Case-Based Learning

General

Case-based learning (also: *guided inquiry approach*[1]) is a constructivist instructional design method employed in law schools even as far back as 19th century and suggests learning through **introducing** a learner to a situation he might face in real world, **discussing** it and making **conclusions** out of it.

What is case-based learning?

Case based learning introduces learners who typically work in groups to a **hypothetical situation (case)** they are likely to face in real life. They are then encouraged to **examine and discuss** it. This approach is learner-centered and the teacher's role is to guide the discussion to address the right aspects of the problem and thereby facilitate learning. This approach is often used for developing of decision making skills and therefore often referred to as *case-based reasoning*.

Case-based studies can be used in every classroom and present a way of connecting theory with practice. They enable learners to see different consequences of their decision as well as different points of view offered by others.

Simple rules that should be followed when writing a case for students are that the story (case) should be[2]:

- focused on an **interesting issue**,
- set in the past five years,
- provoking **empathy with the central characters** and including quotations,
- **relevant** to the reader and have a pedagogic utility,
- **conflict provoking** and decision forcing,
- short and **enable generalizations**.

The suggestions on leading a case are:

- Divide students into small groups (3-6).
- Present a carefully designed case which requires participants to reach a concrete outcome like judgement or decision.
- Facilitate, structure and guide further discussion in groups using carefully designed (written) questions requiring elaborate answers.
- Leave the questions concerning concrete decision for the end of the discussion.
- If possible, support reaching a consensus in group decision or observation, but also allow groups to work without interference.
- Compare results of different groups and help them understand their implications.

It is important to notice that cases do not necessarily have just one correct conclusion. Based on their format, cases can be **finished cases** (based on facts used for analysis or suggestion of alternative solutions), **unfinished open-ended cases** (where the outcome has to be decided) and fictional or real.

What is the practical meaning of case-based learning?

What follows is an example of a case-based learning session borrowed from work of Srinivasan et al.[3]

A number of example cases in all areas of science can be found on the web site of National center for case study teaching in science.

Instructional element

Criticisms

As case-based learning is a more guided approach to learning in which field experts can provide students with correct answers when needed or correct incorrect students' assumptions, proponents of pure discovery learning methods argue that this might cause experts to lecture instead of facilitate learning and that providing answers kills curiosity[4].

The proponents of guided instruction on the other hand argue case-based learning still does not exploit successful methods of teaching like worked examples and does not take into consideration current knowledge of human cognitive structure.

Keywords and most important names

Bibliography

Herreid, C. F. What makes a good case?. Start with a story: the case study method of teaching college science: 45. 2006.

Srinivasan, Malathi, Michael Wilkes, Frazier Stevenson, Thuan Nguyen, and Stuart Slavin. Comparing problem-based learning with case-based learning: effects of a major curricular shift at two institutions. Academic Medicine: Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges 82, no. 1: 74-82. January 2007.

Centre for Teaching and Learning: What Is Inquiry-Based Learning? Queen's University. Retrieved June 6, 2011.

Read more

Herreid, C. F. Cooking with Betty Crocker. JCST 29, no. 3, 1999.

Internet resources for case based learning.

Crosling, G. and Webb, G. Supporting Student Learning: Case Studies, Experience and Practice from Higher Education. London: Kogan Page. 2002.

Wassermann, S. Introduction to Case Method Teaching: A Guide to the Galaxy. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University. 1994.

Case-based learning - EduTech Wiki.

[1], [3], [4]
Srinivasan, Malathi, Michael Wilkes, Frazier Stevenson, Thuan Nguyen, and Stuart Slavin. Comparing problem-based learning with case-based learning: effects of a major curricular shift at two institutions. Academic Medicine: Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges 82, no. 1: 74-82. January 2007.
[2]
Herreid, C. F. What makes a good case?. Start with a story: the case study method of teaching college science: 45. 2006.