ONLINE LEARNING: FLIPPED CLASSROOMS

This month's Teacher's Corner has outlined ways to approach teaching and learning online. These approaches have focused on not only fully Internet-based approaches in online learning but also a mix of classroom practice and online resources known as blended or hybrid learning.

In this week's Teacher's Corner, we will examine a form of blended learning known as the flipped classroom model and look at the tools needed to help build a flipped classroom. The flipped classroom model is based on the ideas of active learning. In active learning, students are encouraged to move from being passive participants, such as only listening to a lecture, to taking more ownership over their own learning. An active classroom approach has students engage in activities such as group projects, class presentations or debates, or worksheet-style assignments but in small groups or pairs. The goal of the active language classroom is for students to be continually engaged in using the language. The challenge to this is in providing the class time for students to be active while balancing the need for explanations of grammar, vocabulary, and other aspects of the language. This is where the flipped classroom approach can help.

In a traditional classroom practice, students are taught new material in class and then are expected to practice and improve upon that material through homework, at home. This new material is often provided through direct instruction in teacher-led activities such as lectures, class readings, or even quizzes and tests. Outside of the classroom, students are expected to do homework activities such as completing worksheets, writing paragraphs, or practicing vocabulary to reinforce their knowledge of the material.

The flipped classroom approach uses Internet-based tools to change, or flip, this classroom model. In the flipped classroom, students are first introduced to material at home over the Internet by watching lectures, completing readings, or even taking quizzes or tests online. Students then come to class with the knowledge of the material and use class time to complete typical homework-style activities. This allows students to work on new material while having the teacher and fellow students as resources with whom they can share ideas, practice communication, or find answers to questions.

THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM: CONTENT CREATION TOOLS

Flipping the classroom requires planning and preparation to maximize its effectiveness. As the instructor, it is critical to have a clear outline of the course and the objectives for each day. With these objectives set, you can begin creating content for students to study at home.

Having the right tools is key to creating engaging content for students. The list of software and websites below is not a complete list as there are many options available for creating online learning content; therefore be sure to identify which tools work best for you and your teaching context. Finally, remember that creating content can be time-consuming at the beginning, but once the videos, audio recording, or presentations are made, they can be reused for later classes.

Video Recording/Hosting

YouTube – YouTube is one of the largest video hosting services. After creating an account, you can post videos that can then be added to websites or course management systems. Videos hosted on YouTube can be made private so that they are only available to those who have the weblink.

Camtasia – Camtasia is a professional-level screen capture and video editing software. Users can create screen recordings, make edits, and add images or audio. However, it must be purchased.

Open Broadcasting System (OBS) – OBS is a livestreaming and recording software. Free and open source, OBS allows you to stream your computer screen directly to websites such as Twitch, Youtube, or Dailymotion or make a recording that is saved as a movie file.

Quicktime – Quicktime comes installed on every Mac. It can be used to create audio, video, or screen recordings.

Screencast-o-Matic – Screencast-o-Matic has both a free and paid version. The free version allows for recordings of up to 15 minutes; however the screencast-o-matic logo is added to the video.

Presentation Software:

PowerPoint – PowerPoint is frequent in live classrooms but can also be used to create video versions of presentations. Make your presentation, add audio, and then export it to a video format for posting online.

Prezi – Prezi is an example of what is known as 'freemium' software. It has a free version with limited functionality and another version with more advanced features that requires a subscription. With Prezi, you can create presentations that are less linear than PowerPoint, allowing you to make more story-centric presentations.

Strut – Strut is a web-based presentation program that is a mix of PowerPoint's linear design and Prezi's animation style. It is a free to use online program that is easy to learn for people familiar with PowerPoint.

Audio Recording

Audacity – Audacity is an audio recording and editing software that allows for the creation of recordings that can be added to presentations or movies. It exports recordings into .mp3 files which are compatible with all presentation or video recording software.

Ardour – Ardour can take time to learn but comes with a sophisticated set of tools for recording layered tracks such as musical performances. The complexity of Ardour comes from its ability to connect with a range of musical instruments.

Wavosaur – Wavosaur has much of the same functionality as Audacity for making recordings in a variety of formats such as .mp3 and .wav files. It's simple user interface is a good place for learning how to record and edit audio files.

Cell Phone – Sometimes simple is best, and most cell phones have an audio recording function. It's easy to record directly to your phone and then export it via email, an online storage service, or messaging service.

THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM: CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Creating a flipped classroom begins with rethinking traditional classroom practice. A traditional classroom approach focuses on content delivery, such as explaining grammar rules to students or giving a lecture. These approaches place students in a passive role, while a flipped classroom is designed around active learning. In active learning approaches, students are engaged in activities where they must use the grammar rules or vocabulary they have learned. Teacher explanations of materials are kept brief in favor of students learning by doing.

A flipped classroom approach supports active learning by moving the lectures and teacher explanations online. Using the tools listed above, teachers can create short grammar videos that explain the rule. Then in class, students can use what they learned in the video to practice the rule in context.

For example, in a class learning the use of passive voice, the instructor can create a PowerPoint explaining passive voice and how it is used. This PowerPoint can be recorded as a movie file and posted online. Then before class, students watch the video.

Here is a brief example of how the passive voice can be explained.

> Passive voice is often used when the agent of the action is less important than the object acted upon. Passive voice is often used when discussing places of historical value. For example, "The White House was built in 1792. It was built to serve as the home of the president of the United States."

This type of explanation can be given through a recorded presentation that students watch before class begins.

Class can then begin with a short quiz on the content of the passive voice video followed by activities where students use passive voice. Students could spend class time creating English language pamphlets about a historical building in town or tourism videos to share online. The goal with these activities is for the students to engage in projects and language production using what they have already learned in the video and guided by in-class support from the teacher.

This class could be followed-up with more online materials that support the students' in-class activities. In this example, students worked in small groups making materials using passive voice. Questions asked by the small groups during class could be collected and then answered online. The instructor could answer students' questions in a podcast recorded with Audacity. Students could then listen to the podcast as an after-class homework activity. To learn more about Audacity, visit the September 2015 Teacher's Corner.