

INNOpod 2: Personalized Learning in a Flipped Classroom

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Tara Maynard and Her Candid Insights on Getting Started With A Flipped Classroom + the Learning Curve, What She Would Do Differently and What She Would Do All Over Again, and What's Next

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Maureen: Today I'm talking with Tara Maynard from the Zeeland Public School District in Zeeland, Michigan, where she has taught eighth grade mathematics at Creekside Middle School for eighteen years in the same classroom. Tara also coaches basketball and volleyball at her school, and in the summer she and her family look forward to visiting Travers, Michigan, where her family owns and operates Moomers, an ice cream shop voted "Best Scoop In America" by Good Morning America in 2008. You can follow Tara on Twitter at @tmaynard5.

Tara, thank you for taking time out of your busy day to talk to us about how you came to understand, implement, and assess the impact of blended learning, specifically using a flipped classroom to make learning more personal for your students. First question. Can you take us back to when you first learned about blended learning, specifically flipping a classroom? Where did you hear about it? What were some of your early questions and impressions?

Tara Maynard: Thanks for having me today. Looking back at when I first heard about it, it was in the year 2011-12 during that school year. A teacher at Zeeland East High School, Tony DiLaura, and I worked together because we both taught high school geometry. I teach that to our advanced eighth graders. He just said, "Hey, I've heard about this. What do you think about it? I'm trying it, you should try it too." I was kind of reluctant at first, but everything he was telling me about in his classroom was amazing, so I ...

The big thing I didn't want to do was send videos home to kids that didn't have internet at home. I wanted to do flipping in a way at first that I made sure the playing field was level. I did it that first year was just a reading. They read out of their textbook that our district has purchased, then in class I did more of a gradual release model of "I do, we do, you do" kind of thing. I dabbled in it then, and then that next summer Tony and another colleague Shawn Wyckoff at the high school, they went to the national Flip conference in Chicago, and they said, "Hey, we really want you to come with us. We've tried this."

I ventured to Chicago that summer and sat with my arms crossed, kind of reluctant at first just for the whole video piece. That scared me. Luckily I had a student teacher in the fall of 2012 that came in, Caitlin [Morett 00:02:37] from Granville State University. We were also getting iPads one-to-one that year with our students, and I just said, "Hey, you've got to take advantage of iPads." She had gone to a pre-service teacher's conference that they have for the local colleges and came back and said, "We've got to flip. I want to do this with video." She kind of ... Between her and Tony I think they both threw me over the cliff in the sense of they just said, "We've got to do it."

We did it, and when she left in December the kids, via survey, said, "We want to continue this," and I continued it. I could do it with iPads and having the videos not require internet, so that was I think the big thing that sold me on the whole video piece. There's many ways around that, but for me I wanted all my kids to have that piece, so it was Tony, it was the national conference that I'd heard about it, and that's kind of how it all started.

Maureen: Eventually were your students able to take their laptops home with them?

Tara Maynard: Yes, they had iPads not laptops. From the beginning they could take them home, so that first fall, the fall of 2012 when Caitlin was here student teaching, with Tony's help from the high school, he taught me how to make iBooks. When you put a video in there it doesn't need internet access, so they could take their iPads home, which they have been able since the beginning of getting those at the middle school level here in Zeeland.

Maureen: Great. Was there a specific need you were looking to address using flipped classroom? Can you share your motivation or goal for using it, and why your colleagues were so intent on bringing you along on the journey?

Tara Maynard: I think the biggest need was I just wanted more student engagement. I was bored myself some days talking up in front of class, and if I was then I can only imagine what those poor kiddos were thinking out there. I wanted students to talk more in class, I wanted students to interact more with each other in class and use each other as experts. With the flipped classroom, through video and reading and explorations, I could get the little bit of math that they needed out of the way outside of the class, then that left our whole in-class structure so that they could talk more, that they could be more engaged, that I could help them more one-on-one. I needed more time with them, and the flipped classroom was a way that I could give them myself outside of class through a video, through reading in their book and then answering a couple questions, so that when they came to me I actually could be with them the entire hour.

That was the main thing that was bothering me about the traditional teaching, was just how sit-and-get. The students weren't engaged as much as I wanted them to be. That was the main reason I started flipping.

Maureen: Do you feel like you're making progress toward that goal, and if so can you describe or quantify what that progress looks like, what we would see happening in your classroom today?

Tara Maynard: That almost instantly changed and was successful, and that's what sold me so quick, is that the second I started doing this ... It took time to teach them how to talk in groups, it took time to teach them how to work as partners and how to critique each other and help find each others' mistakes, but once we got through that piece it looks like a lot of kids talking to each other every day. They sit in groups facing each other, they don't face the front or one wall of the classroom. It looks like partners with body language where they're actually facing each other, and not just one doing while the other one sits there. It looks like students getting up and walking around because the answers are posted in the back of the room, and me running around like a chicken with my head cut off trying to help and answer questions as quickly as I can, and then push. If somebody doesn't have their hand up, I walk by, I ask a question about why that answer is what it is, or, "How did you get that," or, "Tell me about this."

From the outside when you walk in I think that some people would think that it looks a little bit chaotic and it looks a little bit unstructured, and in a way it is, because on a regular day the students have a couple things they need to do. I really don't care what order they do those in. They probably have practice problems, they might have a short activity to do, they might then have a [QuickCheck 00:07:39], which is their first assessment, maybe four to six questions, over that topic. As long as they're practicing and they're getting that [QuickCheck 00:07:49] I don't care what order. Some students that are really confident want to do their [QuickChecks 00:07:53] right away, then I always say, "Well, you got to practice first." They know that now, but some students that get it right away don't have to practice as much.

I did see right away kids talking. In the beginning they weren't as on task, but that's where I've learned more and more, you have to teach them how to talk in groups. We had to model the first four to five weeks of school, "This is how you stay on task. This is what you do. This is how you help redirect a classmate to get back on task." All those things that I wanted to happen honestly have happened, and I know that sounds kind of cliché, but by me sending them home with video, in class we can do so much more together and talk more together about math instead of me being the one that's talking all the time.

Maureen: We can actually see this on the webinar that you also created and shared as part of this.

Tara Maynard: Yes. There are videos linked in that webinar that are short. I think they're less than five minutes. They're from various people that have made videos of my classroom, that you can see kids talking, you can see them working together, you can see me helping small groups. All of that is in that webinar.

Maureen: Have you observed other benefits to this approach that you hadn't thought of or expected?

Tara Maynard: One of the biggest things that ... Actually to me there's two big things. One is that, parents. I did not think that parents would really care either way. Zeeland is a community that has supportive parents. They're very trusting and very supportive of schools and what we're here to do, but I did not think that parents would have so much praise and be so thankful for this change. The number of parents at teacher conferences, or just when you run into them at a basketball game or whatever, that thank me, that say how it has totally changed their kids' attitude on math, has been way more than I ever imagined that it would be. Parents are thankful that they don't have to help with problems, that they can watch the video ...

I've had a couple parents like, "I'm taking geometry again with my kid. We sit down every night so that I can help him." That is huge that I can help the parents in the community as well not be frustrated. That I didn't anticipate being so positive in saying, "Hey, if you ever need me to go on video I'll be more than happy to do that for you. This is the way to go, my kids' confidence is skyrocketing, you helped them so much more one-on-one so when they get stuck you're there to help them, it's not me with them in tears that night." That was one thing that I never expected to be so good.

The other thing that was a lot different than I thought, and again, better, is that borderline student, that student that ... I hate to classify him as a grade, but that student that works hard but maybe gets that D+, D-. It doesn't click very well for them mathematically, but they're trying. That student has had a lot more success in the flipped classroom than what I thought they would. I was hoping that they would do that. I was a little skeptical, but that kid that wants to work can find the time at home to watch that video, and mine are eight minutes or less. Eighth grade, my rule is to myself, "Keep it under eight." They can find time to plug in headphones, sit somewhere quiet in their house, and focus and try to get as much as they can out of that.

Then in class, I can help then one-on-one, which before that kid would never ask questions in class. They were too scared, not enough confidence to do that. Now as I'm walking around, they don't have to raise their hand in front of everybody, they can flag me down because I'm constantly circulating the room. I know those kids now so much better, because I check in with them more. That middle to low kid has an ability to be successful because they have the resources. Instead of just having to listen, they can rewind that video. There's been a ton of them that have said the night before a quiz or test they go back and watch that one video, or they can pause and re-listen. You can't do that in class, and that's something that that middle to low kid has really surprised me with. They have a work ethic, they do so much better in class, mathematically, grade-wise, academically, confidence, all that stuff.

Maureen: Tara, you make a very compelling case for a flipped classroom. I'm speaking to you as both an educator and a parent. We've heard some of the really fantastic aspects of flipped classroom. Can you share challenges of using this approach? For your instruction, for your students' learning and success, what are some of the challenges and what has been critical to your efforts in making adjustments or addressing these challenges?

Tara Maynard: I think the biggest challenge for myself is time. There's not enough of it. The time to plan a unit from start to finish ... Because to me with flipped I really have to have things laid out. I have to have videos done, I have to have my whole notes packet done that they take that, and also they watch a video. I can't, "Oh I'll do that tonight for tomorrow." I have to have all of that up front for the way that I make it work with iBooks. That, time-wise, is a huge challenge for me. Coming up with the different in-class activities ...

Because I've described flipped classroom one way. I think that there are some people that flip the classroom and do it no justice at all because they just have kids working on problems and they lecture on a video. The in-class time needs to be structured differently, and that piece is something that takes a lot of time to do. It takes time to find really good deep problems, because those can't be done in the video. It takes time to make interactive practice things so that kids are more engaged. I don't want to say "filling up" the class time, but it is, with the rich tasks, making sure that the kids are engaged and that they have multiple ways to be engaged, all takes time. That's the biggest challenge for me as a teacher, getting it, setting it up, and keeping it flowing.

The positive is that once you make some of those things, the way that you solve exponent problems isn't going to change, so once I have those I can reuse some of those pieces. I'm lucky that I have another eighth grade math teacher that is on board with me doing this stuff too, so we share a lot of those pieces. "You make this, I make this," and then we share.

For the kids I think the challenge is that it's brand-new for them. I don't spoon feed them like they've been used to. By eighth grade they've had many years of sitting and, "The teacher tells me what to do and I learn how to follow directions, then I just regurgitate what you told me I need to learn. Then I forget it the next day." Kids have to learn how to learn in my class, and that is a challenge for them. For the first four to five weeks, especially the advanced kids, my entire advanced geometry class, any of my higher kids in the eighth grade class, they struggle because they have never had to dig a little bit deeper on their own. That for them is challenging.

I will say though after about six to eight weeks you see some of those light bulbs click on in the sense of how rewarding it is that they have figured it out on their own, that they have problem-solved enough, that they have persevered enough, that they have asked other classmates and not needed me per se in the sake of I'm helping somebody else, "I can go to another classmate and still feel confident." The challenge for students is just a new way of learning, and not just sitting in a seat. When I say, "I don't care which one of those you do," they look at me like, "You don't?" Even that choice of, "I can do part A or part B, you don't care?" "Nope, I don't care." That's new to them, because so many times teacher gives them five steps, and, Those are the five steps you've got to follow in that order, and do it my way." That's a challenge.

The other piece that's a challenge for me and students is, the flipped classroom is not magic pixie dust for the kid that doesn't do anything when they walk outside of your classroom. I still have four to five kids, probably more right now because it's the middle of the winter and they decide to do nothing, that just don't do anything when they leave the classroom. With a flipped classroom when they come in the next day and they haven't watched the video, I make them go off to the side of the room and watch their video right then and there. They still get more out of that, in only having part of the time in class to practice, than they would if I was standing up in front of class. That kid's not going to listen to me instructing in front of class, but that kid will go watch a video, plug in headphones, and sit off to the side and fill in their knowledge, because that's what I've asked them to do, and they still in eighth grade want to follow the rules per se.

They're still getting more out of that, but that's a big challenge. It's not a fix for that kid that has no motivation, that doesn't like to do anything outside of class. I'm still trying to figure out how to get that kid to work and to be engaged, but I have more time with that kid than I would in a traditional classroom.

Maureen:

I think this is a good time to talk about process, because you just shared some really exciting ways this is working, but also some of the challenges that you have had to plan and prepare for. I know we'll go into this deeper in the written materials that we're going to provide with this [InnoPod 00:18:29], but could you briefly share your process for implementing the flipped classroom approach. What did your research preparation/implementation/reflection activities look like?

Tara Maynard: The research, basically I'm thinking, "How do I plan a unit?" If I think, "How do I plan a unit for a flipped classroom?" My research is, "What common core expectations are in that unit, and what standards do I need to meet?" Then the preparation is ... We have common assessments in Zeeland in our middle school math department, so that assessment has to be created first for that unit, and that is done collaboratively with the other eighth grade math teachers. The assessment's created, then I do guided questions. "What are the things that I want for each lesson and for each standard?" We as a department make "I can" statements, and I break those down into more Bloom's taxonomy statements of using "how" and "what", compare and contrast and some of those pieces for each lesson on the chapter.

Once the questions are established, then I create the whole notes packet for the entire unit. Again, that's done collaboratively sometimes. A lot of times I create it and then other teachers will critique and share and help fix that. Once that notes packet is created for the whole unit, that's what I then make my videos out of. That notes packet might be, "Read in your textbook on this page and fill out this vocabulary." Vocabulary is usually something that I don't go over in the video. I have them write down and then I use it in the video. By eighth grade they can look up something and try to get a little prior knowledge on their own.

I make the videos, I then create my iBook, I use iBooks Author, which is a free software on a Mac that will then take everything and put it into an iBook, then I just have the in-class practice. Here's my lesson, what do I want them practicing? They've got to do a couple book problems, or if it's a handout, or what kind of activity do I want to do with it? Is there an exploration that needs to come before they even watch the video? Then I start to get the nitty gritty of all the individual lesson pieces.

Then I say, "Hey, here's your iBook." At the beginning of a chapter, and then they get a notes packet. It's a little packet of paper that they have for an entire unit. We start rolling and we can only hope that my timeline works for that unit. Inevitably it never does, so that's where you take one day and split it into two, and on the fly that night before, "This is what they're struggling with." I come up with those re-teach problems or other review in class that we need. Students, when they're working through that, I have a [inaudible 00:21:38] schedule, which I'm pretty sure this is in the webinar too, that they fill things out on. They're reflecting, "What did I get on that? I only got a forty-two percent, I need to redo that," or, "Hey, I got an eighty-nine, I'm doing well."

I'm reflecting a lot via socrative.com. Socrative.com is a data gathering formative assessment site that I can ask short answer multiple choice. I ask short answer questions a lot, just, "What question do you want answered today, or what are you stuck on?" That helps me know what they're stuck on, and they ask really good questions. That's a whole other huge benefit of the flipped classroom and how my teams work, is they ask questions so much better than they used to. That helps me reflect what they know and what they don't know so that if I need to plan re-teaching, if I need to plan some interventions for small groups, I can then do that. I can call over five kids because they all have the same question and go over that real quick since everybody else is working on something else.

That's kind of the big picture of it. I think I hit most of the big pieces of me planning a whole unit and then delivering it to the kids.

Maureen: Great, and again, our listeners can find more in-depth information in the written documents we'll provide, and also in the webinar if you haven't accessed that yet either.

If you were to give advice to a teacher who is interested in flipping his or her classroom, what would that advice be?

Tara Maynard: You've just got to jump and do it. I know Tony was on me for a good year, like, "Come on, come on," and I was so being the math teacher and being the type A perfectionist, "Everything's got to be really good." I was so hesitant. It's never going to be perfect. It's never going to be absolutely wonderful, just like your normal class. Teaching traditional is not always wonderful, so you just have to do it. Saying that, many people won't just jump in and say, "I'm flipping my classroom, here we go," so I would suggest that ... Normally in a unit, no matter what topic content it is, whether it's math or ELA or social studies, you give mid-unit assessments. If you give a quiz on, let's say a Wednesday, normally that night you don't have homework because you're kind of at a breaking point in that chapter. That is a really good spot to try a flipped lesson and not be so overwhelmed with flipping the whole unit. After you give a quiz, send them home with a reading assignment, send them home, try to make the video, send them home with an exploration where they're making a new drawing after reading about some vocabulary words. Then that in-class part the next day is time for them to practice and process all of that, and you being able to work with small groups. If you're not willing to just say, "I'm going to try this whole unit." I think that finding the day of a shorter assessment is a good one-day, "I can try to flip a lesson." Place to start.

The other thing is, because I put my videos in an iBook I have to have them done at the beginning of the unit. There's a lot of teachers that flip that make the video the day before they need it for their kids because it's all internet accessible. My big thing was that I want them in their iBooks so my couple kids that don't have internet, we don't have to deal with. There's so many ways to do it, so you can make your videos throughout the unit, it's not like you have to do it at the beginning. You can use an "explain everything" app on an iPad, you can use different software to capture your screen depending on how you make that, and have it for them. "Here's the link," however you give your students things online. Here's a link that they can then access.

One of our teachers makes her videos and then they can save them into their Google Drive on their iPads, and they can make them available offline, which helps with the whole internet piece. You don't have to do them all, but even just trying one or two really helps. I say the video piece, but the in-class part is honestly almost more important, that that day is then structured very differently than just kids practicing that content, that you have a couple different activities, or that there's one really hard problem that they're going to struggle on, but that's okay because they don't struggle enough. They need to learn how to do that.

That in-class has to be structured so that there's more engagement, that there's more kid communication, there's less of you as a teacher talking as you try that flipped lesson.

Maureen: Has this approach ... I guess the question is, how has this approach shifted the focus of your instructional planning meetings with other teachers?

Tara Maynard: It has ... So many of our meetings are over our assessments because we don't get to meet that often. That's the one thing that we need in common. A lot of times we talk about that assessment, and upon occasion we get to talk about the assessment we just gave, to then realize what we're not doing well. That's when I can bring up, "I did this and I did this," and I talk about activities or different review things that I've done in class, and teacher's ears perk up like, "Oh that sounds fun. I bet the kids liked that."

I'm a very sharing person, anything you see in the webinar, if it's not linked right and you need something, email me and I'll give it to you. I give that to a lot of eighth grade teachers, so they are starting to ask more questions about, "How does that work?" Right now because we do not have a lot of department time together for instructional planning, it's more me sharing and me pushing that on when we're trying to critique our assessments and say, "Hey, maybe you guys can try to practice it this way if you have time," kind of thing, if that makes sense.

Maureen: Working on assessments is a huge advantage, and it's great that you all have the time to work on building those together as well.

How have you used blended learning to ensure that technology and data enhance relationships rather than substitute for them? We hear a lot of concerns about the replacement of technology in the classroom, but it sounds in what you've described and what we've observed that the opposite is happening, that it's only enhanced your interactions with students. Can you elaborate a little bit on that, and why the teacher is so important to blended learning in the flipped classroom?

Tara Maynard: Yes. The technology has allowed me to be available outside of the classroom for my students. Some people use other teachers' videos for flipped. I don't. When I survey my kids, they want to listen to me, they don't want to listen to somebody else. Because we have iPads, I can create something that they have outside of class that when they get to class, they can work and have me physically present with them, face-to-face, every single day. If you take me out of that, even if I made the videos, they still don't have anybody to help them when they're practicing. The tech piece allows that to be delivered outside, but then I also use technology in the classroom for investigations using decimals.com or GeoGebra, which is a geometry website. That lets them see the why and the how some of the math stuff works. That really enhances what they understand and what they talk about in the middle of class.

I use Socrative for getting information out of them. Again, if nobody's there to ask them what they don't know, then they're not gaining anything. I'm asking them all the time, "What are you struggling with? What part of this don't you understand?" They're telling me, so then I as a teacher, right there right now, can help them. It's not waiting for that quiz to be handed back physically. I gather data from them to change what I'm doing right now or to call over small groups.

Because I talk to them more, I know them better mathematically. The tech has opened the door for me to have more face-to-face conversations with them, and I can predict pretty well how kids are going to do on assessments. I know so-and-so and so-and-so, they're not going to do well, they're not ready to take it. I wish that I could structure my class with more time so that kids could ... I don't like that every assessment, we're on this timeline. That's one of my next big things is, "How can I let one person have another week without letting all thirty-one of them go in every different direction?" That I can't manage in my head yet.

I know them, I know the mistakes that so-and-so and so-and-so makes. I know this one keeps messing up on negative signs. A computer's not going to do that, a computer's just going to mark it wrong. I see their work, I talk to them, I hear them verbally stepping through problems so that I can correct that, "No, that's not addition, you want to choose subtraction here." I can hear those pieces. Again, because they've done a little bit outside of class, now I get to work with them in class.

Maureen: Our last question for you this morning, Tara. What's next for you in continuing to improve your practice and personalize learning for your students?

Tara Maynard: My big group is that struggling kid that doesn't understand math, that two plus two does not equal four, and when you throw negative signs in front of it, it's a disaster. How do I reach that student? Also that student that doesn't like to do things outside of class. I know right now I've got a couple special ed students that are really struggling, and part of it is they don't do anything outside of class, which is frustrating, but what can I do a little bit different in class with a small group? I don't want to take away from my other twenty-seven, twenty-eight that are working to [inaudible 00:32:45].

How can I hold them more accountable for some of the in-class is another struggle that I have. When I say, "Here are your practice problems, I want you to do this card sort activity." I don't grade them on that kind of stuff. They grade themselves with answer keys that are up. I don't have this master checklist of, "You've got to have all this done." They record it on their schedule. I check their schedules at the end, but it's not a grade. That whole in class holding them accountable piece is something that I'm continually trying to improve and think about and restructure and change. I think the most struggling kid, if they're not ready to take that assessment, how do I give them more time, yet the constraints of my day and my school year are such that I can't, but I can, but I can't. How do I hold kids more accountable for the in-class practice? Those are the two things that are not where I want them to be that I need to get better at.

Maureen: Tara, thank you so much for your time and your candid, honest conversation with us this morning. I know that people listening will have many more questions for you. You can find Tara, again, on Twitter @tmaynard5, and you can also access her website at tara-maynard.weebly.com. Tara, again I want to thank you, and we look forward to hearing much more from you on your personalized learning endeavors.

Tara Maynard: Thank you very much for having me. It was fun to talk about the goods and the bads of all this stuff.

Maureen: Thank you again.

