

Review of *Innovations in flipping the language classroom: Theories and practices*

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Innovations in flipping the language classroom: Theories and practices

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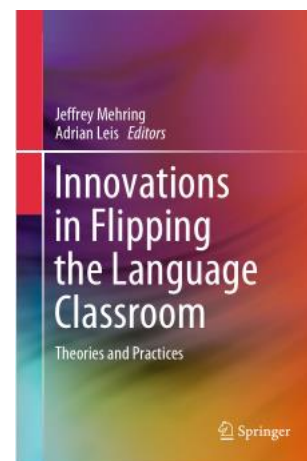
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As a new instructional strategy, the flipped classroom has gained increasing popularity among institutions and teachers over the past decade. In contrast to the traditional classroom, in which introduction of new information takes place in class and students' assimilation of the new information is assigned as homework, the flipped classroom moves the former to before or outside of the class and students assimilate the new information and develop their ideas in the process of collaborating with the teacher and classmates in class. Over the past few years, there have been a wide range of discussions and studies about the flipped classroom in different subjects, such as chemistry, math, and social sciences, but flipping the classroom of English as a foreign language (EFL) remains understudied. The flipped language classroom is very helpful since it provides students with more opportunities to use the language in authentic situations and to receive immediate feedback from the teacher. Undoubtedly, the implementation is often easier said than done. The EFL flipped classroom is demanding for teachers since they must invest enormous amounts of time and energy in various aspects, including material development, pre-class preparation, in-class operation, provision of feedback, and understanding of students' needs, etc. It also exposes students to greater challenges. *Innovations in Flipping the Language Classroom: Theories and Practices* is a timely and resourceful contribution that addresses most of the issues under discussion. It aims to provide teachers with the fundamentals of the flipped classroom and guide them through the process of implementing a flipped approach step by step through discussions of a number of successful EFL lessons..

The first chapter serves as a brief introduction to the flipped classroom. Jeffrey Mehring takes a glance at the general flipped classroom by pinning down its learner-centeredness in contrast to traditional teacher-centeredness. While the author recognizes the merits of the flipped classroom, which helps students to construct their social identities with more learning opportunities, he also points out its limitations since it

requires much more pre-class work from both the teacher and students. At the end of the chapter, the gist of each chapter is offered to help the reader have a preliminary knowledge of what the book is about.

The following chapters can be roughly grouped into four parts, based on the theme that each part focuses on. The first four chapters (Chapters 2 to 5) revolve around some major challenges teachers may face when they learn how to flip the classroom from experienced teachers. Drawing on the experiences of instructors from different institutions and disciplines, Anna F. Brown tries to provoke the reader's critical thinking on this new approach, including how the teacher will alter the presentation of content, what the teacher will do during class time, and how the teacher will skillfully combine the in- and out-of-classroom activities. Besides, the teacher needs to reconsider the readiness of students, since the flipped classroom calls for more responsibilities and may even overload them, as discussed in the introductory chapter. Although Brown does not focus on English language teachers, she tells the teacher how to avoid pitfalls in creating the flipped classroom from the experience of other disciplines. In the next chapter, Marie Yeo provides the reader with an empirical study on 13 non-native speaker teachers of English from ASEAN institutions. The author describes their experiences in learning about all the procedures of the flipped classroom and provides insights into how to address problems associated with the flipped approach and how to adapt the flipped approach to the Asian teaching environment. The final two chapters in this part focus on lessons learned from flipping a pronunciation course for teacher training and integrating formative assessment in the flipped classroom. In Chapter 4, Martha Ramirez provides an overview of an 8-week flipped pronunciation course attended by 10 Spanish L1 teachers of English who intend to improve their own pronunciation and learn different ways to be used in their future teaching. It reveals that although flipping the course is time-consuming and competence-demanding, the participants find it difficult to go back to the traditional approach once they experience the benefits of the flipped course. Finally, John M. Graney describes the assessment of an English reading lesson attended by students from South America, Asia, Europe, and Africa, most of whom are recent high school graduates, with the purpose of investigating how the students make progress toward their proficiency and providing guidelines for future teaching plans. It reveals that "formative assessment makes the flipped learning more responsive to student needs for scaffolding, differentiation, and individualization" (p. 66). These four chapters provide a solid foundation upon which the following chapters are grounded, presenting the necessary background for the reader to better understand the nature and principles of the flipped classroom and how it has successfully become an important strategy in language learning.

The next five chapters move to flipping productive skills, with each chapter investigating how to apply the flipped approach to a specific language skill. Carolina R. Buitrago and Juliana Díaz describe how to create a compare-and-contrast essay with the application of flipped writing workshops to undergraduates from different programmes who are required to "take an international exam by the end of the seven levels offered by the department" (p. 70). The flipped class leads the students to be more independent in the EFL writing process. Of particular interest is that students found the pre-class work valuable rather than burdensome because it is highly relevant to their involvement in class activities. The findings in this chapter are inspiring for teachers of writing since the flipped approach helps them to develop independence of students who, consequently, become more motivated and engaged in class activities.

Martha Ramirez turns to flipping a literature class by using the In-Class Flip, an alternative approach recently coined by González (2014) and defined by Barnes and Gonzalez (2015) as moving the pre-class flip into the classroom, where rotation work is done with flipped content. The In-Class Flip is most effective in allowing the teacher to closely observe students' process of performing individual and group activities, thus helping slow students to catch up and keep the fast ones advancing. The author also admits that the In-Class Flip poses challenges for the teacher who needs to plan a meaningful lesson and prepare appropriate resources. Next, Akihiko Andrew Tohei shifts to flipping EFL classes for second- and third-year university students who will become elementary or junior high school teachers in the future. They are required to use smartphones with video functions to record their in-class role plays each week. Students allowed to use smartphones spend twice as much time in studying at home as those who are not allowed since the former group are more motivated. In the next Chapter, Mark Feng Teng examines how

flipped learning can be employed in a cross-cultural communication course whose participants are 100 EFL students without any experience of studying in an environment where English is the official language. The research finds that students improve remarkably in both graded performance and speaking performance. Of course, this approach requires the teacher to prepare more diverse and creative materials in order to improve learners' speaking skills. In the following chapter, Mark DeBoer investigates dialogic inquiry as a process in a flipped EFL classroom, which combines online discussions with face-to-face discussions on certain topics. Students mediate each other's learning through different means, including asynchronous dialogue, sharing files, video files, face-to-face discussions, teacher-student discussions, and PowerPoint presentations. It is helpful to offer the students, particularly those at a higher education level, a more complete experience based on skills.

The next three chapters look at receptive skills. Cherie J. Brown employs a group leader discussion activity to flip ESL and EFL academic reading classrooms, where the teacher acts as a facilitator and mentor instead of providing learning input. With the pre-class time devoted to content assimilation, learners can use class time to scaffold each other and have a better understanding of how to apply reading skills and strategies more effectively. In the next chapter, Daniela Wagner-Loera experiments on the reduced cognitive load class with flipped elements. The lessons are planned weekly rather than daily with the purpose of reducing the cognitive load of both the instructor and the learners, allowing learners to concentrate on constructing their skills regardless of distractions in their busy daily lives. This approach proves to develop greater autonomy in learners and make them feel more confident and perform better in English learning. It also results in easier planning, which allows the instructor to have more time to assist learners. Next, Khalid Fethi and Helaine W. Marshall touch on a unique method of flipping movies for learners of advanced intermediate level to help improve their listening and speaking skills. Language and themes of movies are flipped before class and a system of Share, Help, Ask, Comment (SHAC) is adopted to involve learners in exploring their ideas and reactions to the movies. The results indicate that learners are highly motivated and their oral and aural skills are significantly improved. Additionally, learners became more engaged with the public when they went out of the classroom and into the community to design their projects. The second and third sections are so practical that their results and findings can be directly applied to our EFL classroom.

The final two chapters shift from skills-based courses to content-based lessons. With the advancement of technology, massive amounts of learning content are available online. In Chapter 14, Yu Jung Han flips a content-based EAP course using high-quality online content and finds remarkable improvement of content and language among the students. In the final chapter, Adrian Leis concludes the volume by looking at how flipped learning can successfully increase linguistic self-confidence of Japanese university students. The presentation of online resources timed with the teacher's oral explanation can enhance students' understanding of content. Online testing and grading software, such as Google Forms, Google Sheets, and Flubaroo are used, which enable the teacher to focus on areas that students find most difficult and to make use of class time more efficiently. As the author claims, the flipped learning approach enables the teacher and the students to make the most out of limited classroom time.

Profound studies and investigations made by all the contributors form a substantive volume. It is written in such a practical and approachable way that it makes the information easily accessible and walks the reader through a pleasant journey. If we compare the flipped EFL classroom to a product, this volume serves as the user guide that instructs the practitioner step by step on how to make use of all the functions of the product. In each study, readers are provided with detailed background information to better understand the specific lesson objectives, brief summaries of the skills being taught, and activities completed by students. Lesson plans are also presented to readers, so they are able to see how the lesson progresses and how each teacher skillfully ties pre-class and in-class activities together. Technologies are given in each study, including why the teacher chose the specific technologies and what role they play in achieving the lesson objectives. Certainly, the authors do not claim that technologies are compulsory for a successful flipped lesson. In these studies, while a large amount of evidence is given to support the success of various practices in the flipped EFL classroom, some practices that have not fulfilled

expectations are also discussed and analyzed for subsequent researchers to draw lessons from. Despite these minor shortcomings, all the authors agree that flipping a language classroom is interesting and rewarding for both the teacher and students, although they are encountered some challenges at the beginning.

The authors are also very happy to see the changes taking place in their students, who tend to become more motivated and independent in language learning, especially when they study outside the classroom. The authors of most chapters provide their reflections on the process of flipping the classroom and put forward some suggestions to make it better in the future. The geographical diversity of the contributors enriches the scope of the flipped language classroom. However, with most of them coming from the US and Asia, more teachers and students with different demographic profiles are welcome to further explain the adaptability and effectiveness of new technology in language classrooms. At the bottom of the first page of each chapter, the authors provide their email address so that readers can get in touch when they have questions or wish to share their experiences in flipping a class. As an EFL teacher, I am really impressed not only by the usefulness and informativeness of the content, but also by the reader-friendly writing style and the authenticity it provides. The most important thing is that I and my colleagues can see the great energy of flipped EFL classrooms, and we believe that it will continue to change language learning for the better.

All in all, the volume provides advice on a wide range of topics concerning second and foreign language teaching, such as assessment, pronunciation, speaking, listening, reading, writing, and content-based language teaching. It helps EFL teachers to better understand the idea and nature of a flipped classroom. It serves as a valuable resource not only for novice teachers learning to design flipped EFL lessons, but also for teachers experienced in the flipped approach who want to further improve their lessons. It also appeals to teaching professionals, material developers, and curriculum designers, who are likely to provide support for teachers and students in the flipped language classroom.

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