Chapter IV

The Case Method and Collaborative Learning

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Abstract

With increasing interest in online education, instructors must have a repertoire of tools available to promote the critical thinking skills of their students. This chapter will present the case method as one pedagogical approach for teaching online courses. Example cases are provided. Pedagogical approaches to working with new and seasoned online students are addressed. Further, the benefits of using the case method to promote learning in the virtual classroom are explained. The case studies presented for online classes present concrete situations that can be used to stimulate analysis, requiring students to project how they might respond to a set of circumstances. The case studies promote Socratic dialogue and higher order thinking skills. Further, the case method can be a good vehicle for stimulating students’ thoughts about step-by-step planning.
Introduction

With increasing interest of students, educators, and administrators in online education, instructors must have a repertoire of tools available to promote the critical thinking skills of their students (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Bertram, 1973). This chapter presents the case method as one pedagogical approach for teaching online courses, one which can promote collaborative learning. Research shows that students are satisfied with opportunities for collaborative learning in asynchronous, computer-supported environments (Dewiyanti, 2007). Example cases for beginning and experienced—or seasoned—online students are provided. Further, the benefits of using the case method to promote problem-based learning in the virtual classroom are explained. The virtual classroom refers to classes taught online. The case studies presented for online classes present concrete situations that can be used to stimulate analysis, requiring students to project how they might respond to a set of circumstances. The case studies promote higher order thinking skills. Further, the case method can be a good vehicle for stimulating students’ thought about step-by-step planning. Using the cases with groups of students promotes opportunities for collaborative learning. Finally, cases promote learner-learner interaction through Socratic dialogue and cooperative learning.

The use of the case method to teach is not particularly novel. It has been used for some time in face-to-face classes. Conant (1949) of Harvard University was the first professor to center his entire course on the use of the case method. As colleges and universities go through technological innovations, such as offering classes online, the case method can be adapted to the virtual classroom to promote critical thinking skills, and promote collaborative learning. One critical challenge is to engage the online learner in the material presented, and to foster higher order thinking. The case method is an active learning strategy that engages students and fosters higher order thinking. Also, the case method facilitates problem-solving skills (Levine, 1994).

Problem-Based Learning

Problem-based learning (PBL) is an instructional method that challenges students to actively learn by working cooperatively in groups to seek solu-