

Chapter 3

Using Case Studies in the Higher Education Classroom: Case Studies in Higher Education – What's the Big Idea?

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ABSTRACT

There is a proven paucity of literature regarding the implementation of case studies in the higher education classroom. This theoretical review will synthesize the research that has emerged and explore the student learning outcomes for inclusion in higher education pedagogy. In this investigation, the usage of case studies with a specific purpose and guided analysis has been found to be beneficial for the explanation of content. When provided the scaffolding for moving from theory to practice, students are prompted to familiarize themselves with the case study and examine the nuances and implications. Based upon this study of the relevant literature, the benefits and advantages of using the strategy of the case study approach outweigh the disadvantages.

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INTRODUCTION

It is often a challenge for Instructors in higher education to seek out the best practices for teaching their students (Zeng & Blasi, 2010). Strategies that relate to students' experiences and engage their interests can be difficult to glean and execute depending on the class dynamic and content area (Healy & McCutcheon, 2010).

Each discipline, be it accounting, nursing, mathematics, science, physical education, or special education, has reported that the implementation of case studies is a method that has deepened the learning of students and promoted personal development (Richard, Hemphill & Wilson, 2015, Ozdilek, 2014, Healy & McCutcheon, 2010, Elksnin, 1998).

The use of case studies as a teaching tool in higher education is a worthwhile methodology when implemented with a clear purpose and facilitated with authentic guidelines. When case studies are simply given to students to explore on their own without the instructor scaffolding and without providing the essential tools to deepen understanding, the use of case studies is questionable and not efficacious.

This chapter will look at the history of the use of case studies in the higher education classroom and will discuss the pros and cons of the practice. It will include a review of relevant literature on the subject, and will synthesize the sparse amount of research gleaned, offering beneficial strategies to incorporate in the higher educator's pedagogical cache.

The use of case studies in the training of pre-service teachers will be shown to have potential advantages in understanding how disabilities may be presented in students. Similar benefits may help teacher candidates acquire strategies geared toward identifying and managing cultural diversity as well as other unique identifiers.

In this chapter, there will be an examination of the essential elements required in case studies to be used in the classroom. A general evaluation of current, typical application will be followed by contemplation of future development of the use of case studies in higher education.

BACKGROUND

Wasserman (1994) finds that the case study method has “a highly visible record of success in other professional programs and with considerable promise in teacher education” (p.604). Indeed, case studies are used more frequently in areas where field experiences are involved, such as nursing, medicine, business and now the teacher education classroom.

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