



Hard to take new report on Khan academy and flipped classroom seriously

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The report's title caught my eye: *One World School House vs. Old World Statehouse, The Khan Academy and California Red Tape*. I'd interviewed Sal Khan, the founder of the insanely popular online warehouse of instructional YouTube videos, about a year ago

Khan was one of the general session speakers at NSBA's 2012 Annual Conference and I found him to be an incredibly smart and down-to-earth individual, who from the start batted down any attempt to label him as an educator to the masses. No, no, no, he was just a regular guy who'd discovered this gift to explain complex concepts like differential equations or mitosis, first to his family and then, to his surprise, growing legions of fans. Khan saw a need and he just wanted to help.

I still think that's who Khan is, but boy, you wouldn't get that from this "report" published by the free-market think tank, Pacific Research Institute. To begin with, to call it qualitative would be kind; the study reads more like a love letter to Khan, heavily citing his 2012 book *The One World School House*— or even worse, the *Washington Times* book review written by none other than Andrew Coulson, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.

I'm sensing a theme here, which frankly made it difficult to take this report seriously. But I tried. I read through each of the 36 pages and while I can't disagree with some of the findings— awarding a student course credit should be based on content mastery and not seat time— some of them are conditional and others downright ludicrous.

Yes, the "flipped classroom" model, which Khan sees his academy dovetailing with, is one of the hottest trends in education because it makes sense. Why wouldn't you want all classroom time to be cerebral and interactive and outsource all that boring, lecture-hall, rote memorization stuff to kids at home, where they can learn at their own pace thanks to technology?

Because not every home has a computer or Internet access, which is why I suppose one of the charter school's profiled in the report has groups of students taking virtual courses from online provider K-12 (that's another story) on campus ... which kind of negates the purpose of a flipped classroom, no?

Sort of the final straw in this report for me was the great leap it made by positing that the integration of programs like Khan Academy into school's instructional model could save them tons of money because it wouldn't have to hire and retain as many teachers. I found this

fascinating not only because it sounds preposterous— it surely can't be easier to deliver thought-provoking and participatory lessons to a class of 60 than it is to a class of 30— but because Khan himself described his own volunteer stint at teaching as preposterous because he couldn't manage the class.

Don't get me wrong, I have much respect for Mr. Khan and his obvious passion for helping those who have struggled with learning one subject or another, much of which has nothing to do with them and everything to do with the poor way in which that material is handled and presented. I guess, you could say, that's the same problem I have with this report.