

Lessons at home and homework at school in US

June 28 2013, by Fabienne Faur

When April Burton explains the intricacies of French grammar to her American classroom, the students are at home, in front of their computer or smartphone.

As for the homework, they will do it the following day, at school, thanks to the "flipped" classrooms approach made possible thanks to new technologies that are transforming education.

Burton, who teaches at Francis Howell Central High School in Cottleville, Missouri, decided last year to use the approach made popular in the United States since the Khan Academy began offering thousands of lessons and exercises online.

"We really have to change the way things used to be done," said Burton, a Southeast Missouri State University graduate in French education who has 14 years of teaching experience.

"There were so many things I wanted to do with my students but didn't have the time, so many days I was spending lecturing."

"Madame" Burton, as she is known by students, now explains grammar rules or vocabulary in a five-minute video to be watched at home. Students do exercises in class.

"It allows us to have more work class time where I'm not standing in front of them, where they can work in groups on projects," Burton told

AFP.

"It allows me to walk around the room and to talk to every student on a daily basis... see if they have questions. I actually feel that I know my students better because I'm not standing in front of them lecturing."

Burton had to learn new skills quickly, like building a website, using a new type of PowerPoint presentation and tweaking software.

In a video explaining how to conjugate the verb "pouvoir" ("can"), students can hear her voice, see her pencil writing words, connecting them, underlining them. In one for demonstrative adjectives, she added drawings and photographs.

"Basically you talk through the PowerPoint that in a traditional classroom I would have shown in front of the class," Burton explained.

At home, students watching videos on their computer, tablet or smartphone can listen to the lesson as many times as necessary and at his or her own pace while taking notes.

And students can address any questions they had about the videos to the teacher in class the next day.

'Video is much easier'

"In theory, we should have told students a long time ago to take their books home, read a chapter and do exercises in school," said Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry, founder of market research firm Noosphere.

"If this had worked, practically speaking, we would have done that a long time ago. Video is much easier."

Increasingly sophisticated tablets, media players and smartphones can host thousands of applications and images now available for teachers and [students](#), products of both e-learning and brick and mortar institutions.

New technologies have "changed education in ways that the Industrial Revolution changed society from an agrarian one," said National Education Association senior policy analyst Mike Kaspar.

"That may be philosophical, but new technologies are changing culture overall: the way we think about the school day, the need for 'brick and mortar' schools, the use of a hard copy materials versus e-books and other e-resources like videos, games."

TeachThought, an online platform for educators, forecast that teachers and schools would begin disappearing by 2028 due to the advent of learning simulations, with some pockets of resistance.

"Remaining schools that refuse to adapt to new technology and cultural trends will cause splintering in some communities as the significant cost of technology integration increases socio-economic gaps," TeachThought's curriculum chief Terry Heick wrote in a post.

Burton stressed that children today are not like their predecessors who just sat behind desks and took in the information teachers gave them.

"They are so busy, they are playing videogames constantly, texting their friends, watching YouTube videos; they can't sit in a classroom and we can't expect them to just sit and listen," she added.

"I want them to love French, to learn about the different cultures that speak French, and I think that just listening to me talk all the time doesn't do. They need to be researching and finding out by themselves."

Mackenzie Klotzbach, 15, said she liked the new approach.

"I liked the flipped classroom, it meant less homework most of the time. I came to class prepared, because we would talk about the video and I could just zone out because I already had it down. I think I learned it better too," she said.

"It was tough though. Learning object pronouns through videos, I would have liked to have learned that one in class."

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