Using Social Media to Create a Flipped Classroom

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USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO CREATE A FLIPPED CLASSROOM

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Abstract:

The potential of the social media can be garnered to motivate students to create a better teaching- learning environment. The present paper is a proposal to use the flipped classroom methodology with the help of the technology that students of today are equipped with – the mobile phone and the social media applications that they are fond of. The paper is explicatory in the sense it attempts to explain the notion of flipped classroom methodology, explain the advantages of the pedagogy that purports the methodology, enumerate ways in which it can be used in the undergraduate classrooms and also list the challenges that the teacher would encounter in using it.

Keywords : Flipped learning, Social media, Whatsapp, Facebook etc.

Introduction -

Technology has made inroads into every field. To counter the numerous challenges that we face today in the teaching-learning process the instructional mode and methodology is also being overhauled so as to provide our students with the best opportunities of learning and assimilation. We no more depend on the traditional 'Chalk and Talk method'. Creating a blended learning environment – a proper combination of online digital media with traditional classroom methods – is the need of the hour. A typical Indian classroom is a place where the teacher / professor is the centre of the teaching process and normally the learner is a passive component. The teaching learning process is aimed at the learner acquiring and assimilating knowledge through the lecture method. Our learners come from varied backgrounds with a variety of levels of understanding; each learner's pace of acquiring knowledge and understanding concepts varies in accordance with one's intelligence quotient and caliber. Catering to this diversity is not easily possible in the typical classroom.

Digital Technology and Internet has enabled a range of information sharing methodologies that can know be used to reach out to all learners irrespective of their grasping levels and catapults the teaching learning process into an interactive one. Online learning requires extremely self motivated learners who do not require any external push to continue in the process of educating oneself. Given the present scenario we cannot rely on technology alone. A hybrid learning – a combination of online and in-person learning would ideally enhance the teaching learning process.

Given the present scenario wherein a class is engaged in person by the teacher for a period of 55 minutes it is always not possible for the learner to grasp the entire concept at one go. A repeat of the same instructions is not possible. So if we flip – reverse – the scenario that is engage in a little more constructivist learning from the students' point of view it would probably benefit every learner trying to learn at one's own pace. The Flipped classroom methodology or model of teaching-learning purports methods wherein the learning resources are provided to the students prior to the classroom teaching process. This not only allows the learner to grasp the resources at one's own pace but also gives ample time to 'ruminate' and form one's own knowledge base which can then be tested through discussion and group

work in the classroom. Doubts can be raised, problems can be solved, suggestions can be made and new approaches can be floated.

Need for Flipped learning

Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson (1987) reiterate in rather strong words that 'There are neither enough carrots nor enough sticks to improve undergraduate education without the commitment and action of students and faculty members' and thus offer the following seven principles based on research on good teaching and learning in colleges and universities:

According to Chickering and Gamson (1987) any 'good practice' (methodology) in the undergraduate education:

1. Encourages contact between students and faculty
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.
3. Encourages active learning.
4. Gives prompt feedback.
5. Emphasizes time on task.
6. Communicates high expectations.
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Content and pedagogy both interact in complex ways and therefore a proper understanding of 'what' to deliver and 'how' should be a matter of concern for the teaching fraternity. A proper understanding of the students psychology, their dreams and aspirations, their interests and levels of expertise have always been of great help in this process. Flipped classroom methodology is one such 'good practice' that follows the seven principles enumerated above.

A typical flipped classroom would boast of a scenario wherein 'students watch and listen to your lectures... for homework' and then the classroom time can be used for 'tackling difficult problems, working in groups, researching, collaborating, crafting and creating' thus turning classrooms into 'laboratories or studios'.(Jonathan Martin, Feb 2011).

The term 'flipped classroom' was made popular by Aaron Sams and Jon Bergman, teachers from Woodland Park High School, Colorado in 2007. They realized that class time would be best spent guiding knowledge and providing feedback rather than delivering direct instruction. According to Bergman and Sams (2012) direct instruction could be delivered by recording video content for students to engage with before class (and any time) freeing up class time for activities that allow deeper exploration of content.

Challenges of flipping the classroom-

The problems one encounters when one puts the flipped classroom theory into practice are numerous. Some of the most common ones are:

• Selecting the right resource material

• Size of the learning resource

• Convincing administrators of the institute and its stake holders regarding the efficiency of the methodology.

• Size of the Classroom and group work

• Technological issues

• Engineering the course requires a lot of resourcefulness on the part of the teacher

Right resource material: The very act of surfing through the internet for the right learning material is a daunting task. The best way to counter this problem is through making your own videos. Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012) elaborate on this aspect thus provide a detailed helpline for teachers aspiring to make their own study material – videos that the students would appreciate.

Size of the learning resource: It is very important to keep the learner's attention span in mind. The learners attention span of today is 'bit sized'. In a recent study by Microsoft

Corporation, (Borreli, 2015) it has been found that it is now difficult to stay focused, with the human attention span shortening from 12 seconds to eight seconds in more than a decade. Thus any learning material that goes beyond eight seconds is definitely is not given appropriate attention. Statistics indicate that videos that are eye catching are never lengthy. Thus if we want our students to pay attention to the learning resources then the recommended size of the video should be interesting enough to fit into their attention span.

Convincing administrators of the institute and its stake holders regarding the efficiency of the methodology: The idea of the Flipped Classroom is in its infancy at least in the Indian context. We have a long way to go, until educationists adopt the methodology wholeheartedly. Neither the administrators nor the learners would be in a receptive mode until the benefits of this methodology are propagated. It is only through experimentation can the teacher prove the efficacy of the methodology. But until then it is indeed a daunting task.

Size of the Classroom and group work: The normal size of the Indian classrooms at the undergraduate is not what we have in the Universities of the West. Any commerce class in a city college of Mumbai has 100 to 120 students in a single class. No experienced flipped classroom exponent can practically handle such large classes. Handling queries, discussions and creative sessions for such large classrooms is nearly impossible. Thus the flipped method needs to be used creatively – as motivating introductory 'set induction' so as to initiate the students into more complex learning material. For small batches as in tutorials they can be ideally used. For subjects such as Business Communication or Communication Skills the flipped method is best.

Engineering the course requires a lot of resourcefulness on the part of the teacher: Resourcefulness on the part of the teacher is the most important component of the flipped classroom methodology. Thus it requires extra effort on the part of the teacher to prepare the lessons.

Technological issues: The major reason why teachers are not able to use digital technology in the classroom is related to our classrooms not being fitted with the required infrastructure. Our classrooms are not wi-fi enabled, nor do we have the required hardware to stream audio-video resource material in class.

The greater challenge in our classrooms is related to technological issues especially when our students have limited access to the internet. In metropolitan cities where the university itself has taken measures to ensure that campuses are wi-fi enabled; the teacher should not have much of a problem implementing flipped classroom methodology by connecting to students through the smartphones that majority of them use. For such classrooms the smart phone that our students are already equipped with is a boon. The videos, power point presentations or any other resource material in pdf form can now be easily circulated within the students' Whatsapp groups so that they can come ready for the next lecture.

Flipped classroom in the Indian scenario- Making of video content for Indian teachers is not an easy task. But given the myriad of good video content already available on the internet does not necessitate the Indian teacher to create video lessons. The created video lectures often lack imagination and animation and thus can be mundane and monotonous. They fail to hold the attention of the learner, especially those that merely record the chalk-talk method, with little voice modulation on the part of the teacher. Instead videos that demonstrate the concept rather than merely spell it out are more effective.

'Rich media' not only holds the attention of learners but it also engages

their minds in an interactive manner. A white paper by Cisco elaborates on 'Video : How Interactivity and Rich Media Change the teaching and Learning process'. The paper enumerates the various benefits of video on the learners:

- Establishes dialogue and idea exchange between students, educators, and subject matter experts regardless of locations.

- Lectures become homework and class time is used for collaborative student work, experiential exercises, debate, and lab work.

- Extends access to scarce resources, such as specialized teachers and courses, to more students, allowing them to learn from the best sources and maintain access to challenging curriculum.

- Enables students to access courses at higher - level institutions, allowing them to progress at their own pace.

- Prepares students for a future as global citizens. Allows them to meet students and teachers from around the world to experience their culture, language, ideas, and shared experiences.

- Allows students with multiple learning styles and abilities to learn at their own pace and through traditional models

If all students have to watch a video on the same night before a particular class as homework we need students who have easy access to the internet on their computer. This is yet not possible in all Indian homes. But the mobile revolution that has been ushered by the application – Whatsapp has changed the scenario. On February 03, 2016 The Hindu reported that 'With 220mn users, India is now world's second-biggest smart phone market'. Though the government-driven initiatives such as Make in India and Digital India has made an impact, aggressive marketing techniques of service providers such as JIO has added to the urge to own a smart phone

that eventually gives free data usage.

Though in comparison to nations such as Canada, Italy, Spain, South Korea and Australia that have reported 100% Internet usage or smart phone ownership, survey indicated that more than one in three (34%) Indian millennial users (aged between 18 and 34) said they use the Internet occasionally or own a smart phone, compared with 12% of older users (aged 35 and above).

The undergraduate population today is increasingly using these smart phones. In a metropolitan city like Mumbai and an educational institute wherein students come from middle class background we do find in a class of 100, only two to three students not possessing a smart phone. The scenario may differ definitely in muffosil areas. But the smart phone fever is catching up and soon we would find many of our undergraduate students using them. These gadgets are the learning tools that educators can use for their flipped classrooms.

Social media – the disseminating application

We need a profound shift in pedagogical designs that engage with mobile applications that are popular with the youth of today. If we intend to make an impact on the young minds we need to get under their skin and think what interests them and engage with them accordingly. Web based technologies are being used by internet users to form communities and network through them in order to socialize and from social circles.

Social media is described by Bryer and Zavattaro (2011) as "technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders". The most popular social media amongst the college youth today is Facebook and Whatsapp.

Statistics indicate that India now has over 28 million Facebook users and over 1/3rd of all Internet users are on Facebook and Mumbai has the highest Facebook user base in India with 3.7 million FB users (18th in the world), while Delhi (1.6 mln) & Bangalore (1.3 mln) rank 36th & 38th respectively. While more than 80% of these Internet users access Facebook via their mobile phones.

At least 97 per cent of smartphone users in India use communication apps every day, with WhatsApp being the app of choice for 96 per cent of them.(The Hindu dated March 14, 2016)

With the ever growing popularity of Facebook and Whatsapp the Indian teachers can now use these for purpose of their flipped classroom.

Flipping the classroom through Whatsapp and Facebook

The popular Social media platform – Facebook and the almost ubiquitous end-to-end encrypted instant messaging application for smartphones – Whatsapp can be used to network with students and give them homework for the next class. The Internet is a web that can definitely be intimidating. As John Allen Paulos puts it "The Internet is the world's largest library. It's just that all the books are on the floor." Thus to select the right book is a humongous task. One has to surf the turbulent sea of knowledge in order to get the pearls that one is actually looking for. This is a major challenge for teachers when they use YouTube or Vimeo there are other sites wherein one can surf for appropriate educational resources in the video format.

Following are some of the free online resources that can be availed by the teaching fraternity:

Sr. No.	Name of video library	Icon	About the library	Web url
1.	Alison		Standards-based education material covering a broad range of subjects	alison.com
2.	Amazon Education		Amazon Inspire is a free service for the discovery of digital educational material	amazon.com/ education
3.	Big Think		Video interviews with 600+ thought leaders in a range of fields.	bigthink.com
4.	Brightstormc		Short-form online video lessons by professional educators. Free math lessons.	brightstorm. com
5.	CosmoLearning		Aggregator of free, online video lessons and documentaries.	cosmolearning. com
6.	Coursera		Lectures taught by world-class professors and reinforced through interactive exercises.	coursera.org
7.	EdX		Courses designed specifically for interactive study via the web.	edx.org
8.	FutureLearn		Offers a diverse selection of courses from leading European universities	futurelearn.com

9.	GCFLearn		Free online courses teaching basic life skills, technology, literacy, and math.	gcflearnfree.org
10.	Howcast		Professional and user-generated how-to videos.	howcast.com
11.	Internet Archive		Collection of more than two-hundred thousand free historical videos, many academic.	archive.org
12.	iTunes U		Free lectures, language lessons, audiobooks, and more accessible via Apple iTunes	Apple iTunes - Apple iTunes Software
13.	Khan Academy		Self-paced learning with extensive video library, interactive challenges, and assessments	khanacademy.org
14.	Learner.org		Professionally developed programming for K-12 classrooms	learner.org
15.	Math TV		Professional video lessons in mathematics. Covers basic math through calculus	mathtv.com
16.	MIT Open CourseWare		Lectures and course materials for students, teachers, and self-learners	ocw.mit.edu
17.	NeoK12		Aggregator of high-quality educational videos from around the Web	neok12.com
18.	SnagFilms		Library of free, full-length documentary films.	snagfilms.com
19.	TeacherTube		Online aggregator of educational videos	teachertube.com
20.	TED		Fascinating presentations by the world's leading thinkers and doers.	ted.org
21.	Videojug		Collection of videos from professors, professionals, coaches, teachers, and consultants	videojug.com
22.	YouTube #Education		Free lectures from more than one hundred colleges and universities.	youtube.com/edu
23.	WatchKnowLearn		Comprehensive online directory of educational videos aggregated from across the Web	watchknowlearn.org
24.	Open Yale Courses		Free access to a selection of introductory Yale courses	oyc.yale.edu
25.	SchoolsWorld		Engaging, professional videos and practical resources for educator development.	schoolsworld.tv

Changes that the flipped classrooms bring

The benefits that directly or directly result through the use of this methodology are numerous. Some of them are enumerated below:

Killing boredom: The video content definitely sparks the imagination of the young students and invigorates them with greater enthusiasm. The students the next day, come mentally girded with the basic understanding of the concepts to be discussed in class are then ready for a higher level of analysis and understanding, which is the basic need of the undergraduate curriculum.

Avoid death by PPT: Classroom teaching many a time with the help of Power Point programmes often turn students into passive sponges that merely listen to the powerpoint slides being read aloud in class. If the PPT's are self explanatory, then it would be better if they were watched beforehand by the students. Using the college classroom time for 'a read aloud session' is a mere waste of precious time.

Caters to the interest of the students: The 'digital generation' of today is fascinated by interactive media. It appreciates cell phones and the apps delivered on it. Thus study material that they can be accessed easily would definitely spur them towards greater creativity.

Learning is now fun: The activity based classroom teaching learning process is accepted readily by students as it involves interactivity through the mobile phone that brings in the fun element.

E content creation: The content once created goes a long way as the teacher is equipped with a lot of material that can be used as and when required. Depending on the feedback of the students the study material can be tweaked and reconstructed. The ready material can be accessed by students any time they want and review becomes easy.

Tapping the analytical mind of the teacher and student: This methodology gives ample time for both the teacher and the student, for discussion and greater analysis. Once the basic concepts are understood, doubts can be clarified, assessments can be made and the undergraduate student learns to construct one's own ideas and point of view. This methodology thus engages the critical analytical skills of both the teacher and the learner. The teaching-learning process thus turns into a process of knowledge creation rather than just dissemination.

Conclusion:

The flipped classroom methodology fits into the social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) wherein the collaborative teaching learning methodology is given the utmost priority. The greatest amount of learning happens when students actually engage themselves in the teaching learning process and take part in the meaning making process on their own tapping their resources. True to what Martin Luther Jr. said "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically" and this cannot be achieved through passive learning that encourages rote memorization. Igniting the imagination of the learner, enhancing the ability to judge, analyzing complexities and coming to conclusions, are vital processes, if we want to mould our students into 'wise' individuals rather than just 'knowledgeable' ones. Flipped classroom methodology is vital in igniting the passion for self education; and inculcating the love for life-long learning.

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