# Chapter 5
# Triumphs and Tribulations of the Flipped Classroom:
## A High School Teacher's Perspective

**Frederick J. Carstens**
*Tapestry Charter School, USA*

**Milton Sheehan**
*Tapestry Charter School, USA*

## ABSTRACT

*This chapter focuses on the experiences of a Social Studies teacher who has recently introduced the concept of the flipped classroom to his students at an inner city school in Buffalo, NY. Despite his technological issues and struggles with homework completion, his perseverance throughout this process provides valuable lessons for educators seeking to implement similar initiatives in their own classrooms. Ideas for improving student engagement and literacy in the flipped classroom as well as first hand accounts from his ninth grade students are discussed.*

## INTRODUCTION

I have been teaching ninth grade Global History and Geography at Tapestry Charter High School for the past five years. Tapestry is an Expeditionary Learning School (EL). The Expeditionary Learning model is unique in that it connects academically rigorous curriculum with real world issues and current events. As a teacher in an EL school, my students utilize case studies, projects, fieldwork and service learning as a means of learning their global history. By engaging in "learning expeditions," students learn in authentic and meaningful ways to produce high quality work (Expeditionary Learning, 2013). EL is a great way to harness students' curiosity about the world around them, while improving their academic skills and content knowledge through a variety of teaching methods. This year, I have expanded upon the teaching methods utilized within the Expeditionary Learning model with my attempts at using the flipped classroom approach.

## BACKGROUND

## Tapestry Charter School

When I was hired by Tapestry, I had no idea what a charter school was, or Expedition Learning for that matter. Since then however, I have come to realize that there are several aspects that make Tapestry Charter High School unique. These aspects include weekly professional development opportunities, student led conferences, team building trips and intensive experiences.

One of the primary differences between Tapestry and other traditional high schools is the professional develop opportunities afforded to its teachers. Tapestry sets aside two hours every Monday morning for professional development. Essentially, every Monday is a half-day for students, as classes start for students at 10:20 instead of the normal school daytime of 8:20. While some teachers may think that this is a waste of time, this professional development is unlike anything I have ever experienced elsewhere.

Typically, school administrators organize professional development. They will hire an outside firm to facilitate a lesson to teach their faculty about some new buzzword that is taking the profession by storm. This may only happen between 2-3 times a year, and despite their best intentions, many teachers are unengaged. At Tapestry, professional development is grassroots and teacher driven. Having this sort of professional development every Monday is beneficial because it allows teachers to hone their skills, share best practices and collaborate across grade level and within their departments. Teachers not only have a choice in what learning cycle they would like to participate in, but their input in the process is crucial to its success. Every teacher is engaged in his or her learner cycle. Every teacher is also empowered with the ability to make suggestions and lead the discussion.

Student Led Conferences (SLC's) are another worthwhile structure at Tapestry. Three times per year normal classes are suspended to accommodate this process. Student Led Conferences are similar to parent teacher conferences, except that the process is entirely student driven. During these hour-long appointments, students present their portfolios to their parents. These portfolios consist of student work samples and reflections upon their progress towards meeting their learning objectives. They receive feedback from their teachers and parents as to their strengths and areas in need of improvement. Although a very powerful structure, it does occupy between three to four days of classroom instruction.

Tapestry also differs from traditional high schools in the extracurricular opportunities that are afforded to its students. Every fall, Tapestry students and staff engage in overnight camping trips. Through well-structured team building activities and initiatives, students are able to bond with their teachers and peers in ways that would otherwise not the possible.

Then every spring, Tapestry provides students with enrichment experiences known as intensives. Intensives are designed to give students meaningful experiences outside the classroom. For three days students work on an intensive project that challenges them both academically and socially. Often these intensives involve students exploring possible career choices or working on service projects in the larger Buffalo community. Last year Tapestry students had 21 different intensive options, ranging from enrichment activities involving culinary arts to music production. In a school wide end of the year survey, more than fifty percent of our students pick intensives as some of their most memorable moments at Tapestry. This is a close second only to their teambuilding camping trips.

Intensives, Student Led Conferences, professional development, and team building trips are just a few of the things that make Tapestry different from traditional schools. While these are key elements that make Tapestry successful, all of these extra initiatives amount to the loss of precious seat time with the students. This subsequently

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