

Hello! My name is Oleksiy Markunin, but everyone calls me Alex. I'm a professor with the School of Advancement, English Language Learning Program.

Today, in an online environment student engagement and community building definitely present quite a challenge. So, I've decided to share one easy strategy with you that I use to overcome this challenge. OK, here goes!

When we moved online, I asked myself these questions - How do I keep my students engaged? How do I empower their voice? How do I find a platform that provides students with an equal voice and equal opportunities? How do I engage them and ignite discussion? Well, there's no need to reinvent the wheel. What do students use nowadays to stay connected? Short-video based communication on social media. That's why I decided to use the same approach and started using a very handy app called Flipgrid. In a nutshell, it is a video discussion platform which allows the sharing of user-generated videos.

The process is very, very simple. You post a discussion topic and students then reply using their videos. They can pause their cameras while recording, and they can do various things. For example, they can use a whiteboard, they can use various emojis. You can move them around. You can even write on your screen, and many more. Both students and teachers they can post video replies to other videos, they can like them, and teachers can even provide private feedback.

So how do you use this platform and my strategy? You can use it in various scenarios, from ice-breaking activities to full assignments. For example, when the summer semester started, I used it successfully as an engagement tool to build my class community. Every student had to record a short video introducing themselves. They had to talk about their expectations, about their needs, and about their interests. Also, I used this platform as a final reflection assignment in which I asked students to reflect on their journey during the semester.

After all, the set-up was very easy and not time-consuming, and the results were fantastic. No matter whether the discussion was for marks or not, students were equally engaged. They watched each other's videos, posted replies, and were happy to participate. What could be better?

Would I change anything? Nope. The platform exceeded my expectations. Students were able to get social interaction skills, they were able to express their emotions, and share their unique ideas.

Did I reach my goals? Absolutely! I managed to reach every single student, even those who are usually very shy in class and hesitant to speak. Everyone had a chance to contribute at their own place and time. On top of that, my strategy of using this video platform aligns nicely with some core UDL principles: which are multiple means of expression and multiple means of engagement.

All in all, using a video discussion platform is an easy strategy to promote engagement and facilitate community. Would I use it again? Yes and yes and yes! I encourage you to explore it and try the same strategy and the same platform in your classrooms! Thank you. Thank you so much!