

CrazyForEducation Review

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As a Technology Integration Specialist at Eastchester Middle School, I teach a one-semester, blended-learning course that provides participating 7th and 8th grade students with instruction and practice on research and technology skills, while addressing the *Common Core Learning Standards* and the *National Educational Technology Standards for Students*. During the course, students select a research topic to investigate and then use various software applications and websites to work with the information they gather.

This is the fourth year I have been teaching the courses. Last year I “flipped” the courses, recording screencasts about the assignments and then requiring my students to view them as homework so that they were prepared to work on the assignments during class so that I could better assist them with the assignments. A secondary purpose of flipping the classes was to provide differentiated learning experiences and facilitate students working in self-paced, self-directed manner.

When I initially flipped my classes I purchased an account on another website to record and store my screencasts. A major drawback to the site was that even with a paid account, there are advertisements on it when I recorded the screencasts and when my students viewed them. This is less than ideal, but because of the ease of use and lack of other viable alternatives, I continued utilizing the website.

The other major drawback was that the site was not specifically designed for educational use, so there was no means for students to provide me with the information I needed after they had viewed the screencasts. The only viable alternative was for me to require the students to return to our Moodle course site after viewing a screencast to post a response in a discussion forum. Although this did provide me with the information from the students, it was not accessible on the site where the screencasts reside and it wasn't well-organized.

I discovered [CrazyForEducation \(CFE\)](#) through an e-newsletter that I happened to receive from the [Flipped Learning Network](#) during our winter vacation. I created an account on the CFE site and spent some time exploring it. I found the layout to be very logical, intuitive, and easy to navigate. Because of this, I decided to upload some files of the screencasts I had created on the other website.

I was immediately impressed with how easy it was to upload a video and create a lesson around it. Most of all, I liked the idea that there was a “Digital Note Card” associated with each lesson I created, providing a much more convenient, practical, and structured way for my students to submit their response to a screencast. Furthermore, the CFE site organizes the student responses in a report in an easily accessible format that allows me to much more quickly determine whether any of my students need additional support.

The CFE site is student-friendly as well as teacher-friendly. My students had an easy time getting started with CFE. I simply provided written instructions on how to access the site, register for a free account, find my lessons containing the screencasts, and respond to the lesson by completing a Digital Note Card. None of my students had any problem with the process and only a few needed a “walk-through” to begin using the site.

CFE technical support is truly outstanding! After uploading additional screencasts and creating lessons, the following day (on a weekend) I received a phone call from one of the developers. We spent a significant amount of time on the phone, discussing the CFE site and how I might utilize it with my students. This was promptly followed up with several email messages, detailing the matters we had discussed, thereby providing me with a written record of the procedures to follow as I got started using the site.

This was not a one-time event; CFE support has been prompt and ongoing since I have been using the site. This has enabled me to refine the use of the site with my middle school students, organizing them into classes within my two courses, making it even easier to access their responses to the viewing of the screencasts. I have also expanded my use of CFE by using it to flip an undergraduate course I teach for pre-service teachers at local college.

Besides the CFE site itself, there are other advantages to utilizing it for flipping a classroom. CFE makes available, either free or at a minimal cost, several other features that augment my flipped learning “toolbox.” First among these is a discount on the purchase of [Ink2Go](#) software, which provides a simple, easy to use, yet robust tool for recording screencasts.

Very quickly I was able to use the software to begin re-recording the screencasts I had made previously, not only removing the advertisements, but also using the tools in the software to enhance my screencasts with, among other things, highlights and annotations. The other very worthwhile (and free) service is the use of a [Box](#) account, that is linked to the CFE site. This provides me with storage for my screencasts as well as related resource files.

In summary, CFE has totally revolutionized the way in which I develop, deliver, and manage flipped learning experiences for both my middle school and college students. I now have one comprehensive platform that addresses all the aspects of flipping my classroom.

Because of the outstanding, highly responsive technical support, the process of flipping my classrooms has become significantly more simple and straightforward. Even though it has only been about a month since I started using CFE, additional features have been added to the service that makes it even better. I would encourage anyone who is considering flipping their classroom, or who has already flipped, to take some time to consider using CFE as their platform.