

TechMatters: Managing a Flipped Classroom without Flipping Out: ClassroomQ

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Over the past decade, the “flipped classroom” approach to instruction has become a fairly common pedagogical choice throughout the educational community, including for those of us engaged in teaching information literacy. With this model, the goal is to deliver the “lecture” portion of a class prior to the classroom session using methods such as assigned readings, presentation slides, podcasts, and videos, thereby freeing up classroom time for students to engage in active learning and problem solving activities designed to support and augment that prior learning with the instructor adopting the role of a coach or mentor guiding student learning.

Ideally this methodology results in a dynamic learning environment with students working together to apply knowledge and instructors guiding students when they get stuck and providing targeted instruction to individuals and groups. In reality, however, supporting students within a flipped classroom can be challenging for instructors. The larger the number of students, the harder it is to effectively work with individuals and ensure that everyone is getting the help they need. Fortunately, I’ve discovered a simple, but really useful tool designed to help instructors provide more efficient and effective assistance to students in the physical classroom.

What is ClassroomQ?

<https://classroomq.com/>

Developed by teachers (Kyle Niemis and Dan Martinho), ClassroomQ was designed “to create a classroom in which students can easily ask for help without stifling the flow of a lesson.” Basically, it is a digital “hand-raising” tool that allows student to claim a “spot in line” to consult face-to-face with their instructor during a class.

Getting Started

To get started, instructors need to first sign-up for an account by selecting “Register” from the “TEACHERS” drop-down menu. You will be prompted to select the type of account you want to create: Basic or Pro. The Basic account is free, but your question queue will be limited to a maximum of five students at a time. The fee-based Pro account provides you with an unlimited queue along with a few additional features, including the ability to see how many times each student has entered the queue and download data from each session. To create a free account, all that you need to provide is a username, password, and email address.

How it Works

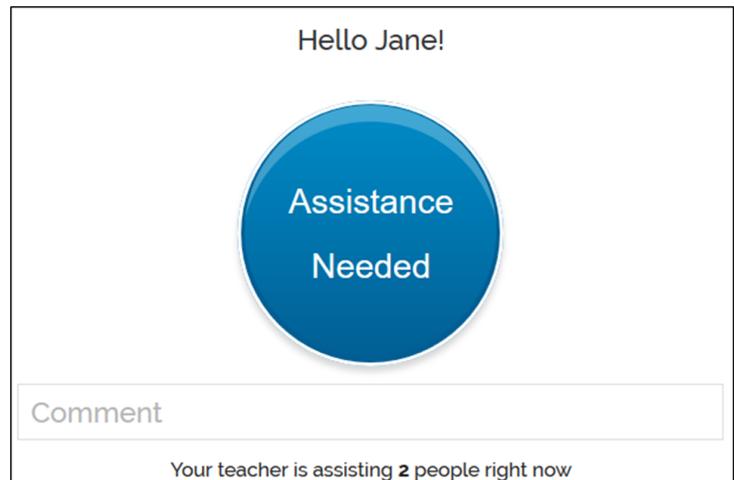
Once you have an account, the tool is super simple to use. From the “Teachers” landing page, you click on the “Start” button to begin a new session. This will generate the “class code” (see Figure 1) that your students will need in order to submit their questions.

Figure 1: Teachers view of an active ClassroomQ session



Things are just as simple on the student side. To join a session, students use a device (e.g., a computer or their phone) and go to <https://classroomq.com/> and click on the “STUDENTS” button. On this page, students enter their name and the class code which takes them to a page where they can enter their “Comment” (i.e., their question) and press a button to indicate to the instructor “Assistance Needed” (see Figure 2). On this page, the student will also see a count indicating the number of other people that have already requested help ahead of them.

Figure 2: Student view of an active ClassroomQ session prior to submitting a request for assistance



After submitting a question, the student view shifts to a page (see Figure 3) where they can monitor their place in line or cancel their request (e.g., if they figure it out the answer on their own or get help from another classmate before they reach the front of the virtual “line”). As the instructor, after you visit the student and finish helping them, you just click on the name of that student and it will remove their name and advance the next student to the top of the queue while also updating the student view(s) in real time.

Figure 3: Student view of an active ClassroomQ session after submitting a request for assistance



Why Use It?

Although potentially useful in a variety of classroom situations, I consider this tool to be particularly well suited to active learning environments where students are engaged in problem solving tasks and the instructor is serving as a resource to aid in their discovery process and providing targeted assistance when required.

The first, and most obvious, benefit of this tool is that it eliminates any confusion around the question of “who’s next?” You know the situation: Your attention is focused on working with one student or group, you look up, turn around, and discover five students with their hands in the air. How do you decide who to help next? ClassroomQ can help you make that decision.

Obviously, the simplest approach is just to proceed to the next person in the queue, but if you require all of your students to enter their question when they make a request, you can use the tool to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the support you provide as well. For example, if multiple students seem to be asking the same question, you can gather them together and help them all at the same time, or address your comments to the whole class if a concept seems to be causing a significant amount of confusion. On the other hand, you might want to quickly scan the list of questions to see if there are any that can be answered quickly, thereby allowing those students to get back on task while you spend more time with others who may have more complex needs).

In addition to requiring students to submit their questions, you might also want to consider displaying the question queue on a projected screen so that it can be seen by all of your students. The advantage to this approach is that it allows students to help one another when they know the answer to a particular question or have already talked to the instructor about the same issue. Of course, the downside of this is that some students may be less inclined to ask their question in an open forum.

Finally, if you choose to subscribe to the “Pro” version, the ability to export a record of the questions lets you review all the questions submitted during the class session. You can then use this record to identify concepts that may warrant follow-up instruction in a subsequent class. You might also decide to contact students with questions you weren’t able to get to during the class in order to provide answers and/or offer to setup a one-on-one appointment to provide additional assistance.

Conclusion

As anyone who engaged with the pedagogy of the “flipped classroom” can attest, the active learning environment that it creates can at times become chaotic and difficult to manage. Particularly with larger groups, providing individualized support and acting as an effective coach or learning facilitator can be challenging. Although it may seem simple, just having a means to organize and monitor student questions and requests for assistance can significantly improve your ability to meet student needs. To that end, ClassroomQ is a great tool for managing student-teacher interactions in the classroom. Give it a try, and I’m guessing you might think so too!