

Conference explores the technology-driven classroom

Watch a video about how many teachers are “flipping” the style of instruction in their classrooms, thanks to technology, on myajc.com

Robert Garrett was walking fast. The social studies teacher had traveled from Birmingham to hear two visionaries talk, and their techno-education session on the far side of the sprawling Georgia World Congress Center was about to begin.

Garrett “flipped” his middle school classroom back in 2008, before the word had the cache it does today in education circles, due in part to the authors whose session he was hunting down. To “flip” means to record the facts of a day’s lecture in a podcast or other format and send it home with students.

A typical seven-minute recorded lecture would take three times longer to present in person because students learn at different speeds, Garrett said. At home, they can absorb the material at their own pace, leaving time in school for discussion. That leaves time for thoughtful discussions and probing questions in class, instead of “lulling kids to sleep” with drills, he said. “What is dramatically different is the amount of time you have to spend with your students.”

Garrett was among thousands of educators who converged on the [International Society for Technology in Education](#) convention at the Congress Center, including many from metro Atlanta. A sampling of the sessions: cinematic storytelling with tablets and phones, bringing your own technology, digital books (“why it works, why it's time”) and teaching with a device in every child's hands.

Teachers and administrators are harnessing technology to engage their students and to streamline their burgeoning workload as class sizes grow while the pressure to achieve mounts.

Garrett made it to his session Monday with Aaron Sams and Jonathan Bergmann, the authors of the 2012 book “Flip Your Classroom.” Excited, he pulled out his phone to take a selfie with the pair, who now have a [nonprofit](#) to promote the method.

They’re about to release a second book. “Flipped Learning” follows educators who implemented the concept, such as the math teacher in Houston who used the time saved to launch his students into an exercise showing the real-world value of fractions. His students perused federally approved school lunch recipes and used their new math skills to “scale up” the volume of ingredients for their own cafeteria. The school rewarded them by serving their recipe.

“It’s teaching them to use it in a way that’s very real,” Bergmann said, “because they got to eat the results.”

The Cobb County School District has experimented with flipped classrooms, as have private schools in metro Atlanta. This was just one of many topics at the four-day teaching and technology conference, which ended Tuesday.

The DeKalb County School District sent about 200 educators at roughly \$400 apiece, said Chief Information Officer Gary Brantley. Teachers there are using test data to diagnose students’ strengths and weaknesses, while the central office is moving to “paperless” processes and letting principals

choose devices on the operating systems of their choice. Teaching is better with devices, he said. “The kids seem to engage a lot more with what’s being taught when they’re using these tools.”

Bob Farrace, the spokesman for the National Association of Secondary School Principals, led a session Monday for principals. He said school leaders are realizing that educational technology is driving fundamental change in the classroom.

“What we’re starting to see is, more and more, educational technology is being seen as less of a layering on of technology to things we already do and more of a way to transform the practice of education,” he said.