Managing In-Class Learning Experiences in Flipped Classrooms

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In this ongoing series focused on flipped and active-learning classrooms, we're taking a deeper look into how to create successful learning experiences for students. We've examined how to encourage students to complete pre-class work, how to hold students accountable for pre-class work, and how to connect pre-class work to in-class activities. Now let's focus on the challenge of managing the in-person learning environment.

When you think about flipping a lesson or a class, you must, on some level, embrace the messiness of a dynamic learning environment.

By design, flipped classrooms and active-learning environments are dynamic. There are so many moving pieces. Students might be working in pairs or groups. They are most likely moving through the course material at different paces. The classroom is noisier than usual because students are talking, interacting, and working on tasks together. Some students are looking up resources online, while others are reviewing their notes. A few students may be on their phones choosing not to participate. You are probably moving around the room as you try to speak with as many students as possible. You might rush from one group to another based on how many hands are raised. Several students may decide to walk up to you to ask their questions rather than wait for you to make it to their table.

This "messy" type of learning environment can be challenging for both students and faculty. For some, it may seem too chaotic and disorganized, causing anxiety and frustration. For others, this is exactly the type of excitement and energy they need to learn and thrive.

When you think about flipping a lesson or a class, you must, on some level, embrace the messiness of a dynamic learning environment. But that does not mean you lose control or let chaos rule your classroom. In fact, because there are so many variables in the flipped classroom, you need to be even *more* organized, and put systems in place to help you and your students focus on the learning. Here are three strategies to help you manage the in-class learning environment and stay organized:

Create a system to organize the paperwork. Even in this digital world, there always seems to be paperwork. Worksheets, outlines, papers, quizzes, index cards, and notes from excused absences can quickly get out of control, especially if you teach a large class. One of my colleagues developed an in-and-out folder system that works really well to help her manage her paperwork and communicate with 180 students across two classes. She places students in semester-long groups and gives each group a colored pocket folder. She asks the students to create a name for their group and write each group member's name on the front cover of the folder. Then she asks students to label the right pocket "IN" and the left pocket "OUT." When students turn in a piece of paper, they place it in the "IN" pocket. After the instructor reviews it, she places the piece of paper in the "OUT" pocket for students to pick up and take out.

At the beginning of every class, the first member of the group to arrive picks up the folder, takes it to the group, and distributes the paperwork. At the end of class, each group member turns in any paperwork, and one student gives the folder to the instructor. If someone is absent, the paperwork stays in the folder until the student returns to class. If something is confidential between the student and the instructor, the student places it in a sealed envelope or folds and staples it, so others cannot see it. What makes this folder system effective is that it's simple, it reduces the sheer amount of individual sheets of paper you carry when you leave class (12 folders is better than 90 pieces of

paper!), and students are involved in the process of keeping things organized.

Develop ways to focus your energy. This idea comes from Jon Bergmann's blog (Bergmann, 2016). Bergmann is a teacher and flipped classroom advocate. Recently, he shared a great idea he learned from an anatomy teacher who attended one of his workshops. The teacher gives each group one green cup, one yellow cup, and one red cup to place on their tables during class time. When the group is working and they don't need help from the instructor, they place the green cup on the table. If students are working and they have a question, but it's not urgent, they place the yellow cup on the table. If the group places a red cup on the table, then they have a question that requires immediate attention. This type of strategy helps you focus your energy, so you're not running around and feeling overwhelmed trying to speak to every group and possibly interrupting their work process.

Use templates. When I lead faculty development workshops, I always provide templates for lesson plans, brainstorming processes, and assessments to give participants a place to start. The process of creating a template clarifies your expectations and sharpens your focus on what's most important. Templates allow you to communicate with your students, clarify expectations, and provide structure to the learning experience. Think beyond rubrics. Use a template to structure group discussions. Create a template to help students outline the chapter as they read. Develop a worksheet template. Try developing a template for your slides. Give your students a template for all writing assignments. Create templates for emails, so you can copy and paste your responses to the types of questions you're asked most frequently. Templates can save time and allow you to focus on content rather than layout or design. Templates also offer some predictability for students, which can be helpful and reassuring in dynamic learning environments.

Now it's your turn! Let's keep the conversation going. What strategies do you use to manage all the moving pieces in your active learning classroom? How do you stay organized in the midst of all the activity in your flipped classroom?

Resources

Bergmann, J. (March 20, 2016). Mastery simplified: Five tips to make mastery a reality. *Flipped Learning Blog.* Online at: http://jonbergmann.com/mastery-simplified-five-tips-to-make-mastery-a-reality/

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Barbi Honeycutt is the owner of FLIP It Consulting in Raleigh, N.C. and an adjunct assistant professor at NC State University. For more strategies, download the free whitepaper "10 Strategies to Encourage Students to DO the Pre-Class Work in Flipped and Active Learning Classrooms." Connect on Twitter @BarbiHoneycutt or the FLIP It blog.

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