Flipping Music Bibliography

Presented at the National meeting of the
Music Library Association, Orlando, Florida
February 23, 2017

Carl Rahkonen
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Starting in 1987, I taught a graduate “Bibliography of Music” course at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I taught it approximately once a year and had anywhere from one student, taking it as individualized instruction, to a high of fourteen. The average was somewhere between eight and ten students. It was a required course for the Master’s degree in music and was intended to be the first course that they took, but in reality many students took it as their last course, one last hurdle to get done before they got their degree. The purpose of the course was to develop skills for graduate-level music research.

Challenges of teaching the Born Digital generation

The current generation and all future generations of students will be “born digital” and will never know a time when there weren’t digital devices. Just because they were “born digital” does not mean that they are informationally literate. The world they know is the one found on their smartphones. Their information needs are met by the internet, especially with mobile devices, but they may not know how to find sources of reliable information. They may have a hard time knowing what they are looking at on the web and even a harder time assessing the quality of the information they find. They generally don’t care about the ultimate sources of the information, as long as they find something. They have an expectation of instantaneous information gratification.

For all these reasons, they resist finding and using books and may only have a vague concept of scholarly authority. They may not be aware of the value of journal articles, or even know what an academic journal is, so they resist using catalogs and indexes (databases). Their general attitude is, “Why do I need to look in several places?” They prefer using “discovery searches” even if such searches do not yield the best results. Many have done a lot of their academic course work online, so they do not relate to a lecture model of teaching. The library exists primarily as a place to meet friends and study.

Why I needed to try something different

Many of my music bibliography students had little experience with basic bibliographical skills, such as proper citation, searching catalogs and indexes, using reference books, and creating an annotated bibliography. Their final projects, an annotated bibliography on a topic of their own
choice, kept declining in quality over the years. I didn’t understand how my students were thinking about bibliography. There needed to be a sea-change in the way I taught that course, so I decided to try “flipping” it, where the students would study the course materials outside of class and complete practical assignments during class with my guidance.

**Online vs. Blended vs. Flipped.**

I had used Moodle for many years, but only as place to store course materials for later study. I resisted the idea of teaching music bibliography as an online course since much of the work needed to be done in the music library. My objective was to get my students to “open a book.” If you are already teaching your courses online, you have significant experience needed to teach a flipped class. In a blended class, you teach face-to-face, and also have them do work online, sometimes in lieu of class. The flipped class reverses the positions of lecture and assignments.

**The before and after of flipping Music Bibliography**

I was a very traditional teacher, and my course was based on the model of the three separate music bibliography courses I took during my graduate studies. I would lecture on a given topic, using an overhead projector with the outline of that topic. I was an early adopter of PowerPoint, transferring the information from my overhead slides. I would give assignments every week (or every day in the summer intensive session), which were designed to help the students apply what they had learned in the lecture. Then I gave a midterm and final exam on the content.

In the flipped model, the students would study the PowerPoints before class, then take a quiz on each topic. We would do the assignments together in class. The exams were done online. I also added a weekly (or daily) research journal. Only the Final Project, the annotated bibliography, remained essentially the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where I was (traditional):</th>
<th>Where I went (flipped):</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>Students study lecture materials before class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments done outside of class as “homework”</td>
<td>Quizzes on lecture material</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exams on paper in class (using anything found in the library)</td>
<td>Assignments done in class with the help of the teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project (annotated bibliography)</td>
<td>Exams online (using anything found on the web)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research journals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Final Project (annotated bibliography)</td>
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In the past I had my students put away their electronic devices during class, knowing that they would be more focused on the cyber-world than what was going on in class. After flipping, I *required* them to bring their devices to class. A few did not have access to their own devices, so I provided them laptops from the library. The goal was to integrate the technology with which the students were already familiar and use it to our advantage in the classroom.
One example of how this worked was when we covered the Sachs-von Hornbostel system of music instrument classification, as part of a unit on musical instrument dictionaries and to understand taxonomies. As I was showing various instruments to have them give the proper classifications, half the class had looked up the Wikipedia article and they were giving the classification numbers in real time!

I used the flipped model three times: in the summer of 2015 as an intensive two-week session four hours a day, in the spring of 2016 as a regular fifteen-week full semester course with one three-hour session every week, and as an independent study in the fall of 2016. It was a qualitatively different experience in each of these teaching situations, so I had to adjust the course accordingly, but the things I learned from flipping the course remained the same.

**Tweaking the Model**

I wanted to motivate my students to study the material in advance, so I had them log onto D2L and take a short quiz on each topic at the beginning of class. I found this to be an effective tool to motivate study, and to get the discussion rolling. We did the assignments in class, which were geared mostly to adding citations to the Final Project bibliography. I had them do a formal update of their final project every week, which I would correct. Then I had them also do an informal research journal, so I could find out how they were thinking about their research.

They had a hard time telling the difference between the formal bibliography, which had to be right, and the informal “stream of consciousness” research journal. I explained that the journal was like practicing and the Final Project update was like the recital.

**How the Syllabus Changed**

Structurally, the syllabus remained more or less the same, the same topics in the same order. Only the *execution* of the work was flipped, doing things online which were previously done in class and then doing in class that which were previously done at home.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Before:</strong></th>
<th><strong>After:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Topics</td>
<td>• Topics (in the same order)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assignments (homework)</td>
<td>• Online Quizzes in class</td>
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<td>• Classroom participation</td>
<td>• Assignments done in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Midterm Exam</td>
<td>• Online Midterm</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Final Exam</td>
<td>• Online Final Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Final Project (annotated bibliography)</td>
<td>• Final Project (annotated bibliography)</td>
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**Set up for a flipped class**

It would be very difficult to teach a flipped class without a good Content Management System. I learned how to use D2L literally two weeks before teaching the flipped course for the first time.
Everything had to be in place in advance. You must truly have faith that your students will actually study the materials in advance for the flipped model to be a success, though I added some extra motivation with the topical quizzes.

Some basic assumptions shattered

I originally believed my students wouldn’t learn sufficiently from just my PowerPoints, which were basically my lecture notes. I assumed that the live teacher gave the greatest “value added” to a lecture. Boy was I wrong! I was truly shocked at how much they did get from just my PowerPoints. They were prepared to interact in class. I did have to tweak some of my slides with additional information I wanted them to know. The slides were even more effective than a textbook since they would rather learn from an outline than to read dense prose.

Also, I believed that if I gave them everything at once, they would “cheat” on exams and assignments. Instead of that, the fact was that this model brought incredible transparency to the teaching process! It is very hard to hide ignorance in a flipped environment. One of my better students had to admit at one point that he had never checked out a book as an undergraduate and didn’t really know how. I also learned to overcome my prejudices and come to terms with the way my students were thinking about research, and I adjusted accordingly. This developed far greater trust between me and my students.

What is it like to teach a flipped class?

What is it like to teach a flipped class? The answer is “messy.” If you are very linear and organized, as I am, it will feel uncomfortable. The classroom sessions are quite “free form” and could take almost any direction; they are non-linear. You must be flexible in teaching topics as they arise during their practical application. You must be willing to give up some control of the classroom; the students become active participants and teach themselves, and you! You must monitor the D2L course site constantly and give frequent online feedback.

As my dissertation advisor taught me, “Your best students will learn, in spite of your mistakes.”

–Dr. Ronald R. Smith

Example from the Copyright class session

Here is an example from the Copyright class session. I used the white board to write principles as they came up in discussion of copyright case studies. You can see that it is all over the map. They used their smartphones to photograph the board at the end of class and shared this image with me.
Teaching flipped

The way I taught also got flipped. As an example, for years I taught music subject headings from the red *Library of Congress Subject Headings* volumes, and how they were organized there. In the flipped class, I had them go to an online catalog to find subject headings in catalog records. That way they learned how subject headings *function* in an online environment. For example, they found the subject heading for *music education*, and discovered a link for *Music – Instruction and Study*. Clicking on that link brings additional books on music education.

Course Assessment flipped

With the flipped course, the way I did assessment changed. It became far more skills based, rather than fact based. It became less about what they knew, and more about what they could do. My thinking about the purpose of quizzes and exams changed *radically*. Previously I had used these as assessment tools, to measure a student’s success in the course. My thinking slowly evolved from very formal exams, on paper, taken with a time limit in class, to having them take these online, eventually with fewer time limitations. Bottom line was that quizzes and exams become more learning exercises and less assessment tools. The following chart shows the before and after on course assessment.
Exam questions flipped

My exam questions also became flipped, becoming more skills based and less fact based. Just asking for a list of facts made it too easy to Google the answers and that really didn’t measure a student’s abilities and their thought processes about practical problems. I had to rewrite many of my exam questions in a way that it would be impossible to “cheat,” and it would take genuine understanding and skill to answer. I worried that my foreign students, struggling with language problems would find these questions too difficult, but they actually did just as well with these questions as with the purely factual questions. Here are a couple of examples:

Advantages to flipping

Perhaps the greatest advantage was that I became much better engaged with my students, I learned their points of view, and was better able to assist them to become informationally literate. It was as much a learning experience for me as for my students. There was much greater transparency in the experience, building trust between teacher and student. The students received better and more immediate feedback and as a result did better work. Learning became less fact oriented and more skills oriented, geared more towards practical reality.

Disadvantages to flipping

It is not for the “faint of heart.” It takes a great deal more work on the teacher’s part, especially initially. Students with learning disabilities and those with language difficulties will find it harder to learn with this model. It is not something that will work for every subject. It is better for skills-based subjects, rather than concept-based subjects. It is not for every kind of student. It worked well for me because I was teaching a small class of highly motivated graduate students.
My next challenge will be to revise the entire course, examining the topics covered, which deal mostly with paper-based materials, and cover topics relevant to doing music research in the digital world. Flipping my course provided a better way towards fulfilling the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, and this framework may serve as a guide that can take Music Bibliography into the 21st century.