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## FEATURED THEME: FLIPPED CLASSROOMS

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MICHIGAN STATE  
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## Strategies for Flipping Communicative Language Classes

by Le Anne Spino and Daniel Trego

Take a moment to reflect on your language class. What do in-class activities look like? What activities do students do outside of class? And if your class is a communicative one, is there real communication happening in all of those activities? In this article, we will describe how to implement a flipped communicative language class, one that represents a conceptual departure from traditional language classes. Flipped classes empower students, putting them at the helm of their own learning. However, implementing these classes can be challenging. Below we explain what a flipped class is, how flipped communicative language classes work, and the benefits of flipping classes. Finally, we discuss some technological considerations and give some tips for flipping classes.

### What is a Flipped Class?

Before we define what a flipped class is, let us be clear on what it's not: a flipped class is *not* a traditional class. In a traditional class, students are presented with new material during class time, are perhaps given a little bit of time to practice the material under the guidance of the teacher, and then are asked to complete work at home that reinforces and applies the concepts learned in class. Subsequent classes begin by reviewing the previous lesson and then repeating the "present, practice, reinforce, apply" model. However, in a flipped class, this structure is shifted: new material is presented to the students outside of class so that class time can be reserved for practice, reinforcement, and application. In the traditional model, students are left alone during the reinforcement and application phases, and any student who did not understand the information presented in class is left in the lurch. The flipped model remedies this problem by making sure that activities requiring higher-order thinking happen during class time, when the teacher is present to help.

### Applying the Flipped Model to Communicative Language Classes

While the flipped classroom has garnered much attention in major academic content areas (e.g., science, math, etc.), it can also be applied fruitfully to communicative language classrooms. As the name suggests, a communicative language class is a class with communication at its core. That is, it promotes the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning within a language class (see Lee & VanPatten, 2003; VanPatten, 2003 for more information on communicative language classes). That means the focus

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## EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Readers,

If that groundhog was right, we should be seeing signs of spring as this newsletter finds its way into your hands... though we certainly haven't seen any yet! We are in the middle of the first full semester of our new grant cycle, and we're pleased to report that a number of our projects are up and running. We'll have updates in future issues and on our website about the progress that's being made on new projects and some new aspects of continuing projects.

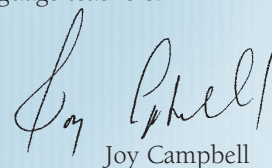
The main article in this issue of *CLEAR News* was written by Le Anne Spino and Daniel Trego, both of whom have many years' experience in presenting on flipped classrooms, having given sessions on this topic at a number of regional and national venues. They offer a rationale for flipping, define what it is (and isn't), and give helpful tips for teachers wanting to explore this method of language teaching. A handy reference list also gives suggestions for further reading for those who want to know more.

Four professional development workshops are coming up in July, with three new topics and one encore offering. Please visit our website to learn more about these four workshops, which will focus respectively on reading and

listening in the language classroom, using technology for teaching, proficiency-based approaches in assessment, and using short stories to facilitate reading.

CLEAR will be exhibiting at upcoming regional and national conferences, specifically the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in Minneapolis in March and the annual conference of the Computer-Assisted Language Instruction Consortium in Boulder, CO in May. We always enjoy meeting our constituents face-to-face, so please stop by to say hello! For those of you not on the conference circuit this spring, you can of course always find us at <http://clear.msu.edu>.

If you haven't done so already, you can "like" us on Facebook (search for our full name or visit [www.facebook.com/CLEARatMSU](http://www.facebook.com/CLEARatMSU)) to receive updates on current activities, upcoming projects, and links to helpful articles or sites for language teachers.



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### SUGGESTIONS WANTED!

We strive to publish *CLEAR News* articles that represent current topics in foreign language teaching, and we want to hear from you! If you have an idea for an article or would like to see a particular subject addressed, please let us know at [clear@msu.edu](mailto:clear@msu.edu). We will consider your idea for future issues of the newsletter.

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The US Department of Education awards grants through Title VI funding to a small number of institutions for the purpose of establishing, strengthening, and operating language resource and training centers to improve the teaching and learning of foreign languages. There are currently sixteen Language Resource Centers nationwide: the Assessment and Evaluation Language Resource Center (AELRC), a consortium of Georgetown University and the Center for Applied Linguistics; the Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER) at The Pennsylvania State University; the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota; the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon; the Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region (CeLCAR) at Indiana University; the Center for Educational Resources in Culture, Language and Literacy (CERCLL) at the University of Arizona; the Center for Integrated

Language Communities (CILC) at City University of New York; the Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR) at Michigan State University; the Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning (COERLL) at the University of Texas at Austin; the Center for Urban Language Teaching and Research (CULTR) at Georgia State University; the National African Language Resource Center (NALRC) at Indiana University; the National East Asian Languages Resource Center (NEALRC) at The Ohio State University; the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa; the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC), a consortium of UCLA and the UC Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching; the National Resource Center for Asian Languages (NRCAL) at California State University, Fullerton; and the Slavic and Eurasian Language Research Center (SEELRC) at Duke University.

is on *using* a language rather than learning *about* the language. Ensuring that students receive a copious amount of input is integral both to communicative language classes, and to successful second language acquisition more generally. Students also need opportunities to produce output and interact with others in class. It is typically best to provide students with input before expecting them to produce output. That is, students should be exposed to written and oral language that is both meaning-bearing and comprehensible (i.e., input) before they are expected to produce that language (i.e., output) when speaking to others. Therefore, students should not be expected to use language that they have never heard before in a meaning-bearing context. The challenge, of course, is fitting in enough input, output, and interaction, particularly given the time constraints of a language class.

That's where the flipped class comes in. The first step in applying the flipped model to a communicative language class is deciding how class time is best spent. Because it is difficult for students to interact in the target language outside of class, class time should largely be spent doing just that. Since students must receive input before they can be expected to produce the output necessary for interaction, input is given during pre-class input activities (i.e., the flipped activities). Therefore, in a flipped communicative language class, vocabulary and grammar are presented for the first time *before* class. Class time, then, is primarily dedicated to providing students with opportunities to produce output and interact with one another. For communicative classes, it is essential that pre-class activities have communicative value. This means that these activities should not be overt grammar drills. Instead, they should be meaning-bearing activities, and students should be tasked with *understanding* the communicative message. Interactive activities in class consist of the exchange of meaningful information in order to reach some communicative goal. In this way, the pre-class activities serve to prepare students to successfully complete the interaction activities in class. The result is a seamless class, in which students feel prepared and ready to express their ideas and thoughts.

### **Benefits of Flipping a Communicative Language Class**

As far as successful language acquisition is concerned, the benefit of adopting a flipped model is clear: teachers can increase the amount of comprehensible input learners receive,

and can also provide more opportunities for output and interaction in class. There are, however, many other benefits of teaching a flipped class.

The first benefit has to do with the relationship between the teacher and students: flipping refers not only to flipping the presentation of material to before class, but also to flipping the roles of the teacher and students. In a traditional class, the teacher is seen as an authoritative figure transmitting knowledge to the students, who are simply empty vessels waiting to be filled. This relationship is commonly referred to the Atlas Complex: the teacher, like Atlas, assumes too much weight, shouldering the responsibility of his or her students' learning completely. In a flipped classroom, however, students are in control of their own learning. The teacher then becomes an architect, responsible for creating the blueprints of the class, and the students become builders, in charge of constructing their own knowledge. Thus, in a flipped class, students are empowered, and are ultimately held accountable for their own learning.

Another benefit of flipping is the opportunity for increased individualized learning. Since students complete the pre-class activities at home, they can spend as much time on them as they need, reading, listening to audio files, or watching videos over and over again until they feel they understand. This ultimately slows down or speeds up the presentation rate of material to a speed that is defined by each student. If a student still doesn't understand the material before coming to class, he or she can always ask for clarification in class. In a traditional class, students have only one opportunity to understand what the teacher is saying in class, and if they don't, they are left on their own to figure out how to complete the homework. Therefore, students in flipped classes are less likely to fall through the cracks than in traditional classes.

### **Technological Tools**

If you decide to flip with the help of technology, your success will depend, in part, on the tools you select and how well you implement them. But before we discuss some technology-related considerations we'd like to clearly state the following: technology does not make your class better. *You* make your class better. Put differently, flipping with technology does not magically convert bad classes into good ones or ineffective teaching practices into effective ones. As a corollary, this means that putting confusing input activities online is actually



worse than implementing them in class, in part because the teacher is not there to clarify when the students become lost.

With that being said, there are a plethora of tools available for use, each, of course, with its own benefits and drawbacks. We don't have enough space to list all the tools available to you, but a good place to start would be CLEAR's Rich Internet Applications (RIAs) ([http://clear.msu.edu/clear/resources/rich-internet-](http://clear.msu.edu/clear/resources/rich-internet-applications/)

[applications/](http://clear.msu.edu/clear/resources/rich-internet-applications/)). With these applications, students can listen to podcasts or watch videos (*Broadcasts*, *Viewpoint*), and interact with audio and video (*Conversations*). The great thing about the RIAs is that all of these applications can be embedded and customized in one place (by using the *Mashups* application). The RIAs are free to teachers and students, and there is a wide variety of tools to choose from. We encourage anyone who is interested in using these applications to check out the RIA website.

### Flipping Tips (so your flip doesn't flop)

Flipping a class is no easy task. There is an enormous amount of material that will eventually need to be created, so the creation of flipped activities can be quite slow. Below are some suggestions to make flipping your classroom more manageable.

**Flip backwards.** The goal of a flipped language classroom is to give students input on the vocabulary and grammar they need so that they are well prepared to complete interactive

activities in class. Therefore, make sure you are flipping backwards, that is, be sure to start with a clear in-class goal *before* you create your flipped material! That will help you decide what kind of activities your students need to prepare them for class time.

#### **Start small.**

Flipping your class will be an adjustment both for you and your students. You can ease the transition by starting small and only flipping a few classes at a time. Don't be discouraged if the

pace is slow: even though flipping your class may be a large time investment at the beginning, you can reuse activities and reap the benefits for years to come.

**Keep it simple.** That is, resist the urge to use too many different technological tools. Your students may not be as tech savvy as you think they are, and using a variety of different tools could confuse and frustrate them. Focus on a few different tools and use them well. In this way, students can focus on the material instead of learning the technology they need to access it. In addition, try to keep all activities listed and hosted in one place to the greatest extent possible (e.g., a single website, course management system, or platform). Make sure you also have a single checklist where students can go to see all the activities that are due.

**Construct activities carefully.** Strive to make your activities fail-proof. You can do this in a variety of ways. First, implement multiple choice or true/false activities instead of



### References

Lee, J. F., & VanPatten, B. (2003). *Making communicative language teaching happen* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

VanPatten, B. (2003). *From input to output: A teacher's guide to second language acquisition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

short writing activities. This will ensure that responses marked incorrectly due to punctuation or spelling errors alone don't frustrate your students. Also, since the goal of these activities is to provide students with input, they really don't need to be writing. Second, set your activities to give immediate and accurate feedback. This will benefit your students' learning, and will ensure that you are alerted quickly if there is a problem with how the responses are coded. Finally, make sure you always test out the activities yourself before assigning them to your students. That way, you can catch potential problems before your students do.

**Share.** See if other language teachers at your school are also interested in flipping. If so, collaborate! Keep in mind that you can collaborate across languages too. The content will, of course, have to be translated, but you can always share basic structures and ideas for activities. If you do not have any colleagues with whom you can work at your school, branch out! Attend a local or regional conference, or perhaps even a national one such as the annual convention of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and network there to create a group of teachers that are working toward the same goals as you. With these tips, we hope you'll be flipping in no time!

*Le Anne Spino is a PhD candidate in the Second Language Studies program at Michigan State University. Her research investigates how native English speakers acquire Spanish as a second language. She has taught Spanish, language teaching methodology, and introduction to second language acquisition classes at MSU.*

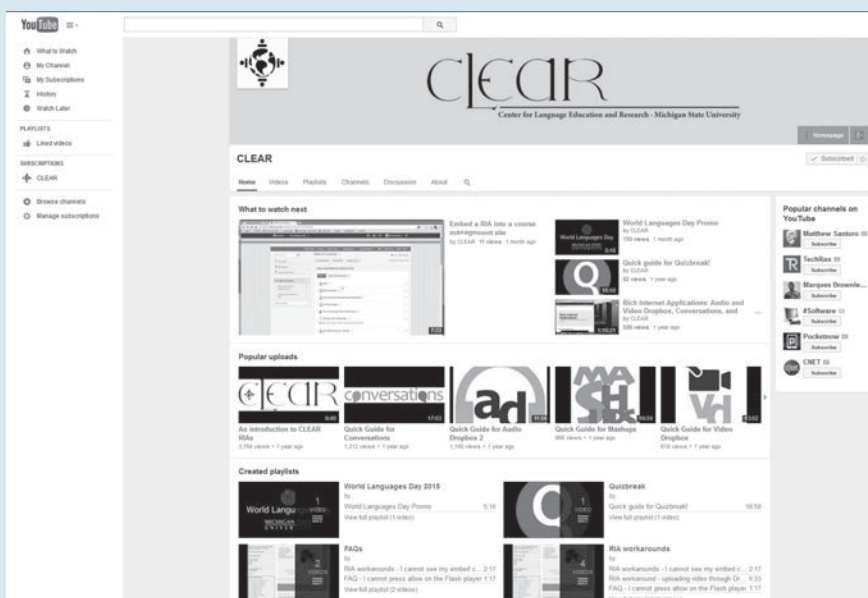
*Daniel Trego is a Spanish Instructor and the Coordinator of Technology-Enhanced Instruction in the Department of Romance and Classical Studies at Michigan State University, where he is involved in the development and implementation of online and hybrid curriculum. His interests include second language acquisition and the creation and use of multimedia in the classroom.*

## OTHER SUGGESTED READING

Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012). ***Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day.*** Washington, DC: International Society for Technology in Education.

Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2014). ***Flipped learning: Gateway to student engagement.*** Washington, DC: International Society for Technology in Education.

Keengwe, J., Onchwari, G., & Oigara, J. (2014). ***Promoting active learning through the flipped classroom model.*** Hershey, PA: IGI Global.



## RICH INTERNET APPLICATIONS

**New to CLEAR's RIAs, but interested in trying them to flip your classroom?** There are numerous forms of documentation available for the RIAs. We have created "quick start" guides for each application for both teachers and students, and also host a YouTube video library (<http://www.youtube.com/user/CLEARatMSU>) of screencasts demonstrating most apps. There is also a collection of FAQs giving the answers to our most common troubleshooting questions. Visit <http://clear.msu.edu/clear/resources/rich-internet-applications/> to get started!

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## 2015 Summer Workshops

This year marks CLEAR's nineteenth year of offering summer professional development workshops! Teachers of all levels and languages have come to Michigan State University's campus for these informative, hands-on courses. Visit our website for more information about the workshops, discounts, and registration. We hope to see you in July!

### **Reading and Listening in the Language Classroom: Focus on the Interpretive Mode**

**JULY 13-15, 2015**

*Workshop Leader: Julie Foss, Assistant Professor in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages, Saginaw Valley State University*

We will begin by defining interpretive communication and examining the various processes, reader- and text-based factors involved in reading and listening. We will also look at what readers and listeners are able to do and the types of written and spoken texts they are able to interpret at different ACTFL proficiency levels and sublevels. After exploring process-oriented approaches to reading and listening, you will find authentic written and spoken texts and use them to develop activities for your learners. We will also consider how to promote effective reading and listening strategies, as well as using technology to help develop interpretive communication skills.

### **Rich Internet Applications for Language Learning: Introductory Techniques**

**JULY 16-18, 2015**

*Workshop Leader: Angelika Kraemer, Executive Associate Director of the Center for Language Teaching Advancement, MSU*

This workshop is for language teachers who want to learn how to use CLEAR's free tools for creating interactive web-based multimedia language materials. The only computer skills that these tools require are point and click, copy and paste, and drag and drop. You get to concentrate on teaching, and don't have to worry about programming, uploading, downloading, or installing. The tools can be used with any language, any textbook, and at any level. Learn how to make web pages where your students can record audio files that are automatically uploaded to your virtual dropbox. Make a "mashup" that combines your text, pictures, and video into one web page. Create virtual conversations for your students where they listen to questions, and the program captures their responses automatically. All of these functions are available to you from within a web browser, with no special hardware or software needed. Come and experience the next generation of web-based language teaching!

### **The Basics of Assessment: Applying Proficiency-Based Approaches to the Classroom**

**JULY 20-22, 2015**

*Workshop Leader: Margaret Malone, Associate Vice President, World Languages and International Programs, Center for Applied Linguistics and Co-Director, Assessment and Evaluation Language Resource Center*

This workshop will allow language instructors to learn about the basic principles of assessment (reliability, validity, practicality and wash back) and how these principles apply to busy language classrooms. Participants will develop proficiency-based tasks to use with their own students. All participants should bring at least one syllabus and two lesson plans to use in workshop activities.

### **Using Short Stories and Young Adult Literature in Literature Circles to Facilitate Reading**

**JULY 23-25, 2015**

*Workshop Leader: Amy Kroesche, Student Advisor, English Language Center, MSU*

This workshop is for language teachers who want to learn to utilize short stories and Young Adult (YA) literature in the second language classroom. You will develop an understanding of how and why short stories and YA literature can and should be incorporated into second language reading contexts, especially through using literature circles. You will also receive hands-on training on how to select appropriate reading materials, incorporate relevant activities, and evaluate their effectiveness. This workshop is designed specifically for ESL or EFL teachers. Though FL teachers are welcome to attend the workshop and apply the principles to their own target language context, the materials used and examples given will be from an ESL context.

Learn more about all of these workshops and find information about accommodations, costs, and discount plans by visiting our website. Go to <http://clear.msu.edu> and click on "Professional Development" to apply online.

**Early application deadline: May 8, 2015**

**Regular application deadline: June 1, 2015**

## WELCOME TO NEW LRCS!

Four new Language Resource Centers were created last fall at the beginning of the 2014-18 grant cycle. CLEAR welcomes its four new sister centers and looks forward to collaborating on joint ventures both with them and with the other continuing centers.

### THE FOUR NEW CENTERS ARE:

**Assessment and Evaluation Language Resource Center (AELRC)**, a consortium of Georgetown University and the Center for Applied Linguistics

**Center for Integrated Language Communities (CILC)** at City University of New York - CUNY

**Center for Urban Language Teaching and Research (CULTR)** at Georgia State University

**National Resource Center for Asian Languages (NRCAL)** at California State University - Fullerton

You can access information about materials and professional development opportunities from all sixteen LRCs at the common **LRC Portal**, <http://www.nflrc.org>.



## DID YOU KNOW...

- That CLEAR celebrates 19 years of service to language education this year?
- That our sixth funding cycle includes half a dozen brand-new initiatives, as well as continued work on some of our key projects from past cycles?
- That CLEAR personnel have given almost 400 professional development workshops in nineteen years?
- That over 41,000 foreign language professionals are using CLEAR's Rich Internet Applications, and more are signing up at a rate of over 400 new accounts every month? This collection of twelve free RIAs includes:
  - An audio dropbox tool (the most popular RIA, with over 1.3 million recordings so far!)
  - An application for simulated conversations, with over a million student recordings logged
  - A process writing application
  - A game-creation tool
  - A video repository
  - A podcasting tool
  - A character formation tool
  - . . . and more!
- That CLEAR co-sponsors the respected peer-reviewed online journal *Language Learning & Technology* (LLT), which since 2007 has ranked in the top 20 Linguistics journals and in the top 20 Education journals in the Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports?
- That CLEAR-funded research has resulted in over 650 journal articles, presentations, and books by our affiliated faculty?
- That almost all of our teaching materials and products are free?



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