



KOJIMA Shinji
Associate Professor

Subjects : Multiculturalism and Society, Social Stratification
Transnational Sociology, Preliminary seminar

3TIPs

- 1 Ask effective teacher-to-student questions
- 2 Propose topics that are related to the students' own lives
- 3 Deliver knowledge from teacher to student, student to teacher, and student to student

Q. What do you consider to be a high-quality class?

A. The subjects that I am in charge of are mostly methodology classes, specialization subjects for disciplines, and courses from undergraduate to graduate students spanning various levels, so it is difficult to think about them as one. Also, my supervisor from when I was a graduate student had said that although they had been teaching for over 20 years at the time, undergraduate students were still a mystery and they still hadn't found the correct answer on how to teach them. High-quality classes were being held,

but they were taught as these worries continued. I myself do not know what that correct answer is. In order to acquire hints into conducting high-quality classes, I read texts related to pedagogy, and revised my teaching plan through student responses to each class and responses in the class evaluation questionnaires. During my sabbatical, I observed classes of highly-rated teachers at the German University where I was staying and was able to reference these classes. In my opinion, we should continue a trial and error method in search of the correct answer.

Based on this line of thinking, I now think that the **first condition** for high-quality classes is **effective teacher-to-student questions**. "The teacher's mission is to ignite interest in the minds of the students," as told to me by my mentor, and I think it is important to ask effective questions so that students can join the lectures with interest. It is difficult to ask these effective questions, but recently I have come to think that dealing with academic and theoretical issues that I am interested in leads to awakening the students' own interests. Basically, we deal with standard discussions and the

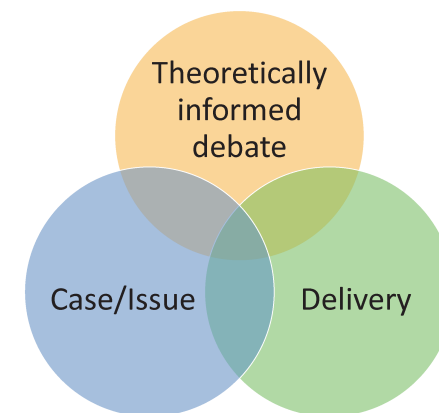
latest disputes in academia, but rather than providing these to students as they are, I provide the theoretical lineage and multifaceted theoretical interpretation behind the topic in an easy to understand manner for debate to encourage students to think about it. If it is an academic topic of personal interest, I am able to proceed enthusiastically with the lecture. Precisely because we are dealing with classic discussions and ongoing current issues, the desire to hear as many opinions as possible from the students comes from within, so the classes naturally become more interactive.

The **second condition** is to **address issues that are directly related to the students' own lives as cases to be considered**. Looking back on my student days, there were a lot of classes where I thought, "What meaning does this class hold for my life?" I could not understand the connection between the textbook and my own life. In order to prevent students from feeling this way, I have created a class structure which provides students with an analytical framework regarding what I would like students to think about before entering society and what they should know, such as the present day social issues.

When I ask students "What makes a good class?" there is one student among them that states: "Classes which deal with 'controversial topics' are interesting." I try to have students think about important social issues in the context of the first academic discussion. I also invite people who are directly involved in real social issues (such as Muslims in Japan or those working in the labor movement in Oita) as guests to discuss the issues arising with those involved and think significantly about these issues.

The **third condition** is **how to effectively deliver knowledge**. When discussing difficult contents of topical discussions or disputes in academic meetings, I try to speak clearly and slowly in a way which is easy to understand, as if I were layering blocks. In the academic world in Japan, there is a tendency to win the audience by complicating things, but I think it will only give birth to superstition rather than fostering understanding (Stevie Wonder). Regarding methods for the effective delivery of knowledge, what I learned through the Minnesota FD program was very useful. In order

to avoid information overload, slides should have few characters and emphasis can be expressed through changing the font color or size.



▲ Guest Lecture from a Labor Union Member

I also try to use many images such as photos and diagrams. I also have a structure in which I first set up small group discussions, and afterwards have the students share the group discussion opinions with the rest of the class.

Q. Were there any changes or innovations to your online lectures?

A. The idea of "**less is more**" became even stronger when we moved online.

In the previous semester, we conducted a questionnaire in order to get to know the needs of students, and there were some students who felt strongly about being required to take courses in real time for students living in unstable network environments or in regions with a time difference to Japan. After I learned about this situation, I stopped holding quizzes during lectures and having the student attendance record reflected in the evaluation. Even if we are lenient with attendance or do not hold quizzes, the students will stay focused if we conduct an interesting class. In order

to create an environment in which students can learn when they want to and are able to, I make all lecture recordings, slides, handouts, and other materials available online in order to **increase the flexibility of learning**.

In addition, I have reduced the lecture time in which I speak one-sidedly. The need to stay focused for a long period of time makes students more exhausted than necessary, so I've decided to sift through the content which I will talk about more than before. On the other hand, I've endeavored to provide topics worth discussing, to have time for students to

talk with their peers as often as possible, and to ease stress while creating more interactive classes.

Q. What steps do you take to improve class content?

A. First of all, I leave notes on the lecture slides as to where the students' reactions were good or poor, and use those notes to make improvements. One more thing I do is change the lecture content each year based on the "good points" and "points for improvement" sections in the class

evaluation questionnaire from students. I also make improvements based on my own subjective feedback and feedback that I receive directly from students.

As I mentioned earlier, if I have the opportunity to spend some time interacting with professors from other universities, I ask them about their lecture designs or observe their classes.

In order to convey the latest discussions and knowledge in the academic community, I attend various meetings in academic society, even if it is not directly connected to my own

research field, and I try to constantly update the trends of discussions in the academic community at the global level.

Q. What things are important to you in teaching?

A. The most important thing for me is to **maintain a balance between education and research**. Most of what I teach to students comes from the mindset that I have cultivated through my own research activities and experiences. For example, I am

able to respond to the demands of students because I am engaged in research activities, such as gathering material on the coronavirus pandemic or trending discussions in academic circles. In particular, I believe that the results of my own research activities will show up in the quality of my education, such as in my guidance of students writing their graduate theses or in my methodology classes. First of all, I think it is important to not neglect efforts to stand at the forefront of research. APU has a history of being an education-focused university which comparatively neglects education, but

for the sake of competition going forward, it is important to **restore the balance between education and research**, as it is impossible to have one without the other.

The other important thing is to **build a grading system that respects APU's diversity**. Some students are good at automated scoring tests consisting of choices, while others are good at doing essays. Some students demonstrate their abilities through individual work, while others prefer group work. Each student has a different field of expertise, so I use both formats on tests, and allow students to freely

choose individual or group work for reports so as not to inhibit their strengths or individuality.

Q. What do you expect from your students?

A. I am generally satisfied with the learning attitudes of APU students. I feel that APU students are full of intellectual curiosity, and when I ask them questions they are actively and progressively willing to share their diverse opinions, which is interesting. It is worth it to ask serious questions.

If anything, it would be nice if they spoke out even more actively. Even if the student doesn't know the answer, they can return it with a question, because anything is okay and giving a response makes it easier for me to understand the reactions the students have. The opinions of students from all over the world can be viewed as valuable first-hand information which can only be acquired through going abroad, the foundation of the learning environment that is APU's strength. Even if you talk about your own experiences a little, it will deepen others' studies, so I would like my

students to speak out by all means.

I also want students to take the class evaluation questionnaire seriously. I am creating classes for the next term based on everyone's responses, so I hope my students realize that this questionnaire is making a difference.

Interviewer's Impressions

Among the 3 points that Dr. Kojima has devised, I thought that teaching “content related to life” would be the most effective way to draw students' attention. I feel that this is because if students can exchange their opinions with their own experiences and what actually happened around them, I feel that opinions will be naturally and actively shared within the lecture. In addition, I was convinced that through the evaluation methods and innovations in online lectures, and as a positive result of “utilizing the diversity” of APU students, a favorable learning environment in which diversity was respected and problems were addressed one by one was created.

What is [Q]?

At APU there are many professors who put together wonderful classes, and if we could get to know how these classes are planned, it would contribute to the improvement of other professors' classes. For that purpose, we have begun doing interviews in order to learn about class planning. These articles have been entitled [Q], comprising a variety of meanings such as: increasing the [Q]uality of classes, answering [Q]uestions to increase quality, and forming a [Q]ueue, or line, of class improvements. We would be very happy if these articles could contribute to the [Q]uest of APU professors' class quality improvement.

