Abstract
We are living in the age of technology where change is the only constant. Online education has significantly increased worldwide and the methods of delivery and engagement must keep pace with the fast-moving cutting edge technological updates. Flipped classrooms have proven to be a good way to ensure students are putting in the time and coming to classes prepared to engage in what they have learned and to incite further discussion and critical thinking has been applauded for those benefits.

Keywords: Blended learning, Bloom’s taxonomy, Flipped classrooms, Gamification, Online education

Introduction
According to the Flipped Learning Network (2012) stated by Goodwin and Miller, membership on its social media site rose from 2,500 teachers in 2011 to 9,000 teachers in 2012. However, there is little research on how well flipped classrooms are actually doing (Goodwin, Miller, 2013). Blended learning has been lauded as combining the best of both world, online and in-person learning sessions. However, according to Hunt, the disadvantages could be that ineffective use of learning technologies can waste resources or learners must have basic technology knowledge or willingness to learn. Other interactive learning pedagogies includes social media, urban computing, serious games, brainstorming, question and answer sessions and buzz sessions, to name a few (Hunt, 2016).

Gamification in education certainly has had its benefits to provide student engagement while having “fun”. Some of the case studies include JFDI Academy for Undergraduate Education, Deloitte Leadership Academy for Corporate Training Education, PlayMoolah for Financial Literacy Education and Recyclebank for Social Responsibility Education (Huang, Soman, 2013). Social media is a highly interactive tool which is being incorporated in collaborative learning which in itself is seen by some as a “social act”. Blogs, videoconferencing, Wikis, email, podcasts, webinars, etc. are all aspects of social media which contribute to creativity in the learning process, thus, enhancing higher levels of learning in critical thinking, analysis and evaluation. Talking about oneself on social media is similar to reflective exercises which is a part of improving the learning experience (Huang, Soman, 2013).

Rethinking Pedagogy for the Digital Generation is a necessity. Statistics on the digital social exchange are tremendous and tapping into these new approaches for learning can enhance the student experience and keep them engaged and excited about the subject matter. Learning will no longer be a chore, learning will now be interactive and fun!
Throughout the years, the role of the teacher has been re-defined not only in terms of determining how much content material to disseminate in a class session but also in terms of the delivery of this material to keep students both engaged and motivated. Face-to-face classrooms can be difficult within itself to avoid distractions and to keep student learners excited about the topic being discussed, but when we get to the online learning environment, that is a whole other ball game. The methods and practices teachers employ, both asynchronous and asynchronous, in distance education is heavily dependent on technology to reach the minds and hearts of our students. But on top of that, just when a teacher gets comfortable with a set of technological tools, alas, technology changes again! The truth is online education would be impossible without technology. Online facilitators heavily depend on technology. The truth is there are many possible ways of organizing your online class sessions to be effective in the transmitting of information to your student learner. One such method is through the flipped classrooms. Essentially in the flipped classroom, the focus is shifted from the instructor to the students and they become responsible for their learning success. A great deal of information and research done on this topic is centred around face-to-face classrooms where teachers record a lecture, students listen to the lecture as “homework” outside of class then come in the next class and have an engaging discussion on the recorded lecture. However, in the online environment, according to Honeycutt and Glova, the focus is not what is done “in” or “out” of class. Rather, students attain to higher levels of critical thinking and analysis through research as a part of self-directed learning (Honeycutt, Glova, 2014). The role of the teacher is not just to simply give information while the students just take information. Instead, the proverbial “teaching them to fish and not just giving them a fish” comes into play where the role of teachers now becomes a “guide on the side” as it were, giving students the tools and resources they need to accomplish the course objectives. In so doing, teachers will be a content expert or resource point where their role is one more of coaching which encourages further feedback from the student and this puts them in a position to connect with students to assist them more and ensure they are on the right path. As such, the flip comes in where the focus is now on the student and not the teacher.

While research information on the flipped classroom is limited, the benefits are many. Teachers and students have increased interaction which gives the teacher more opportunities to receive feedback from their students. This feedback is invaluable information which will help the teacher to gauge the individual needs of their students, their progress levels, adjust their teaching styles and provide them with personalized feedback to assist them to make further progress. Student engagement is increased, especially when the asynchronous information to be considered for an assignment takes the form of a video presentation. All the senses are engaged which leaves very little openings for “boredom” but more opportunities for them to be more enthusiastic about the subject matter, especially when real life scenarios are presented and they are able to make practical application of the information. According to Bryan and Miller, self-paced learning is a huge advantage of flipped classrooms. Assignments have a due date and if it is within a week, students can decide if they would like to do the entire assignment in one day or to dedicate an hour each day to do smaller portions of the assignment. Students like when they can learn at their own convenience, after all, they did choose the online learning environment as the means of doing the course in the first place.

Everyone is available at different times during the day at for varying lengths of time so “flip the script” as it were and have students peruse the information and complete the assignment at their leisure before the due date then have a general online group discussion for shared feedback to include reflection and peer comments (Goodwin, Miller, 2013).

Preparation for classes by facilitators is essential to the success of this method. Active participation of all students is being encouraged. There are a number of methods that can be used in this flipped classroom setting. According to Honeycutt and Glova, one is creating a hashtag for your course. The “hashtag” is one of the more popular social media tools to bring attention to a particular topic since 2015 so why not use it as a tool to keep students engaged in a course as well? Students will be encouraged to search for interesting articles, videos, etc. on the course and then share through discussion boards. The facilitator then reviews these posts and then once a week offers commendation, give comments to keep them on the right track and gauge the participation of the students in the course. This active participation by the student helps them to have a vested interest in the course and they will feel more involved in the entire learning process (Honeycutt, Glova, 2014).

In some spheres, educators may wanted to incorporate methodologies to resemble face-to-face learning in an online learning environment. This is what they would call blended learning. “Blended learning, also referred to as hybrid learning is a combination of learning modalities involving face-to-face instruction and Web-based learning delivery, and is carefully designed using a customized instructional strategy that leverages the strengths of each” (Morrison, 2019). In many online course, you will find both asynchronous and synchronous strategies are incorporated. Students are given written assignments, graded through their posts to discussion boards and make use of the resource material provided by facilitators in their own time in asynchronous settings. However, students may also be required to attend a live online session and participate through various software applications such as Blackboard Collaborate where they would all be bound together online in a particular virtual space and time to be in attendance to that live session in a Synchronous setting. Blended learning strategies are seen as incorporating the “best of both worlds” as while students can post in discussion forums and get valuable personalized feedback on their assignments from facilitators at a later date but an online live session can address any issues they may come up right then and there. In a corporate environment, employees have 24/7 access to resources online to view at their convenience so they are not limited to waiting for a particular training session to come around at a date convenient to everyone. Hunt stated online tests are administered when training is complete and this makes it easier for employers being able to track the performance of their employees and it is a significant reduction in the cost of training, especially in a workplace of thousands of employees. Of course, the proper technological tools will be needed and there may be an initial set-up costs, but these costs are incomparable to the cost savings and benefits associated with blended learning. In an online environment, it is easy for a student to get lost into obscurity due to lack of participation in discussion boards and just by the mere fact the teacher is not in the same physical space to see for themselves a disinterested or distracted students. Online facilitators then need to get to know their students individual needs to aid in their learning, encourage feedback and ensure there is no disconnect. Both blended learning and flipped
classroom methodologies are active learning strategies which encourage high levels of student participation. Active learning empowers students to be responsible for their own learning success, accommodates various learning styles and helps motivate students to give of their best.

As an online facilitator, some of the active learning strategies we can employ include:

1. Online tests and quiz with final scores given upon completion
2. Case studies of real life scenarios
3. Discussion boards
4. Reflective essays and critiques
5. Individual and Group Projects
6. Discussions on Videos/Audio
7. Games & Simulations
8. Role Plays

Getting students involved in the course instead of being passive spectators looking on while the course is in progress is especially a critical element for online facilitators to master. Students must be able to see where they fit in, what their specific roles and responsibilities are in the learning process and how they can actively contribute to the course (Austin, Mescia, 2014).

Gamification guru, Yu-kai Chou defines gamification as “the craft of deriving all the fun and addicting elements found in games and applying them to real-world or productive activities” (Chou, 2017). Another expert on the subject matter, Ray Wang, CEO & Principal Analyst of Constellation Research Inc., describes it as a “series of design principles, pro-cesses and systems used to influence, engage and motivate individuals, groups and communities to drive behaviours and effect desired outcomes”. The truth is gamers feel a sense of empowerment, bravado, “control of their destiny” as it were, which they may lack in real life and their only means of escape from the harsh reality of life is through games. As such, making the connection between games and learning can yield amazing results.

The Deloitte Leadership Academy for Corporate Training Education is an interesting case study in this regard:

According to Gallup’s Employee Engagement 2011 results, 71% of workers were “not engaged” or “actively disengaged” in their work, and a lot of money and effort is spent on training material that often goes unused. Furthermore, employees tend to have low interest in corporate training because of the incurred costs of time and money. “Let’s face it. For most people, on a typical Sunday morning, if given the choice between ‘Am I gonna watch ESPN, or am I gonna do some training?’ training will not win,” says James Sanders, Manager of Innovation at Deloitte Consulting. Thus, to drive stickiness to corporate training, Deloitte successfully applied one of the most common gamification mechanics – points and badges – to its digital executive training program, Deloitte Leadership Academy. Deloitte’s objective was to encourage corporate training among executives and increase their engagement – both a general instructional goal and a behavioural goal. With nearly 200,000 Deloitte employees and more than 50 client companies expected to do corporate training, the student size is quite large, which meant that a gamification application to the training would have to cater to such a large group. Also, as the students were experienced executives, the important pain points to be addressed were that the students had limited time to spare and the course itself had to be of high educational value. The gamification element they chose, was a points and badge system that was added to their digital training program when Deloitte partnered with Badgeville in 2012.

Having identified the context surrounding the program, this element better suited a large group of students who had limited time to learn. The content for the training covered lessons from Harvard Business Publishing, Stanford Graduate School of Business, Melbourne Business School and IMD, and included leadership training classes to deal with situations of high complexity, teams and environmental change. The program was structured as a 12 - month study program tailored specifically for the student by focusing on 12 competencies he needs to improve on. By limiting the length of each lesson from 10 minutes to an hour, it allowed the employees to easily access and complete trainings in their spare time at the office, or while commuting. Deloitte also took into account specific functions of the gamified training to enhance motivation for its students. For example, many executives who travel on the job and couldn’t commit to a week of training. To cater to this, the leader board was reset every week to offer a balanced system, encouraging executives to jump on the training during any week. Ownership was also given to the employees by customizing their learning program and priorities. In addition to this, individuals were ranked amongst the ten that were most competitive with themselves rather than on a Top 10 overall list. These applications of gamification took into consideration the limitations and counterproductive effects; allowing executives to have a sense of accomplishment as they completed the learning programs at their own pace while sharing knowledge with other coworkers. The complete program incentivized students to complete a lesson and pushed them to learn other lessons. As a result,
Deloitte experienced a 37% increase in the number of returning users to their digital learning portal, an increase in the completion of the programs and a 40% increase in weekly visitors (Meister, 2013).

Now when we look on this case study a number of factors can be considered: lack of employee engagement, perceived high cost and time for them to complete corporate training, the size of individuals to complete corporate training was very large and physically dispersed (almost 200,000 employees and 50 client companies) and the students were experienced executives who had to receive training of high educational value to time to prepare was limited. This was a extraordinary task which only Gamification could fill that void required to get the task accomplished successfully. Points and badges were rewarded over the 12-month period under which the training would take place and this would encourage students to “buy out the time” as it were to complete the training. Also, when we look on the makeup of the students, it comes as a surprise that the executives who are the ones to approved training budget at that; would be the ones who did not have the time to complete the training and were not being supportive as they were fully aware of the high cost of training. However, at times it would not be a situation where they were disinterested to do the training but at times, they were genuinely busy travelling and didn’t get the chance to attend a face-to-face training session. With the online game session, they were able to complete training anywhere, any time and for as long as they were available when they were available and not being limited to a physical space or set time or date to get it done. As such, gamification catered to their specific needs, especially that of being flexible to fit into their busy schedule instead of them cancelling a trip to be at a face-to-face training session. The games also sparked enthusiasm in training as “learning while having fun” increased returning user volume to the digital learning portal by 37% and completion of the program by 40%. Those figures show a significant improvement in volumes which would translate into staff overall being better trained, the company was able to experience great cost savings and, as such, the bottom line, profits, would also show significant increase due to better service delivery outcomes to external clients.

Games clearly have their place in the online environment to promote interactivity between teachers and students to achieve required outcomes. We can all agree the greater feedback received from students the better prepared teachers are to address their individual needs for learning success. What better way, then, do we actually share information with people in these times than through social media? Living in the social media age, people feel free to post and blog, without any apprehension or fear, as they have their own personal space where they can speak what’s on their minds and tell the world how they really feel. This freedom of speech is golden for us as educators who sometimes wish those students who are “wall-flowers” in class sessions would just open up and social media is the vehicle especially for those students to have a forum to voice their opinions. Learning is not passive; learning is an active process and, as such, it is considered to be a “social act”. If we really stop to think about it learning takes place in a social environment, ideas are shared, participants are engaged, information is processed and in our online social environment, these are the same actions that are taking place. We use social media for chats, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, webinars, videoconferencing and the list goes on and on. But, why not leverage these social activities, which are always fun just like what we discussed in games, as a tool in education? When we check the popular social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat and YouTube, young people spend a considerable amount of time on these websites/apps. However, while parents may think it is time wasted on posting pictures, telling stories and letting the whole world know what mood you are in, creativity is being stimulated which inevitably leads to higher levels of learning in critical thinking, analysis and evaluation. Reflective exercises are governed by the same concept of “speaking about how you feel” and looking back on what was done is a critical step in the way forward.

As mentioned earlier, teachers should be used as a resource point and not merely information givers. Online research is promoted by social media whether it’s as simple as looking up information on an individual’s profile as a precursor to a conversation to get to know about them better such as through your mutual friends, common interests, where they went to high school and so on to more complex activities such as interactive, real-time RSS feeds on trending news items on an given topic happening around the world.

Teachers can leverage this technology in various ways to enhance creativity and use the tools as vehicles in transforming student thinking too higher levels by weaving it into the learning process. Bloom’s Taxonomy originally created in the 1950’s has been first updated in the 1990s by David Krathwohli and Lorin Anderson (former student of Bloom) et al to account for social media in the learning process. Take the “create” level at the top of the pyramid, for example. Create denotes action-based processes such as design, produce, imagine and invent. The new tech words that can replace these words are blog, remix, program manifested in the form of producing podcasts, blogging, coding and editing. Reading charts, maps, graphs are tools that can help students not only to visualize theoretical concepts but also to analyze these and make sense of the world in which we live. Facilitators need to prepare for their class sessions with these technological tools in mind to make their classes more engaging and to connect with students at their social level to enhance their cognitive thinking. Apps such as Skype can help students connect with their teachers in real time via video-conferencing to discuss “face-to-face” any pressing problems they may be having and emails can go into further details. Self-expression, even in 140 characters of less, helps the teacher get into the mind of the student and this form of feedback can assist you as the facilitator to help the student in a meaningful way (Anderson, Krathwohli, 2001; Churches, 2016).

In this ever-changing world, teachers have the monumental task of keeping abreast with the changing needs of their students and how to leverage technological tools to facilitate learning success and higher levels of critical thinking and analysis. It then goes without saying active learning pedagogies need to be adaptable and examined regularly to ensure they are keeping pace with technology which is constantly changing. Flipped learning has its place as the focus is shifted from the teacher to the student and students are now responsible for their own learning outcomes through active research and problem solving and using the teacher as a content expert and resource point, the “guide on the side” not the “be all and end all” of the course delivery. Blended learning has its advantages even though research on the topic is limited as it makes provision for both synchronous and asynchronous methodologies to keep students engaged and accomplish required objectives. Gamification, learning while having fun, promotes engagement and this techniques aims to tap into the analytical skills involved in getting from one
level to the next to level up as well as the “must win” attitude of gamers to encourage learning success. The case study of Deloitte Leadership Academy for Corporate Training Education that was considered showed how engagement can lead to productivity and better outcomes. Many times people may ask, “how did we really live without social media in the past” as it forms a significant part of our daily lives in today’s world. Social media helps broaden the skill set of the student learner in the areas of critical thinking, analysis, evaluation, research, collaboration, creativity and communication and even teachers can use social media as an excellent form of both transmitting information and receiving feedback from students leading to continued and sustained adjustments to their teaching styles to reach that minds and hearts of their students.

Anderson L.W., Krathwohl D. et al. (2001), A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: a revision of Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives, New York, Longman


