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Keywords

filming classes, professional development, instructional videos, technology



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Daniele M. Vingelli

Abstract

Filming in the classroom is becoming a more common practice, in part because of the many advantages found in viewing and sharing videos of instruction. As filming classes and using instructional videos for professional development occurs more frequently, educators may want to adopt methods to increase the accessibility of videotaping. This best practice article identifies problems and offers possible solutions to teachers in K-12 settings who want to film their classes. It includes challenges that teachers can anticipate when engaging in the process of filming, as well as tips on how to manage these issues.

Introduction

Technology in the 21st century has made it enormously easy to view and share video. Countless music videos and famous film clips are available for public viewing at youtube.com. We can stream movies from our computers through our Netflix or Amazon accounts. Google, ‘making kitchen cabinets,’ and a plethora of how-to videos by master carpenters can be found. Also found online, and probably in greater quantity in the future (Thorpe, 2013), are videos of classroom instruction.

The purpose of this paper is to identify problems and offer possible solutions to teachers who want to film their classes. It includes challenges that teachers can anticipate when engaging in the process of filming, as well as tips for how to manage these issues. It concludes with a discussion section proposing possible methods for educators to make the process of filming in the classroom more accessible in the future.

Why Video?

Filming in the classroom is becoming a more common practice in part because of the many advantages found in viewing and sharing videos of instruction. The ability to watch and analyze themselves in the classroom aids educators in more effectively self-assessing, reflecting, and developing as teachers (Berg & Smith, 1996; Broome & White, 1995; Dieker, Lane, Allsopp, O'Brien, Butler, Kyger, Lovin & Fenty, 2009; Groom & Bellaver, 1997; Gunter & Reed, 1996; Kurtz & Batarello, 2010; McQueen, 2001). Reviewing teaching and learning on

video can help improve classroom practices for all participants. In creating her portfolio as part of the application process to earn National Board Certification, one teacher even found that her first-graders were able to better understand and improve their performances in the learning process after viewing their participation in class on video (Thorpe, 2013).

Sharing instructional videos with colleagues has enormous benefits for professional development. Viewing the classroom practices of others helps educators more closely examine best practices (Dieker et al., 2009; Kurtz & Batarelo, 2010) and behavior management techniques (Broome & White, 1995; Kurtz & Batarelo, 2010). Incorporating instructional videos in professional development gives educators the opportunity to see and evaluate examples of exemplary instruction from peers in their building, districts, and beyond (Berg & Smith, 1996; McQueen, 2001; Thorpe, 2013). Reviewing classroom video to identify key teaching practices can also help determine those areas teachers should develop professionally (Grossman, 2012).

Classroom video is becoming more popular as a means for assessing and honoring teachers. Currently, of the portfolio submissions required for teachers to become Board Certified, two must be videos of their work with students in the classroom (Thorpe, 2013). Instructional videos can serve as entries in teacher portfolios to show growth, and help administrators gain a more complete understanding of teachers' skills beyond that which can be demonstrated in yearly observations (Berg & Smith, 1996; McQueen, 2001). Educators evaluated as master teachers can demonstrate their skills on ATLAS (Accomplished Teaching, Learning and Schools), which is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' website and searchable online library of authentic classroom videos that highlight exemplary instruction (Thorpe, 2013).

Houston, We Can't Hear You!

When we think of film, we tend to envision a picture on a screen. When we prepare to view a video, we imagine what we will *see*. But when it comes to filming classes, what is heard, or what cannot be heard, is often a much more important aspect of video to consider.

It is imperative that when teachers film their classes, they take steps to ensure that everyone can be heard. Poor sound quality can make it extremely difficult to get an accurate picture of what is happening in a classroom on video (Berg & Smith, 1996; Broome & White, 1995; Kurtz & Batarelo, 2010; Williams, 2000). A basic video camera can be affixed to a sturdy tripod, stationed in the back of the classroom, and turned on to begin filming. However, using the appropriate equipment will increase the chances that those in instructional videos can be seen and heard.

Choice in video cameras and microphones both play a significant role in the quality of sound on film (Berg & Smith, 1996; Williams, 2000). A camera with a built-in condenser microphones and 30 degrees to 150 degrees of mid-side stereo configuration makes it easier to capture sound, especially when the person speaking is facing the camera. Cameras with proficient condensers cost approximately \$200. If the budget does not allow for this cost, you could connect a condenser shotgun microphone to an existing camera. Condenser shotgun microphones pick up sound best when held in the direction of the sound source and from no

more than 10 feet away. The cost is about \$65, and the microphone and support devices such as connection cables and battery typically come together. Also noteworthy is that neither of these options will capture distinct sound when many people are speaking at the same time. Hence, it will only be possible to hear what individual students are saying during group work if students are recorded within close range.

Whether filming one person or a group, from near or far, lavalieres, or lapel microphones, can improve sound quality. The voices of those wearing lavalieres can be captured individually and distinctly, regardless of the number of people speaking at once or the noise level in the classroom. This eliminates the need to position video cameras at a specific distance from speakers (Berg & Smith, 1996). A good lavalier microphone can be purchased for less than \$20. If the instructor and some or all of the students are also wearing lapel microphones, it will be necessary to mix the video's sound. Depending on the quality, sound mixers can cost from \$50 to hundreds of dollars. Although sound mixers add equipment and cost to the filming process, using lavalieres will enable more distinct voices to be heard on classroom video.

Behind Every Great Teacher Videotaping...

Although most teachers are quite adept at successfully multi-tasking in the classroom, it is much easier to create instructional videos and get quality footage when there is assistance. Because it is time consuming to set-up equipment and can detract from instruction, soliciting a videographer is beneficial. While a colleague or student may be free during the period filmed, this role should not be randomly assigned. The skill level of your videographer will greatly impact the amount and quality of material you can collect (Berg & Smith, 1996).

Filming in the classroom is one small component of the work necessary to create videos of classroom instruction. Recordings will most likely need to be downloaded to the computer. The level of background noise in a video may need to be diminished, and therefore, sound must be mixed if you are using more than one microphone. For good sound and picture quality, editing will likely need to occur (Berg & Smith, 1996; Kurtz & Batarelo, 2010). This task requires time and skill, and more of the former if a novice performs the task. Engaging the aid of people who are tech-savvy and have some experience working with video will be an enormous benefit to teachers filming instruction.

Practice Makes Good Video

Without Steven Spielberg's film crew, it will be difficult to create classroom video of the highest cinematic quality. However, with diligence and practice, and, possibly, a little help from videographers and editors, it is possible to produce video excerpts that highlight classroom instruction and interactions worthy of sharing. Although teachers and students usually become accustomed to being filmed, it may take time for the action to seem natural. The recordings may seem somewhat contrived or awkward initially (Berg & Smith, 1996; Gunter & Reed, 1996). Students may feel inclined to put on a performance, and conversely, the atmosphere in the room may seem unusually quiet and reserved in the first few filming sessions. Awkwardness and

embarrassment often felt by people unaccustomed to participating in classroom videotaping may be quite apparent, making students and teachers alike seem self-conscious.

To give participants time to become comfortable with and relaxed during videotaping it is beneficial to use the first few filming sessions as practice. Once students *and* teachers forget they are being filmed, there will be more opportunities to capture authentic classroom instruction, procedures, and interactions (Berg & Smith, 1996; Gunter & Reed, 1996; Williams, 2000). The more accurate the portrayal of the classroom on film, the more useful the videos will be in aiding educators to assess and improve practice.

Choose Your Words Wisely: Obtaining Parental Permission

Requesting consent to be filmed can be a bit more serious than merely asking parents to allow children to attend a fieldtrip. If parents feel suspicious that videos will be used for anything beyond instructional purposes, guardians may be reluctant to permit children to be recorded. Making it clear that the purpose for videotaping is to share, assess, and improve the quality of instruction will help parents feel more confident about granting filming permission. Communicating this in written form (Broome & White, 1995) on more than one occasion may be necessary. Obtaining written consent and verbally reiterating filming purposes when you are face-to-face with parents and guardians, such as during Open School events, might also help alleviate any uncertainties.

Implications for Educators

As filming classes becomes a more common practice, educators may want to adopt methods to increase the accessibility of videotaping. Purchasing the necessary equipment and making it available for teacher use will help administrators encourage their staff to participate in filming. To eliminate the need for videographers, educators may want to utilize robotic recording devices (Groom & Bellaver, 1997) or mount 360-degree cameras on ceilings of individual classrooms, which can also provide a definitive space for recording instruction. Hiring or assigning technology staff to download and edit video will save teachers time and help make instructional videos more professional and accessible. More research regarding effective recording systems and the benefits of sharing and viewing classroom videos is necessary. As educators make their work more public, we must continue to explore best practices for teachers to film classes.

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Daniele Vingelli is a doctoral student at Rutgers University in the Graduate School of Education. Her doctoral study concentration is on teacher leadership, and her dissertation focus is on designing effective professional development. She began her career in education as a New York City Teaching Fellow, and has been teaching high school English in Special Education for the Department of Education of New York City for 11 years. She can be contacted at dvingelli@gmail.com.