

The Marriage of Constructivism and Flipped Learning

Sau Hou Chang

Indiana University Southeast

4-19-2016

## **Abstract**

This report talks about how a constructivist teacher used flipped learning in a college class. To illustrate how to use flipped learning in a constructivist classroom, examples were given with the four pillars of F-L-I-P: Flexible environment, learning culture, intentional content, and professional educator.

## **The Marriage of Constructivism and Flipped Learning**

I am a constructivist and I believe that students construct their own learning when they expand and transform their existing knowledge (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Even though students attend the same class, listen to the same lecture, participate in the same classroom activities, read the same book, they may have a different understanding of the same topic. It is because students do not come to the class as blank slates, but as learners with their own prior experience on the very topic. When they encounter new experiences, they would incorporate it with their prior experiences to produce a unique understanding of the topic.

Fosnot (1996) explained that constructivist teaching provide students with meaningful and concrete experiences in which they can look for patterns and construct their own knowledge. Teachers facilitate and guide when students engage in activities and reflect. I started to include more meaningful and concrete experiences in the class. For example, I used video clips to explain the concepts, encouraged students to illustrate the concepts with their own real-life examples, and provided hands-on activities for students to experience the concepts. I thought I was doing a great job as a constructivist teacher until a peer reviewer told me otherwise. The peer reviewer told me that I spent too much time explaining the basic concepts but little time exploring the concepts in depth. I was perplexed how students could move to higher-level activities without my explanation of the basic concepts.

I found out a way to do it when I learned about Flipped Learning. Flipped learning is a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the

individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter (Flipped Learning Network, 2014). The idea of shifting instruction to students before the class and using class time for assignments allows students to learn the basic concepts on their own and explore the concepts in depth during the class. Such engagement allow students to construct their own knowledge.

To illustrate how to use flipped learning in a constructivist classroom, I am going to give a course design with the four pillars of F-L-I-P: Flexible environment, learning culture, intentional content, and professional educator (Flipped Learning Network, FLN, 2014).

1. Flexible environment allows students to learn in a variety of learning modes. Teachers may establish spaces and time frames that permit students to interact and reflect on their learning as needed, observe and monitor students to make adjustments as appropriate, and provide students with different ways to learn content and demonstrate mastery (FLN, 2014). In my flipped classroom, students are asked to read the textbook and PowerPoint slides, watch video clips, post to the discussion forum, and take a practice test before the class.
2. Learning culture promotes a student-centered learning culture. Teachers may dedicate class time to exploring topics in greater depth so that students are actively involved in knowledge construction (FLN, 2014). In my flipped classroom, students are engaged in individual and group tasks to apply what they have learned in real-life during the class.
3. Intentional content determines what materials teachers need to teach and what students should explore on their own. Teachers may prioritize concepts used in direct instruction for learners to access on their own, create relevant content for students, and make content

accessible and relevant to all students (FLN, 2014). In my flipped classroom, a variety of materials are available for students in different formats: textbook, PowerPoint slides, video clips, practice tests, and discussion forum. Students explore the basic concepts on their own before the class by reading the textbook and PowerPoint slides, and watching video clips. I design individual and group tasks for students to apply the concepts in real-life scenarios.

4. Professional educator is reflective in practice, connect with each other to improve instruction, accept constructive criticism, and tolerate controlled chaos in classroom. Teachers continually observe their students, provide them with feedback relevant in the moment, and assess their work (FLN, 2014). In my flipped classroom, I observe and give feedback to students when they are engaged in individual and group tasks. To be a reflective teacher educator, I use surveys to get feedback from students, and peer reviewers to observe my teaching. To improve my instruction, I am active in attending training workshops, seminars, and conferences.

A constructivist teacher encourages students to construct their own knowledge, and a flipped classroom shifts instruction out of the classroom and assignments into the classroom. You can use flipped learning for students to learn the basic concepts before coming to the class so that you can use the class time for students to explore the concepts in depth and to construct their own knowledge.

Brooks, J. G., & Brooks, M. G. (1993). *In Search of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Fosnot, C. T. (1996). Constructivism: A psychological theory of learning. In C. T. Fosnot (Ed.), *Constructivism. Theory, perspectives, and practice* (pp. 8-33). New York: Teachers College Press.

Flipped Learning Network (FLN). (2014). *The four pillars of F-L-I-P*. Retrieved from <http://fln.schoolwires.net/site/Default.aspx?PageID=92>