

# **DEVELOPING SELF-REGULATED LEARNERS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE ONLINE CASE DISCUSSION IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Case study instruction is characterized by centering instruction around the use of hypothetical classroom dilemmas. It uses descriptive stories and invites students to discuss application of course material as they engage in hypothetical classroom problem-solving and teacher decision-making. Teaching is a complex profession that requires high levels of multitasking in order to successfully instruct students and handle classroom disruptions. Because most pre-service teachers do not possess extensive classroom experience when enrolled in teacher education, working with case studies provides opportunities to test theoretical concepts and speculate on making decisions that would affect their future classrooms. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the elements of case study instruction that we have found to be effective in encouraging online learner's self-regulated learning for educational psychology.

## **KEYWORDS**

Case instruction, online learners, educational psychology

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Case study learning can be viewed as a constructive approach to teaching in which learning, from a sociocultural perspective, takes place in context. Because cases can be written from various perspectives, they offer instructors a multitude of real-world scenarios from which students can learn from while also demonstrating the collaborative nature of teaching by illustrating how a teacher works jointly with the school principal, guidance counselor, and students' parents in order to assist students (Ching, 2011). The use of case instruction in educational psychology, in particular, is a "natural fit" with constructivist principles that views learning as "interactive, socially constructed, collaborative, and problem-related (Sudzina, 1997, p. 207). In addition, case-study instruction has many benefits including student learning, problem-solving, decision-making, critical thinking, self-efficacy for educational situations, cognitive flexibility, and perspective-taking as well as enlightening them to the complex nature of teaching (PytilikZillig, et al., 2011; Ching, 2011; Sudzina, 1997). The published literature discusses a number of ingredients for effective case instruction: collaborative learning, case complexity, perspective-taking, scaffolding critical thinking, revisiting cases and authentic assessment.

## **2. CASE INSTRUCTION AND ONLINE LEARNING**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), from 2000 to 2008, the percentage of undergraduate students enrolled taking at least one distance education course increased 12% (from 8 percent to 20 percent) (Radford, 2011). This ascending curve in enrollment is projected to continue, thereby presenting the education community with numerous challenges (Allen & Seaman, 2008). Case discussion can be adapted to the online environment and could take place in synchronous or asynchronous discussion boards and chat-rooms. Past research also indicates case studies can have positive results for educational psychology students' involvement, communication, peer support, and reciprocate interaction among stakeholders that includes students, instructors, and cooperating teachers (Bonk, et al., 1998). In fact,

students engaged in either traditional or online case discussion improved in their ability to critically analyze novel cases and outperformed students not being taught using case studies (PytlikZillig, et al, 2011). One element of case instruction particularly important to encouraging online learner's self-regulated learning for educational psychology is case complexity (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Vasquez-Colina, 2014). Case complexity refers to the case's intricacy and ability to engage pre-professional teachers in problem-solving for real-life situations. It is possible that when students see more utility in what they are learning, they are more willing to apply themselves and take an active interest in their learning. This finding mirrors what others have found in that cases can be intrinsically motivating and promote self-regulated learning if they are realistic, personally relevant, and where activities are seen as valuable and interesting (DeMarco, Hayward, & Lynch, 2002).

### 3. POTENTIAL INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The purpose for this proposal is to take the elements of case study instruction that we have found to be effective encouraging online learner's self-regulated learning for educational psychology and investigate teaching strategies that can be used to further scaffold and encourage students to work collaboratively with cases in the online environment. This will include discussion of video-based cases to test theoretical knowledge and encouraging students to participate in collaborative discussions. Computer programs allow for video cases to be manipulated by the instructor to add questions at various points in the case, allowing for the instructor to test students' individually or to offer the opportunity for whole-group collaborative discussions in real-time. Instructors could also design sessions in which only small-groups of students discuss a particular case while he or she scaffolds their learning. Or cases could be used as part of a culminating written project where students reflect on their learning as they complete independent authentic case analyses. Using cases in this manner is directly linked to case complexity, offering instructors various ways in which to expose students to real-life teaching challenges, the multiple perspectives of the different stakeholders involved in the case, and the applicability of diverse theoretical perspectives in educational psychology. These potential strategies add to the discussion of how instructors can incorporate case instruction in the online environment most effectively.

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