Chapter 7

Making the Most of the Flipped Format:
Active Learning at Work

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ABSTRACT

Flipping the English language arts (ELA) classroom can be equally empowering and frustrating. However, the increased time and effort are worth the gains in student knowledge and teacher satisfaction. The key to success is helping students to work individually and independently. In this chapter, ideas for promoting student independence through flipping writing, flipping discussions, and flipping vocabulary instruction are provided.

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, I went on a field trip up the mountain, in both a literal and figurative sense, to visit two science teachers, Aaron Sams and Jon Bergmann, in Woodland Park, Colorado, who were doing something new and revolutionary in education. As part of a district-initiated technology grant, my colleagues and I were seeking new ways to implement technology to improve students’ engagement and success in school. When I walked into Sams’ and Bergmann’s classrooms and spent some time observing them, I knew almost immediately that I had found an idea that I could not only use but advocate for as well. Bergmann and Sams (2012) went on to write a book that detailed their experiences in flipping their chemistry classroom. They have since been credited with founding the flipped classroom method and have continued to
publish and speak on their initiative. Since that fortuitous journey in 2006, I have adopted the flipped classroom method in my English language arts (ELA) high school classes and have gone on to present on the method for over seven years now.

My first question after coming down from the mountain was, “So where do I begin?” The question was an easy and obvious one to ask, but a very hard one to answer. It was difficult in part because there is no one best way to flip classes – a notion that can be equally empowering and frustrating. Flipping instruction can be empowering in that it allows for teacher autonomy and flexibility to meet student needs, but it can also be challenging because there is no easy step-by-step guide to easily model your class after. In this chapter, I will walk you through my journey – how I started by addressing the key consideration of what was the best use of my class time and then researched activities that encouraged my students’ growth in critical thinking. I offer my story as a guide for starting your own flipped classroom odyssey.

GETTING STARTED: WHAT IS THE BEST USE OF MY CLASS TIME?

After my experience with Sams and Bergmann, I came back to my own classroom and started reviewing my classes – purposefully analyzing content, objectives, and assessment. I quickly realized that the best use of my class time was when my students were having to use higher-order thinking skills. They didn’t need my help to listen to a background lecture on William Shakespeare; they needed me when they were analyzing and writing about his works. So I decided to start with considering what my students could learn independently.

To do this, I examined my curriculum and lesson plans and considered what English language arts (ELA) content could be addressed by students working independently and, probably individually, along with any content that needed to be addressed as a whole class activity. I started writing and recording videos to address any content that students could learn independently. One example of this type of ELA subject matter is background material on authors. When I teach Hamlet, it is important for my students to have some background information on Shakespeare, of course, but also on the culture, religion, and politics of the time. Providing background information is traditionally completed as a whole group activity; however, I realized that this was not the best use of my class time, so I flipped the lesson. I created videos and webquests that covered the lecture material, but also encouraged creativity and curiosity before my students read the play. As Moran and Young (2015) state, one
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