THE USES OF FLIPPING
David Ridley, Lecturer in Humanities, CU GTA and PhD in Sociology, Uni of Bham
In actuality the Luddites *wanted* new technology to help relieve back-straining work; what they didn't want was to lose control over the work process by allowing the proposed new technology and factory techniques to centralise control in the hands of factory managers. Their exclusion from the planning process ensured that technology would be employed to further their exploitation, not to enhance their working conditions.

- Maxwell, 2003, p. 77
Technologies are not ‘neutral’, they are always used for the achievement of particular ends or in order to solve problems (John Dewey)

Aim of this talk is to increase awareness of academics regarding uses of ‘flipping’ not primarily concerned with learning:
  - As a time and labour saving tool for over-worked and stressed academics
  - As a money saving tool for universities put under pressure by new market forces

In this talk, I will outline these uses and the problems associated with each

I will conclude that ‘flipping’ does not present an easy solution to the structural problems preventing quality teaching. When we are considering ‘flipping’, and other learning technologies, we need to be focused on whether or not it improves the learning/teaching experience for teachers and students.

In order to make sure this is the case, teachers and students need to be involved in discussion and decision making regarding not just the implementation of technology, but the ends/purposes of higher education in general.

Argument
USE OF FLIPPING #1
A TIME/LABOUR SAVING TOOL
Might not know this, but original 2 versions of ‘flipping’:

- **Ordinary flipping** (my name for 1st version)
  - Lectures replaced by videos
  - Class time used for practice, Q&A and/or discussion
  - Time-saving tool for academics

- **Flipped Mastery** (2nd version)
  - Complex differentiation of learning to suit individual needs/abilities
  - Endless proliferation of worksheets, online materials
  - ‘Flipping’ no longer about time-saving, much more difficult and demanding on academics
Bergmann and Sams: ‘Flip Your Classroom!’ (2012)

- **Important point: ‘ordinary flipping’ didn’t work!**
  - Improvement in test results, but...
  - In a conversational setting, students couldn’t explain meaning of key concepts
  - ‘...they had learned just for the test, instead of really learning the essential concepts' (Bergmann and Sams, 2012, p. 9)

- **Nevertheless, ‘ordinary flipping’ very popular**
  - ‘This is reproducible, scalable, customizable, and easy for teachers to wrap their minds around’ (p. 7)
  - Bergmann and Sams are happy to ride the wave of popularity!
Why doesn’t ‘ordinary flipping’ work?

- HE ‘best practice’ theories of teaching and learning
    - Basis of HEA PgCert courses and HE professional standards (QAA)
  - ‘Surface’ approaches (encouraged by ‘flipping’)
    - Videos just another form of ‘transmission’
    - Students focus on task completion
    - ‘Disastrous’: Students don’t understand what they are learning, and in most cases forget the content anyway after the goal has been achieved.
    - Results in feelings of resentment, depression and anxiety
  - ‘Deep’ approaches
    - ‘Change in conception of reality’ (Ramsden)
    - Challenge and involve students, maximum participation needed
    - Give rise to feelings of pleasure, personal fulfilment and a general sense of achievement
USE OF FLIPPING #2
A MONEY SAVING TOOL
The Structural Transformation of HE in UK

- Reform: Privatisation and Marketisation
  - **Privatisation**: replacing UK Gov teaching grants with £9000 student fees
  - **Marketisation**: introducing ‘new providers’ into the sector, ‘to drive up quality’
  - Result: universities driven towards ‘efficiencies’ and surplus accumulation

- How do you squeeze more productivity out of academics?
  - Short-term: freeze pay-rises, increase work-loads, micro-manage
  - Long-term: create a 2-tier structure of research and teaching
    - **Centre**: Small number of research intensive, well-paid academics on secure contracts spending as little time as possible producing content and concentrating mostly on grant-capture
    - **Periphery**: Large numbers of de-professionalised ‘tutors’ on insecure contracts with diminished conditions ‘facilitating’ pre-packaged learning much like burger-flippers or Costa baristas

- **Flipping used as a management technology, like assembly line in Fordism**
But...

  - Concern with teaching ‘quality’
  - Will not be achieved ‘without parity of status between research and teaching careers’ (p. 32)
  - Will not be 'achieved easily or without focus, time, challenge and change' (p. 21)
  - Government must ensure that graduates actually learn something for national economic and social needs, also reputation of UK HE sector as global ‘export’

- Arguably a self-created problem, due to privatisation/marketisation:
  - If we look at USA, since 1970s (40+ years of marketisation):
    - ‘According to their analysis of more than 2,300 undergraduates at twenty-four institutions, 45 percent of these students demonstrate no significant improvement in a range of skills—including critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing—during their first two years of college...[This is] the expected result of...an institutional culture that puts undergraduate learning close to the bottom of the priority list.’ (Arum and Roska, 2010)
Contradiction

- If ‘ordinary flipping’ is used as a management technology:
  -Universities will be in direct contradiction with UK government, which will have consequences for ability to raise fee-caps if TEF is introduced
  -Two-tier rationalisation of production would exacerbate problem of split between research and teaching.

- Contradiction can be used by academics
  -To open up question of what ‘quality’ is
  -To defend our professionalism, especially that of casualised teachers
  -To question the privatisation and marketisation of higher education
USE OF FLIPPING #2
IMPROVING LEARNING
What is good about ‘flipping’?

- **Encourages academics to focus on ‘small group teaching’**
- ‘Small group teaching’ according to ‘best practice’ theorists
  - Encourages a 'deep' approach
  - Creates an exciting, challenging, dynamic and participative context for learning
  - *Students really like it.* Early-career academics often build best relations with students
  - Very difficult, requiring a high level of skill, an open mind, wide background knowledge, social awareness, and the ability to lead without dominating.
- **But...** *Casualisation: most small group teaching done by insecure staff*
  - New UCU report: ‘49% of all academic teaching staff are on insecure contracts’ (2016, p. 1)
  - Often overworked, not paid for extra, feel need to prove themselves
  - Can’t plan for the future, work not recognised in terms of participation in decision-making processes, pay and progression.
  - Some HPLs 5+ years, often leads to stress and depression
There is no simple solution to issues of ‘quality’

- Small-group teaching is undermined by:
  - Excessive workloads, academics have no time to adequately focus on teaching
  - Casualisation, we are not investing in and respecting small group teachers
  - Excessive class sizes (need to bring more student money in), encourages lectures
  - Short-term solutions like ‘flipping’, attractive as a time-saving tool

- Small-group teaching requires investment:
  - In professionalism: respecting and listening to good teachers
  - In staff: employing more teachers, giving precarious teachers secure contracts
  - In teaching-time: reducing class sizes, giving teachers opportunity to spend ‘quality’ time with students
‘Flipping off’ lectures altogether

● In an ideal world, would we use lectures at all?
  ○ We confuse knowledge production and dissemination with teaching
  ○ HE teaching is about guiding/encouraging students towards self-discovery, building autonomous and confident adult learners/problem-solvers
  ○ At undergraduate (and masters?) level, students and teachers can explore the ‘canon’ together, or recreate problems and rediscover solutions
  ○ Works particularly well with Humanities and Social Science courses

● My own experiments with student-led learning
  ○ See Ridley (2015; 2016a; 2016b)
  ○ Exploring philosophy of education in practice: John Dewey, Jacques Rancière
  ○ Come to this if you’d like to hear more...
JACQUES RANCIÈRE
AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY
MAY 20TH, COVENTRY UNI
Remember the Luddites!

- ‘We must put people before machines’ (Avis, 2016, p. 1)
- Need to think about, debate and have control over ‘ends’ of higher education, not just ‘means’ to pre-decided ends:
  - **Profit**: all about delivering products in cheapest, most profitable way. Technologies such as flipping as means to this end at expense of learning
  - **Education**: need to solve problems of overwork, large class sizes, de-professionalisation and casualisation, all resulting from underfunding and marketisation
References


Bergmann, J. and Sams, A. (2012), *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day*. Arlington, ITSE


References


THANKS FOR LISTENING!

CONTACT: ab1955 at coventry.ac.uk