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Five Best Practices for the Flipped Classroom

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Ok, I'll be honest. I get very nervous when I hear education reformists and politicians tout how "incredible" the flipped classroom model (<http://www.knewton.com/flipped-classroom/>), or how it will "solve" many of the problems of education. It doesn't *so*lve anything. It *is* a great first step in reframing the role of the teacher in the classroom.

It fosters the "guide on the side" mentality and role, rather than that of the "sage of the stage." It helps move a classroom culture towards student construction of knowledge rather than the teacher having to tell the knowledge to students. Even Salman Khan (<http://www.khanacademy.org>) says that the teacher is now "liberated to communicate with [their students]."

It also creates the opportunity for differentiated roles to meet the needs of students through a variety of instructional activities. But again, just because I "free" someone, doesn't mean that he/she will know what to do next, nor how to do it effectively. This is where the work must occur as the conversation of the flipped classroom moves forward and becomes more mainstream in public and private education. We must first focus on creating the engagement and then look at structures, like the flipped classroom, that can support. So educators, here are some things to think about and consider if you are thinking about or already using the flipped classroom model.

1) Need to Know

How are you creating a need to know the content that is recorded? Just because I record something, or use a recorded material, does not mean that my students will want to watch, nor see the relevance in watching it. I mean, it is still a lecture. Also, this "need to know" is not "because it is on the test," or "because it will help you when you graduate." While that may be a reality, these reasons do not engage the students who are already struggling to find meaning and relevance in school. If the flipped classroom is truly to become innovative, then it must be paired with transparent and/or embedded reason to know the content.

2) Engaging Models

One of the best way to create the "need to know" is to use a pedagogical model that demands this. Whether project-based learning (PBL), game-based learning (GBL), Understanding by Design (UbD), or authentic literacy, find an effective model to institute in your classroom. Become a master of those models first, and then use the flipped classroom to support the learning. Example: Master design, assessment, and management of PBL; and then look at how you can use the flipped classroom to support the process. Perhaps it is a great way to differentiate instruction, or support students who need another lesson in a different mode. Perhaps students present you with a "need to know," and you answer with a recorded piece to support them. This will help you master your role as "guide on the side."

3) Technology

What technology do you have to support the flipped classroom? What technology gaps exist that might hinder it? Since the flipped classroom is about recorded video, then obviously students would need the technology to do this. There are many things to consider here. Will you demand that all students watch the video, or is it a way to differentiate and allow choice? Will you allow or rely on mobile learning for students to watch it? Again, these are just some of the questions to consider in terms of technology. Lack of technology doesn't necessarily close the door to the flipped classroom model, but it might require some intentional planning and differentiation.

4) Reflection

Every time you have students watch a video, just like you would with any instructional activity, you must build in reflective activities to have students think about what they learned, how it will help them, its relevance, and more. If reflection is not a regular part of your classroom culture, then implementing the flipped classroom will not be as effective. Students need metacognition to connect content to objectives, whether that is progress in a GBL unit, or work towards an authentic product in at PBL project.

5) Time and Place

Do you have structures to support this? When and where will the learning occur? I believe it unfair to demand that students watch the video outside of the class time for various reasons. If you have a blended learning environment, that of course provides a natural time and place to watch the videos, but it

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will be difficult to ensure all students watch a video as homework. In addition, do not make epic videos that last hours. Keep the learning within the videos manageable for students. This will help you formatively assess to ensure learning, and it will feel doable to students.

I know I may have "upset the apple cart" for those who love the flipped classroom. My intent is not to say that the flipped classroom is bad. Rather, it is only a start. The focus should be on teacher practice, then tools and structures. The flipped classroom is one way to help move teachers toward better teaching but does not ensure it. Like the ideas above, focus on ways to improve your instruction before choosing to use the "flipped classroom."

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