



Experiential Learning Teaching Methods

Method: Case Studies

Description: Case studies provide an opportunity for students to apply their learning to real life scenarios. Case studies can take a variety of forms, but most often a description of a particular situation is given and students are asked to problem solve or respond to that particular situation drawing links to themes discussed in a particular course, or their own experiences.

Rather than attempting to find a correct answer, case studies are best used to understand the opportunities and risks associated with the different ways that individuals and groups respond to particular situations. Having a variety of small groups of students work on the same case study may be an opportunity to highlight different approaches to problem-solving and can be used as a strategy to enhance classroom conversations.

Link to Experiential Learning: It is not practical to assume that all courses can have an out-of-classroom component built into the design of a course. Case studies can provide an opportunity to bring real life situations and problems into the classroom. Working with external organizations to identify actual problems/opportunities that they are working through can be an opportunity for students to contribute to real life problem solving that can then be fed back into those organizations.

Another opportunity to link experiential learning to case studies is for individual students to identify the actual case studies that they would like to work on. These case studies can come from experiences they have had in practicum placements, their own life experiences, public policy concerns, etc.

Facilitator Notes: Case studies are process oriented. Done well they require adequate time for the group work to take place, and for debriefing and discussion in the class. Be flexible with timing. When using case studies that are older it can be helpful for students to learn what actually happened with a particular case and what the impact has been. Case studies work best when the problem questions are open-ended, the situation requires multi-disciplinary thinking, and when there is no right answer.

Learn More:

<http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/resources/handouts/CaseMethodBestPractices.pdf>

<http://sciencecases.lib.buffalo.edu/cs/>

<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/instructionalstrategies/casestudies.html>