Chapter 23

Two Sides of the Flip in Middle Grades ELA:
Student and Teacher Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to guide secondary teachers through the process of flipping their classrooms. The authors will share results from their action research and lay out recommendations for before, during, and after a flipped unit, providing readers with resources to flip their own classrooms. The authors will also share student perspectives and describe how these perspectives have shaped future flipped lessons and classroom approaches.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers have endless educational strategies at their fingertips, yet there seems to be a particular buzz in recent years surrounding the idea of flipping the classroom. In the course of this chapter, we will use the term flipped learning to describe a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from a whole-class, school-based lesson to an individual lesson taught outside of school through a brief video. The intended result is to transform class time into a period where teachers have ample time to help students apply concepts and engage more creatively with the content. If flipped learning is truly "a method developed by teachers for teachers" (Bergmann & Sams, 2012a, p. 25), then who better to assess the strategy's effectiveness than teachers themselves? In this chapter, we will discuss and examine both the teacher and student perspectives of a flipped poetry unit in a 7th grade middle school English language arts (ELA) classroom. While we agree with Bergmann and Sams (2012a) that "there is no one way to flip a class," (p. 25) our action research has allowed us to develop important considerations that might

benefit any middle school ELA teachers wanting to implement the flipped method. This chapter presents our lessons learned flipping the ELA classroom and outlines our recommendations for flipping.

BACKGROUND

As teachers who consistently used technology in our instruction, we were curious about all the excitement around flipped learning. We knew that the idea behind flipped learning was to "do what had been conceptualized as 'homework' at school and hear traditional lectures at home via online digital videos" (Moran & Young, 2015). It seemed like everywhere we turned, people were talking about flipping the classroom, and though we understood the basic premise, we struggled to imagine what flipped learning would look like in our own 7th grade ELA classrooms. We had experimented with flipping a few lessons when a doctoral student approached us to request our participation in a study about the flipped classroom method. Because our own search for scholarly literature about the flipped method in the ELA classroom had yielded limited results, we were excited about participating and eager to help provide important insights about the method's effectiveness. We hoped that participating in the study would give us the opportunity to try the method first-hand while also seeing data about our own classrooms from the eyes of an outside observer.

The doctoral student's research questions focused on student engagement. As classroom teachers, however, our research questions were broader, for we were trying out the flipped method to see if it was a viable instructional practice in our own classrooms. We were, of course, interested in student engagement, but we also wanted to know *how* to flip. Our questions included the following: What can we do to maximize the effectiveness of the flipped method in our classrooms before, during, and after a unit? What problems arise during the flip, and what can we do to mitigate them? Do middle school students enjoy flipped learning?

We saw our work with the doctoral student and our research that followed as ways to bridge the gap between research and practice. Too often, educational research is disconnected from real classrooms, and teachers, including ourselves, judge "much of the research to be lacking in practicality and to be inconsistent with classroom realities" (Pine, 2009, p. 6). Pine (2009) defines action research as "a process of concurrently inquiring about problems and taking action to solve them" (p. 30). Therefore, while the doctoral student studied our students' engagement, we conducted ongoing, recursive action research to find answers to our own research questions and to figure out solutions to problems that arose. In the months following the doctoral student's research, our action research continued, and we measured the effectiveness of modifications we made to our subsequent flipped units.

The suggestions outlined in this chapter are derived from our action research. The teacher impressions are our own. The doctoral student with whom we worked interviewed us before, during, and after the unit, and we used the transcription of her interviews with us as a data source. We met with each other daily as a professional learning team to plan, discuss, and reflect on the units, and our meeting minutes are another data source. As we taught the units, we recorded our reflections about the experience in digital journals--a third data source. The student impressions come from surveys that we gave students after the flipped units. We asked students about their impressions of the flipped method, and they composed written responses; we collected the students' responses, sorted them by theme and coded them, and organized them by frequency (Pine, 2009).

Throughout our action research, the following themes emerged from the data analysis:

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