structure as being “more democratic.”
- Students identified the teacher as a facilitator and not necessarily the expert. “It changes the idea that the professor is at the front of the room just saying ‘this is the truth.’”
- Students identified collaborative learning, teaching each other, and taking responsibility as part of their flipped classroom learning experience.

End of the semester interviews

- A highlighted strength of the model for some students was being able to recall class material as well as a new motivation to research further into topics discussed in the course.
- “You know if someone asked me what I knew about the welfare model (before our class) I would have just shrugged and said, ‘yes.’ But I really wouldn’t have been able to have a conversation about welfare. So I think that is what has been the most valuable.”
Student Comments

- An overall enjoyable class experience was reported.
- The ability to use class time to complete work was described as “less of a burden, less stressful,” “no scheduling headaches,” and “in other classes the collaboration happens outside of the classroom.”
- The role of the professor was also mentioned as helpful during in class-activities, “you were there to help us brainstorm.”

Student Feedback for change

- However, some students felt more accountability was necessary. Although at the end of each unit students gave presentations, many students reported they did not always use class time to stay on task.
- One student even reported that although the student enjoyed the teamwork, the student found it difficult to complete all the student’s work within the classroom because sometimes the classroom was “too loud.”
Students reported the use of class time to complete “homework” provided a less stressful experience with course material.

However, some students may have associated a less stressful learning environment with a less rigorous learning environment.

Implications for Flipping a Class

When instructors are considering restructuring a course to a flipped design, they should consider a course likely to be taught again.

To incorporate a new pedagogical framework into any classroom requires the educator to conduct research, consider a redesign of course curriculum, conduct course planning, and engage in reflection.
- It is important to note the flipped pedagogy does not remove the role of the professor, but merely restructures it.
- As facilitator and guide, the instructor still needs to help students draw conclusions, demonstrate themes, and highlight learning outcomes.

**Discussion and Questions**

- Has anyone flipped a class before?
- Any questions, concerns, complaints?
- Thank you!
- Contact information Debbie Gonzalez dlh1@humboldt.edu
- 707 672-3063 (text okay)
References


