Professional Reflections on "Why Should We Use Case Studies in the Classroom?"

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Case studies have been recognized as an effective learning tool in various disciplines, such as medicine, business, law, science, mathematics, and education, to name but a few. The increasing use of case studies as a learning tool has stemmed from its provision of opportunities for engaging students in analyzing and solving problems. Particularly, students working in groups on case studies will be able to help each other develop their understanding and interpersonal skills needed for effective group work. Cases also help students apply their knowledge and principles to real experiences.

Potentiality of cases has been emphasized in a number of previous studies in the field of education. Quite a few researchers have reported interesting findings on case study benefits, particularly *cognitive* skills in an analytical mode, decision making and independent thinking (Cameron et al, 2012), problem solving skills and discussion (Chaplin, 2009; Yoon et al, 2006; Latthasaksiri, 2016) and enhanced analytical thinking skills (Kunpol, 2014), critical thinking skills (Popil, 2011; Iqbal & Rubab, 2012; Gallego et al, 2013). Some other studies pointed to *affective* benefits for students to increase their motivation and interest in learning (Koç, 2011; Ayyildiz & Tarhan, 2012; Casotti et al, 2013) as well as their self-confidence (Cameron et al, 2012). Moreover, students would be engaged in the learning process as active learners (Yadav et al. , 2010).

As reported in the literature on case studies aforementioned, those researchers covered a wide range of problems created for analysis. Cases generally deal with real or daily life events, often involving complex issues, conflicts, or problems to be resolved, or requiring logical decision making. Case studies in fact serve as a form of problem-based learning on a problem or situation with relevant case background; students are assigned to work in small groups to seek out relevant information for group analysis or discussion for a practical solution.

Using case studies in the classroom is a challenge to both the teacher and students in class discussion that in turn prompts the latter's participation in support of their thinking process. As known, quite a few course instructors are more likely to develop their own cases related to their subjects. Though rather time consuming, cases can be designed with specifications pertinent to the target discipline and learning outcomes.

Kunpol (2014) showed a good example of creating 30 mathematics cases for Primary 6 students at Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University (SBS). The researcher covered her case design and construction by integrating a wide range of mathematical problems based on real or daily life events; such as, Thailand's Damaging Floods in 2011, Building Public Parks in Lak Hok Manicipal Area, How Students Make Buying Decisions at Supermarkets, and SBS Yard Sale, to name but a few topics. The researcher gave her students opportunities to analyze real-life situations and apply relevant math formulas for practical solutions to the given cases. The learning outcomes on students' analytical thinking skills were at a high

level; the tasks included matching, classifying, analyzing errors, generalizing, and specifying a steady increase in the given learning period. The students became enthusiastic with their attempts at applying math formulas to real-life situations. They were able to see for themselves the relevance of mathematics to their daily life rather than a mode of abstraction in thinking.

From the author's point of view, this type of learning can greatly engage students in their learning process, and thus motivate them to develop analytical thinking and other higher-level thinking skills, if desired. From my past communications with my colleagues in business administration who used case studies in their undergraduate teaching, they agreed upon cognitive and affective benefits for their students. They recognized the importance of case studies as relevant to students' prior knowledge and experience. Lack or insufficiency of relevancy in given cases might result in students not being engaged in class discussion or challenged to find a well-justified solution. It should be noted that case study creation truly requires excellent knowledge, superb reasoning and questioning skills from one who wants to attempt case-study design and writing up.

In conclusion, case studies though somewhat difficult to create, have benefits in helping students develop their high-order thinking ability. In addition, small group discussion can engage students in sharing their learning experience and problem-solving skills for a specific purpose on the target learning outcome—be it a solution, a recommendation, or a justified plan with facts or concrete/ predicted evidence as required in the given case. Moreover, case studies have wide applications in various disciplines as seen fit by the teacher or course instructor from the secondary to tertiary levels of education.

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Comments: We welcome your comments and also any information that are pertinent to this topic in your context. Also please let us have your suggestions for the next round of "Professional Reflections."

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