

Online Learning Revolution

The flipped classroom is revolutionizing the way teaching and learning take place, both in and out of the classroom. No longer is learning confined to a brick and mortar school setting between the hours of 8 and 3. Through increased access to online resources and courses, improved communication tools and programs like the Khan Academy, teaching and learning have expanded to become a where you want, when you want, how you want entity. Though some tout the flipped classroom as being another passing craze in the ever evolving education world, I see it as having merit that can be implemented to the advantage of most and an intriguing experiment that I would definitely like to try.

The Khan Academy is an online resource (also available as an app) that provides video lessons on a number of given topics and subjects for people to watch, review when necessary, use to supplement other materials and refer to often in order to deepen their (or their students) understandings of said topic. This tool has been adopted by a number of educators in order to 'flip' their classroom, where students are expected to watch a video or research information for homework and then bring their information, understandings and questions to class where they will have time to discuss, collaborate and apply their knowledge in working groups with their peers and clarify understandings with the help of their teacher. Using class time to work through questions and projects has proven advantageous to build student understanding and provide a sense of relevance to their learning. (More information on the Khan Academy is available at <http://www.khanacademy.org/>).

As with every educational movement, there are two camps involved here – those that hype the usefulness and value of the flipped classroom and those that advocate against it. Though initially a fan of the practice, Shelley Wright (The Flip: End of a Love Affair, accessible at: <http://plpnetwork.com/2012/10/08/flip-love-affair/>) has moved her classroom away from being a flipped classroom because she felt that students were still simply watching a lecture and passively learning what she had set up for them to learn, all on their own time at home. This went against her own principles and beliefs as a teacher and therefore she let go of the flip and incorporated a practice of student led exploratory learning into her class environment instead. In this example the experience of using a flipped classroom led to the author's own learning revolution and in the end improved her practice through a process of trial and error.

However more and more people seem sold on this idea of student learning (whether passive or active) being started at home followed by the application, exploration and problem solving happening in the classroom where a teacher can talk students through their questions or stumbling blocks and support the development of deeper understandings.

I've said it before and I'll say it again...I feel very fortunate to be learning about all of the things we are covering in OLTD right now. Perhaps I've had my head in the sand for the last few years, but I readily admit that I've been a bit slow on the uptake in this revolution (though faster than some – I wouldn't say that I'm at the back of the pack, I think I'm just working my way towards the middle). I've only recently started to use technology in the classroom and am still working out how it can benefit my students, their learning and my teaching. The obvious answer is hugely! In some ways I wonder why I'm not using it

more and in other ways I hesitate to use it more as the use of mobile devices (which are the most prevalent technology in my class) can be isolating in some respects in the classroom and, to be frank, change is a slow process and it takes time, energy and motivation to convince people that technology is more than just video games. It's all a part of the learning process and growing pains are to be expected.

What I can tell you is that every time I bring technology into my classroom the students become engaged, on task and collaborative learners. They problem solve and find a way to make the technology work for them. At the grade six level they've used technology enough to know the basics – how to turn their devices on, how to navigate through various websites, apps or programs to find a tool that will fit their needs, how to save, copy, print, etc. So now I'm at the point where I can push them. Push them to see where they can take their learning using this valuable resource.

So now in my studies I come across the concept of a flipped classroom (okay, I came across it last year initially but I wasn't in an online course that required me to use this technology in the classroom then so I could safely say, "oh that's nice" and go back to my routine and not think about it for a while). Now, after revisiting it and seeing some powerful arguments for implementing a flipped classroom I think I'm ready to get my feet wet and try it out....

As a teacher I like the idea of more hands on time in the classroom and more time for me to meet with each of my students one on one which is a luxury I don't often get with a class bursting with 30 students. But I also have a few nagging questions about flipped learning, for instance will my students watch the videos? I have a strong group of students who I recognized in reference in the Vancouver Sun article *Flipped classrooms create magic and controversy in B.C. schools* (<http://www.cancouversun.com/news/Flipped+classrooms+create+magic+controversy+schools/7202690/story.html>). In the article Prince George teacher Steve Chase was interviewed and said, "[High-achieving] students have the skills and attitudes to be successful no matter what we do as teachers. But it's those struggling students who we need to change the game for." I have those high achieving students who will watch the videos, take notes and develop questions all in time for class the next morning. But I have just as many disinterested, homework-losing, unmotivated students who could care less that they have homework – even if it is to watch a youtube video. In my situation, I think we'd be doing a lot of catch up the morning of so that everyone was ready to go. Secondly, I wonder if my students would internalize information provided in the video and be able to recall it the next day in class, particularly because they hadn't had the chance to apply it right away. I think there will still be a need for a refresher lecture to start us off. This is not to say that I'm not open to trying to 'flip' my classroom, because I certainly am. I think I just need to spend some more time exploring Khan Academy and other such resources and actually put them to use in my own classroom before I jump on the bandwagon. I see that this could be a very useful tool to use in my classroom, I'm just not convinced of the seamless flow that many seem to talk about in our readings.

I haven't yet tried flipping my classroom, but I am excited to explore its potential. Is it good? Is it bad? I don't yet know. Do I care that other people are done with the flipped classroom idea? Not at all. I'd like to try it, see what works and what doesn't and decide if I will try it again. I think I'll wait and judge for myself whether it is worthy of being integrated into my teaching style and practice.

In life I tend to go by the mantra – take the best and leave the rest – be it at a buffet, a garage sale, the home show or even in my teaching. One of the best parts of talking with other teachers or doing professional development workshops is that you get to tailor your own learning to your own interests and find something that is meaningful and relevant to your own classroom. In that respect I am loving skulking in the background following educational blogs, twitter feeds, discussion threads and youtube video links because it allows me to have those “ooooh, I have to try that!” flashes as well as the “meh, I could take it or leave it” moments.

I do know that I have to stop feeling like I need to be the expert in everything I teach. I need to make more use of other people’s expertise in the classroom and become the “guide on the side” instead of the “sage on the stage.” And I’m going to start right off the bat in January by using a link I saw when skulking on Andrew (from our OLTD class)’s blog....the plasticine artwork by Barbara Reid. Her videos made me want to try to create something. So I’m going to do it. I’m going to post a link on my virtual dashboard, get my students to watch the videos at home and come to school ready with a picture in mind from a book they are reading, set the stage, provide access to the video in class (in case they need a refresher) and set them to work. I see this as a two birds with one stone occasion – flipping my classroom and bringing in an expert in the field. I can foresee some great works of art....though I think there may be some struggles as well.....but I am eager to make my own attempt at a flipped classroom and see where it takes me.

For now, I remain in the middle of the pack, and though in reality I am closer to the back, I’m slowly working my way up!