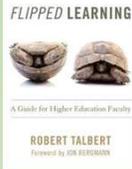


# Flipping the Classroom on Zoom: Experiences from a Graduate Social Work Course

Cyleste C. Collins, M.A., M.S.W., Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor, School of Social Work  
Cleveland State University



## OVERVIEW



In Fall 2018, the author attended CSU's Center for Faculty Excellence book discussion group on *Flipped Learning* by Robert Talbert. She implemented key ideas from the book in two of her courses. This poster discusses how she worked to adapt in-person flipped learning principles in Fall 2020 teaching a synchronous graduate course over Zoom. Strategies and tools, instructor and student feedback are presented.

## WHAT IS FLIPPED LEARNING?

Flipped Learning involves having students prepare to apply concepts in class and actively engage in discussion. Students are assigned reading and assignments to ensure they understood the reading before class which allows class time to be focused on more in-depth discussion concepts and accomplishing higher level learning objectives. The approach allows students to work through questions and issues in a supported learning environment in the presence of their instructor and with peer feedback.

## THE COURSE

SWK 503 Human Behavior and the Social Environment focuses on theories to explain human behavior on multiple levels. It is one of the first required courses in the Master's in Social Work program sequence. Offered in the fall, the course is a foundation course in the students' generalist year. Students generally enjoy the course.

### Homework: Weekly Journal Assignments

- Worth 20% of the grade
- Low stakes, graded liberally-full sentences, grammar and APA style did not have to be followed strictly, points awarded for submitting the assignment

Journal structure:

**Part I. Overview.** Outlined the reading assignment, its place in the module, and course.

**Part II. Instructions.** This section describes what the student should do, how they should do it, how to submit the assignment, points awarded for completion and grading.

**Part III. Learning Objectives.** Specifies what the students should focus on in their reading. Simple learning objectives are followed by progressively more complex, application-focused objectives.

**Part IV. Questions, closely tied to Learning Objectives.** The questions begin with basic definitions and progress to asking the for examples from their own lives and/or experiences in social work practice situations.

## Fall 2020 Synchronous Class Schedule on Zoom (2 hrs 50 minutes)

- 1) **Entrance Ticket:** Response to Writing Prompt "Based on the readings from today..." (2 minutes quick writing in chat (Private Message to me)
  - Focus: Focus students on topic from reading
  - Purpose: Grounds students in the day's discussion
- 2) Wrap up last class
- 3) **Mini-lecture,** discussion of concepts from chapter
- 4) **Break.** 10-minutes
- 5) **Applying Chapter Knowledge to Practice.** Students worked in Zoom Breakout groups (10-15 minutes), then return to main room for whole class interaction (30 minutes)
- 6) **Break** (5 minutes). Two breaks to cut back on Zoom fatigue
- 7) Continue Discussion (#5) and/or wrap up chapter discussion
- 8) **Exit Ticket:** "Muddiest points" prompt: in chat, students respond to a prompt asking them for the "muddiest point" from the day's discussion.

## IN-PERSON VS. ZOOM BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS

### In-Person Small Group Discussions

- Happy "buzz" of conversation
- Instructor can observe the "vibe" of the room, figure out timing for how long the discussion should go
- Can observe nonverbal behavior of the class/groups to determine how well the conversation is going

### Zoom Breakouts

- The in-class "buzz" is missing!
- "Popping in" to the room can be awkward
- Adjusting the timer is difficult/impossible
- The time goes faster than it seems
- Sending documents (discussion prompts) can get tricky.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL ZOOM BREAKOUTS

- Think ahead about how many groups you want to have
- Clearly label each discussion prompt for each group
- Share discussion prompts in Chat (copy and paste or attach document (must make sure your chat is set up to do this)
- Ensure students know which group they're in
- Pop in (join breakout room) to see if students need more time/help understanding the prompt, etc.

## INSTRUCTOR REFLECTION

- **Journals helped students be more prepared for class.** They are basically "forced" to read before class.
- **Refined teaching approach.** Crafting progressively easier-to more difficult learning objectives allowed me an opportunity to refine my teaching focus, become more clear on the focus of the class, and structure the class to maximize instructor support and responsiveness.
- **It was challenging.** Zoom breakout time went quickly and technological challenges could cause delays.
- **Appropriateness for grad course.** This worked very well for a graduate course. I did not want to lecture to graduate students, who should be ready for more advanced and applied work. Posting slides on Blackboard that supported their reading helped move most of the content learning outside of the classroom, and in-class time could be reserved for examples, highlighting major topics, applying and contextualizing the content.
- **Grading Journals** was fairly quick but also allowed me to pinpoint issues or areas to focus on in class. They were due about 9 hours before class, and ideally I would grade them before class, but it was often a little tight timing-wise, so I had to be strict about attending to them.

## EXAMPLES OF STUDENT FEEDBACK

### Entrance Tickets (biology chapter)

- "It makes sense that biology and human behavior are connected but I started as a pre med student so I only ever looked at biology and physiology without connecting it to behavior so I thought that was interesting. I didn't know social workers needed to do that."
- "Although I have read before how poverty impacts people at the molecular level, reading how poverty and oppression impact every major system in the body reiterates how important social workers are. So much illness and disease could be prevented."

**Exit Tickets/Muddy Points** helped for planning next session and/or contacting students (individually or group as needed) to clarify missed/misunderstood. Examples from first day:

- "Muddiest point was how epistemology, ontology, and axiology relate to social work practice."
- "Thanks terrific overview of the course and looking forward to looking at the world in a whole new way. nothing pops out as muddy, just a whole different (and terrific) worldview!"
- "The muddiest point is epistemology for me. Not because you didn't explain it well but because it's very abstract, like philosophy in general and I typically like concepts that are more black and white. but I'm excited to keep learning."

## CONCLUSION

Flipped learning worked extremely well on Zoom. The discussions were rich and only technological tinkering kept the class vibe from being nearly the same as the in-person class. However, these students were at the beginning of their cohort and missed seeing each other and their instructors in person and getting to know one another more informally.

- The journals: students appreciated being told how to focus their reading; journals outlined objectives and told students how and where to focus their time
- Students came to class prepared for discussion and to apply concepts they read
- In future classes, I plan to:
  - More fully incorporate out-of-class recorded mini-lectures to accompany the assignments (fully flip)
  - Shorten, more carefully target the journal assignment toward their larger assignments so students don't feel like it is busywork

## REFERENCE

Talbert, R. (2017). *Flipped learning: A guide for higher education faculty*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.