

FLIPPING THE ESL CLASSROOM. STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATION AND INCLUSION

F. Machì

University of Palermo (ITALY)

Abstract

One of the most interesting and recent teaching approach that is attracting insistently both academic and teaching environments, is the Flipped Classroom, or Inverted Classroom. The class, where there is a turning over of the activities with the purpose of making both lessons and individual study more interesting and productive is “flipped”.

This approach is fundamentally based on three issues:

1. a conscious use of technologies for learning/teaching purposes,
2. a revision of learning times,
3. the importance of the educational relationship.

The flipped is also an answer to the teacher's aim to solve problems related to the learning process, that means, to create the best condition through which students can be aware of what they learn and find out a personal method of learning.

The Flipped model is particularly suitable for the ESL classes as it allows to create the best learning setting. The reasons is that workroom setting of the classroom, where the language is a tool and, at the same time, the object of the learning process, allows that the language be practiced and improved in a very natural way. Moreover, when students are outside the classroom, the free access to the internet, the data retrieval in original language besides the materials provided by the teachers for the students, represent a quantity of language resources hardly to find in any traditional lecture classroom. Besides, the Flipped Classroom gives the chance to diversify teachers' activity according to personal learning styles, abilities, cognitive ways of learning, even in case of SEN.

This paper presents a research now in progress, within the frame of the Phd in “Pedagogical and Didactic Teacher Training”, carried out by the Educational Sciences Department of the University of Palermo in the triennium 2015-2018. Moving from the idea o giving teachers a theoretical and didactic background to flip their classroom and their teaching, this research project aims at the experimentation of the flipped strategies in a language class of Secondary School first grade, with the purpose to activate linguistic and communicative inclusive learning process accessible to all students. This research also aims at leading teachers to think about the necessity to changed their professional profile, pointing out the importance of efficiency, reflective practice, affective relationship with the students.

Keywords: Foreign Languages, Flipped Classroom, Inclusion.

1 INTRODUCTION

The present study moves from the observation on what are the difficulties that teachers have to make efficacious their lessons/lectures especially where there are complex contexts even with Special Educational Need (SEN) children. Teaching problems increase with Foreign Languages, because the means and the aim of the learning process coincide. In addition ESL teachers find difficult to identify the plausible causes that compromise a plain language acquisition both of all the classroom and of children with SEN. It appears that very often teacher tend to link the poor performances to lack of attention, aptitude to the subject or motivation rather than try to intercept/ recognize the real causes of learning difficulties and disease. Teachers have to recognize the importance to redesign their educational approach that means to move from a teaching centred perspective to a learner-centred perspective.

It is necessary to re-think the educational action in order to make easier and accessible the ESL learning of the whole classroom. According to this statement we think that the Flipped class model can comply with the request of a more innovative active and interactive form of instruction.

2 THE FLIPPING MODEL A PLAYFUL PRACTICE INTO THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

What is innovative in the Flipped Classroom model is the constant practice with technologies and the new role assumed by the teacher. As we said before the lack of a relationship between teacher and student can seriously compromise the learning. Flipping the classroom giving teacher more time to dedicate to each student means to establish a significant, face to face relationship that can contribute to make students self-conscious trust in their potentialities and better motivated to overcome difficulties concerned with the acquisition of the Foreign Languages. It is clear that if teacher can spend less time on presenting contents in class, he/she can concentrate his /action on the strategies aimed to involve and spur the all students.

Moreover, the class lends itself to be lived as a community where it is possible to practice accessibility and inclusion. That means to carry out strategies of accessible ESL teaching that make easier learning the Foreign Language and promote inclusion as the right for everybody to have autonomy, to learn and do. Due on the previous considerations this project wants to experiment the flipped classroom model connecting it to the theoretical framework of the Ludic Methodology of Foreign Languages Teaching (FLT).

The flipped classroom is a pedagogical model in which the traditional teaching paradigm is flipped (Bergmann, 2012; Bergmann, Overmyer and Willie, 2013).

In a flipped classroom, the instructor/teacher serves as a facilitator and students are empowered to become active participants in their learning experience.

While the Ludic Methodology quite acknowledged in the FLT scientific communities, is based on the conviction that a pleasant and interesting learning environment represents the basis for a significant language acquisition. Besides the ludic methodology makes use of the play as a tool to do things and by which to learn. It brings into a multi sensorial dimension, cooperative work, alternatives teaching supports such as ITC that better fit with that learners generation that Prensky (2001) indicates as *digital natives* that can hardly tolerate traditional lessons.

We think that all these elements, characteristic of the Ludic methodology are even to be found in the Flipped Classroom dynamics. As in the Ludic Methodology, the flipped classroom can be intended as a playful strategy because first of all it introduces instead of books the use of technologies in class, tools particularly loved by children and kids, then it holds the ludic dimension in promoting an environment, the workroom setting which increases the interaction between the students and teachers and engages students in learning through application and practice. Following the flipped classroom and working in a cooperative way, students learn not only contents, but also values which facilitate their personal and social growth.

As to this aspect, flipped classroom uses a student-centered approach as it focuses on student learning and it places the responsibility for learning more on the shoulders of students than teachers while giving them a greater impetus to experiment (Sams, 2011). This can be seen from - the Bergmann and Sams' instructional design of the FC - where students explore and make sense of their learning through active learning activities like inquiry learning, problem-based learning and peer collaboration (Sams, 2011). This creates the face-to-face time to have a "much deeper interaction" between the teacher and student as they engage and interact on case studies, and discuss particular problems (Leckhart & Cheshire, 2012; Gerstein, 2011).

There is another aspect to take into account, recent studies demonstrate that *digital natives*, decrease tolerance for traditional lecture or lessons. What best characterizes them is the preference for multitasking and appreciation for social aspect of learning. Besides, independently by the social or cultural context they come from, everybody are very familiar with technologies and digital media. As the use of technology represents the social environment in which we live, therefore teachers have the necessity to train students how to use it in an appropriate way. In other words, the skill known as digital competence must be included in every single stage of the learning process and teachers must address students to an appropriate use of technologies.

Therefore, flipping the ESL classroom represents the challenge to engage students in significant learning, because it give teacher the opportunity to handle the classroom for her /his specific purposes adopting alternatives active and interactive methods of instruction.

On the contrary, the use of video and other prerecorded media puts lectures under the control of the students: they can watch, rewind, and fast-forward as needed, at home, with their friend the pc, tablet

or any digital device. This ability may be of particular value to students with accessibility concerns, (think about, for examples, where captions are provided for learners with hearing impairments). Lectures that can be viewed more than once may also help those students for whom English is not easy. Devoting class time to application of concepts might give instructors a better opportunity to detect errors in thinking, particularly those that are widespread in a class. At the same time, collaborative projects can encourage social interaction among students, making it easier for them to learn from one another and for those of varying skill levels to support their peers

There is a concomitant change in the role of students, many of whom are used to be passive participants in their education process. Where instruction is given to them the flipped model, there is an increase in the conscious learning responsibility for students while being involved within the new flipped teaching/learning experiment. Activities can be student-led, and communication among students can become the determining dynamic of a lesson based on learning through hands-on work. One of the main advantages of the flipping strategy is to bring about a distinctive shift in priorities-from merely covering material to working toward mastery of it.

Students appreciate having a higher participation in the classroom and having the possibility to work with their classmates, which represents a new work dynamics and leads to an increasing motivation in learning English, a subject usually rejected by students. It can be inferred, therefore, that the flipped classroom implies not only the acquisition of concepts and procedures but also attitudes, an aspect of personal growth which usually is excluded from daily routines in high school. In addition, it has also been discovered that the flipped classroom allows students to interact with each other as well as with the teacher, creating an instantaneous feedback inside the classroom, being a multimodal feedback: between students, from teacher to students and from the videos.

Moreover, as interaction and feedback take place within heterogeneous groups, students with learning problems or with SEN may feel supported by their classmates. Therefore, the flipped classroom can also be considered as a tool for attending diversity and inclusion in the classroom (Bergmann, 2013; Lasry, 2014).

3 CONCLUSION

The present study springs from the request for putting together the most recent contribution on the ESL learning with innovative, most inclusive teaching practices. In Italy, as well as all over the world, current studies on the flipped model are limited, but as Marshall and DeCapua (2013) note that, if language lessons are flipped, in class the teacher and students can focus on working with the language and practicing it. They also note that the organization of time into the classroom increases opportunities for interaction and speaking, a linguistic aspect which is not given special attention.

Starting from these consideration, we have been working on a flipped project to be carried out with a group of 70 English teachers of secondary School, first grade, in Palermo of the in order to obtain competences and skills useful to handle an accessible ESL teaching. Besides, we want to lead these teachers to experience/experiment their strategies of *flipped teaching* in order to activate foreign language learning processes accessible for the all class.

In other terms, we expect that teachers engaged in the project shall acquire the right competences to recognize and analyse problems concerned with English as a Foreign Language and to make appropriate teaching strategies.

The goal of this project is a twofold direction: to verify the potentialities of the Flipping Model in the ESL Classroom, to re-qualify the professional profile of the ESL teacher. That means:

1. evaluating the results of introducing the flipped classroom methodology and to compare them with a traditional methodology;
2. analyzing the results of introducing the flipped classroom methodology regarding the development of personal competences by students;
3. helping teachers develop inclusion strategies into the ESL Classroom making use of ITC;
4. leading teachers to think about the necessity to re-qualify their professional profile pointing out the importance of efficiency, reflective practice, affective relationship with the students;
5. personalizing teaching action according to every student;
6. re-thinking the teaching planning and setting;

7. improving teacher personal language competences through ITC and a more communicative approach to the FL;
8. giving teachers the opportunity to improve their competences in order to use them in international educational contexts.

On this purpose in the perspective of HORIZON 2020, the European financial program for research, educational, innovative and technologic projects aimed to enhance the value of excellences, we wish that Italian teachers, as their European colleagues, could achieve high levels of personal competences in order to have the same opportunities to take part to international important projects.

The experimental phase of the project will start in September 2015 and it will cover the School Year 2015/2016. Research data will be collected according to a qualitative/quantitative education experimental design and will be inserted in my PhD final thesis.

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