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ABSTRACT

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Flipped classroom is a technique that involves a reordering of classroom and 'at-home' activities. Content provided prior to classroom interactions is used to prepare students for face-to-face classes. The flipped classroom has been shown to benefit students, including improvements in examination results and there is increasing interest in veterinary education. The current study aimed to investigate the potential of the flipped classroom approach to prepare students for practicals in a clinical skills laboratory. An online survey was distributed to the international veterinary clinical skills community to determine the extent to which flipped classroom is used prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory and how educators viewed the benefits, challenges, and possibilities. There were 101 survey participants representing 22 countries and all were involved in clinical skills teaching. Fortytwo were using flipped classroom techniques prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory and 55 of the other participants would consider using the technique in this context in the future. Videos were the most common resource used. The main benefits, experienced or anticipated, were positive changes in student behavior, including preparation and better use of time during the practical by both the students and instructors. The main challenges were time for instructors to develop the materials, lack of student engagement with the flipped classroom, space in the curriculum, and institutional issues. In conclusion, there are many potential benefits that could be realized if a flipped approach was embedded prior to clinical skills laboratory practicals.

- 48 Key words: flipped classroom, clinical skills, clinical skills laboratory, clinical skills center,
- 49 veterinary education

INTRODUCTION

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As higher education looks to transform in order to stay relevant in producing a 21st century workforce, more and more institutions have begun to shift toward learner-centered teaching and away from content-centric lectures. Rather than utilizing in-class time to passively consume content, universities increasingly adopt active learning strategies that can help students practice the skills they need under the guidance of a content expert. One teaching method that has gained growing popularity through this transition is the flipped classroom. The flipped classroom is most broadly defined as a reordering of classroom and at-home activities (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). Some of the content that would traditionally have been delivered by the teacher becomes the homework used by students as selfdirected learning to prepare for the face-to-face class, which may be a lecture, case-based learning session, laboratory practical or clinical skills class. During the flipped component students typically study key concepts through reading assignments, recorded mini-lectures or videos and assess their knowledge through quizzes. Advocates of the flipped classroom cite increased engagement during subsequent classroom time and enhanced ownership and flexibility of learning outside of the classroom (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). The flipped classroom has been shown to have benefits for students, including significant improvements in examination results and overall increased student satisfaction, engagement, and skill development (Baepler et al., 2014; Murillow-Zamorano et al., 2019). The flipped classroom approach is gaining popularity in veterinary education. A multinational survey found that 95% of participants were familiar with the concept of the flipped classroom, though only 65% had employed the technique themselves (Matthew et al., 2019). Veterinary educators have used flipped classroom strategies to build students' content knowledge in science (Dooley et al., 2018) as well as developing their professional skills (Moffett & Mill, 2014). The positive educational and student success outcomes of the flipped classroom within the context of medical education have been similar to other disciplines (Pierce & Fox, 2012; Ferreri & O'Connor, 2013). A growing body of literature shows the flipped classroom to be an increasingly common educational strategy in medical education with promising results in enhanced student performance on written exams (Shatto et al., 2017; Day, 2018; Chen et al., 2018). However, the impact on Objective

Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) performance has been variable with studies reporting improvements or neutral effects (Gillispie, 2016; Chen et al., 2018).

As use of the flipped classroom has grown in veterinary medical education, clinical educators might logically use this pedagogical approach to teach clinical skills. The development of clinical skills is an essential part of veterinary medical education and, arguably, one of the most active components of many existing veterinary curricula. Use of flipped classroom strategies has become more commonplace in human medicine within the context of surgical and clinical skills education as studies find it to help with the development of skills, increase student engagement, and decrease time required from faculty (Liebert et al., 2016a; Liebert et al., 2016b; Chiu et al., 2017; Elledge et al., 2018). In veterinary medicine it is not uncommon to use video and narrated audio presentations prior to specific clinical skills practicals (Langebæk et al., 2016a; Langebæk et al., 2016; Read et al., 2016). However, there is limited research on the use of flipped classroom strategies in the context of clinical skills education. The aim of this study was to (a) understand how widespread the use of the flipped classroom is in the context of clinical skills laboratory teaching and (b) determine how clinical skills educators viewed the benefits, challenges, and possibilities of flipped classroom techniques in this context. The study received ethical approval from the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (ID 00001830).

METHODS

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Survey design, delivery and distribution

The survey questions were developed by the project team through discussion and with reference to the literature to identify areas to explore in relation to the use of the flipped classroom. At the beginning of the survey there was a brief description of the flipped classroom approach in education followed by a paragraph explaining that participants could withdraw at any time before submitting the survey. Completion of the survey indicated consent to the use of the responses in the study. Participants were informed that all data would be anonymous, stored in a secure location only accessible to the project team, and that the project had received ethics approval from Michigan State University.

The survey included basic demographic data (country, gender, and profession) and details about the individual participant's teaching (number of years involved with teaching and percentage of time involved with activities related to teaching clinical skills). The survey then branched depending on the participant's use of flipped classroom and familiarity with the term before starting the survey. For those familiar with the term, further questions explored the use of flipped classroom in their teaching and at their school. For those specifically using flipped classroom prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory, a series of questions explored what techniques were used, whether the flipped classroom was compulsory prior to the practical, and if/how it was assessed, as well as the perceived benefits, challenges, and suggestions for ways that flipped classroom could be used in the future. For those not using flipped classroom prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory and those who were not familiar with the term 'flipped classroom' before starting the survey, a series of questions explored suggestions for ways flipped classroom techniques could be used in the context of clinical skills laboratory teaching, potential benefits, and possible challenges.

The survey questions were piloted by colleagues and minor edits to text were made. The survey was administered online in Qualtrics^a and the logic (branching) was thoroughly tested by the project team. The survey was distributed via clinical skills networks (Network Of Veterinarians In Continuing Education (NOVICE)^b and International Veterinary Simulation in Teaching (InVeST)^c) and through those involved with clinical skills teaching at other institutions.

Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data

The data were downloaded to Excel and filtered to identify the different subgroups based on their route through the survey. The free text comments were analyzed by two members of the project team (MF, SB). They independently used hand coding to identify themes and then compared and discussed the themes until reaching consensus.

RESULTS

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Survey responses

There were 101 completed surveys; Figure 1 depicts participants' routes through the survey 136 137 depending on their use of flipped classroom and familiarity with the term before starting 138 the survey. The participants represented 22 countries with the majority from Europe and 139 North America: UK (29), USA (23), Germany (7), Australia (6), Grenada (5), Ireland (5), 140 Canada (4), Belgium (3), South Africa (3), The Netherlands (3), Norway (2), Argentina (1), Austria (1), Denmark (1), France (1), Hungary (1), India (1), Italy (1), Jordan (1), Poland (1), 141 142 Spain (1) and Thailand (1). Most were veterinarians (85), followed by veterinary nurses / 143 veterinary technicians (14 - from USA, Canada, UK & Ireland), one laboratory technician, and 144 one selected 'Other' (model maker). Eighty-one were female, 18 were male, and two 145 preferred not to say. All except one (model maker) were involved in teaching with a range of 146 years of experience <1 to 43 (median = 10). Of the 100 involved in teaching, all spent some 147 time teaching clinical skills ranging from 90-100% of their time (12), 70-90% (17), 50-70% 148 (16), 30-50% (18), 10-30% (37). Figure 1: Survey participant responses based on the use of, and prior familiarity with, flipped 149 150 classroom. Subgroups for the qualitative analysis are identified by numbers in (). 151 For those familiar with the term flipped classroom before starting the survey (n = 80), 152 questions then explored their experiences further. When asked if the flipped classroom 153 approach was embedded in their curriculum, 35 (44%) responded 'yes', 31 responded 'no', 154 and 14 were 'not sure'. Fifty-eight (74%) had integrated the flipped classroom approach in 155 some area of their teaching; 22 had not used the technique in any context. Of those who 156 had used the flipped classroom, just over three quarters felt 'very confident' (18) or 'fairly 157 confident' (26) using the technique, followed by 'a little confident' (11), and 'not at all 158 confident' (3). The context/s in which they had used flipped classroom were prior to 159 'teaching in a clinical skills lab' (42), 'case-based learning' (25), 'group work' (24), 'lectures' 160 (23), 'teaching in a clinical setting' (18), 'other laboratory-based teaching' (17), and 'Other' (1) described as "in CPD" (continuing education). 161

The use of flipped classroom was explored further with those who reported using the technique prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory. These participants (n = 42) were from USA (15), UK (9), Belgium (3), Ireland (3), Australia (2), Canada (2), Germany (2), The Netherlands (2), Denmark (1), Grenada (1), India (1), and South Africa (1). When asked if using the flipped classroom resources was compulsory prior to clinical skills laboratory sessions, the answers were: 'all sessions' (7), 'some sessions' (24), 'no' (10), and 'not sure' (1). Twenty reported that some type of assessment was included in the flipped classroom material. When asked if what the students had learned was checked at the start of the clinical skills laboratory teaching sessions, 23 answered 'yes', 18 'no', and 1 was 'not sure'.

Of those familiar with the term flipped classroom before starting the survey but not using it prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory, 35 (of 38) would consider using the technique prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory in the future. Of those not familiar with the term flipped classroom before starting the survey, 20 (of 21) would consider using it in that context in the future.

Qualitative data

- 177 For the free text questions, the data were divided for the four subgroups of participants
- 178 (Figure 1) and themes were identified for each (Table 1).
- 179 Table 1: Themes emerging for the four subgroups from responses to free text questions
- about use of flipped classroom techniques prior to teaching in a clinical skills lab: techniques,
- 181 benefits and challenges.
- i) Had used flipped classroom prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory
 - When asked about approaches used for the flipped classroom prior to teaching in the clinical skills laboratory, video was the most commonly mentioned and was typically "skills being explained and performed." Participants also described other types of flipped activities for students e.g. reading clinical skills booklets, watching and listening to a short PowerPoint with or without voiceover. In some instances, a comprehensive 'package' was described that combined multiple resources for example, ""Learning paths" with text, pictures, videos etc." The flipped classroom often included a quiz "students read our clinical skills booklets and

take a short quiz on the skills we'll be teaching them in the practical, prior to attending." In a few instances completing the flipped material was compulsory with a pass mark and/or access was monitored via the virtual learning environment and failure to engage could mean "they cannot participate in the practical". A few mentioned ways of assessing the impact of the flipped material on student learning during the practical such as "having the students do the skill" before it was demonstrated/taught.

When asked to comment on the benefits, the responses were classified as for 'students' or 'instructors'. For students, two main themes emerged. The first related to the effects on their behavior i.e. as a result of the flipped classroom students were more prepared, engaged, and confident: "The great advantage in my opinion is that the students are prepared when they come to the skills lab" and can "engage more with the content and more readily ask questions". The second theme related to how students spend their time in the practical e.g. being able to get started straight away, more time doing hands-on (less reading or listening to an introduction) and learning/improving their technique, with the overall result that more can be achieved by the end of the practical: "Students are able to get further in class because they come already with some knowledge of what is required. So they use class time to refine techniques, receive feedback, or practice, rather than have a demonstration." For instructors the main benefits related to time: less time being required for explanation and demonstration of the basics; more time being available to teach the skills, help individuals having difficulty, and provide feedback: "It saves me time going through some essentials and basics with every group, I can spend more time teaching what I need to be teaching and students need to learn." Some participants included the caveat that if students don't engage with the flipped classroom, the benefits are variable or limited.

When asked about the challenges, a major theme emerged around the issues that instructors encountered: the time required to create the flipped material, keep existing material current, upload the material and inform students; institutional reluctance to embrace flipped classroom as an educational approach; clinical skills teaching not being part of the core curriculum; and some colleagues not wanting to use a flipped classroom and/or not understanding the concept. Often, a combination of challenges was identified e.g. "The learning material has to be reorganized to work well as a self-directed activity - the time commitment can be very intense ... Faculty interest in investing time to adjust the content

and train the staff is almost inexistent as it requires an intensive time commitment before the sessions take place." Another major challenge was getting students to engage with the flipped material particularly if it was not assigned a mark and/or compulsory, if they did not have time, or because of their pre-existing expectations "Students want lectures. It is hard for them to understand that techniques like this increase their learning" although this was not always the case "we have minimal to no push back from students." Instructors found it difficult to integrate those who had not prepared (not done the flipped classroom) in the subsequent practical class which caused problems "Some students don't watch the videos in advance, which I find opens up the gap in ability and can become time consuming as you try to catch those students up with the rest of the group. It also raises questions around safety" and concerns that "they slow everyone up". However, several mentioned that students who have not passed or completed the flipped classroom were not allowed to attend the practical "they now have to come back in a different session so this usually only happens once". A minor theme emerged around technical issues including "video buffering" and "computer glitches". The final question asked about other ways of using the flipped classroom in the future and suggestions related to having more videos "Videos of frequently made mistakes and how the students can prevent the "mistakes"" and some mentioned specific skills e.g. "I would like to create instrument identification and handling quiz" or parts of a practical e.g. "I'm going to review some of the repeated/introductory part. I am sure some/much of that could be flipped." ii) Were familiar with the term 'flipped classroom', were using it in teaching although not prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory but would consider doing so in the future When asked about the ways flipped classroom might be used prior to practicals in the clinical skills laboratory, the techniques identified were videos, reading (e.g. booklets or other relevant material), and quizzes. When asked about anticipated benefits, the major theme focused on the students and the potential for changes in their behavior, particularly improved preparation and better use of their time in the practical "Students come prepared with knowledge activated, can focus on the practical aspects rather than the theory in the lab." The main anticipated challenges were around poor student compliance (getting them

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to engage and accept the approach) which in the context of clinical skills teaching would mean that "the content has to be repeated before starting the planned practical." Some institutional challenges were identified including curriculum integration, allocating time in the timetable, and faculty buy in, time, and training. A couple of concerns specific to clinical skills were that the flipped material must not be seen as an alternative to the practical and there was a risk that during self-directed learning students "might develop bad habits". iii) Were familiar with the term 'flipped classroom', were not using it in teaching but would consider using the technique prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory in the future Suggested ways that flipped classroom could be used prior to practicals in the clinical skills laboratory were similar to those mentioned by the other groups; several emphasized that the activity should be brief and include "short online videos", "nanolectures", and "short quizzes". The proposed benefits focused on the students with the flipped classroom serving to "de-mystify expectations" and students being able to "'hit the ground running'" so that during the practical "students would get greater opportunity to work on their weakest areas". The challenges also focused on students and their (lack of) engagement with the material and the consequences "if students don't 'show up' to the webinar they will not know enough to get the most out of the practical session." Other potential issues raised related to the time requirements for students and instructors (creating and "policing" the flipped classroom). iv) Were not familiar with the term 'flipped classroom' before starting the survey but would consider using the technique prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory in the future Participants described similar techniques for the flipped classroom to other groups (videos, etc.) as well as mentioning specific skills e.g. "ophthalmology", "blood smear", "basic surgery". The potential benefits were also similar, focusing on student preparation and time in the class "for practical performance and deliberate practice" allowing instructors to "focus their time on targeted teaching". One of the main expected challenges was around student engagement whether due to their attitudes or time and subsequently being 'likely to fall behind in class' if they did not complete the preparatory assignments. Some also anticipated

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that the time demands associated with the flipped classroom model could be an issue e.g. "it will take a lot of time to prepare these classrooms".

DISCUSSION

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The survey has enabled us to gauge the extent to which flipped classroom techniques are being used prior to teaching in clinical skills laboratories as well as to identify some of the benefits and challenges in adopting the approach. The study is timely as more and more veterinary clinical skills laboratories are opening around the world and the associated teaching is increasingly embedded in modern curricula. There is an opportunity for the clinical skills community to embrace the flipped classroom and design effective learning activities for students to complete prior to arriving at a practical. The results indicated that most of those involved in clinical skills teaching were familiar with the term 'flipped classroom' and just under half were already using it prior to teaching in a clinical skills laboratory, while most of the rest would consider doing so in the future. The participants were in general agreement about the benefits, whether anticipated or based on experience. Although our focus was on using flipped classroom prior to clinical skills practicals, the findings were similar to those of others in veterinary medicine (Matthew et al., 2018), including when used in the context of professional skills (Moffett & Mill, 2014) and preclinical science (Dooley et. al., 2018). It can also be argued that the flipped component is a more appropriate setting for knowledge acquisition because it allows the practical to be focused on the actual skill. Students and instructors can then make more efficient use of their time, with the students more able to engage, ask relevant questions, and make use of the expertise of the instructor. The instructor benefits from more time for direct instruction and feedback and to provide additional support to those in need. Time in clinical skills practicals should optimize the opportunities for practice as skills acquisition depends on repeated deliberate practice with feedback (Ericsson, 2004; McGaghie et al., 2010). A widely accepted approach used in clinical skills teaching is George and Doto's (2001) five-step technique; the preparatory materials in the flipped classroom would align with, and potentially address, several of the steps. For example, Step 1 'conceptualization' could be covered by an explanation of the significance to the skill while Steps 2 and 3 ('visualization' and 'verbalization') can be demonstrated in a video by an expert performing

the skill. The five steps should still form that basis of teaching in the practical, but students

310 can focus their attention and questions and would be more prepared for Steps 4 and 5 311 practicing the skill followed by opportunities for correction and reinforcement. 312 The challenges our survey participants listed could be considered as major barriers and are 313 well recognized by others who have studied educators' skill and mindsets as they approach 314 adoption of the flipped classroom (Wang 2017; Ertmer 1999; Ertmer 2005). The time 315 commitment from busy faculty to develop the materials can be significant while also 316 ensuring the design and content will promote the desired learning – that is, if the students 317 complete it. Although the use of technology has been identified as a barrier in the past 318 (Rienties et al., 2013; Moffett 2015; Wang 2017), this was not a major finding in our study 319 which could indicate improvements in usability and/or improved IT skills amongst faculty. 320 Although the flipped classroom does not entirely depend on technological approaches 321 (Matthew et al., 2018), removal or reduction of such barriers to implementation is likely to enable greater adoption of the approach. 322 The issues around students who have not done the flipped classroom materials are well 323 324 recognized by others (Radunovich & Acharya, 2018; Akcayir & Akcayir, 2018). In the 325 literature the flipped classroom material is often referred to as homework, implying that the 326 work is to be done after class. In the case of a packed veterinary curriculum, this evening or 327 weekend work can compete with other demands on student time. One potential solution is 328 dropping the term 'homework' and changing the expectation of when the work is done. The 329 flipped material would be assigned a slot in the student timetable in the week prior to the 330 face-to-face class. Such an approach would give students protected time to do the work and 331 would send a message to students and faculty that the flipped classroom is recognized as a 332 core activity. Students would then be more likely to engage, and the time faculty spend 333 preparing the flipped material would be given the same priority and emphasis as other 334 learning materials. 335 Alternately, curricular and cultural shifts that replace the notion of homework as something 336 to be done after class with the idea of preparatory work necessary to take full advantage of 337 the affordances of valuable class time could alleviate some of the challenges. In some instances, participants indicated that students were not allowed to attend if they had not 338 339 completed the flipped components. Several individuals also reported concern over the 340 institution supporting their decision to send students home if they were unprepared for the

practical. Realistically, it is more likely that instructors will be faced with finding a way to catch students up during the practical or deal with two groups, prepared and not prepared. This is particularly true in the context of clinical skills where some participants quite rightly raised issues around safety and animal welfare. To mitigate risk to both students and animals, students need to come prepared to class. A way of ensuring their preparation would be to make it compulsory, monitored and requiring a specific pass rate on an assessment based on the preparation material prior to the start of the practical. The overall need for institutional support was clearly presented by participants. They noted that faculty not only needed time and training to develop and maintain high quality materials, but also that their institution's administration and their colleagues needed to clearly buy in to the shifting pedagogical approaches of flipping one's classroom. Participants shared the notion that the flipped classroom was an investment of time and resources, but overall, worthwhile in terms of results if students come prepared. Eventually it is anticipated there would be a change in the culture and expectations that would mean engaging with flipped classroom became the 'norm'. This would involve a better understanding of the approach and the benefits by students and faculty, embracing the pedagogy within the curriculum and by the institution, and ongoing research to evidence the benefits (Chen et al., 2018; Dooley et al., 2016). The limitations of the study include that the participants may not be representative of broader views as just over half were from USA and UK and the survey was sent out through networks already known to the authors. However, responses were received from 22 countries and there was an overwhelming engagement in the potential of the flipped classroom approach. Despite the overall positivity and keenness to utilize flipped classroom, caution should be exercised as there is currently limited and somewhat ambiguous evidence of the benefits on student learning in the context of clinical skills (Chen et al., 2018). Therefore, it is proposed that future work should focus on evaluating the impact of flipped classroom, for example with an OSCE used to measure the effect on subsequent skill development. In conclusion, the flipped classroom has great potential to enhance student learning in a clinical skills laboratory. There is widespread interest in embedding the associated techniques such as videos, short presentations, reading material, and quizzes as required

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preparation prior to the face-to-face practicals. Educational changes should be based on established theories and practical evidence that support veterinary students in a professional program as adult learners. The flipped classroom supports self-directed learning and allows students to serve as agents on their own behalf as they complete preparatory work for practicals on their own terms (Knowles, 1980). Offering learners well-produced materials in different mediums gives them an opportunity to self-direct their preparation and in a way that is personally meaningful (Moffett, 2015). The flipped classroom connects with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002), allowing educators to use time outside of class for lower-level cognitive work and reserve in-class time for application of information and improving students' skills through expert feedback. Though the flipped classroom takes time to thoughtfully set up – and is often a learning process where materials must be revised several times along the way before they can be finalized – the potential of the model is considerable. However, the challenges around time and engagement should not be underestimated and addressing these issues should form part of the approach adopted by the clinical skills community and their institutions.

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- **NOTES**

- 391 a. Qualtrics Survey Software www.qualtrics.com
- b. Network Of Veterinarians In Continuing Education (NOVICE) www.noviceproject.eu
- 393 c. International Veterinary Simulation in Teaching (InVeST) www.vetedsimulation.com

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