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## **CASE METHOD IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Case studies in education have the potential to reveal rich contextual findings of a personal, social and pedagogical nature which cannot easily be obtained by other methods. Case study may highlight facets of language teaching which are missing from the literature on second language acquisition, but which are vital to a full understanding of the language teaching process. [2]

In a case discussion, students "do" the work of the discipline, rather than watch or read about how it is done by others. By engaging in the case, students apply the concepts, techniques and methods of the discipline and improve their ability to apply them. Case discussions bring energy and excitement to the classroom, providing students with an opportunity to work with a range of evidence, and improving their ability to apply the vocabulary, theory and methods they have learned in the course. Introducing the case method, like any change in pedagogical practice, represents an investment of faculty time and energy. Is the investment worth it? I think so, but it is worth thinking about the case method relative to some alternatives, and considering the benefits and costs of introducing it. [5]

Case studies have long been used in business schools, law schools, medical schools and the social sciences, but they can be used in any discipline when instructors want students to explore how what they have learned applies to real world situations. Cases come in many formats, from a simple "What would you do in this situation?" question to a detailed description of a situation with accompanying data to analyze.

Most case assignments require students to answer an open-ended question or develop a solution to an open-ended problem with multiple potential solutions.

Requirements can range from a one-paragraph answer to a fully developed group action plan, proposal or decision. [5]

Let us see what a case is. A case is a story. Cases recount as objectively as possible real (or realistic) events or problems so that students experience the complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties confronted by the original participants in the case. As they “inhabit” a case, students must tease out key components from real messiness of contradictory and complicated information.

A *retrospective* or *narrative* case presents a comprehensive history of a problem – complete with multiple actors, contending interests, and the *real* outcome: students identify alternative options and analyze why this outcome resulted, when other – possibly “better” solutions – existed. A *decision-forcing* case stops short of revealing the outcome, thus forcing students to identify and assess the range of possible options for action. Typically, these cases have an “Epilogue,” which tells “the rest of the story”; again, students analyze why this was what happened. [1, p.1].

As with other teaching methods, the effective use of case studies requires instructors to determine the specific goals they hope to accomplish. In general terms, cases can assess the application of concepts to complex real world situations, including building analytic skills that distinguish high priority from low priority elements. Working in groups on cases also helps students develop interpersonal skills and the capacity to work in a team – goals that some instructors rate highly and evaluate. Cases also help students make connections between what they might otherwise consider to be separate disciplines. [4, p.2]

The advantages of incorporating the case method in a fully lecture-based course are best understood as part of the bigger case for active learning techniques in general. So, here are some main components of the argument:

- active learning methods appeal to students in the affective domain, motivating them to engage with the material even when it is quite challenging;
- students learn the material more deeply, and work with it at a higher level, when they are active generators rather than passive recipients of knowledge;

- students retain more of the material they *do* than material they simply read, hear or see. [3]

Using cases can be a fresh approach to teaching, and can help your students take much more responsibility for their own learning in your class. But because cases are not necessarily the best way to communicate large amounts of new information, they should not be seen as replacements for lectures.[4;3]. In this sense they are probably not always appropriate for introductory classes, since students usually need a good deal of background knowledge to be able to adequately interpret and resolve a case. What cases can do that lectures can't is test to see whether students are capable of using the information that they've been studying in your discipline.

Case study has a great deal of potential in the fields of second language acquisition theory and pedagogy. It allows us to go beyond the isolated and decontextualized issue of what is taught and learned, to questions of how and why languages are taught and learned differently in different interactional contexts and settings. [2]

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