



Integration of the Video Response App FlipGrid in the Business Writing Classroom

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Abstract

In business English writing classes, second language learners can be reticent to speak about their writings. To combat this and give students more opportunities to practice speaking and allow instructors the ability to measure the engagement, a video capture tool is needed that will enable students to have conversations asynchronously and produce the language vocally outside of class. Recently a tool was developed where speaking tasks can be created using a video response service called FlipGrid. This web-based educational technology tool gives instructors the means to help students increase their productive language skills by increasing the time students spend speaking outside class, with the added accountability of video. Both spontaneous and planned vocal practice assignments can be created with this tool resulting in more student engagement and speaking practice. This paper discusses the need and rationale for using the service and shares the results of a class evaluation after implementing the video capture tool in a business writing class. The assessment discovered that students found the tool easy to use and noticed increases with both their perceived time speaking English between classes and their perceived English-speaking confidence.

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Ed tech
FlipGrid
Speaking activities
Technology integration
EFL

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1. Introduction

ESL and EFL students take classes with Native speakers of English for a variety of reasons. Ivor Timmis notes that many of these students want to take classes with native English speakers believing their ideal pronunciation goals will benefit from lessons with a native speaking instructor. (Timmis, 2002) One common dilemma for Native English speakers who teach subject classes to L2 Learners in the L2 learner's home country is the management of speaking opportunities where the students are interacting with the instructors one-on-one in dialogue. The situations where students are producing the spoken language in class and the native speaker hearing and able to give feedback decreases further as the class size increases. The teacher's lecture in these situations may allow students to listen to, and take part in class activities; however, it does not guarantee the time available for each student to speak with the native speaker instructor one on one. It is also easy for students to avoid speaking English once they leave the classroom. As (Knight & Barberà, 2017) point out that there are various reasons a student may 'avoid' speaking in the target language that includes helping the student learn and comprehend the new language. But, even with these factors, we assume students are taking these classes at least want to be able to improve their speaking skills and be able to use their speaking skills after they finish a class. Hayriye Kayi who promotes the importance of talking for learning second languages writes "Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching ... today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance." (Kayi, 2012) Following this pedagogical method, it is then important to have students express themselves verbally and produce the language.

Speaking and writing is an essential aspect of learning a new language; "memory scientists often call this a "production effect." That is, if you produce something from the new learning right away, it not only reduces

interfering distractions but also strengthens the encoding and speeds up memory formation into lasting form." (Klemm, 2017) A recent study by Elise W. M. Hopman and Maryellen C. MacDonald further this assertion. Their research of two groups learning a 'made up' language showed that production training students compared to comprehension training students did better overall in the context of second language acquisition. (Hopman & MacDonald, 2018) It is compelling evidence to keep the speaking activities in class. So then when it becomes logistically challenging to manage speaking activities in classes, we turn to technology to help fill the gaps.

1.1. Technology Assistance

Easy access to and development of Web 2.0 technology has made Educational Technology (EdTech) and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) research and ideas more available to implement in classrooms. Recent studies have used some of these technologies for the purpose of speaking tasks in language classes. Some of the solutions are still emerging. The research by Tim Ashwell and Jesse Elam with English Learners in Japan have looked at ways that Automated Speech Recognition (ASR) can be used in Second Language Acquisition. Their research shows that there is some future potential (that they hope to develop) for services like Google Web Speech API to be implemented and facilitate automatic scoring for vocal tests. (Ashwell & Elam, 2017) These innovations will benefit other educators once they are available and tested beyond these early adopting instructors. However, there are tools currently available that have been helping teachers leverage technology and speaking in both online and flipped classrooms. Tools such as Skype™ and YouTube have been used successfully in many classes and different capacities. Skype has many applications and uses, for examples see (Eaton, 2010), (Morgan, 2013), (Rock et al., 2013), and (Licoppe, 2017). YouTube has been both used for teaching as outlined in (Berk, 2009) as well as for student-generated content as shown in Orlando Kelm's study on student-generated Social Media content in the classroom. (Kelm, 2011)

Other studies have shown the positive impact of the implementation of these Web 2.0 technology tools concerning speaking tasks concerning increased learner confidence and motivation. One such study looks at Jing®—a screen casting and capture software— that allows instructors to offer enhanced feedback for written work. By recording vocal feedback comments and combining them with written feedback, students found that the combination was both motivating and engaging. (Harper, Green, & Fernandez-Toro, 2012) Another tool— Voice Thread®—offers the ability for students and instructors to leave vocal and video comments asynchronously on presentation slides. A study by Melanie Dunn (2012) Found that speech anxiety decreased for students who used Voice Thread® technology. (Dunn, 2012) The commonality between the Jing® and Voice Thread® tools is that they both allow for asynchronous use, which can be beneficial for teachers who need to assign voice practice as homework outside of class.

1.2. Asynchronous Tools

The 2012 Voice Thread® study advocated that asynchronous communication activities help lower the stress of language production and that "improving language proficiency and reducing student anxiety is critical to the production of successful second language learners." (Dunn, 2012) These type of tasks allow the learners to take their time and re-read, re-listen, and re-record before constructing their message; compared to having to produce the language on the spot in front of other students and instructors. (Dunn, 2012) The findings from Gleason and Suvorov support this. The asynchronous tasks that were part of their study encouraged an improvement for students and their L2 confidence. As one of their respondents said, "the only way to increase confidence using the target language is to have more opportunities to use the language." (Gleason & Suvorov, 2012)

1.3. FlipGrid

Recently a Web 2.0 program called FlipGrid has emerged that combines aspects of a social media platform and a video capture tool on one easy to manage space. This new tool allows instructors or teachers to manage discussion activities where students respond verbally to topics in a "grid." This too wants to "give students a fun and creative avenue to develop voice and provide educators with a simple way to integrate it in their classroom." (Flipgrid, 2018a) This new technology has similar aspects to Voice Thread, and YouTube in that asynchronous assignments can be assigned, and students can work on assignments between classes. Some instructors choose to use the tool in the class for in-class activities. The idea is to give a space for all students to add their voice—their spoken voice—to the discussion. According to their homepage website at www.flipgrid.com the mission of the company is to "Empower learners of all ages to define their voices, share their voices, and respect the diverse voices of others. Awesome educators make this happen. Thank you!" (Flipgrid, 2018b) What follows is an evaluation of this tool implemented in an English Business Writing class in South Korea.

1.4. Pilot Program and Needs Analysis

This evaluation was the result of a needs analysis of a specific class because of an unprecedented class enrolment increase. A standard writing class size at the target school ranges from 30 to 45 per class, this

semester it increased to 70 per class due to an influx of registrations for the department. The instructor was faced with a dilemma of class management. The choices were to adjust the course to be a traditional lecture and exam class or find a technology tool that allowed the class structure with spoken interaction to remain relatively the same with the bigger class size. The instructor did a simple gap analysis and decided on a technology tool. The gap analysis is shown in Figure 1.

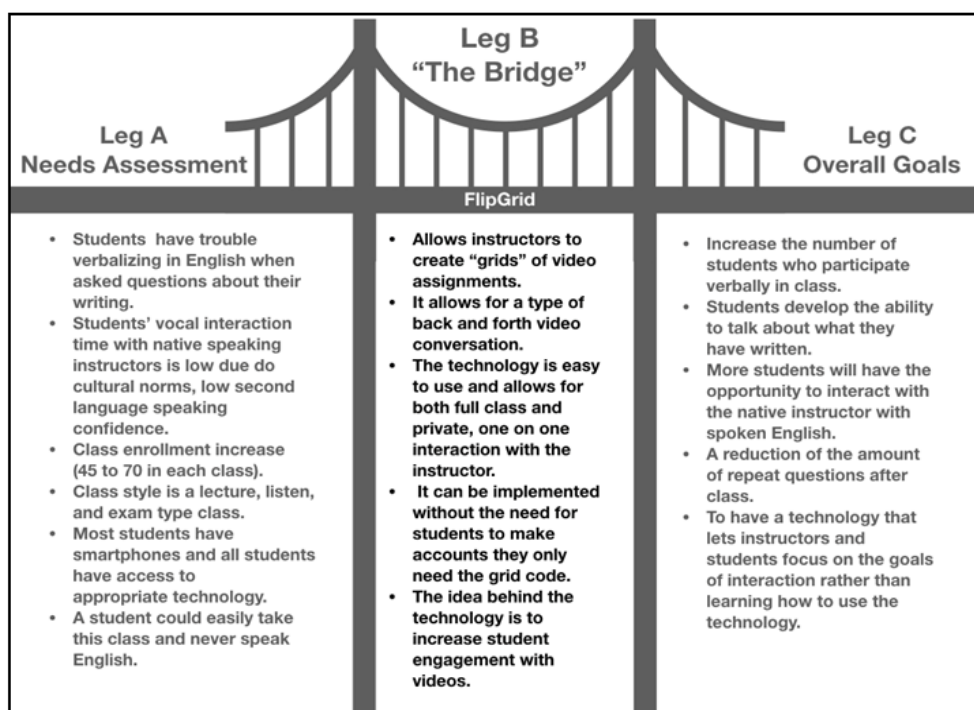


Figure-1. Gap Analysis (Needs Analysis)

Source: In class Gap Analysis/Needs Analysis created by the instructor (2018)

1.5. Description of the Program Evaluated

The goal was to find a permanent EdTech tool that was easy for students and instructors to use that would give students more opportunities to practice speaking and allow instructors the ability to measure engagement and communicate directly to each student. This tool is also able to provide a means for "shy students" generally non-participatory students—those who could take a semester-long lecture type class and never speak a word of English in class—the means for speaking practice and was not reliant upon scheduling synchronous sessions. For this program, four assignments were created using the video response service and social learning app called FlipGrid and students submitted their spoken responses to these assignments.

Program Components: The components for the instructor and the students to set up and use FlipGrid were as follows:

- *Instructor set up:* The instructor created an account with FlipGrid and set-up a class "grid" that would display the assignment topics and the student videos. The instructor then created four assignments and sent the grid code for each of these to the students to complete.
- *Student set up:* Students downloaded the application on their phones or used a computer browser on a computer with a camera—it was unnecessary for students to sign up for an account. Students completed assignments with access to the grid link or the grid code and a simple password.

1.6. Program Objectives

For this formative evaluation, it was important to measure whether or not the program was suitable for the class and helped increase speaking activity. The objectives were created to make sure that the speaking was the focus and not have the technology dominate the learning. The program objectives reflect this, and they are:

- Objective 1: To provide an easy to use technology for students to use outside of class for English speaking assignments.
- Objective 2: To increase student English speaking time between classes by allowing students to produce spoken assignments at home.
- Objective 3: To assist in the reduction of communication anxiety surrounding spoken English by the increased frequency of speaking assignments.

1.7. Evaluation Method

The evaluation model used was the Transactional Model. (Boulmetis & Dutwin, 2014) This model was chosen because its evaluation method combines both monitoring and process evaluation. Since there is a continuous back-and-forth between the instructor (evaluator) and students in the program, the evaluator was an active participant in the program, giving constant feedback and opportunity to update the program to be specific objectives could be met. Also, because this is a new tool, other aspects arose while implementing the program that was not apparent while planning. Choosing this model also kept everyone on track with the goals and objectives for the pilot program; the school semester is 16 weeks long, and the evaluation used four weeks of assignments to evaluate.

1.8. Participants

The participants included the key stakeholders of one instructor and students from the class.

- 133 undergraduate university students in Business English Writing classes in South Korea. All of the students use English as their second or third language.
- The Instructor is a native speaker of English. Facilitates two business writing classes in the Spring semesters.

1.9. Procedures

Formative evaluation and informal monitoring took place during all four assignment periods. This was an essential piece of the puzzle as for the evaluator to notice any unplanned for issues that would take program away from the objectives.

1.10. Data Sources

- Instructor Observations: Sources of data came from informal instructor observations while assisting students in completing the tasks and setting up the tool. These included anything from emails in-class questions and other random data.
- Survey: All students in both classes had an opportunity to voluntarily fill out a survey the ask them questions surrounding they're perceived use of the tool and their perceived confidence with their English speaking.
- FlipGrid Data: FlipGrid tracks the responses made by students. It gathers the data for the length of video and how many videos were uploaded. This data was used to evaluate the second objective because it measures time spent speaking.

2. Results

The following are data and summaries from both the in-class student survey and the FlipGrid assignment data. The data charts and summaries are organized by objective. For the survey, two classes were surveyed. There were 133 students between the two classes 119 students responded to the survey.

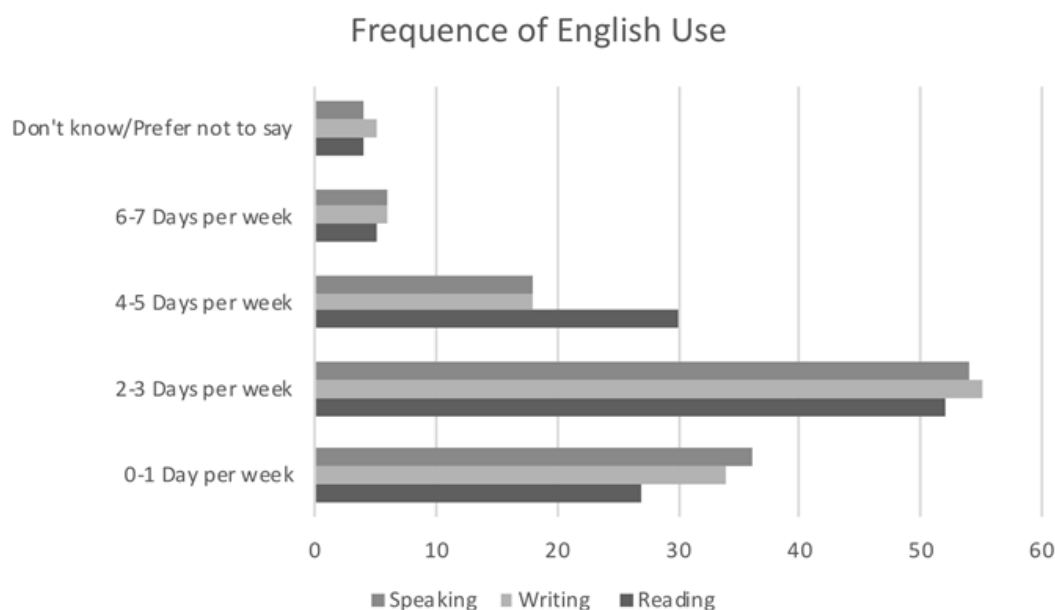


Figure-2. Frequency of English Use

Objective 1: To provide an easy to use technology for students to use outside of class for English speaking assignments.

Students were asked if they felt that FlipGrid was an easy tool to use. More than 58% the students chose either 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. 38% of the students chose 'somewhat agree' with the remaining 9.2% of students making choices in the 'disagree' realm of the spectrum.

Objective 2: To increase student English speaking time between classes by allowing students to produce spoken assignments at home.

The following chart is data that is taken from the FlipGrid tool itself. It shows that the first assignment had the most time speaking, and the second assignment had a large video count. After instructor observation and monitoring, it was found out that this was due to some issues with the integration between the Learning management system and FlipGrid. The lower average video length for assignment two is also due to the inclusion of peer responses in the video time which were generally shorter than the original post.

Table-1. Collected FlipGrid Data

Assignment	Video Count	Classmate Replies	Average Video Length
Assignment 1	212	No	1:13 Minutes
Assignment 2	465	Yes	0:41 Minutes
Assignment 3	141	No	0:58 Minutes
Assignment 4	134	No	0:55 Minutes

The following chart includes student responses as to how they feel they are practicing English speaking more because of FlipGrid. 58.6 of the students responded to either agree or strongly agree 35.3% came more in the middle with Choosing to somewhat agree with the remaining 4.2% of students falling in the disagree spectrum.

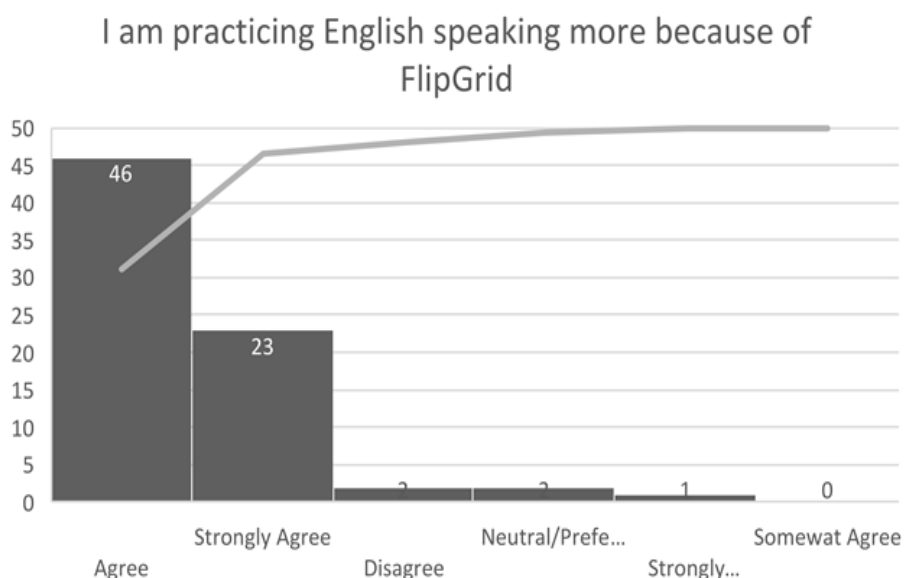


Figure-3. Increased Speaking Practice

Objective 3: To assist in the reduction of communication anxiety surrounding spoken English by the increased frequency of speaking assignments. Students were asked if their English-speaking confidence was improving because of FlipGrid. 42.9% of the respondents answered either agree or strongly agree, 40.3% chose the middle ground somewhat agree, and the remaining 14.3% chose the disagree spectrum

My English speaking confidence is improving because of FlipGrid.

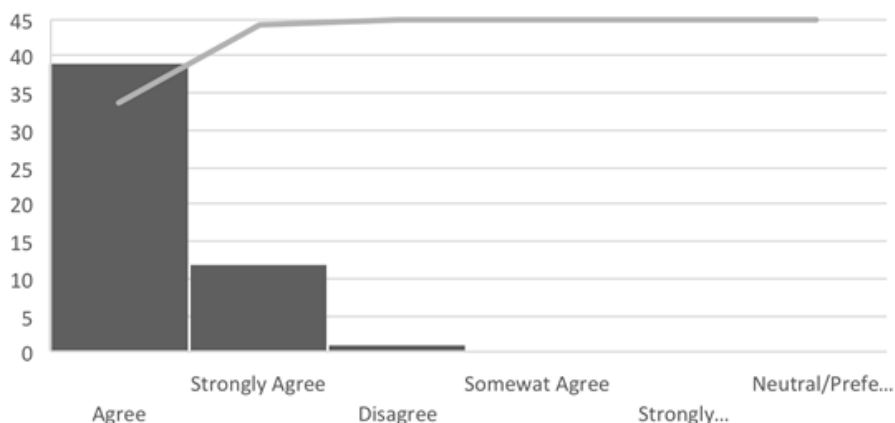


Figure-4. English Speaking Confidence

Students were also asked if they find it easier to speak in class and in small groups because of FlipGrid. Here 32.8% of students fell in the agree and strongly agree, 37% State in the middle with somewhat agree, and the remaining 29.4% of students chose the disagree spectrum.

The following chart represents a non-traditional pre-and post-test question on the student survey where students were asked about their confidence before and after using the tool. The survey shows that before the introduction of flip grid students choosing low confidence 31.1% and after that percentage was reduced to 5.9%. Student who chose neutral were 43.7 before the introduction of FlipGrid and 46.2% after the use of FlipGrid. Students that fill the high confidence where 25.2% before the introduction of FlipGrid and 47% after the introduction of FlipGrid.

Speaking Confidence Before and After Using FlipGrid

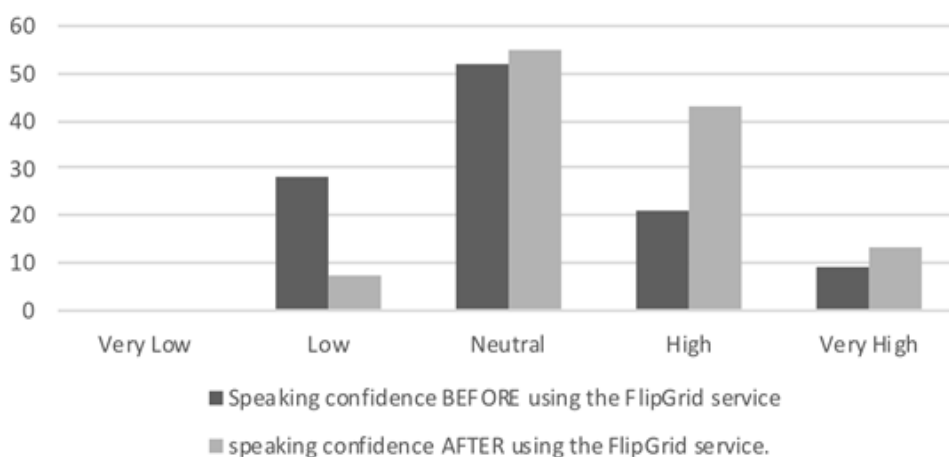


Figure-5. Speaking Confidence Before and After

3. Discussion

Because 89% percent of the population responded to the survey, there is higher confidence in the results for this class. The data analysis indicated the following findings concerning program objectives. This four-week program shows at all three objectives were met. Here is the breakdown of each objective.

Objective 1: To provide an easy to use technology for students to use outside of class for English speaking assignments.

It is clear from the data and the surveys that students overall feel that the tool is very easy-to-use. Indicating the technology itself will not get in the way of speaking assignments. During the second week, there was a danger that this objective was not going to be met because of some issues surrounding the integration of the learning management system. However, because of the observation and adjustment of the program early on the danger was mitigated.

Objective 2: To increase student English speaking time between classes by allowing students to produce spoken assignments at home.

For this objective, the surveys indicate that students believe their speaking time between classes is increasing. From the FlipGrid data starting with weeks three and four the average time measurement is similar more weeks with the need to be added to this data to see if there is a trend in speaking time. So, the FlipGrid data is more inconclusive as to the success of meeting this objective. However, the FlipGrid Data does not consider preparing, practicing, or the stopping and starting or re-recording of videos before uploading. Students' perception and memory can only measure this data. Further research would need to be done to accurately account for these nuances.

Objective 3: To assist in the reduction of communication anxiety surrounding spoken English by the increased frequency of speaking assignments.

The final objective was to see if using this tool will help reduce a student's anxiety surrounding their spoken English. For this objective, it is clear that students believe that this extra practice is improving their confidence in this spoken English. All four of the questions designed to measure this shows the weight the opinions of the majority of students agreeing—FlipGrid is helping them improve their confidence.

3.1. Limitations

Because there was not an external evaluator, there was a potential for bias as the instructor had a vested interest in the outcome of the success of the program. The other factor that could have affected the results is that students may also have exhibited bias in their answers on the survey based on their feelings—either positive or negative—towards the instructor. The other limitation is that this program was only conducted over a four-week time frame and just looked at one instructor's class. Testing and other methods of language apprehension were not used in this study.

3.2. Implications

Overall, the evaluation found that the FlipGrid tool was valuable for speaking practice. It also found that there was an impact on students in this class and their perceived confidence in spoken communication. Students agreed that the service was easy-to-use, helped them practice more at home, and assisted in increasing their English-speaking confidence. Objective one was met. The class program does not need to search for a new tool to help facilitate speaking practice. For Objectives three and four while they were assembled for purposes of this evaluation, they still may make some minor adjustments to help keep this positive trend for the remainder of the semester. The instructor felt that more interaction might be vital to increase time spent speaking. Assignments that make students interact with each other on the videos and responding to videos may help increase speaking time even more are needed. The idea is to create new tasks that incorporate responses, dialogs, and interaction into the requirements.

4. Conclusion

For software designed for more than just second language classrooms, FlipGrid will become a standard tool for many instructors in many disciplines. There is more to learn about the efficacy of this new tool. Future research can assess if this tool aids in language acquisition, other studies can measure anxiety and additional language acquisition traits by adding language testing elements and other proven research elements and controls. Instructors who are unfamiliar with the tool can try it out to see if it will work for their class as the set-up and implementation is straightforward. There is also a vibrant and active social media community on Twitter to ask questions, find ideas, and solve problems (search for hashtag #FlipGridFever). As of June 2018, Microsoft acquired the service, and it is free for all educators to use.

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