CASE-BASED LEARNING

Case-Based Learning

Case-based learning (CBL) is an established approach used across disciplines where students apply their knowledge to **real-world scenarios**, promoting higher levels of cognition. In CBL classrooms, students typically work in groups on case studies, stories involving one or more characters and/or scenarios. The cases present a disciplinary problem or problems for which students devise solutions under the guidance of the instructor. According to Bruner (2002), the case method:

- employs **active learning**, involves self-discovery where the teacher serves as a facilitator.

- promotes more effective **contextual learning** and long-term retention.

- provides students with the opportunity to "walk around the problem" and to see varied **perspectives.**

- builds the capacity for **critical thinking**: It uses questioning skills as modeled by the teacher and employs discussion and debates.

Students work on a case study about sickle cell disease in the Sapp Center, Stanford University

Writing a good case for teaching is neither simple nor quick. When examining the concept of CBL, it is important to first capture the essential components of the method. According to Wasserman (1994) and Herried (1997) effective cases for learning share a number of characteristics:

Table 1. *Essential Characteristics of an Effective Case*

- The case content is closely aligned with the overall instructional goals and objectives.

- The case tells a story and focuses on an issue that arouses interest.

- The case itself is well-written and its readability is appropriate for the age or level of the student.

- The case should be written in the present tense and deal with an authentic situation not more than five years old.

- The case includes direct quotes, using the characters' dialog to tell the story.

- The story is compelling and creates empathy with the main characters.

- The case clearly states and illuminates the dilemma without resolving it.

- The case is relevant to the reader.

- The case provokes conflict and forces decision making.

- The case is general enough to be used in several applications.

- The case is short.

To explore sample cases developed by National Science Teaching Association, please follow the link below.

https://www.nsta.org/case-studies

This site offers resources and examples specific to teaching in the sciences. This includes the "UB Case Study Collection," an extensive list of ready-to-use cases in a variety of science disciplines. Each case features a PDF handout describing the case, as well as teaching notes.

Designing Learning Activities for CBL

Just writing the story is not finishing the job. Developing discussion and study questions is also important, which provide keeping the discussion on track and the focus on the pertinent issues. Wasserman (1994) offers some helpful guidance:

- ✓ Begin with an examination of the events, issues and characters

- ✓ Move to an analysis of what lies behind the surface of events

- ✓ Pull the students deeper into the case with generative questions that call for evaluations and judgments, applications and proposed solutions.

How CBL Works

- Students may be unfamiliar with CBL or may be predisposed to distrust group work. They need to know exactly what is expected of them in order to be successful in class.

- Each case is written from the viewpoint of a real person in a real-life setting. In addition to background information on the situation, each case ends in a key decision to be made. Students' job is to sift through the information, incomplete by design, and decide what they would do.

- Students will bring their ideas to a small team of classmates from diverse professional backgrounds, their discussion group, to share their findings and listen to theirs. Together, they begin to see the case from different perspectives, better preparing students for class.

- Be prepared to change the way students think as they debate with classmates the best path forward for a solution. The highly engaged conversation is facilitated by the instructor, but it's driven by their classmates' comments and experiences.

Example of a CBL Lecture

Interested in experiencing Harvard Business School's Case Method teaching style? Watch the Harvard MBA Case Method classroom brought to life by Professor Tsedal Neeley, and a section of current students and see for yourself what it's like to be cold-called, participate in lively debates, and how CBL leads to emotional intelligence and lifelong application.

References

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Bruner, R. (2002). *Socrates' muse: Reflections on effective case discussion leadership*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Herreid, C.F. (1997). What makes a good case? Some basic rules of good storytelling help teachers generate excitement in class. Retrieved from http://sciencecases.lib.buffalo.edu/cs/pdfs/What%20Makes%20a%20Good%20Case-XXVII-3.pdf

Teaching Methods for Case Studies, Learning & Teaching Office, Ryerson University https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/learning-teaching/teaching-resources/teach-a-course/case-method.pdf

The Case Method, Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Retrieved from https://citl.illinois.edu/citl-101/teaching-learning/resources/teaching-strategies/the-case-method

Wasserman, S. (1994). *Introduction to case method teaching: A guide to the galaxy*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Further Reading and Resources

- [Case Studies, Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University.](#)

- [Case Study, University of Michigan.](#)

- [Case Based Learning at Cardiff University School of Medicine](#)

- [Perspectives on the Case Method, Harvard Business School](#)