ASSESSMENT OF CASE STUDIES IN GROUP 
AND IN ONE-ON-ONE CLASSROOM SETTINGS

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Abstract

This paper examines how teachers in a graduate education class developed skills through group and one-on-one peer assessment of case studies. It demonstrates how the design, construction and peer assessment of case studies provided valuable real-world experience. It also taught them how to evaluate peers and how to accept evaluation from them.

KEY WORDS: active learning, analytic assessment, authentic assessment, case analysis, case construction, case study, peer-assessment, summative assessment

BACKGROUND

Case studies help future human service professionals understand the need to work collaboratively with each other to address the existing and emerging social challenges that affect children, families, and ultimately the community. They can help these professionals analyze both the obvious and hidden needs of individuals/groups, examine the best courses of action, and determine the steps that will lead to greater collaboration among service providers [Wright and Heeren, 2002]. Research indicates that using case studies in training both pre-service and in-service teachers provides them with a variety of opportunities to broaden and expand their teaching skills and problem-solving abilities [Miller & Kantrov, 1998; Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1991; Kowalski, 1991]. The case method helps students to apply appropriate educational theory to the problem(s), and their analysis, solution and evaluation [Silverman, Welty and Lyon, 1992]. A case is an actual situation commonly involving a decision, a challenge, an opportunity, a problem or an issue faced by a person (or persons) in an organization, e.g. a school setting [Mauffette-Leenders, Erskine & Leenders, 2001]. The following are the benefits of using case studies as teaching tools as identified by Grant, 1997; Kowalski, 1998, Raju and Sanker, 1991. Case studies:

- are a bridge between theory and practice
- promote active learning
- require mature analysis, critical summaries, and responsible judgments about every intricate and difficult situation
- develop skills in communication, group work and problem-solving skills, and
- increase student motivation.

The case method relies on the active participation of students. Students, collectively or individually, take responsibility for their own learning. The case method is an active learning process requiring learners to understand and apply applicable theory; thus they need to be self-reflective and think critically about their craft [Silverman, Welty and Lyon, 1992]. Active learning comes from the student’s own experience in the design, construction and assessment of case study.

Peer assessment has been implemented in several higher education courses such as writing, engineering, sciences, information science and arts [Liu, Lin and Yuan, 2002]. Students assess the
performance of other students. For peer evaluation to be successful, the learning environment in the classroom must be supportive. Student must feel comfortable and trust one another in order to provide honest and constructive feedback. This trust can be developed by forming working groups in class. Dochy and Segers [as cited in Liu et al. 2002], indicated two guidelines for educators who employed peer assessment in instruction… (1) peer assessment criteria should be determined beforehand. Experiences show that it works well if these criteria are determined jointly by staff and students (2) peer assessment should be presented in familiar operational terms. In peer assessment, students review learning outcomes of other students on the basis of set criteria. The instructor can provide the set criteria or students can be involved in setting these criteria. Students can also benefit from using rubrics to guide their assessment. The rubric becomes the scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work and the gradations of quality for each criterion. Variations in peer grading include the scoring of the work of students in one class by members of other classes and blind review with names undisclosed [Sandler and Good, 2006]. Peer assessment, both formative and summative, is a way of enabling students to think critically about peers’ work. This formal assessment provides students opportunity to think about their performance in a critical way. It allows them to identify and discuss their strengths and weaknesses, and consequently, to decide where there is a need for improvement. Learners assess, critique, and make value judgments on the quality of other learners’ work. They provide feedback and receive it in return, enabling enhanced performance [Juwah, 2003].

CASE DEVELOPMENT

PARTICIPANTS

This project used case studies as a teaching tool for 26 in-service teachers who were graduate students enrolled in a course on teaching in culture-and-language-diverse classrooms. Each student was required to construct a case study of a child in his/her classroom or school. The participants were practicing teachers holding Illinois teacher certificates and/or temporary teacher certificates; they were pursuing a master degree in a program with bilingual endorsement.

CASE CONSTRUCTION

Students were required to design, construct, and complete a case study as a final project for the course. During the first two weeks of the course the participants were provided with an orientation, which included samples of case studies in Education. They discussed the written instructions about designing and constructing a case in relation to a child’s academic performance, language problem and/or behavioral problem. The case was required to contain (1) background of the student and family, (2) home/school environment, (3) the child’s problem, (4) data collection, and (5) analysis of problem and recommendations for remedy (strategies and interventions).

CASE EVALUATION GROUPS

The strength of the case method as an educational technique lies in its ability to arouse the interest of the students by giving them an active role. One of the ways in which students internalize the characteristics of quality work is by evaluating the work of their peers. Peer evaluation develops their critical skills and insight into the evaluation process. Peer assessment is part of developing evaluative, analytical and reflective skills. Course participants were expected to provide formative review as well as summative assessment of their classmates’ case studies. An orientation session provided the students with expectations about their peers’ work. An analytic rubric table was developed incorporating all the case elements and each case was assessed to determine if it met each of the established rubric standards.

The peer grading was conducted by scoring the case studies of students within the class. The 26 students were randomly assigned into Groups A, B, C and D; each group had six or seven students. This group assignment was conducted during the first two weeks of the course. Each group was expected to work through the semester with group presentation on different topics identified in the course syllabus as well as to conduct group assessment of case studies. This group setting was intended to build team,
leadership and communication skills between and among the members of each group. It was intended to make them comfortable and trust one another in order for them to give honest and constructive feedback when conducting the case studies peer evaluations. These evaluations had three phases: individual rating, group rating and one-on-one student feedback. In each of the phases, a blind review was conducted with undisclosed names on each case study.

EVALUATION GROUPS COMMUNICATIONS

For Individual Ratings, materials were sent via individual e-mails. Each member of Group A scored the case study of all the members of group B; Group B scored Group C; Group C scored Group D; and Group D scored Group A. The ratings were done outside the classroom by each class participant using an analytic rubric scale (minimum 5-maximum) and a Summary Scoring Sheet was sent via e-mail to the course instructor.

For Group Ratings discussions were held in the classroom. The members of Group A discussed the individual rating for each case of members from Group B and by consensus gave a Total Group Rating to each case study. Group B followed this process for Group C, Group C for Group D, and Group D for Group A. As a group, members were assessing the performance of other students and asking questions about the quality on each criterion as well as reaching consensus on the final scoring for each case study.

Due to the size of the groups, the one-to-one feedback was conducted by pairing members from each of the four groups with members whose case study was assessed at the individual rating phase. The student who performed the individual assessment and the rating was able to provide feedback to the author of the appraised case study; followed by feedback by the author. Each participant received peer feedback of his/her case study and was required to provide a fifteen (15) minute oral presentation of the case study.

Table I shows the analytic rubric used for individual and group assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Data</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Indicates some</td>
<td>Meets standard on</td>
<td>Meets standard plus adds more supportive data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborates on child's home, school environment</td>
<td>No evidence presented</td>
<td>Minimal evidence presented</td>
<td>meets standard on elaborating on child's home/school environment</td>
<td>Meets standard on identifying child's home/school environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies child's academic/ personal problem</td>
<td>No evidence of child's problem</td>
<td>Meets standards on identifying the essentials on the child's problem</td>
<td>Meets standard plus additional insight on identifying child's problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies sources of data collection</td>
<td>No evidence of data collection</td>
<td>Minimal evidence of data collection</td>
<td>Meets standards on identifying all sources for data collection</td>
<td>Meets standard plus a thorough analysis of data collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies and Interventions</td>
<td>No evidence presented</td>
<td>Minimal evidence presented</td>
<td>Makes logical/applicable strategies/recommendations</td>
<td>Exceeds standard with thorough analysis of recommendation/strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COURSE CASE METHOD EVALUATION

QUESTIONNAIRE

A group evaluation was conducted at the end of the course. Each participant was asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire with the following questions and to sign a release form acknowledging that the answers to each question could be used by the instructor for future research projects:

1) What skills were you able to revisit and/or learn in developing or creating your case study?
2) Would you use the case study to assess and analyze future students in your classroom? Why?
3) How comfortable do you feel in teaching other colleagues in using case studies in their classrooms and why?
4) What skills and learning experiences did you gain in reviewing peers’ case studies, both individually and in group?
5) What learning experiences did you gain in providing feedback to a colleague regarding his/her case study?

FINDINGS

The design, construction, and peer assessment of the cases provided the participants with the opportunity to take the initiative and responsibility for their own learning. More important, peer evaluation became a valuable tool for the participants in developing their critical skills and insight into the evaluation process while making critical appraisal of another student’s work both in a group and one-on-one settings. The following reflects the variety of their comments on the course summation questionnaire:

What skills and learning experiences did you gain in reviewing peers’ case studies, both individually and in group?

- I gained new perspectives and learned how others’ strategies.
- Individually, I learned about behavioral problems from my partner’s case. In my group, I learned how to evaluate the peers’ case study step-by-step.
- I learned about different reflections and teaching strategies that teachers should implement with students. The intervention strategies gave me some ideas on how to deal with a certain issue.
- I learned to broaden my views and see beyond the situation in the classroom.
- I enjoyed seeing the depth and details that others used in their case studies and as a guide for future case studies that I would write.
- I learned and practiced professional communication with my peers. Some points were clarified both for my classmate and me.
- I learned that although many of us teach in different schools and/or school districts the problems exist there, too. Also interpretations vary and it was good to meet and discuss those interpretations. You gain different perspectives.
- The group learning experience did help to revisit each of our peer case studies.
- I learned that depending on their perspectives/experiences and attitudes, we are all going to see differently.
- Individually, I was able to see that the more seasoned teachers were either detailed and thorough or brief with many shortcuts and jargon.
- I was able to relate to cases that were actual situations in my classroom. The interventions my classmates presented helped me with my own cases.
- I learned that regular classroom teachers need more information about special education as related to referral, etc.
- I was able to discuss with peers and get their feedback as a third party reviewing the case studies.

What learning experiences did you gain in providing or receiving feedback from a colleague regarding the case study?
• The one-to-one reviewing helped us to learn more from the student’s case because the other person was able to give more details and we talked about the strategies.
• I have learned how to use the rubric—the greatest assessment tool in providing feedback.
• Professionally you can give some positive feedback in order to find solutions and help students.
• I was able to point out areas that needed development as well as give others more strategies and interventions.
• It was interesting to point out things that were important, interesting, or unclear and discuss them with my peer.
• Providing feedback to my colleague did help me to provide her information I had learned with my case study and in class.
• I think my colleagues were very receptive. I think we were able to put differences aside for a common goal.
• This was tough. I learned to be specific about what was good as well as what was lacking.
• I liked analyzing the case studies in view of the experiences I have had with special education students and bilingual students. I particularly liked the rubric.
• I was fortunate to have some one that understood my points of view and really liked my writing. I was harder on myself than she was.
• It was so nice to hear about a student I know so well. I might have been overlooking ideas or strategies because I was so focused on what I had already been doing for the student.
• My colleague did give me different strategies and told me what else the child could do at home for reinforcement.
• I appreciated my colleague’s expertise and the sharing of ideas because one never learns enough ways to handle situations; insights from others are important.
• I was able to analyze in depth what I had said initially.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overall, the case study is a powerful teaching tool that engages students in real-life learning contexts and authentic assessments by peers. Participants indicated that the case experience went beyond the construction and design of the cases. They expressed that they were better able to examine teaching and learning outside the classroom context and to bridge the connection of theory and practice in real life settings. The participants expressed confidence in being able to continue using the case method to assess students in their own classrooms. Participants viewed peer-assessment as a summative method and part of the learning process. They found it valuable for their active engagement in learning about using the method and their particular case. And they found it valuable to give and receive the peer assessment of the case studies.

REFERENCES


