

# Learning From a Videotape of One's Own Classroom Teaching

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***“Do I really look so uninterested when my students speak?!”***

I'm watching a videotape of my Sociology 170 discussion section, and I'm aghast at how little verbal and nonverbal reinforcement I provide to the students. While the undergraduates in this upper-division course discuss the day's readings, the viewer can see that I'm gazing mostly at the chalkboard and only half-listening to the students. Instead of actively engaging with the students and delving more deeply into their ideas, I'm trying to think about the next point I want to raise.

I remind myself, “Next time, I really have to concentrate on responding to the students' ideas and using their points to segue to the next topic.”

After attending a GSI Teaching and Resource Center workshop on classroom discussion strategies last spring semester, I invited a member of its staff to videotape my class. Because I want to be an effective teacher, I figured I should make the most of the opportunities at UC Berkeley to improve both my lecture style and classroom facilitation. Little did I know how eye opening it would be to take my students' perspective and watch myself as an instructor.

Before the actual videotape session, a consultant at the GSI Teaching and Resource Center met with me to find out which aspects of my teaching I wished to improve. I informed her that in previous evaluations, I scored lower in “encouraging students to

ask questions and express ideas” than in other areas. Also, I have had some difficulty ascertaining whether or not students have fully understood points from the lectures or readings. Finally, I just wanted to know if I had any distracting body language or particularly obnoxious habits, such as using the California vernacular “it's like” in every other sentence.

When I asked my students for permission to videotape the class in order to improve my teaching, they were quite supportive. We had already established a fairly informal, good rapport during the first part of the semester so none of the students objected. In fact, most of the students had seen themselves on videotape before and were therefore relatively uninhibited. The consultant set up the camera in the corner of the room, and once the class began, both the students and I forgot about her presence.

This particular day was unusual in that we had student presentations, which precipitated an especially animated discussion on the need for multicultural education. However, the consultant was still able to capture on tape and later point out aspects of my usual teaching style — the pacing of my instruction, the clarity of my explanations, and the facilitation of student discussion. Although one class session may not necessarily represent one's teaching overall, my one hour of videotape showed me more than enough ways to improve.

The consultant provided me with a list of things to watch for when viewing the videotape. In the first



*GSI Russell Jeung, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology, reviewing a videotape of himself teaching a class.*

viewing, most people tend to focus on how they look and sound: Am I really this nasal? Do I slouch that much?! By the second viewing, however, one can observe other, pedagogic details. I paid close attention to how I phrased questions and responded to student comments. As mentioned above,

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I was stunned by how abruptly I shifted from a student's remark to the next topic. Also, I could see how easily students drift off when they do not think they have to participate or if I drone on too long.

During the post-videotaping

consultation, I watched the tape with the consultant, and we identified both strengths and areas that needed improvement. For example, at one point I posed a “what” question to the class and no one answered. I rephrased the question but received only a brief response, and then a more awkward silence ensued.

The consultant suggested that instead of asking a close-ended question, I could have asked a “why” question, which might have elicited more student responses. Furthermore, a probing “why” question would help me better ascertain whether students truly comprehended the material.

Reviewing a videotape may also reveal an instructor’s unconscious biases. Although my students were diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion, we did not always capitalize on this diversity by sharing a range of ideas and viewpoints. Watching the tape with the consultant made me aware of who spoke out more often, who remained silent, and how an instructor might foster even greater student participation.

I want my classroom to be an interactive and safe learning environment. As a result, I’m preoccupied with explaining course material, seeing if students understand, encouraging class discussion, and integrating students’ ideas with lecture points. Time flies by when I’m in the classroom trying to do all of these things well simultaneously. As I watched the videotape from the student’s seat, however, I got a different view of my section. Students in my class easily disengaged because I allowed them to do so. My challenge as an instructor is to foster greater

student responsibility for his or her own learning and participation in the section.

In summary, the GSI Teaching and Resource Center videotaping process — from initial consultation and taping to private screening and consultant feedback — made me much more aware of my own teaching style, habits I need to break, and techniques I could utilize to improve the class. As a result, I am now much more conscious of how I can help my students by giving them more positive feedback, encouraging them to speak up, and posing more challenging questions.

*If you would like to be videotaped in the classroom, please stop by our center in 301 Sproul Hall or contact us at 642-4456 or at [gsi@berkeley.edu](mailto:gsi@berkeley.edu).*