Flipping Your EL Classroom: A Primer
by John Graney

How many of us have had this experience? We attended a class, took notes, and felt confident we understood the concept being taught; however, when doing the homework assignment, what seemed so clear in class proved opaque? We became frustrated and sometimes gave up because everything we tried, what we thought the teacher showed us, or what was in our notes, did not work. Perhaps you felt something was wrong with you because the lecture had been so clear and you were unable to apply what you had been taught in class. With enough of these struggles while the class moved forward, you may have fallen hopelessly behind.

The Flip

The flipped classroom seeks to change this scenario by bringing homework into class time. Thus, learners engage in more cognitively demanding activities with the teacher present. The frustrated student, the confused learner, the student in danger of tuning out gets attention and support when they need it (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). In turn, the instructional part of the learning moves outside the classroom. Now teachers can reach learners at their point of need or frustration and build on that point as a learning opportunity.

In a sense, what is flipped is the clock. The clock at home gets used on instruction, on piquing curiosity, on initial exploration. When the classroom clock starts ticking, teachers spend their time interacting with students on activities that they used to assign as homework. Like all good homework assignments, these activities still challenge students to use what they have learned.

The Flipped Classroom in Three Parts

We can break a flipped classroom lesson into three parts: work at home, work in class, work after class. A lesson on subject-verb agreement might look like this:

Students prepare for the class by watching the videos and/or studying the textbook explanations. Perhaps, the teacher has inserted a quiz into the video or accompanying the video. In class, the teacher sets up the activity and hands out any needed materials. The students go to work on the activity individually, in pairs, or in groups. While the students work, the teacher moves around the classroom and diagnoses needs and problems through over-the-shoulder assessments (formative assessments). Some problems can be addressed immediately through interventions such as a tutorial, an explanation to a small group, or a mini lecture. The teacher may teach the same point to several students but vary the approach to meet the needs of the student or students. For after class, the teacher can assign an activity to expand upon or deepen the learning taking place in the classroom.

What happens in the flipped classroom revolves around the learners' needs. The classroom activities challenge learners to apply the information and instruction from the videos. The activities may elicit the misunderstandings, they may take the students deeper into the subject, and they should provide students with opportunities to learn or relearn the elements of the lessons that they find difficult. Learners benefit from this approach because the teacher is available when the learner has a problem.

By moving instruction outside of class, learners gain control over their learning. Learners have the power of the pause button to control the videos. Learners who get lost in class as the teacher explains more quickly than they can process can now stop the video and review. They can use the Internet to research issues the video may have raised. They even have the power not to watch the videos and learn in another way—though teachers can encourage students to watch the videos by using in-video quizzes or quizzes with an embedded form.

The Videos

Because videos have become so closely associated with the flipped classroom, let's consider two ways to provide videos for a class: Finding appropriate videos and creating your own videos.

Finding an Existing Video

The first way involves finding a video that fits the teacher's needs through online through sites like YouTube, TeacherTube, TED-Ed, Educreations, or ShowMe. As the flipped classroom becomes more popular, better instructional videos should become available. Still, the teacher needs to spend a good amount of time selecting the most appropriate video or videos for each lesson.

Creating a Video

The second option involves making your own instructional videos. Several screencasting applications exist online such as Screencast-o-matic, and there are free screencrasting applications like Jing or Camstudio. See the article "5 Free Screencasting Apps for Creating Video Tutorials" for a more complete listing.

Investing some money in a program like Camtasia or similar applications can make the editing process easier. With an iPad, several applications can help, including Educreations, Showme, Doceri, and Explain Everything, which have been reviewed on Crazy Teaching. Movie editing applications come free on the PC (Windows Live MovieMaker) and the Mac (iMovie), if you decide to shoot a video using a video camera. Lecture capture applications like Tegrity can also be used. If a teacher makes a video, a general guideline is to aim for a 5-minute final product. Before making a video, especially one that lasts more than a minute or two, it is wise to storyboard it first.

Other Nonvideo Options

Much attention has been given to the videos with the flipped classroom. Videos are not the key element of the flipped classroom. The flipped classroom is about helping learners the best way we can. The videos are the sexy part of flipping, but teachers can use a variety of resources for the initial exploration of a topic. Reading the textbook seems the most obvious, but researching a topic through reading blogs, going to sites explaining a topic, completing a survey, or making a slide show are other possibilities.

The initial engagement with the topic can be designed to awaken curiosity or present a problem to be explored more deeply in class. In other words, the flipped classroom approach makes the learner the central part of the process and works outward to find ways to help them learn better. Each teacher will do the flip differently to fit his or her learners.

Conclusion

The flipped classroom challenges learners to take control of their learning. Some students may find this responsibility one they take on reluctantly. The students used to "playing school" successfully may find the approach frustrating as it makes demands beyond simply having the correct answer. The students struggling with the material can benefit from getting support from teachers and fellow students in the mistake making that accompanies language learning.

By flipping the clock, teachers have more time with their learners. Teachers engage their learners not from the front of the room but next to them, and while the teacher still has a role as an explainer, he or she diagnoses from ongoing formative assessments that will guide the explanations. Why explain to the students who already get it? The teacher may need to explain to only one or two students; moreover, the explanations can be targeted and adjusted for each student or group. The flipped classroom requires a flexible and adaptable teacher able to use the new technology and creativity to meet the learners' needs.

Reference

Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012). *Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day*. Washington, DC: International Society for Technology in Education.

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