Chapter 13
Flipping the Flip to Empower Students: Using Constructivist Principles to Reinvent Flipped ELA Instruction

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ABSTRACT
One of the key criticisms leveled at the flipped method of instruction is that it is simply “business as usual” with teachers delivering didactic lectures, and the students relying on them for information. To address this issue, the authors each enacted a form of flipping in their respective classroom contexts in which students made digital videos for their peers to view for instructional gain. This process, which the authors dubbed SMILE (Student Made Inquiry-based Learning Experience), advocates for students to be the creators of content actively engaging their peers. Rather than teachers serving in a more traditional role, they serve as facilitators in this model. Results from action research across the varying classroom contexts indicated that students were highly engaged and achieved targeted learning goals through the SMILE process.

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the flipped classroom and its potential to transform the classroom dynamic (Bergmann & Sams, 2012), increase instructional time (Herreid & Schiller, 2013), and eliminate the struggle with homework (Strayer, 2007). Early advocates “saw the ‘Flip’ as a way of addressing the ‘covering the content’ debate” (Baker, 2000, p. 3) and believed that it allowed them to quickly disseminate direct instruction while preserving class time for active learning. Yet, many English Language Arts (ELA) teachers have looked on the method with skepticism and confusion (Moran & Young, 2014), contending that it is more suitable for math/science content and wondering how they would go about flipping major elements of an ELA curriculum.

One of the key criticisms leveled at the flipped method of instruction is that it is really just “business as usual” with teachers delivering didactic lectures via video, and the students still relying on them for information (Hamden, McKnight, McKnight, & Arfstrom, 2013). To flipped learning opponents, teachers never quite relinquish their “sage on the stage” (King, 1993) status as they position themselves as givers of knowledge and view their students as the receivers.

IMPETUS FOR THE STUDY

In light of these concerns, we wondered if the flipped model could be used as a means for empowering students in addition to teachers. As ELA teachers, we were curious if providing students the opportunity to create the flipped videos would allow for more authentic student voices in the ELA curriculum. We envisioned a classroom paradigm in which students reached beyond their role as recipients of teacher-delivered knowledge and instructed themselves and each other in a more autonomous and democratic environment. We drew on the basic learner-centered, constructivist belief that students should be encouraged to think on their own and reflect critically on the process with meaningful guidance from a teacher (Eby, Herrell, & Jordan, 2006). We believed that this philosophy contrasted sharply with a direct instruction approach in which the teacher is the center of the classroom, and students’ time is spent primarily on academic tasks structured by the teacher (Sanrock, 2008). We wanted to promote a more democratic classroom, and we believed that we could use the flipped method to do that.

After meeting to discuss a more constructivist approach to flipping, each of us sought to enact the idea within our own respective classrooms with different sets of students. Clarice launched an action research project with her students in a required reading course in a teacher preparation program at a large, public
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