Teaching Policy Theory and its Application To Practice Using Long Structured Case Studies: An Approach that Deeply Engages Undergraduate Students

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This paper reviews the use of extended case studies as a teaching method to deeply engage students in the learning and understanding of policy theory. Discussion commences with a review of the literature on the use of case method as an approach to teaching and learning and then critiques the results of student surveys that questioned their opinions on the effectiveness of the case teaching method as experienced in their policy studies course. The analysis of the findings suggest that where a key course goal is to teach policy theory and enable students to use it as a tool to analyze practice, then at the undergraduate level, long structured case studies extended over a number of weeks are most effective. Engaging students in extended case studies helps them develop applied policy skills, an understanding of policy theory and greater capacity to apply theoretical concepts to assist in the analysis of real, everyday policy problems. This paper argues that extended case studies that involve students in the research and analysis of contemporary policy issues is an effective way of engaging students in course material and encourages deep learning.

A key challenge faced in university teaching is how to actively engage students in the course material and learning objectives. This challenge is even greater when one considers how studying and learning at university is only one of a number of commitments pursued by undergraduate students. The interests and pressure of work, family, sport, and social life all compete with the time students have for university learning. This contest over student time and attention increases the need for class time at university to be effectively utilized, to be engaging, and to encourage deeper learning. The task becomes even more complex when one considers how best to go about teaching students policy theory, when the key concern for most undergraduates enrolled in professional courses is how to understand and develop applied skills for the world of practice.

This paper reviews the use of extended case studies as a way to deeply engage students in the subject matter of a policy theory course. The research examines a course that combines weekly lectures on theory with long structured case studies that examine current policy issues. The aims of the course are to enable students to develop an understanding of policy theory and then apply these concepts to analyze practice. This paper reviews the literature on the use of case method as an approach to teaching and learning and then critiques the results of student surveys that questioned their opinions on the effectiveness of the case teaching method as experienced in their policy studies course. Analysis of the findings suggest that where a key course goal is to teach policy theory and enable students to use it as a tool to analyze practice, then at the undergraduate level, long structured case studies extended over a number of weeks are most effective. Such an approach helps students (a) develop generic skills required for policy practice, (b) gain a deeper understanding of policy theory, acquire knowledge about policy theory and the policy process in the context of practice, and (c) demonstrate an ability to apply theory to analyze policy problems.

Allowing the research and analysis of a policy case study to be undertaken over a longer period of time ensures the benefits of this teaching approach are realized by more students in the classroom. Extended case studies that effectively integrate the teaching of policy theory with policy practice help university policy programs develop students, who are not only technically experts in policy analysis but also capable of becoming enlightened practitioners, with a broader awareness of the forces that influence and shape public policy outcomes.

Background

Courses on public policy, policy analysis, and the policy process draw on a broad range of theoretical concepts from the political and social sciences to help analyze how individuals and organizations influence the decision making of government and shape the way we are governed. This includes, for example, theories of the state to analyze the exercise of power, an examination of the role of stakeholders and how they influence what gets on the policy agenda, the role of the media, the nature of coalitions and policy communities, and how organizations react to issues and problems. The discourse draws on distinct policy theory to understand processes of decision making such as

incrementalism and rationalism (Lindblom, 1959), and we look at different approaches for engaging in the policy process (top-down and bottom-up), problems with policy goals, and implementation difficulties (Colebatch, 2002; Lipsky, 1976; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). The breadth and depth of the theoretical literature means the course takes a selective approach drawing on the more common analytical frameworks and examines how they lend themselves as tools to assist in the analysis of practice.

A challenge for undergraduate students is that they often lack a depth of organizational and real-world experience to draw on to help identify how these theoretical models can be observed in practice. What approaches, therefore, are available for teachers to get students to understand the theory and then make use of it to analyze other policy issues put before them? Velenchik (1995) noted that in general, undergraduate courses tend to treat the applied understanding as secondary to the exposition of theory. Examples are used to illustrate a reference to theory, "rather than thinking of the theory as a set of tools for answering the question posed by the application" (p. 30). Case studies are seen as one approach that moves teaching beyond the use of examples for illustrative purposes to a deeper level of engagement that shifts student thinking towards the use of theory as an analytical tool (Brooke, 2006).

This paper examines a case teaching approach that immerses students in real case studies which facilitate their capacity to learn about current policy issues and, in a supported and structured environment, test their understanding of theory and how it might be observed in the case study. This approach is adopted to help address three key challenges faced when teaching policy theory, specifically the following:

- *engaging students in the course material;*
- *motivating students to collect and analyze information relevant to policy practice; and*
- *developing students' understanding of policy theory and their ability to apply theory as a tool to analyze and interpret policy problems.*

Deep Learning

Student engagement is as much dependent on the approach and method adopted by the teacher as the student's own characteristics and interest in learning. Biggs (2003) examined key factors that influence the approach students take to learning. He identified two distinct approaches: surface and deep. When students adopt a surface approach, they tend to regurgitate facts without fully understanding them, focus on completing the minimum requirements to achieve a passsing grade, and generally fail to engage with the course to achieve a meaningful understanding of the content. It is unlikely

that students adopting a surface approach will be able to effectively demonstrate how to apply policy theory to analyze and interpret policy issues being debated in the world around them.

When students adopt a deep approach to learning, they tend to engage more with the material of the course and not only focus on completing tasks, but they also have a concern for learning and understanding what is revealed in the process. Such students would more readily be able to grasp the value of policy theory and critically draw on it to help interpret situations of policy practice. Biggs (2003) has argued that the structure of teaching and assessment is critical in influencing a student's approach to learning. A focus on facts and covering material will encourage a surface approach whilst teaching for active participation and engagement, building on the knowledge base that students already have, and assessing for interpretations and understandings is more likely to encourage deeper learning.

Eastcott and Farmer (1992) argued that the motivational context is important for student learning and students learn well when they feel they own the task. The learning activity needs to go beyond reproduction and the students need to be engaged in the activity working to analyze and solve a problem. Problem-based learning is seen as a strategy that actively engages students (Brooke, 2006). It is through the process of interaction and working in groups to actively solve problems that students learn from each other (Brooke, 2006; Flynn & Klein, 2001). Eastcott and Farmer (1992) suggested that knowledge is built up from a base and that students learn by building upon what they already know. A similar theme is echoed by Northedge (2003) who drew attention to the importance of teacher expertise in helping students understand and interpret what is going on. The teacher, as the expert, "is able to lend students the capacity to frame meanings they cannot yet produce independently" (p. 172). Northedge (2003) explained how a course can be structured to take students into higher levels of abstraction and analysis by building up from a case based on a reality with which students can relate. In such an environment, students join with the teacher developing their own understanding of the discourse.

These general observations about how students learn lend support to the case teaching method as a strategy for deeply engaging students in the course material. The use of group work and the focus on solving real problems suggests that a learning process centered on the examination of cases is an effective way to build knowledge around an applied setting and in the process demonstrate how theory can be used as an analytical and interpretive tool. This is important for students of policy studies because, as practitioners, not only will they be required to know about the policy

process, they will also need to competently analyze real policy problems. Just as Denhardt (2001) argues about public administration, effective policy practitioners need to be able to work back and forth between theory and practice (Szostak, 2005).

Deep Learning and the Case Method

Case methods have been extensively used in graduate business schools and have been applied to the teaching of numerous other disciplines (Brooke, 2006; Kim, Phillips, Pinsky, Brock, Phillips, & Keary, 2006; The Electronic Hallway, 1999). Its popularity as a postgraduate teaching method is demonstrated by the number of universities throughout the world that offer online case teaching resources for university teaching, particularly through their postgraduate schools of public administration and business.

In postgraduate teaching the case study method is promoted on the basis that students are engaged more directly with the material and each other (Electronic Hallway, 1996). Case teaching is seen as a way of breaking down the implied authority of the teacher and more evenly shares power in the classroom between the teacher and students. Addressing power and authority is an issue raised by Weimer (2002) who argues more effective learning takes place where students feel they have more control over the process and ownership of the material. The case method allows the teacher to maintain intellectual and procedural authority, while at the same time the teacher and students share discussion, determine what is learned, and raise questions (Electronic Hallway, 1996; Harling & Akridge, 1998). The process requires less conversation from the teacher and more input, discussion, and comment from students as they grapple with their own analysis and understanding of the complexities and challenges presented in the case. This generally represents an approach to course work that neither teacher nor student is completely familiar (Harling & Akridge, 1998). Again, this resonates with some of the more general literature on learning and teaching that argues deep learning is better served where there is a change in the role of the teacher and the traditional student-teacher relationship in the class room (Weimer, 2002).

Effective teaching also involves moving students away from familiar formats, exposing them to different approaches to learning that move them out of their comfort zone (Brookfield, 1998). The successful use of case studies, however, requires significant preparation by the teacher (Carlson & Schodt, 1995). The teacher needs to be able to facilitate good discussion, pose a range of questions that probe the key issues of the case, and, finally, bring the exercise to closure with an adequate sense of completion (Harling & Akridge, 1998).

While the use of case teaching is well practiced at the postgraduate level, there is still some question over its effectiveness in comparison to other teaching methods. Flynn and Klein (2001) observed that research on the case method is limited. Kim et al. (2006) reviewed 100 studies on case teaching and noted that the majority of research articles were descriptive, lacked data and outcome measures, and few addressed the implications for refining and improving the case method. They concluded, "it is difficult to validate the widely accepted belief that cases contribute to critical thinking skills in learners compared with conventional teaching methods" (p. 873). Despite this observation the practice in many disciplines such as medicine, law, education and business have a long history of teaching from cases that challenge learners with problems in complex, real-life situations (Brooke, 2006; Flynn & Klein, 2001; Kim et al., 2006).

Approaches to Case Teaching

The case approach particularly appeals to practitioners and professional educators since it allows them the comfort of working with real-world examples and with appropriate facilitation can lead them to deeper levels of analysis that draw on the theory to interpret and predict why things have occurred and what might happen in the future. Cases provide a context for understanding knowledge in a field of study and how to apply this knowledge to practical situations (Brooke, 2006; Carlson & Schodt, 1995; Harling & Akridge, 1998). The analysis of cases and the weighing up of possible options rather than focusing on "right way" solutions helps develop professional skills to apply in real-world settings (Flynn & Klein, 2001). Undergraduate students, however, generally lack the same level of real-world experience that postgraduate students so readily draw on to assist with their analysis of the forces that influence individual and organisational behavior in a case study. How then might case studies be structured to allow a similar depth of analysis to occur with undergraduate students who lack a comprehensive level of engagement in practice?

Drawing on the work of Ronstadt (1994), Harling and Akridge (1998) identified five types of case studies, each structured to engage students differently. This includes the following:

- *Anecdotes. These types of cases describe a problem and what was done. They are used to demonstrate how problems are resolved. Generally, little analysis is required and the anecdote is used to illustrate a concept or introduce a new topic.*

- *Technical problem solving. These cases focus on getting students to use a particular tool or model to solve a problem. The focus is on practicing using the analytical tool to arrive at the correct solution.*
- *Short structured cases. These cases involve students in applying their knowledge to improve the situation. The type of required answer is known and the student is challenged to select the most appropriate conceptual tool or method to improve the situation.*
- *Long structured cases. These cases deal with complex organizational and policy problems where there are no clear solutions. Students will draw on qualitative and quantitative data to help analyse the issue and the detail of information around the case may be extensive.*
- *Ground breaking cases. These are exploratory cases that focus on the type of analysis, expertise and experiences that can be exchanged around the case topic. The focus is on the analytical approach rather than the solution. (Harling & Akridge, 1998, p. 3)*

At the postgraduate level cases are generally reviewed, analyzed and solutions considered during one session. For complex cases this may extend to two class sessions, particularly where the case lends itself to a range of theoretical interpretations. At this level of teaching, short structured and long structured cases are likely to be more common. At the undergraduate level, a longer period of engagement with the case material is required to achieve a deep understanding of theory and how to apply it as an analytical tool. Brookfield (1991) argued that students need more time in class to mull things over and reflect on their experiences and the new material they have learned. A structured, longer case study provides students the extra time needed to become familiar with the detail of the case and develop a more comprehensive understanding of what is actually going on. This in turn gives students more time to reflect and integrate the theoretical material with their analysis of the case. A key finding of the work of Flynn and Klein (2001) in their analysis of the case method is that individual learning is enhanced where there is more time for group discussion and individual preparation. Having more time for discussion and analysis builds student confidence with the content of the case. Confidence and a better understanding of the detail helps students with limited organizational and policy experience to draw on the policy theory as an analytical tool and apply it to the case with more assurance and certainty.

The case study experience examined in this paper reflects the characteristics of long structured cases. The focus is on complex problems. There are no obvious solutions to the case and the process of identifying and collecting relevant information to assist in analysing the case is equally important as weighing up the options and selecting a preferred course of action.

Methodology

The following discussion examines survey data from students involved in three consecutive, long structured case studies, each of 4 weeks duration. Students attended a weekly lecture on policy theory and a weekly workshop to examine their case study. The case studies were live issues currently being debated in the media or subject to a parliamentary inquiry. Students were provided with background material on each case study and allocated to groups to work on structured tasks that required further research and analysis of the policy issue that forms the case. The case study is designed to reflect an applied policy analysis exercise and in the final workshop students are engaged in a role play that requires stakeholders to present their analysis and recommended actions for dealing with the policy problem to a team representing senior public officials and government ministers. At the conclusion of the role play, the public officials/ministerial team present their analysis of the issue and the actions that they have determined should be implemented as the government's response to the policy problem.

A general debrief then follows which commences with a report from a number of students who acted as independent observers, watching and note-taking as each stakeholder group made representations to the ministerial team. These students report on what the role play revealed about the policy process and policy theory covered in the course. This leads to a broader discussion facilitated by the teacher about policy practice and policy theory.

Over the duration of the course students repeat the same exercise on three different policy issues and submit various pieces of written work for assessment. At the very end of the course, students submit a reflective journal where they are required to comment on what insights and learnings they gained from the case studies about policy theory and how it applies to practice (Gibb, 1999). The reflective journal is an important component of the learning framework that challenges students to draw the link between theory and practice. Hubbs and Brand (2005) noted in their critique of the use of reflective journals that they are effective tools for allowing students the opportunity to mull things over and piece together unconnected ideas and concepts. They argue that this process is "central to developing competent practitioners" (p. 62).

The survey instrument used a combination of closed and open–ended questions to explore students'

perception of the effectiveness of case studies in teaching policy theory and policy practice. The multi-item questionnaire used 13 measures of perceptions regarding the effectiveness of case studies. Respondents were asked to choose from four response options (from *extremely effective'* to *not effective at all*) in answering 12 questions (Q4 – Q15) relating to specific issues raised in the literature regarding student engagement and deep learning. Some of the key themes the questions covered include how effective the case study was in

- *improving their understanding of key concepts (Q5);*
- *engaging with the course material (Q6);*
- *facilitating student interaction (Q10);*
- *developing their understanding of policy practice (Q11), policy theory (Q13); and*
- *how effective the process was in helping them to apply policy theory to analyse practice (Q15).*

The closed questions and a summary of results are presented in Table 1 and the full survey instrument is included at Appendix A.

A total of 61 undergraduate students were surveyed across three cohorts. The open-ended questions sought comments in response to how useful they found the exercise, what was least useful, what students gained from doing the case study and recommendations for change and improvements.

Results

Statistical analysis found that the scale used in the survey was very reliable as a measure of the effectiveness of using case studies for teaching. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient value obtained was 0.866, which is considerably high given that the acceptable Cronbach's alpha value is 0.700 (Hall, 2007, p. 203). This indicates that the different items in the scale relate well to each other and all contribute to the total reliability of the scale. Table 1 provides a summary of the results for the closed questions.

The responses to the closed questions indicate an overwhelming positive reaction to the case study experience. Ninety-five percent of students rated it as an effective learning experience. Only two of the 12 closed questions had less than 90% of respondents indicating the case study was generally or extremely effective. This was in respect of Q8 where 21.7% of respondents said analyzing case studies was generally not effective in making them feel that they were in control of the process and Q12 where just over 11% of students (7 respondents) said they found the process

generally not effective in helping them learn about policy theory by building upon existing knowledge.

The strongest response was in respect of student interaction where two-thirds of respondents (67%) found the case study extremely effective in helping them interact with and learn from other students. Half the students found the case study extremely effective in helping them understand the complexities of policy practice. In respect of questions on understanding policy theory (Q13) and how to apply theory to analyze practice (Q15), just over 90% of students found it generally effective or extremely effective (though the majority of respondents, two thirds, indicated it was generally effective).

Qualitative Responses

The responses to the open questions were extensive and the tone overwhelmingly positive. Overall, 260 qualitative comments were recorded. The fact that students took the time to provide detailed written comments suggests they placed a high value on the process as a learning experience. However, some students still found room for improvement with the process. Of the 260 qualitative comments, 59% could be categorized as positive, 11% as neutral (the respondents indicated they had no comment to add), and the remaining 30% made comment on areas for improvement and some could be considered negative.

Positive responses commented on teaching style, the learning process, and learning outcomes. Students also commented on their interest in the policy topics, the applied relevance, and the value of working in groups. A key aspect of student comments concerned the realism of the role play and the insight it provided into the policy process. The role play was seen as an effective way to compensate for their lack of real-world experience in policy work.

Negative responses and suggestions for improvements reflected student concern about class presentations, their participation in the final role play, time spent on the case study, level of interest in the case study topic, and approaches to teaching. A number of sample comments are listed below grouped under these themes.

Student concerns about presenting material and the level of participation in the role play.
- The role play can be more detailed if we had more time.
- Presentations/talks were boring.
- Less presentations.
- Didn't like spending 30 minutes sitting outside the classroom doing nothing during the role play.

TABLE 1
Summary of Responses to Closed Questions

Survey Question	Not at all effective (%)	Generally not effective (%)	Generally effective (%)	Extremely effective (%)	Total Valid Responses
Q4: How effective did you find the way the case was facilitated by the teacher in helping you get value out of this learning experience?	0	0	49.2	50.8	61
Q5: How useful did you find the case study content in helping you to develop your understanding of key concepts in this course?	0	1.6	50.8	47.5	61
Q6: How effective was the case study in enabling you to actively engage with the course material?	0	3.3	52.5	44.3	61
Q7: How effective was the case study in making you feel that you were actively working to analyse and solve a problem?	0	4.9	47.5	47.5	61
Q8: How effective was the case study in making you feel you had control over the process?	0	21.7	60	18.3	60
Q9: How effective was the case study in making you feel you had ownership of the workshop material?	0	10	65	25	60
Q10: How effective was the case study in helping you interact and learn from other students?	0	6.6	26.2	67.2	61
Q11: How effective was the case study in helping you understand the complexities of policy practice?	0	8.2	41	50.8	61
Q12: How effective was the case study in helping you learn about policy theory by building upon knowledge you already had?	0	11.4	65.6	23	61
Q13: How effective was the case study in developing your understanding of the policy theory covered in this course?	0	6.6	67.2	26.2	61
Q14: How useful was the case study in enabling you to develop higher levels of abstraction and analysis?	0	6.6	75.4	18	61
Q15: How effective was the case study in developing your skills in applying policy theory to analyse and interpret practice?	0	8.2	65.6	26.2	61
Q18: Overall, have you found the case study a worthwhile learning experience? N=60	No = 0	Unsure = 5%	Yes = 95%		

Preference for more time to be spent on the case study.
- Instead of four weeks maybe make it longer so we can cover it in greater detail.
- Rather than having three case studies, limit it to two. I felt a bit rushed.

Complaints about the case study topic not being of interest.
- Drop obesity; it's a boring policy area.

Request for different approaches to teaching.
- Make use of interactive materials such as videos to spice up the case study even further.

Implications for Case Teaching at the Undergraduate Level

Developing Skills Required for Policy Practice

Velenchik (1995) suggested that effective case teaching required the selection of cases that did not require students to posses significant institutional or historical knowledge and noted "it is best to select cases in which all the factual material necessary for analysis is included" (p. 35). While this approach suits the review of cases within one class session, such an approach fails to develop some of the core policy analysis skills required of effective practitioners. Requiring students to research and locate information over a longer period of time directly engages them in the task of policy work. This was borne out in the following student comments:

- There was not so much work due the next week that it was overwhelming, but enough for us to learn lots. I gained a lot of insight into the policy process.
- I gained experience on how policy and its stages work.
- I gained knowledge into how policy works in practice.

Working in teams, sharing information and critiquing issues as events unfolded over time linked students to a body of policy practice that they had not

yet experienced. Long structured cases extended over a period of weeks allows for more exposure and practice of other related policy skills. Through the structure and design of the weekly case tasks students developed debating skills through class discussions, presentation skills through in-class presentations and group work skills. The scheduling of weekly tasks also required students to develop skills in managing a workload within defined timeframes. Ninety-two percent of students indicated the process was effective in helping them understand the complexity of policy practice (Q 11). Evidence of the application and development of policy skills was revealed in the following qualitative responses:

- Having to work in a group and having deadlines to meet (provision of information to the group) was a great simulation of a real-life work scenario.
- I think my research skills have definitely improved following this case study.
- Having every group member consistently doing their share of the weekly workload as initially agreed made a difference.
- Through the role play I learned how communication is done but I also learned what personal attributes I need to be able to communicate effectively with others under pressure.
- I also learned more about presentation and group skills.
- I think it was good for learning to interact with others who disagree and learn the intricacies of diplomacy.

These skills are readily transferable to policy positions in the world of practice. Requiring students to undertake tasks, apply knowledge and engage in problem solving skills that they would encounter in everyday policy work lends greater authenticity to the case study exercise (Kim et al., 2006). Ninety-five percent of students indicated the experience was effective in making them feel they were actively working to analyse and solve a problem (Q7). The authenticity of the problem and associated tasks makes the exercise important for students and helps maintain their motivation and interest (Bain, 2004).

Understanding and Knowledge in the Context of Practice

The structured nature of the learning environment also challenges students to draw on theory to enhance their analytical and interpretative skills. It is the engagement in a time frame that extends beyond the class schedule that transforms the student relationship with the case into an applied experience not dissimilar to that of policy practitioners. Students learn through their extended case experience that knowledge is understood and applied within the context of problems and issues that are continually developing in the world around them. This was evident in a number of student comments about their understanding of how stakeholders act in the context of policy problems.

- I really enjoyed this case study because it gave me a better understanding of the policy process. It also made me realize that there are a number of stakeholders and it is difficult to make everyone happy.
- I gained an overall understanding of the roles of key stakeholders and how these stakeholders exercise their power within the policy process.
- I found that forming a policy for a particular problem is quite complex.
- I learnt how to analyse a problem from different views.

By being actively engaged in decision making, drawing on the information they have collected and analysed around a real-world policy issue, students experienced the use of knowledge and theory as a participant, rather than just learning about it in the abstract (Carlson & Schodt, 1995; Harling & Akridge, 1998; Brooke, 2006). A recurrent theme across student comments was how close the case study was to real life and how it effectively linked their class room experience to what happens in the policy process. A number of students commented on this theme:

- I gained a better and clearer understanding of policy processes in real practice.
- I learnt the realities of working in the policy field.
- I feel as though I was able to at least simulate policy work in the real world.
- The role play was extremely useful because it effectively looked at the ministerial/stakeholder relationship. In the role play all the factors that contribute to the policy process naturally rolled out. It gave me a first hand experience on how things are done in real life policy making.

The case method examined in this paper concerns extended case studies that involve students in actively sourcing information to learn more about the background and interest of participants in the problem, locating relevant research, and compiling quantitative

data that assists in measuring and defining aspects of the problem. This process of building familiarity with problems over a number of weeks is carried out in small groups. Students work collaboratively to develop their own solutions. The use of group work facilitates deeper learning and enables students to cover a broader range of material then if done on an individual basis (Flynn & Klein, 2001). Working with others exposes students to different ideas and alternative points of view. Through the process of cooperative group work students progressively interpret and analyze information they collect as part of their case work. Discussion in small groups helps students reinterpret and reconsider what they have found. Through their small group work students are engaged in a continuous process of reflection and review about their understanding of the case and how the policy theory can be used to analyse and understand the dynamics of the problem. This observation is reinforced by responses to the survey question that asked how effective the case study experience was in helping students interact and learn from others (Q10). Sixty-seven percent of students indicated it was extremely effective and this increased to 93% when respondents who indicated it was generally effective are included.

Putting Theory into Practice

Knowing the detailed complexity of the case study is critical for students to then move to an analytical frame of thinking that looks at how theoretical concepts might be observable in practice. Being comfortable with the case material enables students to move their thinking towards a level of abstraction that relates specifics of the case to elements of conceptual models. Just over 90% of students indicated the process was generally effective or extremely effective in getting them to understand policy theory and how to apply it to analyze practice (Q15). Relevant student comments include the following:

- The scenario in the fourth week put into practice all the elements of policy theory we had learned, i.e. vertical and horizontal authority.
- I gained a deeper understanding of the political nature of the policy making process.
- I was able to put practical and theoretical ideas into practice. This helped me understand the policy process better.
- It was an interesting case study that helped me understand the complexities of policy making.

The role that teaching plays in facilitating and leading this intellectual development is important. The teacher plays a critical role in helping students develop and consolidate their own conceptual insights. By drawing on the teacher's expertise and explanations students can more effectively articulate in their own words how they see the link between theory and practice. When asked to rate the effectiveness of the teacher in facilitating the case study and enabling students to get value out of the case study exercise 100% scored this as extremely effective or generally effective (see Q4 in Table 1). This positive response highlights the important role the teacher plays in motivating learning. The contribution of the teacher is a significant influence on the results measured in this survey.

When Velenchik (1995) evaluated the use of case studies for her intermediate undergraduate courses, she found that students exposed to this method of learning were able to more competently grasp theory and effectively apply it to analyze the real world. Similarly, Flynn and Klein (2001) observed that the use of cases moved learning and teaching away from measuring facts to the application of concepts and theories. They found the use of small group work enhanced the tasks of analysing, explaining and synthesizing. When engaged in case work, students developed better listening skills and felt more engaged and responsible for their own learning (Brooke, 2006; Velenchik, 1995). This point is further reinforced by Northedge (2003) who argued that the use of real cases enables students to engage in the material and subject discourse at levels that relate to their own experience and understanding.

Szostak (2005) argued that exposure to the complexity of real world policy problems should be an important component of university policy programs. Examples in lectures are often abstract, condensed versions of a more complex reality, and case studies allow students to become more familiar with the complexities of every day policy problems. Student feedback collected for this research project and the comments made on policy theory in their reflective journals confirm this observation. The analysis documented in the reflective journals demonstrated that a majority of students were able to competently draw on theory to explain events and analyse the dominant characteristics of policy problems. This intellectual development is further reinforced by the quantitative results where 94% of students indicated the case study was effective in developing their understanding of policy theory (Q13) and 88% indicated it was an effective way to learn about policy theory by building upon knowledge they already had (Q12).

More Time Delivers More Benefits for More Students

Case studies also allow for multiple interpretations as students reflect on their own personal experiences that relate to the case and demonstrate similar dynamics. However, undergraduate students are different to postgraduate students in the level of experience they are able to draw on to help analyse and understand complex cases of public policy. This difference needs to be compensated for in terms of time and facilitated support. Making use of long structured cases allows students more time for critical reflection and also accommodates varying levels of student participation and contribution. Not all students perform at their very best every week. Over a 4 week period, students can manage their contribution within the context of the other pressures and commitments they face in life. By working through the case in small groups students are able to draw on other members to compensate when they are not operating at their peak level. A number of students commented on the value of this approach in their qualitative responses to the survey.

Follow up, review, and incremental summation is also more manageable over an extended period. Rather then relying on a brief summation at the end of class in situations where the case has been covered in one sitting, long structured cases spread over a number of weeks allows for incremental summation and weekly review. In this situation it is more likely that a majority of students will have engaged at some point in the learning and conclusions that the group reaches from their weekly tasks and analysis. Such an approach also accommodates the varying levels and pace at which students learn. For some, the ability to use theory as an analytical tool falls into place during the first session, whilst for others the process of enlightenment takes longer (Meyer & Land, 2003). The quantitative results indicate that 98% of students found the case study effective in helping them understand key concepts of the course (Q 5), while 96% indicated the process was effective in actively engaging them with the course material (Q 6). Extending the case analysis over a few weeks provides opportunities for all levels of learning to engage with the detail of the case and the policy theory (Bain, 2004). Again, this can be observed in the student feedback where some students suggested a longer period of time on the case study would have facilitated deeper learning while another noted that repeating the process built confidence with the analytical tasks.

- The length allocated for each case study should be longer so that we can have a deeper understanding of the case.
- I felt more confident about this case study as we had already been through one. I gained

more confidence also in identifying the policy agenda and the way in which the media use their tools of persuasion to get a certain point of view.

Harling and Akridge (1998) also point out that successful case teaching requires students to understand and appreciate the changed role they play in class discussion and participation. Responding to this new role takes time and repetition of the process assists with building confidence and familiarity (Flynn & Klein, 2001). Incrementally, as students build their knowledge and level of familiarity with each policy case, an environment of relative comfort emerges that facilitates higher levels of class discussion and participation. This sentiment was clearly articulated by one student who noted,

I gained knowledge about how to best communicate with others. The course has helped develop my confidence to speak out about things that I wanted to talk about.

Conclusion

This paper puts the case for extended case studies that engage students over a number of weeks in the research and analysis of contemporary policy issues. If we want to move students beyond a level of familiarity with policy theory to actively use conceptual models as tools to analyse practice then they need to be given more time to practice the task of policy analysis. Working with others over a number of consecutive sessions enables students to adsorb and reflect on the theoretical concepts in the policy literature and practice its application to real-world problems. This sequential building of knowledge around a case develops student confidence and capacity to apply theory as an analytical tool. Students become deeply engaged in the course material and not only develop potential solutions but display an interest in what has been revealed from the process (Flynn & Klein, 2001).

Policy analysts work in a diverse range of settings and draw on a range of technical and analytical skills as well as engage with people and stakeholders in listening and consulting about issues of public concern. The tasks of undertaking analysis and providing advice is more likely to bring analysts into contact with a political world where other forces beyond rational assessment shape what is finally agreed and acted upon. Engaging undergraduate students of policy studies in long structured case studies over a period of weeks effectively immerses them in the real world of policy practice. Students are required to research, analyze, and understand the interests and roles of key stakeholders engaged in the policy problem. As

students' knowledge and understanding of the stakeholders grows, they readily adopt characteristic behaviour and attitudes of these stakeholders in the final role play (Carlson & Schodt, 1995). As they act out the interest and preferences of stakeholders, students observe and experience the role of politics in the policy process. In the context of academic learning, students are challenged to intellectualize this experience so they can see the value of policy theory and how it helps put in context a range of forces and processes that shape policy work and policy outcomes. The survey results demonstrate this with 93% of students indicating the case study process was effective in enabling them to develop higher levels of abstraction and analysis (Q 14).

Practicing the policy skills of group work, research, and stakeholder analysis are important for effective policy work. However, being able to conceptualize events within broader theoretical models develops the enlightened analyst who can predict and anticipate likely outcomes. This is different from the functional analyst who practices policy skills on a routine basis without connecting their analysis and advice on issues to the broader context of events that shape public policy. It is the enlightened analyst with a strong foundation in theory that university policy programs should be striving to develop (Szostak, 2005). Obtaining a deep understanding of policy theory and experiencing its application to practice through case studies is one way university courses can contribute to the development of such graduates. Of course, the role of the teacher is a critical factor contributing to the success of any teaching method and more research is needed on how the approach, style, level of expertise, and experience this person brings to the task contributes towards the positive learning outcomes of the case method.

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Appendix A
Student Survey Form

1) Which particular aspects or elements of the case study did you find *most* useful?

2) Which particular aspects or elements of the case study did you find *least* useful?

3) Are there any areas/topics of the case study you think should have been explored in more detail/further?

4) How effective did you find the way the case study was facilitated by the teacher in helping you get value out of this learning exercise?

5) How useful did you find the case study content in helping you to develop your understanding of key concepts in this course?

6) How effective was the case study in enabling you to actively engage with the course material?

7) How effective was the case study in making you feel that you were actively working to analyse and solve a problem?

8) How effective was the case study in making you feel you had control over the process?

9) How effective was the case study in making you feel you had ownership of the workshop material?

10) How effective was the case study in helping you interact and learn from other students?

11) How effective was the case study in helping you understand the complexities of policy practice?

12) How effective was the case study in helping you learn about policy theory by building upon knowledge you already had?

13) How effective was the case study in developing your understanding of the policy theory covered in this course?

14) How useful was the case study in enabling you to develop higher levels of abstraction and analysis?

15) How effective was the case study in developing your skills in applying policy theory to analyse and interpret practice?

16) Could you please write a few comments on how you found doing this case study task, and what you feel you gained from it?

17) Do you have any recommendations for changes to how the case study is taught, or other comments to add?

18) Overall, have you found the case study a worthwhile learning experience?