

Chapter 18

Creativity in Interdisciplinary Teaching: How We Used i²Flex in a Co-Teaching Framework

Caitlin R. Lewis

American Community Schools (ACS) Athens, Greece

Margarita Gournaris

American Community Schools (ACS) Athens, Greece

ABSTRACT

We co-taught an interdisciplinary English and social studies class in 9th grade. Our class had very diverse ability levels. In order to differentiate instruction and engage all our students, we turned to the i²Flex methodology as a guide, and found tremendous success implementing it together with role-play and simulation. We found that incorporating Web 2.0 tools within our instructional approach increased student motivation. The ideas behind i²Flex guided us in changing our approach to instruction and lead us to creating a far more constructivist classroom. Student engagement and enjoyment improved, and we saw struggling student flourish.

INTRODUCTION

True innovation requires unusual combinations. When we met for the first time in September of 2013, neither of us realized what innovations would come from the unorthodox combination of a thirty-one year veteran teacher at ACS and a U.S. public school teacher of five years working together to create a new interdisciplinary course.

I (Margarita) have taught at ACS Athens for my entire career, sponsoring Model United Nations, working on courses from ESL to IB history. I have, as the saying goes, done it all.

I (Caitlin) started teaching in a failing inner city public school in the southern U.S. After the school was taken over by outside governance, I chose to go to a rural high school and teach English there.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0267-8.ch018

After being deeply disturbed by the effects of No Child Left Behind—a sweeping piece of U.S. legislation which mandated that all students be proficient in core subjects by 2014—and the incessant usage of standardized testing, I decided it was time to find a school where I could do more than test preparation. A few months later, I was hired at ACS Athens.

The first year we worked together, we were asked to design a 9th grade honors “combo” course—a course that taught students both European history and an introduction to literature. All our students in this class had qualified to enter the honors program, so the need for differentiation was fairly minimal. After working together for a year and seeing how much more students seemed to gain from a co-taught interdisciplinary class, we were open to further innovations.

At the end of that school year, our principal approached us with a unique idea. He suggested that we teach the interdisciplinary class again, but this time, we would mix all ability levels together. Of course, students could still take the class for honors credit, but they would do so by doing extra work outside of class and by completing more challenging assessments in class. During class time itself, the room would be a mix of students taking the class for honors level, standard level, ESL, and special needs. Part of the impetus for the class was the desire of students who were not prepared for honors level to also be able to take an interdisciplinary class.

We had some initial concerns about the class: how would we cover the standards for all students? How would we challenge the students in honors without losing the students taking the class at the regular level? When the new format for the class was announced to the parents, several parents raised the same concerns. How was honors level going to be rigorous if these students were receiving the same classroom instruction as standard level? We even had one parent make quite a scene at our back-to-school night, loudly arguing that we were damaging the education of her son.

But despite these concerns, we went forward with the class, believing that we could find the innovative means necessary to differentiate instruction in such a blended environment.

That year, we had the following breakdown of students (split fairly evenly into two groups) (Table 1).

Such a diverse group of students required a rather unusual approach. We had no idea exactly how unusual that approach was going to be until we started teaching. This chapter will narrate the process we went through in changing our teaching methodology from a more classical approach to the i²Flex methodology.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION TO i²Flex METHODOLOGY

The i²Flex methodology proved to be the best way to adapt our content to our blended classroom—but we didn’t immediately fall into this teaching approach at first. It was a natural process, born from our constant search for new ways to engage our diverse group of students.

The i²Flex methodology, as defined by Dr. Gialamas and Dr. Avgerinou (2015), revolves around three principles. First, independent learning is of paramount importance. Second, student learning is

Table 1. Student profile

Total	Male	Female	Honors	Standard	ESL	Special Needs
69	37	32	33	36	12	10

9 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/creativity-in-interdisciplinary-teaching/157593

Related Content

3D Modeling in a High School Computer Visualization Class: Enacting a Productive, Distributed Social Learning Environment

Rebecca M. Combs and Joan Mazur (2013). *Cases on 3D Technology Application and Integration in Education* (pp. 359-387).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/modeling-high-school-computer-visualization/74417

The Impact of Educational Robotics on Student STEM Learning, Attitudes, and Workplace Skills

Gwen Nugent, Bradley S. Barker and Neal Grandgenett (2012). *Robots in K-12 Education: A New Technology for Learning* (pp. 186-203).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/impact-educational-robotics-student-stem/63415

Entering the i-World of Teens: An ACS Athens Advisory Model for College Applications

Mandy Dragatakis, Anna Makris and Peggy Pelonis (2016). *Revolutionizing K-12 Blended Learning through the i2Flex Classroom Model* (pp. 400-410).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/entering-the-i-world-of-teens/157599

K-12 Educators as Instructional Designers

Kendall Hartley (2006). *Handbook of Research on Literacy in Technology at the K-12 Level* (pp. 515-530).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/educators-instructional-designers/20946

Beyond Finger Painting: Kindergarten

Catherine Schifter (2008). *Infusing Technology into the Classroom: Continuous Practice Improvement* (pp. 89-108).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/beyond-finger-painting/23771