The Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach (SOFLA®) in a Literacy Methods Course for Teachers

MARSHALL, Helaine W. (Long Island University - Hudson)
WALLESTAD, Chizuko K. (Osaka City University, COIL Promotion Office)

1. Introduction

As educators seek to navigate the new post-pandemic landscape for language teaching, there are elements of distance language learning that can be incorporated into our pedagogy going forward. One such element is online flipped learning. The Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach, or SOFLA® (Marshall, 2017; Marshall & Kostka, 2020), combines two separate learning pathways that, in combination, can result in robust instruction: the Community of Inquiry framework for online teaching (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; Garrison, 2016) and flipped learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Flipped Learning Network, 2014). SOFLA® is a distance learning model that most closely replicates actual classroom teaching and includes structured, interactive, multimodal activities in an eight-step learning cycle with both asynchronous and synchronous components that create fertile spaces for students now learning language online. The eight steps of SOFLA® include: (1) Pre-Work; (2) Sign-In Activity; (3) Whole Group Application; (4) Breakouts; (5) Share-Out; (6) Preview and Discovery; (7) Assignment Instructions; and (8) Reflection (Marshall & Kostka, 2020). This paper describes an implementation of this model in a literacy methods course, along with the results from student course evaluations and questionnaires.

2. Classroom Setting and Participants

The literacy methods course took place from September to December 2020 at a large, private university in the U.S as part of an online cross-campus program. Participants were 14 graduate students in teacher education, either pre-service or in-service, studying to earn a public school credential in either TESOL or Bilingual Education. This was a required course in their respective programs. Classes met synchronously in an Adobe Connect virtual classroom, where students used audio devices and webcams, as well as the chat feature and whiteboards, to communicate with each other and complete learning activities. Class sessions provided two and one-half hours of instruction each week for 15 weeks. In addition, students were required to complete at least five hours of work per week asynchronously.

3. Online Pedagogy in Practice

Each class session followed the 8-step SOFLA® learning cycle. Following is a description of each step, adapted from the Holistic Rubric for SOFLA® designed by Heather Rubin (2021), along with a specific example from the literacy methods course. Step 1 – Pre-Work: Prior to the synchronous session, the teacher assigns a short video with embedded interactions, related readings and/or activities to introduce the content to students. The pre-work is structured, multimodal and interactive. Example: Students watch a video lesson on the teaching of writing presented in PlayPosit with embedded questions. They also read the textbook chapter on that topic in Perusall, while participating in social annotation alongside. Step 2 – Sign-In Activity: The session begins with an open-ended prompt related to the pre-work, posted in a shared space where students respond and sign their name. Example: Students write a sentence about what they did before class using a language in which they are not proficient and then engage in a discussion of how they felt and what they focused on during the task. Step 3 – Whole Group Application: The teacher guides the class as they collaborate on an activity that applies concepts from the pre-work, clarifies misconceptions and/or deepens their understanding. Example: Students examine a writing sample from an advanced intermediate non-native speaker and create a T-chart of what features of both native speaker writing (e.g., idiomatic expressions) and non-native speaker writing (e.g., third person singular -s) are evident in the sample. Step 4 – Breakouts: The teacher provides explicit instructions for a timed and

structured group activity that reinforces and extends student learning. Example: The students analyze two writing samples, one by a beginning writer and one by an intermediate writer, and document strengths and areas to work on for each. Step 5 – Share-Out: Groups share their work by presenting their product or findings. The teacher elicits peer feedback using the SHAC (Share, Help, Ask, Comment) Protocol (Fethi, 2018). Example: The teacher asks at least one group to show their whiteboard and invites the others to provide feedback and add material from their own group. Step 6 – Preview and Discovery: The teacher shows the students selected content from the next pre-work and introduces key terms and concepts. Example: The teacher shares slides from the video lesson showing two book covers and asks students what they notice about each book and whether it might be appropriate for language learners. Step 7 – Assignment Instructions: The teacher explains each assigned task for the next pre-work, indicating the timeframe and the location of resources. Example: The teacher assigns the textbook reading in Perusall and video lesson in PlayPosit focused on literature instruction for language learners due the following week. Step 8 – Reflection: The session ends with an open-ended prompt. In a shared space, students write something that resonated with them and sign their name. Example: Students write one or two sentences stating what resonated with them most from the lesson. As these examples demonstrate, in each step of SOFLA, both the teacher and students have specific roles to play that maximize interaction, feedback, and accountability.

4. Results

Survey data from student course evaluations and questionnaires indicate that most students responded positively to a course utilizing SOFLA®. When asked about the likelihood of recommending this course structure to other students, 71.42% of the students, or 10 of the 14 students, indicated they would do so. Regarding the synchronous sessions, 100% of the students reported that the class sessions were organized, interesting and engaging, and that participation was encouraged. A key finding from the final course questionnaire demonstrates how students benefited from the course structure, both in terms of their level of participation and their level of mastery. When considering this course relative to other college courses the students had taken, 78% of the students rated the intellectual challenge as higher and 100% responded that their level of involvement in the course was greater. This student comment exemplifies the effectiveness of SOFLA®: "Online learning has turned me into a better student" (Final Questionnaire, Literacy Methods, Fall 2020).

5. Significance

Overall, in assessing the implementation of SOFLA® in this literacy methods course, it is clear that the course structure contributed to the students' positive experience. What SOFLA® provides is a highly structured sequence of learning activities that, seemingly paradoxically, also provide freedom for both the teacher and the students to be creative and to think critically. SOFLA® serves to create fertile spaces for teaching and learning in an online setting and therefore should be considered when designing instruction for higher education.

References

Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012). *Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day*. ISTE.

Fethi, K. & Marshall, H.W. (2018). Flipping movies for dynamic engagement. In J. Mehring & A. Leis (Eds.), *Innovations in flipped learning in the language classroom: Theories and practice.* (pp. 185-202). Springer Nature.

Flipped Learning Network. (2014). *The four pillars of F-L-I-P.* http://flippedlearning.org/definition-of-flipped-learning/

Garrison, D. R. (2016). *Thinking collaboratively: Learning in a community of inquiry.* Routledge.

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *Internet and Higher Education*, 2(2-3), 87-105.

Marshall, H. W. (2017). The synchronous online flipped learning approach. *FLGI Community Blog.* https://community.flglobal.org/the-synchronous-online-flipped-learning-approach/

Marshall, H.W. & Kostka, I. (2020, August). Fostering teaching presence through the Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach. *TESL-EJ*, 24(2), 1-14. http://tesl-ej.org/pdf/ej94/int.pdf

Rubin, H. (2021, February 6). *SOFLA® Holistic Rubric.* Presented in an online workshop in the 2021 EVO SOFLA session.