

Commentary

What We Learned About Good Teaching From On-Line Cooking and Baking Courses How the Pandemic Will Influence High End Learning in the Post COVID Years

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During the pandemic our family, which is interested in anything and everything related to cooking and baking, learned about the availability of online courses from places we had previously gone to for in person classes. After registering for the courses, we were sent all the necessary background information necessary to prepare us for our one or two hours online. In addition to the obvious (recipes, ingredients, and tools), we were sent information on the history of the recipe, the name(s) and emails of famous restaurants that created the dish, occasionally a short video (usually with English subtitles) of a conversation and demonstration by a well-known chef, and a list of hints from the chef that was teaching the course.

We were always *excited to learn* when “cooking night” arrived and felt prepared as our online chef looked at and gave us a “thumbs up” when he or she asked to see the layout of our ingredients (we usually hid the bottle of wine from our computer camera). What is most important about these activities was that we were well prepared for the time and learning that took place when we were actually in the (albeit virtual) face-to-face situation with our instructor. Admittedly, we were in a self-selected subject rather than a prescribed curricular topic; however, we believe that a good deal of this “flipped classroom” strategy can be used to promote more enjoyable and engaging learning. And because schools using the Enrichment Cluster component of the SEM (Renzulli, Gentry, & Reis, 2002) which allows for student cluster selection, we have found that the online implementation of clusters has worked extremely well.

This approach reminded me of an earlier but not frequently used teaching strategy called the Flipped Classroom (Abeysekera, & Dawson, 2014; Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Briefly, this process recommends that students at home prepare beforehand with material assigned by teachers for more advanced and interactive learning by reading background material about a particular topic, including videos,

PowerPoint's, and any other material that is necessary to begin more advanced work on the topic. After completing the preparation work, students arrive in class ready to start analyzing text, engaging in discussions and debates, solving problems, dividing into small groups, or planning their own investigating projects. This approach is a much approach to virtual learning than what one student who called her experienced "worksheets on line."

In a certain sense, the virtual learning that pandemic brought to the education establishment forced us to reconsider the "sit and git" pedagogy that has been around since the time of the industrial revolution. During the pandemic most teachers learned new skills that allowed them to carry on despite not being able to see their students on a face-to-face basis and most students now have online learning capability. And with technology improving at an exponential rate, new opportunities for personalizing learning and making student engagement and enjoyable are getting easier for teachers to use these new skills. Enjoyment, Engagement, and Enthusiasm for Learning have always been the major goals of our Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM; Renzulli & Reis, 2014) and this was never more relevant to us than when our family group took the online cooking and baking courses mentioned above. These changes in learning situations have important implications for gifted and talented students because they may be receiving a better brand of creative and investigative learning opportunities in their special programs, they also spend the majority of their time in regular classrooms.

How can the virtual cooking school experiences give us some hints about what we can do in the post-Pandemic years to improve learning and teaching? First and foremost, teachers now have a new set of technology skills that will make their jobs easier. Second, rather than sitting for endless hours listening to teacher talk and taking notes, students can receive guidance and resources for receiving preparation information beforehand so that class time can be devoted to much more interactive activities for not only mastering required material, but by being more creative about a topic in which they have a heightened interest within any prescribed curricular topic. I'm playing around with a couple of my own recipes because I can give myself the license to do so. We can promote more creativity and innovation by giving our students the opportunities, resources, and encouragement to do the same. And perhaps most important of all for our honorable profession, teachers, who always seem to be at the bottom of the food chain when it comes to curriculum and instruction decisions, can experiment, discuss among themselves, and play around with how making something like this approach can work for them to make their classrooms more enjoyable and interesting places.

The advantages of online cooking and baking courses using what we learned by necessity because of the pandemic are good reasons to apply this flipped classroom model in the post- pandemic years. We have talked about “self-direct learning” for years but relatively little has been done to change teacher directed instruction. True student empowerment means that students can take more ownership of their education. One of the most effective forms of motivation is empowerment—schooling that puts students at the center of their learning.

The most important advantage is that it gives teachers and students the opportunity to make what we do in our classrooms more interesting, interactive, and a fertile ground for the development of higher-level thinking skills and creativity. And the teachers with whom I have talked about how their virtual enrichment clusters are working have also said that it makes teaching more fun. The pandemic opened the door to a new and effective way of dealing with a better brand of learning. Let’s keep it open rather than returning to what Carol Tomlinson has called “the sit, git, and spit” model of learning.

References

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