

## **Making the Case for Case Method in Teacher Development: What? Why? How?**

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Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill & Krathwohl, 1956), which was later revised (Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian, Cruikshank, Mayer, Pintrich, Raths, Wittrock, 2001), is highly regarded as a conceptual framework that sets hierarchical goals for both student and teacher learning. In regard to teacher development, it is organized from lower to higher order cognitive skills that a teacher as a professional is required to have, using six classifications starting from 1) remembering, 2) understanding, 3) applying, 4) analyzing, 5) evaluating, and finally to 6) creating—the highest order skill on the spectrum. The taxonomy can be seen as skill development outcomes that teacher developers could aim for in teacher learning. In this article, an argument will be made that case method is a worthwhile approach in teacher education to help pre-service and in-service teachers successfully attain the developmental goals listed in the classifications set in Bloom's taxonomy. First, attributes of case method in teaching will be described; second, theoretical underpinnings showing why it is a viable approach for teacher development will be given, and finally implementation of case method in a teacher education program will be delineated.

### **What is case method?**

Case method is comprised of cases that encapsulate real situations in professional practice. Cases are different than examples found in textbooks. In case method, students are confronted with complex situations that require problem solving skills. Information describing the case is given, but no analysis or a clear step-by-step procedure is provided to solve the problem. There is no correct answer. Students are given chances to apply class materials as tools to analyze and creatively solve a variety of issues that occur in classrooms. During analysis students have to make choices of theoretical concepts that they could apply to solve problems emerging in a case rather than focus on a singular theory to practice application they encounter in

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textbooks or lectures.

Initially, case method appeared in law education at Harvard University in the 1870s. Law students studied and analyzed various court cases that gave them opportunities to review actual law options situated in courtrooms rather than merely relying on lectures and course books. Eventually, the idea of case method around 1900 spread to Harvard Medical school and finally in the 1920s to Harvard Business school (Doyle, 1990). In all cases, students could encounter rich narratives of events and characters situated in particular fields of study that offered real life snapshots of their profession in action.

Case method largely emerged in the field of teacher education in the mid 1980s. In a seminal article written in 1986 on redefining teacher knowledge, Lee Shulman depicted two major areas of what teachers should know within domains of subject matter knowledge (knowing what to teach) and pedagogical knowledge (knowing how to teach it). The merging of these two domains was referred to as pedagogical content knowledge. In Shulman's view teacher knowledge should consist of the ability to merge professional theoretical knowledge into action through practice. The process of bringing theory and practice together can be seen in the concept of praxis where theory informs practice and practice informs theory. In case method, theory and practice come together in the narratives of real life scenarios (Gartland & Field, 2004). One way to carry out the praxis cycle of theory and practice, and therefore to further develop teacher knowledge, is through the idea of case knowledge. Shulman planted the seed for case method in teacher education when he called for the development of case knowledge as "knowledge of specific, well-documented, and richly described events" (p.11, 1986). Shulman's call to action was taken up, and by the 1990s research soon emerged in books (e.g., J. Shulman, 1992; Wasserman, 1993) and journal articles on case method in teacher education (e.g., Broudy, 1990; Doyle, 1990; Hutchings, 1993; Levin, 1995; Richert, 1992; Sykes & Bird, 1992).

### **Why is case method particularly suited for teacher education?**

Case method in law, medicine, and business education developed because these professions operate in complex environments where professional judgements cannot simply rely on linear, scientific, prescriptive rule-driven approaches to solutions (Gartland & Field, 2004). Similarly, teaching is a complex enterprise. Hodge (2003) writes that traditional scientific approaches to classroom research cannot fully account for the chaotic nature of classrooms and professional judgements of teachers facing situations that are uniquely particular to their surroundings "where prediction

and control are inherently difficult or impossible” (p. 9). He posits that in stable predictable environments, traditional, linear science works well, but in situations “far from equilibrium, near the edge of chaos, linear science breaks down, and new kinds of [unpredictable] phenomena appear” (p. 10). In case method, through the narrative of particular ‘cases’, participants are able to encounter a variety of situations and decision making moments depicting the complexities and unpredictable events of classroom occurrences.

‘Particularity’ is a reason for introducing case method in teacher education. In the past, large scale comparison studies that sought a standardized approach to teaching by setting out to find the best method through scientific rigour failed because they could not account for the complexities that surround teaching (Berreta,1992). Teachers will sway away from prescribed, one-size fits all methods because they need to deal with particular issues they are facing (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). In short, “teachers will tend to implement a particular approach to L2 instruction within the context of their own personal views as to how they think languages are learned best in the classroom” (Allen, Frolich, and Spada, 1984, p. 149). Given the chaotic and unpredictable events situated in classrooms and the multitude of actions and solutions that will occur based on particular issues each teacher faces, case method through a variety of cases affords participants an array of contextually rich narratives to interact with.

Case method study, therefore, provides cases that are grounded in reality and offer a middle ground from which to narrow the gap between technical advice prescribed by teacher developers based on what ought to happen in classrooms in terms of predicted generalizations of classroom behaviors and what teachers are substantially facing in reality. Hutchings (1993) notes this ability of cases to span the vast middle ground:

A powerful argument for cases is, then, their ability to situate the conversation about teaching on this middle ground between process and content (or technique and substance) where a particular teacher, with particular goals, teaches a particular piece of literature (in this instance) to a particular student (p. 10).

Another argument for case method is in its holistic nature. Gartland and Field write:

This [case] method is used to contextualize knowledge that students typically receive in a linear, fragmented way through separate courses during their teacher preparation. Case studies encourage a vibrant connection between theory and practice—one that is often missing in lecture and textbook learn-

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ing—inviting solutions that must be found by interactive consideration of means and ends. Because cases are based in particular reality, they also lend credibility and relevance to contemporary education issues while helping users build problem solving skills (2004, p. 2).

Gartland and Field go on to say that as an outcome of case method, participants are better able to identify problems, design successful interventions and evaluate their overall teaching performance.

A significant asset of case method is when it is conducted in collaboration with participants. Following the principles of Vygotsky found in sociocultural theory (1933/78) that cognitive activity is stimulated and developed through social interaction, Levin conducted a study on the effects of having participants discuss cases together. The study was divided into two groups. Each group was given a case to read. Only the experimental group was asked to discuss the case with each other. Then, members of both groups wrote their analyses of the case. The results showed that the group that just read the case but did not discuss it with other members performed poorly in the analysis of the case compared with the experimental group.

In the above, a brief overview defining case method and its effectiveness in teacher development was presented. Next, the paper will offer pedagogical insights into how to implement case method in teacher education.

### **How can case method be implemented in teacher education?**

The success of carrying out case method will depend on pedagogical considerations when selecting cases. For example, in conducting case method, the teacher developer should be clear on what skills are being developed. To help, Merseth (1996) offers an organizing framework compiled from the work of Doyle (1990), Shulman (1986, 1992) and Sykes and Bird (1992). The framework is classified into three areas: “cases as exemplars, cases as opportunities to practice analysis and contemplate action, and cases as stimulants to personal reflection” (p. 728).

#### **Cases as exemplars**

Selection of these cases will focus on best teaching models. Participants have opportunities to observe cases showing good examples of prescriptive teaching techniques to follow. This would also mean they would be able to see prescribed theoretical principles given in courses applied in practice “to exemplify the desired principle, theory or instructional technique” (Sykes & Bird, 1992, p. 480). The claim for using standard cases as models in teacher education, as Broudy (1990) writes, “lies

in the identification of a set of problems that legitimately can claim to be so generic and so important that all who teach will be familiar with them” (p. 453). One seeming advantage of the exemplar best practice models is for pre-service teachers who, because of lack of experience, would benefit from seeing good teaching in action.

### **Cases as opportunities to practice analysis and contemplate action**

Whereas the above cases as exemplars provide views of well-organized lessons with appropriate applications of techniques, analyses for problem solving offer chaotic realistic glimpses of the messiness that surrounds classroom activity. They provide situations, where analyses in decision making are highlighted. Thus, these cases give the participants chances to “practice such professional skills as interpreting situations, framing problems, generating various solutions to the problems posed and choosing among them” (Sykes & Bird, 1992, p. 482). The advantages of these cases are that they offer real life situations and demonstrate the teaching to the moment actions that reflect the complex nature of teaching rather than model cases that focus on a prescribed teaching point.

### **Cases as stimulants to personal reflection**

Schon’s (1983, 1991) concept of reflection in teaching is built on Dewey’s (1933) claim that teachers should have a reflective conversation examining why they do what they do in practice. Following Dewey, Schon’s view of reflective inquiry is aimed at building teachers’ knowledge base by making them aware of what they do tacitly in their practices. By making the implicit explicit teachers are able to conceptualize their teaching in ways that better inform their practice. Reflective inquiry is now well-known and highly suggested as a required part of teacher development (Farrell, 2007; 2015; Richards & Farrell, 2011; Richards & Lockhard, 1994). However, skills required for reflection need to be developed, especially for novice or pre-service teachers. This is a pedagogical role of case method as it gives participants the personal experiences to examine cases in action and reflect on what is happening. As Merseth (1996) writes, “Cases appear to foster learning from experience, whether it is from their own experience or the experience of others” (p. 729).

The above three categories provide pedagogical rationales for implementing case methods. The exemplar modeling approach has its roots in behaviorism. The advantage of these types of cases is that participants are presented with prescribed and controlled models of what goes on in the classroom. Although these models of exemplary teaching are beneficial to pre-service and novice teachers, they are limited for

two reasons: 1) they ignore the complexities that surround teaching and 2) they offer few opportunities for interactive ‘puzzle solving’ discussions centering on problem solving. For these reasons, it can be argued that the latter two categories focusing on analysis and reflection on classroom actions are more resourceful in teacher development as they are rooted in contemporary teacher development paradigms. Doyle (1990) posits that the interests in cases that demonstrate complexity is because of a “fundamental shift that is taking place in teaching and teacher education, a shift from a preoccupation with behavior and skills to a concern for the complex cognitive processes that underlie successful performance in classroom settings” (p. 8). Moreover, in getting at the cognitive process involved in teaching, dialogic interaction aimed at critical discussion plays a prominent role.

### **Discussion as a critical activity in case methods**

Having participants work in collaboration to discuss and analyze cases is a powerful pedagogical tool. Recognition of the valuable role that critical discussion through social interaction plays in learning is crucial, and is supported by a paradigmatic shift in education. Merseth (1996) pointed out over two decades ago that “current work in constructivist teacher education, teacher cognition, teacher knowledge, and the nature of teaching provides a hospitable environment for considering cases and case methods” (p.723). Within the constructivist learning approach and specifically social constructivism, learning is considered to be a social activity. This view is based on Vygotsky’s social cultural theory mentioned above. According to Vygotsky, language plays a dual role as a medium for expression of ideas and succinctly as a psychological tool that stimulates thought. Through discussion, a back and forth mediated cognitive process of ‘linguaging’ occurs between interlocutors; a “process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain, 2006, p. 98). During the language process, participants receive ideas and construct meaning. Then, thoughts are shaped and reproduced during the social interaction discussion process. Richert (1991) observed the value of discussion in case method in the following:

In addition to understanding particular teaching situations and thus learning about teaching by reflectively examining cases of practice, teachers construct knowledge as they create and analyze cases. As teachers write and talk about their work, they come to know what they know. The process is dialectical. (p. 125).

In Levin’s study cited previously, she specifically looked at the role of discussion,

directly drawing from the work of Vygotsky, pointing out how social interaction plays a significant role in individual cognitive development. She writes, “social construction of knowledge in a setting like a case discussion has implications for teachers’ individual construction of knowledge...[it] appears to affect teachers thinking in ways that seem likely to promote teacher development about teaching and learning issues” (p. 210).

An interesting outcome of Levin’s study on the valued role of discussion in case method (besides the fact that the group who discussed the case collaboratively performed better in the analysis) was that what was gained during the discussion process was different between pre-service teachers, novices and experienced teachers. Discussion of the case among experienced teachers became a catalyst for deeper reflection leading to broader understandings of teaching issues from various perspectives, whereas with less experienced teachers, discussions were used to either confirm their thinking about the case or to elaborate further on issues they were observing. It is expected that there would be differences between the ways these two groups interact and understand cases and further research could shed more light on these differences.

### **An example of a case study activity**

An example of a ‘case’ using case method in teacher education is given. It will reflect a kind of ‘case’ that the author represents a case that the author used in her English language teaching methods course for pre-service student teachers in Japan. The criteria for designing the case are to:

- keep the case relatively short so that just enough information is given;
- have an open ending to create more possibilities for solutions;
- reflect the realities the students will face as teachers in Japan;
- write the case in English.

Although an argument could be made that the case could be in Japanese, the rationale for writing it in English is part of the problem the students are asked to solve. Ministry of Education (MEXT) in Japan is now asking secondary school Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) to basically conduct their classes in English. In other words, to teach English through English (TETE), so giving the students more opportunities to develop English skills in the course is a pedagogical goal.

Below, a case method activity is listed showing the pedagogical goals, the case (background and details), model questions and discussion format.

<b>Pedagogical goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to practice analysis and contemplate action</li> <li>• Develop personal reflection skills</li> <li>• Content in English to further develop target language skills</li> </ul>
<b>Case: Background</b>	<p>Teacher A (TA) is a JTE in Japan; 10 years of teaching experience.</p>
<b>Context</b>	<p>Teacher B (TB) is a JTE at the same school having 30 years of experience with a PhD in teacher development.</p> <p>Case takes place in a high school English class with first year students.</p>
<b>Situation</b>	<p>Recent changes by MEXT require JTEs to use more English in instruction. Related to this requirement is a trend to involve students in active learning activities. These factors have caused ripples throughout Japan for JTEs. The TETE policy would mandate that they change the way they learned and taught English from a grammar-translation approach that relies on heavy use of L1. Teacher change as we have studied in this class requires a new approach; new or revised materials, and altering beliefs about teaching (Fullan, 2007); these changes have to be seen working in practice (Guskey, 2002). We know that asking JTEs to make major changes in their instruction is a big challenge that requires efforts in teacher development, especially because JTEs feel they are expected to prepare students for entrance tests that demand a grammar-translation approach, or are busy with parallel, non-academic teaching duties that take up a lot of their time and energy. Nonetheless, the official national curriculum is now mandating that they TETE in their courses.</p>
<b>Situation</b>	<p>TA like many JTEs uses a teacher centered grammar-translation approach and students are passive recipients. He mostly uses the content in the textbook to focus on target grammar sentences and vocabulary. Sentences are translated, grammar explained and L1 is largely used. TA is aware of TETE policy and active learning trend. For example, in attempts at making the students more active, he forms groups of four students and divides them into two pairs: A1~B1; A2~B2. Each pair is given a text of the reading topic. TA translates the text into Japanese on a handout. On one side is English; the other Japanese. A is given the English version and B has the Japanese version. They take turns translating the text. Recently, TA upon reflecting on his classes worried that he is not using enough English and wonders if the A~B pair/group activity</p>

<p><b>Find a solution (Discussion)</b></p>	<p>that he usually relies on is active learning; seemingly the activity is just translation in pairs or groups. To him, students seemed bored with his routinized teaching approach. This was confirmed to him when students began to question the purpose of solely focusing on translation. They wanted to go beyond using reading topics from textbooks for studying language structures preparing for tests to engaging more with content to broaden their views. TA also wants to go beyond the approach he is taking with textbook materials. He seeks out TB, who is willing to help him in his teacher development to solve the problem of TETE and implementing more active learning.</p> <p>If you are TB what would you suggest to TA?</p> <p>1) In your group, to understand the case and offer possible solutions, the questions below can help in facilitating discussions; 2) Use the material we studied in this course on learning theories, methods and teaching techniques to help articulate your solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the problem?</li><li>• Who is the key person?</li><li>• Who are the other people involved?</li><li>• What has caused the problem?</li><li>• What are some reasons for the problem?</li><li>• What are some important developmental adjustments that should take place regarding teaching approaches, methods, activities that we have studied in this course?</li><li>• Are there other suggestions or issues to be concerned with?</li></ul>
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The above is based on a real case that the author (at the time TB) was involved in. The open-ended feature of the case allows for more discussion and creative solutions. Included in the analytical discussion among groups, would be opportunities for the students to apply various teaching approaches, complementary methods and teaching techniques that are discussed in an ELT methods course.

### Conclusion

In this article, an argument was made for case method. As shown, it has been around for three decades in teacher education. In the literature review, it can be noticed that there was much interest in case method in the 1990s. This paper has attempted to initiate a continued interest in case method. Bloom's taxonomy, which has set a standard for learning goals, was used as a conceptual framework that can be

used for conducting case method in teacher development.

Because of the complexities and chaotic nature of classrooms intensified by particular issues individual teachers face, applications of case method are uniquely suited for teacher education. Since there is no standardized learning approach or teaching method to fit all classrooms, participants can engage with a variety of situations, looking at exemplary to problematic practices. In the latter case, as this paper has posited, participants are able to view open-ended cases as opportunities to practice analysis and contemplate action. They can also hone their reflective teaching skills, which is particularly needed by novice and pre-service teachers. In addition, the role of collaborative discussions was highlighted as an invaluable asset in case method. Studies like Levin's (1993,1995), show positive learning outcomes emerge when participants are given opportunities to interact and share their views in discussions.

Finally, an example case was given to show how case method can be conducted in practice. The case was taken from a real example and experience the author had in helping a JTE solve a problem that many are facing in Japan. The case was designed to be open-ended, aiming for the development of participants' analytical and reflecting skills. Discussions were included in the activity to engage the participants to creatively apply what they learn in courses in practice. In doing so, case method provides an effective means to bring theory into practice. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to contribute to further research on the benefits of case method and to stimulate its use in teacher development.

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