You've Flipped Your Class and…
by John Graney

More than 4 years ago, I flipped my writing class with some trepidation. It was one of the best decisions I have made. While I have experienced challenges and frustrations, now I work more closely with my students, watch them take more responsibility for their learning, and observe them do more creative work displaying deeper understanding.

In the process, I have evolved from just flipping my classroom to becoming a flipped learning practitioner. Flipped learning is defined as

> a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment, where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter. (Flipped Learning Network, 2014)

In evolving toward flipped learning, we work to make group learning spaces better active learning spaces. Three challenges face the flipped learning teacher: use of video, formative assessment, and higher order thinking skills.

Video

As I described in a previous article (Graney, 2013) many resources can be used for making videos, and more have become available. These resources have expanded with new computer, tablet, and phone applications like ExplainEverything and Powtoon. Also, with more teachers making videos, curating videos has become easier for the teacher facing the inevitable time challenges. With a library of made and curated videos, we can now differentiate learning and make feedback videos for specific purposes or students.

However, no matter how wonderful the videos are, the students may not watch them. Our approach to this problem will revolve around two questions: How crucial are the videos to our classroom activities? And how much responsibility do we give the students for their learning?

If we identify videos as crucial to our instruction, we can integrate the videos into our learning management systems or use sites like EDpuzzle or Zaption. At these sites, teachers import a video and insert questions at points during the video. When the students watch the video, the video stops where the questions have been inserted, so the students cannot breeze through the video while chatting or texting. If we prefer to give responsibility to the students, we can assign the video, refer to it for review, and reference the video when a student experiences a problem addressed by the video, thus addressing a need in a timely way.

We should keep in mind that the videos are meeting the first steps toward learning: remember and understand. The videos allow us to use the collective space, the classroom, for active learning. However, videos are not the only materials for the individual learning space. Textbooks, blogs, quizzes, research question, infographics, and slideshows provide other possible resources and variety.

Formative Assessment

We use formative assessment to help us identify student progress. The use of exit tickets, quizzes, and tests are what we might call formal formative assessment. With flipped learning or other active learning approaches where teachers spend more time at the side of their students, formative assessment occurs almost constantly. The effectiveness of formative assessment revolves around immediacy and individualization. Informal formative assessment occurs as we circulate among the students observing, suggesting, and interviewing. These types of in-class formative assessments can involve a three-part process: observation, analysis, and feedback.

Observation

With observation, we pay attention to each student in relation to their previous performances and current activity. We determine the differences between a mistake and an error (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 15). An aberration is a mistake, the head-slapping misspelling of a simple word, for example. Consistently failing to recognize a comma splice is an error that reveals faulty understanding. Along with these observations, we pay attention to individual affects and group interactions.

Analysis

Using the information gained from observation, we analyze the situation based on the student or students and lesson goals. Because each student differs, we use our knowledge about the student affectively and cognitively to determine what is going on with the success or failure in order to inform the feedback plan. In other words, at this point, we determine what future instruction adjustments are needed and how to provide feedback.

Feedback

Feedback may well be the most important element of this in-class formative assessment. Because the primary purpose of feedback is to cause thinking (William, 2011), we consider what kind of thinking we wish to stimulate. Two general types of thinking are cognitive and metacognitive. We provide cognitive feedback to nudge a student down a different path, as in “that is not a verb,” or to reorient a student, “remember the difference between a proper and a common noun,”

or “focus only on the nouns.” Metacognitive feedback involves asking questions that lead to analysis of personal learning, task demands, or knowledge gaps. We use questions like “What do you need to know to do this activity?”, “Where can you find the information to complete this task?”, or “What do you still need to learn to do this task?” Combining this feedback with the affective elements, we tailor our feedback to the student’s situation.

Higher Order Thinking Skills

While formative assessment helps us with understanding our students and their needs, a key challenge revolves around using the class time freed up by individual space activities. Flipped learning challenges us to provide students with meaningful activities without the teacher being central and scaffold the activities so they are accessible to all students. We want to encourage our students to use the higher order thinking skills, or HOTS, of application, analysis, evaluation, and creation.

Involving students actively presents the challenge of moving beyond worksheets. As we continue flipping, and especially as we work to incorporate the HOTS, we will look for ways to provide students with opportunities to be makers. This involves incorporating project-based and task-based learning activities, or, in other words, “to-show-what-they-know” projects. These can include creating slide decks, infographics, making videos, and hands-on projects. In creating these activities, we scaffold learning: by determining the elements of the knowledge/content students need to know, assisting the students by identifying and meeting their needs, giving them enough time to fail and succeed, and providing opportunities to revise.

The evolution from flipping the classroom to flipped learning encourages us to make our classrooms active learning spaces for both students and teachers to continue to grow and learn.

References

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John M. Graney *is the ESL coordinator at Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Florida. He has been an English language teacher since 1979 when he began as a Peace Corps volunteer. He has taught in China, the Philippines, and Mali as well as in intensive English programs in the United States.*