**Using Flipgrid to practise teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic: A brief review from a teaching practice coordinator’s perspective**

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**Abstract**

Over the past 18 months, teaching practice in education faculties has taken different forms. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced teaching practice coordinators to revisit original teaching practice models and approaches. The purpose of this article is to review the effectiveness of Flipgrid for teaching practice from the perspective of the teaching practice coordinator at a South African university. This social learning video platform was successfully integrated into the third year teaching practice module and the tool did provide the opportunity for student teachers to practise their teaching. One of the greatest strengths of this platform from a teaching practice coordinator’s perspective is its ability to store and retain lesson presentations and feedback. Due to the time limit on the Flipgrid platform it is recommended that multiple video submissions are used to represent one lesson being broken up into different segments.

**Introduction**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, South African universities have, similarly to other universities worldwide, been faced with the transition from face-to-face classes to online teaching (Carrillo & Flores 2020; Hojeij & Baroudi 2021; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison 2020). This sudden change in pedagogy required improvising and innovation in the teaching practice landscape. With the closure of schools and/or the prohibition of visitors in schools it meant that pre-service student teachers were unable to gain access to the usual teaching practice school visitations. South African universities, including Sol Plaatje University, were forced to propose and implement alternative ways for student teachers to practise their teaching. This resulted in programme coordinators scrambling for solutions and alternatives so that university programmes can progress with minimal interruptions and without negatively impacting the throughput rate of the education faculty. After using Flipgrid as an online platform for third year pre-service student teachers to demonstrate teaching methods and capabilities over a period of three weeks, this article aims to provide a brief overview of the effectiveness of using Flipgrid for teaching practice from the perspective of the teaching practice coordinator at Sol Plaatje University.

**Flipgrid as social learning video platform**

Flipgrid ([www.flipgrid.com](http://www.flipgrid.com)) is a free and user-friendly video discussion platform which facilitates collaborative and social learning between students (Stoszkowski, 2018). Taylor & Hinchman (2020) define Flipgrid as “a valuable experiential learning tool” which “enables educators to engage students in a variety of learning and assessment activities” (p. 26). Flipgrid can be accessed via a webbased browser on a computer or via the mobile application (Stoszkowski, Hodgkinson & Collins 2021). According to McClure & McAndrews (2016), the original 90 seconds or less Flipgrid responses were used to provide students with the opportunity to critique articles, to reflect and to demonstrate understanding of course content. Now, Flipgrid allows video responses up to 10 minutes which poses new opportunities for course engagement. Taylor & Hinchman (2020) point out that Flipgrid can be utilised, amongst others, as a group discussion or assessment tool.

Flipgrid utilises grids and topics. A grid is created for a course and houses the topics (discussions) (Green & Green, 2018). By entering a ‘join code’ or by clicking on a custom link, students are able to upload their discussion videos on a specific topic. When a video is uploaded, others (those who have access to the code or link) can view the videos and make comments (public or private). The videos are managed in the ‘educator dashboard’ by the educator or course coordinator. This feature gives course coordinators the opportunity to respond to students’ work by providing constructive formative feedback. Flipgrid has many more strengths (and weaknesses), as summarised by Stoszkowski (2018).

**Reviewing the implementation of Flipgrid into teaching practice**

The unforeseen circumstances that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic forced teaching practice coordinators to revise their operations and to think in a renewed manner. In ???desperation, the search for teaching practice alternatives started. These challenging circumstances provided opportunity for teaching practice coordinators from Sol Plaatje University to question, test and evaluate a variety of online platforms. In 2021, Flipgrid, as an alternative platform, was implemented to provide pre-service student teachers from Sol Plaatjie University the opportunity to share their voice and to practise their teaching during this time of crisis.

Flipgrid was integrated into teaching practice of Year 3 at Sol Plaatje University. The university is one of the youngest and smallest universities in South Africa which means that the university’s operationality in terms of staffing, support and facilities are different to established universities. It was unclear whether Flipgrid could be successfully used to fulfil the purpose of virtual teaching and/or replace physical school visits at this particular university. However, it soon became evident that the Flipgrid platform would provide the pre-service student teachers with the opportunity to practise their teaching as they recorded and viewed their lesson presentations. By practising and applying specific teaching strategies and methods, they were able to share the videos they felt satisfied with, with their peers and lecturers. The utilisation of FlipGrid provided the opportunity for the presenters, their peers and education lecturers to observe the presenters ‘in action’ for the first time. After students had shared their lesson videos and lesson plans on Flipgrid, it was distributed to the respective specialisation lecturers for evaluation and feedback. Based on over 3700 video submissions by 322 third year pre-service student teachers, the author, as the teaching practice coordinator who provided support to students, would like to share a few of her experiences. From a teaching practice coordinator perspective, these experiences were both positive and negative.

***Unfamiliarity***

Most students were unfamiliar with Flipgrid. At first it was evident that this unfamiliarity caused worry, anxiety and frustration amongst some students. This was apparent in distressing emails and phone calls seeking support and guidance. In some cases, the size of a video was problematic while in other cases the students experienced challenges with uploading. It was clear that students started to feel more comfortable with using FlipGrid after the first week because the number of enquiries for technical support started to reduce significantly. This can be an indication that the introduction of an online platform, such as Flipgrid, can be intimidating at first because of its unfamiliarity but exposure to and experimentation with the platform can assist greatly.

***Connectivity***

One major cause of students’ anxiety was poor and/or unstable internet connection. As a means to reduce COVID-19 transmissions, the majority of the third year student teachers were requested not to return to campus and/or campus residences but to rather stay at home. This meant that not all third year student teachers had access to the high-speed fibre internet that is available on campus. Despite the university supplying internet data to all the students, this challenge persisted. It resulted in the stalling and stopping of video uploads on the Flipgrid platform. The majority of students (approximately 80%) at Sol Plaatje University are from the Northern Cape Province. In terms of surface area, the Northern Cape Province is the largest, but also the least densely populated, province in South Africa. This means that internet access and connectivity in some remote parts of the province tend to be poor and restrictive. Poor connectivity can make students in small and/or remote towns or villages feel excluded and helpless.

***Socio-economic factors***

The utilisation of Flipgrid requires a device with a functional camera such as a laptop, mobile or tablet. In some cases, students had to borrow devices from family members, neighbours or community members in order to record their lesson presentations. While it is easy to assume that most, if not all, students have access to smart devices in this day and age, it is not the case.

Also, before Flipgrid introduced the backdrop option (launched in August 2021), students had to record their videos in their rooms or personal spaces. This meant that the video backgrounds were clearly visible. With the viewing of the videos it became clear that background noises such as a baby crying, slamming doors or crowing roosters seem to make some students feel self-conscious. These factors can potentially have ethical implications and make students feel less comfortable in the recording and sharing of their lesson presentations.

***Innovation***

When creating and uploading videos, some students demonstrated innovation and creativity. Without providing guidance on how to edit videos, some students edited their videos using editing software such as Inshot Video Maker, VivaVideo and Panopto. By editing their videos, some students’ lesson presentations were more interactive because they utilised functionalities such as screen recording and stickers. By editing their lesson videos, they reduced the size of their videos which eased upload. This shows that some students have the ability to improvise and solve technological challenges themselves.

***Storage and record keeping***

The fact that Flipgrid allows unlimited uploads means that ample storage is available. This is a very useful feature because the student teachers’ video submissions and the feedback provided by lecturers remain on Flipgrid and can easily be accessed via the educator’s dashboard. This is important for moderation and auditing purposes.

**How to effectively utilise Flipgrid for teaching practice: Lessons learnt**

Despite all the challenges, the utilisation of Flipgrid for teaching practice was relatively successful. As the teaching practice coordinator responsible for the drive and implementation of this initiative and student support, the author makes the following recommendations which might increase the effectiveness of Flipgrid for teaching practice:

Firstly, to effectively demonstrate complete lesson presentations, multiple video submissions might be necessary. The current 10 minute video length restriction might not be sufficient for student teachers to showcase their teaching competencies and for lecturers to make reliable assessments. Breaking the lesson up into multiple videos, for example, part 1 (introduction/stimulus), part 2 (body) and part 3 (conclusion/storage) works well.

Secondly, before students submit their videos, they are provided with the opportunity to name their video and to add more details. Flipgrid has a nametag option which can assist to organise video submissions for large groups of students. Similarly, by pasting a link to their lesson plan (example: OneDrive, Google Drive, etc.) into the ‘link’ field before submission means that the student’s video presentation and lesson plan will be located in one place which increases accessibility and streamlines assessment.

Thirdly, with large student groups and multiple video submissions per student, it is important to carefully consider the naming of topics within a particular grid. While according to subject area might be considered as logical, it depends on staffing capacity within an education faculty. Fortunately, the moving of videos from one grid to another can be done by the educators.

Fourthly, the deactivation and removal of the rubric functionality in August 2021 can impact the summative assessment of lesson presentations for teaching practice. Teaching practice coordinators will have to propose alternatives to grade students’ work on Flipgrid.

Lastly, teaching practice coordinators should not rely too heavily on the exported csv data file. While the file is useful for record purposes and has a summary of the submission made, the file format and the layout are not user-friendly. Accessing videos and analysing video submission data using this file are time-consuming. Details regarding a specific video submission can be retrieved easier directly from an individual’s video.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this brief review was to focus on the effectiveness and practicality of Flipgrid as a social learning platform. It was found that Flipgrid can be used by university education faculties so that pre-service student teachers can practise their teaching competencies. The successful implementation of Flipgrid into teaching practice is largely dependent on internet connectivity and the support made available to students. The perspectives shared in this review article are based on the experiences of the teaching practice coordinator and not those of the students.

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