EdTech in ELT: Flipping the Classroom—Essential Steps for Success
by Christel Broady

On a very simplistic level, in a flipped classroom, students learn new concepts and materials *outside* of the school and apply them in the classroom. There is a common perception that teachers using this concept provide preteaching materials, videos, handouts, worksheets, and such to be completed alone and in isolation. Many teachers also believe that class time is used to let students do their homework. Some teachers are relieved not to have to create detailed lesson plans anymore. But, in reality, truly flipped classrooms require careful planning and preparation to create the most optimal learning environment at home and school.

Essential Components of Flipped Classrooms

The International Society for Teaching in Education (ISTE) lists four components required for a flipped classroom: relationship building, personalized learning, passion-based learning, and project-based learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2015; See an excellent infographic on the ISTE website, "4 Signs You Have a Real Flipped Classroom.")

1. Relationship Building

Language and communication are more authentic when users have positive relationships with peers and teachers in their classrooms. It is easy enough to feel embarrassed when making mistakes, and a safe classroom allows for students to express themselves without fear of ridicule.

2. Personalized Learning

Students learn in different ways and different paces from each other. Personalized learning opportunities address diverse learning styles and abilities. Teachers should complement lessons with personalized formative and summative assessments allowing students to demonstrate what they learned. After each lesson, teachers should know whether students have learned the material or skills or not. In language classes, this is easily done with authentic communication.

3. Passion-Based Learning

Flipped language classrooms offer great opportunities to students to explore their passions in authentic communication that is high on Bloom's Taxonomy level, thus creating deeper mastery of English.

4. Project-Based Learning

PBL allows students to apply their skills hands-on within the context of real life situations, perfect for authentic English communication.

Flipped classrooms and English classes appear to be perfect companions, because they both seek to establish authentic and meaningful communication and products.

Language Pedagogy and How It Connects to Flipped Classrooms

How we teach English classes is closely aligned with the way we were trained. How we were trained is a direct result of learning theories. Many teachers ground themselves in behaviorism, a way of conditioning students by providing a stimulus and soliciting a certain response. Some teachers adopt a method anchored in cognitivism, a learning theory that uses mental processing to reach learning outcomes. Another widely adopted learning theory is constructivism, which is a way of viewing learning as an active process, highly individualistic to each learner who has to create his or her personal outcome. (See Ertmer & Newby, 2013, for a comparison of these theories from an instructional design perspective.)

When considering a flipped classroom, it is important that you are aware of your pedagogical framework, which frames how you view teaching, learning, and the role of the classroom materials and the environment. Here are several major language learning methods and approaches:

Grammar Translation Method

Historically, this method is the most traditional way of teaching language studies. Teachers plan a lesson around grammar rules, add a list of vocabulary, and then expect students to translate something. This method is based on reading and writing.

Audiolingual Method

Contrary to the grammar translation method, the Audiolingual Method focuses heavily on listening and speaking. Prescribed dialogues and drills are in the center of instruction. Authentic communication is not the goal of this method—rather, it is that students master preset dialogues.

Communicative Approach

The Communicative Approach seeks to build communicative competence. Therefore, it encourages lessons to be built on communicative functions and the process of communication, and students to meet tasks of social interaction.

Constructivism

Constructivism bases instruction on how students learn. The focus drastically shifts from teacher actions to student ones. Constructivism is based on the assumption that each learner has a different experience of the world around him or her and thus connects to new learning situations in his or her personal way. Constructivist classrooms encourage active participation, creation of products, and the opportunity for each learner to create his or her knowledge. For students to be successful, teachers need to prepare a nurturing

classroom environment and use spiraling and recycling strategies to allow all learners to connect with the materials.

Which pedagogy do you employ in your classroom? It is important to note that a flipped classroom has little chance of success unless you employ constructivist pedagogy.

Resources for Teacher Professional Development

Teachers can find webinars, short articles, blog posts, and more to acquire skills needed. A good and reliable starting point is to visit the ISTE website and the TESOL International Association website. As in all teaching, life-long learning is essential, and technology skills should be on top of the priority list for professional development to help teachers effectively relate to learners. Here are some specific resources to get you started:

- Flipped Classroom: A collection of articles and resources for the flipped classroom (edutopia)
- Flippedlearning.org: A website devoted to helping educators successfully implement flipped learning. (Flipped Learning Network)
- Flipped Institute: A website devoted to helping educators flip their classroom, providing articles, resources, examples, and video content management.
- Tech Tools of the Flipped Classroom: A site explaining and linking to resources for the tools necessary to flip a classroom—video hosting, video creation, video interaction, and learning management. (Flippedclass.com)

Tips to Start Your Flipped Classrooms

1. **Get to know your students.** What interests them, what technology do they use, what technology is available to them at home and in your school? Consider sending out surveys to find answers.
2. **Define your approach, method, and personal preference.** Be aware of how you prefer to teach and why. Consider what could stand between your favorite teaching approach and what the flipped classroom would require. Be prepared to unlearn strategies and methods and to reinvent your teaching to be relevant to your learners. Be the teacher who is a partner in learning to the students.
3. **Create an environment of constructive and communicative learning**. This environment should exist both at home and school, should have built-in collaboration opportunities for students, and should provide students with the tools to navigate it successfully.
4. **Start Slow.** One activity/lesson at a time. There is no need to change all your units at once. Start with one group and one lesson.
5. **You cannot overprepare for flipped instruction.** For students to work effectively at home and without teacher guidance, students need meticulously prepared materials and activities.
6. **Use Bloom's Taxonomy.** Provide experience on various levels. Try to provide instruction for *understanding* and *remembering* at home, and reserve classroom time for *applying*, *analyzing*, *evaluating*, and *creating*.

7. **Provide clear instructions.** They must be unambiguous and clear to all learners.
8. **Make yourself available.** It is extremely beneficial to students to be able to reach you after school hours to clear up any learner confusion. Consider virtual office hours or availability via email and phone.
9. **Maximize collaboration and social interaction.** Consider how collaboration among students can be maximized. Provide technology tools for this purpose.
10. **Use constructivist methods.** Provide ample opportunity for all learners to be able to construct knowledge in their way and to be able to show mastery.
11. **Consider low technology environments.** Think of ways that the flipped classroom will work if students do not have access to technology at home and at school.
12. **Teach digital literacy.** Infuse learning with 21st-century skill activities. Using teacher-created PowerPoint presentations will not do. Students can only learn digital skills if they can manipulate technology themselves in meaningful learning situations. Connect 21st-century skills and digital literacy to English language instruction.
13. **Assess efficiently.** Create activities that double as formative assessments. Let students create different products to show mastery.
14. **Utilize data.** Collect and analyze student learning and outcome data to monitor how successful your instruction is. Revise your processes if needed.
15. **Commit to lifelong learning.** Engage in ongoing professional development, even if your institution doesn't provide it.

I hope that you will consider embarking on the journey of collaborating with your students on English learning in meaningful and authentic ways in your own flipped classroom!

References

Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2015). Infographic: 4 learning strategies for flipped learning. Retrieved from https://www.iste.org/explore/ArticleDetail?articleid=14

Ertmer, P. A., & Newby, T. J. (2015). Behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism: Comparing critical features from an instructional design perspective. *Performance Improvement Quarterly, 26*(2), 43–71. Retrieved from http://northweststate.edu/wp-content/uploads/files/21143_ftp.pdf. doi: 10.1002/piq.21143

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Dr. Christel Broady *is a professor of graduate education, chair of advanced graduate programs, and director of the online program for ESL teacher education at Georgetown College. She is an internationally and nationally known keynote speaker, presenter, and author of a book, book chapters, and articles as well as a consultant to educational organizations. Christel is a past president of the Kentucky TESOL, former chair of the TESOL International Association EEIS, and current TESOL CALL steering board member. She is the quality assurance manager of online education with "Quality Matters" for her workplace as well as for all Kentucky independent colleges. She is the manager of "Broadyesl," a worldwide ELT Community of Practice on* [*Facebook*]*, Wordpress (*[*ESL*] *and* [*technology*]*),* [*LinkedIn*]*, and* [*Twitter*]*.*