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Discussing Complex Issues Using Case Studies

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Discussing Complex Issues Using Case Studies

Faculty Teaching Learning Lunch presented by Wendy Sagers, ELCP Coordinator
Wednesday, October 5 from 12 – 1 pm, Funded by the Lacroute Initiative

Case Method:

Case Method considers options in complex situations

analyze real-life scenarios by applying theoretical ideas

story-telling often sets the scene

Examples of case studies:

Companies and health care confronting COVID complications

Scenarios involving cross-cultural communication

Historical events and options faced by political leaders

Very common in business, nursing, and social and behavioral sciences,

Less common in sciences and arts and humanities

Important parts:

- Background: legal, historical, social, cultural, financial
- Story: specific situation generalized with names changed
 - Always a dilemma or course of action to choose
- Discussion Questions: encourage critical thinking
 - What do you want students to consider?
 - What factors are important?
 - What are the options?
- Presentation: How will students share their ideas?
 - written reflection, role play, compare and reconsider

Examples from History on the next pages

Case Study from John Sagers: The Atomic Bomb: Asia for Educators

http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/japan_1900_bomb.htm

The Decision to Use the Bomb

Background reading includes information about all sides purposely attacking civilians and the advancements in technology making possible the deaths of tens of thousands of people in a matter of days. A description of important events showing the Japanese resistance to surrender follows. The difference of opinion between the prime minister and the army leaders is included. Then students are instructed to read three primary source documents and discuss.

Document questions: (1 observation, all agree, 2 – 4 interpretation, many options)

REPORT OF THE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON THE MILITARY USE OF THE ATOMIC BOMB (MAY 1945)

1. From this discussion, what were the major concerns driving American policymakers regarding their decision to use atomic weapons against Japan?
2. What alternatives to dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were being seriously considered by these top American leaders?
3. In addition to the three reasons proposed by General Groves, what reasons might you give for not dropping multiple atomic bombs on Japan at the same time?

REPORT OF THE FRANCK COMMITTEE ON THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A DEMONSTRATION OF THE ATOMIC BOMB (FOR A NON-COMBAT DEMONSTRATION) (JUNE 1945)

1. What arguments did the Franck Committee make against the use of the atomic bombs on Japan?
2. Do you think that this group's suggestion of demonstrating the atomic bomb on "the desert or a barren island" would have been successful in hastening Japan's surrender?
3. Why do you think that the American public did not respond more negatively to the use of the atomic bombs on Japan, as the Franck Committee thought it might?
4. If you had been a member of the Franck Committee, what policy regarding the atomic bombs would you have argued for?

THE POTSDAM DECLARATION (JULY 26, 1945)

1. Why did the United States and its allies issue this declaration? Do you think they expected Japan to comply?
2. Why do you think the declaration called for "unconditional surrender"? Do you think the war might have ended sooner, and without the use of the atomic bombs, if the United States had been willing to negotiate a peace with Japan? Why did America not pursue that course?
3. Does this declaration suggest that the occupation of Japan will be punitive or constructive? According to the declaration, who bears responsibility for leading Japan down the path to war?
4. How would you have responded to this document as a leader in the Japanese government? As an "average" Japanese person at the time?

What types of questions are being asked? What are some goals of these questions?

Case Study from Steve Rutledge: an example from his Greek history course

The discussion about Thucydides' *The Melian Dialogue* takes place in the context of discussing the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) that took place between Athens and Sparta. There is a break in the war during a temporary peace from 421-416. In 416 the Athenians break it by forcing the Melians into their alliance; Melians want to remain neutral and are a colony of Sparta, Athens' opponent. They choose to hold out and hope for assistance from Sparta which never comes. The Athenians defeat them, kill all the men, and sell the women and children into slavery.

Prereading Questions (from life experience, frames the discussion that follows)

1. Which is more important—freedom or survival?
2. How can hope sometimes give you strength, and sometimes mislead you?
3. Is it honorable or foolish to carry on a fight against overwhelming odds? Is honor more important than life itself?
4. Can a slave live a dignified and honorable life?
5. Why is it sometimes hard to remain neutral in an argument or fight? Do you respect people who try not to take sides in a dispute?

Interpretive Questions for Discussion (many more from quotes)

1. Are the Melians fools or heroes for refusing the Athenian offer?
2. Why do the Athenians not merely subdue the Melians, but wipe them out altogether?
3. Are we meant to think the Athenians are barbaric, or just trying to survive in a hard, dog-eat-dog world?

Post-discussion Writing

1. Should the Melians have surrendered to the Athenians?
2. Were the Athenians justified in destroying the Melians, after giving them the option of surrender?
3. Is belief in pacifism and nonviolence an impractical attitude in a dangerous world?
4. Is it better to be idealistic or pragmatic?
5. Are the Melian rulers poor leaders? If you were one of the Melian people, what would you say to your leaders on finding out that they had refused the Athenian offer?
6. Does the “natural law” that the strong always rule over the weak apply to a democracy? (10)
7. What might countries facing Nazi Germany in World War II have learned from “The Melian Dialogue”?

What types of questions are being asked? What are some goals of these questions?

Examples from History faculty: **John Sagers and Steven Rutledge**

Types of questions asked about specific situations

- What is moral?
- Define the role of people in power.
- What ideals can people hold? When should they be abandoned?
- Consider alternatives
- Apply past situations to current events
- Analyzing primary source documents

Example from Communications Arts faculty **Chelsea King**

Consultant for workplaces with a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion emphasis

- Help students understand and analyze situations.
- Consider cultural norms, workplace scenarios, microaggression
- Read together research
- Discuss how to change organization from the inside
- How to change hiring practices to be more equitable
- Who should be on the hiring committee?
- Apply past situations to current events

Example from Business faculty **Kyle Putnam**

Uses real life problems experienced by a specific firm anonymously.

- Students manipulate large datasets to
- offer quantitative solutions or
- concrete strategic directions
- based on quantitative findings.
- Discuss strategy

Challenge: Presenting analyses when each student considered a different case

Service-Learning and Learning Communities: Tools for Integration and Assessment

Group Presentations

- Make groups of students with diverse skills, 3 – 4 people
- All students in the group read the same case study
- Groups choose presentation format: debate, panel, enactments
- Students do/read research
- Circulate, observe, listen
- Provide a written reflection exercise

Individual Presentations with Group Feedback

- Give time for each student to read the same case.
- Ask, “What is the underlying problem?”
- List five solutions and rank them
- Share the list of solutions with a neighbor, add new solutions
- Re-rank and re-state conclusions
- Consider the ramifications of choosing students’ top solutions:
legal, psychological, medical, family, government, etc.
- List three reasons someone might disagree with your solutions

Examples about service organizations

Rob Gardner: Grassroots Disaster Relief in Post-Katrina New Orleans

For this case study, I draw from my field research observing and volunteering with Emergency Communities, a grassroots relief organization that emerged in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and developed five different relief centers across the Gulf Coast. These relief centers served up to 3000 hot meals per day and distributed a range of free goods and services on a shoestring budget, with a flat leadership structure, and entirely volunteer labor.

Most of the core volunteers arrived at the Gulf Coast with little formal experience in disaster response or relief. They were often turned away from larger, bureaucratic organizations like the Red Cross who mandated that volunteers complete an application, undergo a 2-week training program, and complete a background check prior to being authorized to serve. Motivated by the need for an alternative to top heavy, command-and-control organizational models, their goal was to create a horizontally structured organization that was better suited to more agilely respond to emergent community needs.

Questions:

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks to the larger organizations' approach?
2. What are the benefit and drawbacks to the grassroots organizations' approach?

Core volunteers draw from a range of past experiences feeding large number of people in relatively primitive environments at music festivals and other countercultural events (Burning Man, Rainbow Gatherings, street protests, homeless outreach, etc.) and deployed these skills in the neighborhoods most often neglected by major relief organizations. This organizational model has been replicated in other locations, and most notably after Hurricane Ike in S. Texas, the Boulder County Colorado flood response in 2013, Superstorm Sandy in New York, and after historic tornadoes in Oklahoma City in 2013.

Questions:

3. Are there other organizational models that you can imagine?
4. Have you ever helped with either on-going or emergency relief efforts?
5. How can relief organizations help rebuild community after a disaster?

I use this case study to examine competing organizational models by which lay citizens organize communities in response to natural disasters or other emergencies. This particular model also provides insight into how structures of community interaction lost during these crises can be rebuilt in and through the relief process by focusing on non-traditional types of relief activities. I draw from my direct experiences working with this organization as well as studies of other, similar organizations since Katrina. Students gain an appreciation of the importance of community-based alternatives to the "one-size-fits-all" model that characterize many other traditional relief efforts.

There are various ways to solve problems. Sometimes students need to do this in class situations. Sometimes groups fail because of one member. What can we do?

Technology Outreach: Bridging the Digital Divide

Service-Learning and Learning Communities: Tools for Integration and Assessment
by Karen K. Oats and Lynn H. Leavitt. AACU. 2003.

In my course that deals with Internet literacy (critiquing the Internet, exploring economic, social, legal, ethical aspects of the Internet, and publishing course work on the Web), one option for students to fulfill their service-learning requirement is to help people bridge the digital divide by volunteering at non-profit community-based computer learning centers. My students who choose this option help young people learn computer skills: using e-mail and word processing programs, researching on the Internet, doing basic Web publishing, playing computer games that can reinforce skills in following directions, building hand/eye coordination, building skills in math, reading, art, etc.

One student, in particular, came to me very upset because the center to which she was assigned was closing. It had lost its supervisor, and it was too late for the student to sign on at another site. She did not have the required forty-five hours. So that I would not impose a solution on the student and to help her enhance her own problem-solving skills, I asked her to brainstorm about possible ways she could complete her hours, while, at the same time, fulfilling her original intention—to help young people bridge the digital divide. I asked her to e-mail me her possible solutions.

She came up with:

- Doing research on educational sites for children
- Creating a Web site.

We then talked about how we could combine her ideas to make this a fulfilling project. The skills she was learning in class included researching and evaluating Web sites and Web publishing, so that her ideas for an alternative project were a perfect fit. After we discussed possible ways to combine these ideas, the student decided to create a Web “booklet” for students. I suggested she provide a print version that could be copied and placed in the computer learning centers, and a Web site version so that she could practice her Web skills and learn how to link the various components of her book, using hypertext. I also suggested she divide the book into different age groups and categories of activities, such as:

- Games online
- Children’s Museums online
- Educational Activities

Her hours were earned by:

- researching Web sites with games, children’s museums, and educational activities.
- evaluating the Web sites for credibility of sponsoring organization, age-appropriate activities, suitability of material (no violence, or inappropriate language or graphics).
- creating the print and Web versions of the booklet.

Questions Faculty Use to Prompt Problem Solving

1. How could the problem have been avoided?
2. What can be done in the future to prevent this from happening again?
3. How to situate the experience so that the student can transfer the problem-solving skills to other situations?
4. What is a completely different situation where this would apply?
5. How can we improve communication between stake holders?

Case Method: Your Own

Case Method considers options in complex situations

- analyze real-life scenarios by applying theoretical ideas
- story-telling often sets the scene
- dilemma or course of action to discuss

Which of your classes, topics, readings would make a good case study?

- Companies, Management
- Accessibility
- Scenarios, Interactions
- Solving problems
- Historical events
- Political choices

What background will the students need?

legal, cultural, historical, psychological, medical, equitable

Questions for students to consider

Sources

All are available through Summit library services

Darling-Hammond, Linda. *Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from Exemplary Programs*. 1st ed., Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Gorski, Paul, and Seema G. Pothini. *Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education*. 2nd edition., Routledge, 2018.

Naumes, William., and Margaret J. Naumes. *The Art & Craft of Case Writing*. 3rd ed., M.E. Sharpe, 2012.

Oates, Karen Kashmanian, and Lynn Hertrick Leavitt. *Service Learning and Learning Communities: Tools for Integration and Assessment*. AAC & U, 2003.

The Atomic Bomb. Asia for Educators.

http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/japan_1900_bomb.htm

Examples of **diversity and social justice in educational settings**

Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education 2nd Edition. Gorski and Pothini.

CASE 3.4: HIGH EXPECTATIONS OR UNREALISTIC GOALS?

Ms. Sutter was in the middle of her first year teaching sixth grade at Pinewood Elementary School when she decided to form an after-school club for students who could become the first people in their families to attend college. She came to see a need for such a group as she noticed that many of her students lacked knowledge about post-secondary education. Although many of their parents encouraged them to think about college, her students did not have the same opportunities as some of their peers to see a college campus or hear about higher education options.

The school was located close to several colleges and even a world-renowned university, but only a few of Ms. Sutter's students saw those institutions' potential relevance to their own futures. Ms. Sutter, on the other hand, had fond memories of the friendly rivalry between her parents when they discussed their alma maters. At an early age she understood that there was no question about whether she would pursue higher education; rather, the question was where she would earn her degree.

Ms. Sutter proposed the new club at a staff meeting. Some teachers thought it was unnecessary, but several others were excited and offered their support. A major point of discussion was the club's grade range. To limit the number of students attending, the club was open only to sixth graders. The club progressed well that year.

As a year-end celebration for club members, Ms. Sutter scheduled a Saturday field trip to the renowned local university, which would include a guided tour and lunch. They arrived at the Admissions office. Because it was a weekend, the office was crowded with high school students and their families, all awaiting their tours. After speaking with the receptionist Ms. Sutter was shocked to learn that their assigned tour guide had called in sick and that, as a result, her group would need to conduct a self-guided tour.

"But I didn't even attend this university! I can't give them an adequate tour. Why not just let us join another group?" she implored.

"I'm sorry, but our guides are prioritized for the high school students," the receptionist responded. As Ms. Sutter continued to plead the club's case, she was approached by the director of admissions, Mr. Stein, who invited her into his office.

Mr. Stein said, "I'm sorry that a tour guide is unavailable. We do our best to avoid these situations, but I have students waiting in the other room who are credible applicants. Unfortunately, I can't compromise their interest by prioritizing sixth graders ahead of them." He paused briefly before adding, "Frankly, I worry that you're getting your students excited about a place they probably will never be able to attend. Perhaps you should be touring a community college or trade school."

Questions

- 1 What advice would you have given Ms. Sutter when she was deciding which students should be permitted to participate in the club?
- 2 Ms. Sutter (teacher) heard from multiple people, including Mr. Stein (admissions office), that it was unnecessary to discuss post-secondary options with her students. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with this sentiment?
- 3 Mr. Stein expressed his concern about Ms. Sutter creating false excitement about a prestigious university. How would you have responded to Mr. Stein's comments?
- 4 If you were the teacher, what would you say to your students?

CASE 3.5: TECHNOLOGY PROGRESS, EQUITY REGRESS

"Transitioning to a Technology Future": this was the theme school leaders at Oak Grove School chose entering the new school year. Once a school with a relatively wealthy student body, Oak Grove had changed demographically. The percentage of students on free or reduced-price lunch had climbed to 45%.

Ms. Carmella, Oak Grove's principal, had decided this year the school would prioritize technology. Teachers would be required to incorporate computer and Internet technologies across the curriculum. The school would transition to an online platform for communicating with parents.

During staff orientation the week before students returned to school, Principal Carmella announced the plan and mentioned workshop opportunities to help staff integrate technology into their classes. She assured everyone time and support would be provided for reconstructing curricula, which seemed to be a concern for staff.

As the conversation wound down, Ms. Dehne, an Oak Grove teacher, worried an important point was being missed: as the number of students experiencing poverty at the school grew, so grew the number of families who did not have computers or Internet access at home. She also knew many of her colleagues responded defensively when she raised these sorts of concerns. The more she raised concerns about the experiences of these students, the more she felt she was labeled a "troublemaker." Still, she felt responsible for asking questions.

"I'm wondering how the families who don't have computers or Internet are going to access this new platform," she remarked. "And shouldn't we talk about how to avoid assigning homework and projects that require technology some of our students don't have?" she added.

"Most of our students have computers and Internet access at home," Ms. Gifford, another teacher, insisted, "so why should we spend time focusing on the few who don't? Besides, even our families who receive free or reduced lunch have cell phones with Internet access. I see students on their phones all the time in the hallways."

Principal Carmella chimed in, "Part of the benefit of this initiative is, we're inviting families to change with us. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds need this more than anyone if they don't want to be left behind. Our building is full of computers, and so is the local library. We can encourage students to use them after school."

Ms. Dehne agreed technology literacy was important for students, but she couldn't help but feel this initiative would unintentionally punish students whose families could not afford the resources necessary to participate fully. But after several instances of "learning the hard way," Ms. Dehne knew continuing to press her concerns in that moment would not be useful.

Questions:

1. What barriers might make it difficult for students to take advantage of the alternatives Principal Carmella suggested for students who did not have access at home?
2. What are some ways Oak Grove could adjust the initiatives laid out by Principal Carmella to avoid creating more inequity for students and families experiencing poverty? How can the school cultivate technology without assigning homework or projects requiring its use?
3. Do you agree with Ms. Gifford's suggestion that, if most students at the school do have computer and Internet access (assuming she knows this is true), then Ms. Dehne should not focus so much on those who don't have access? Should policy and practice be created based on the access and opportunity enjoyed by most students, even if it might disadvantage other students?