

LEARNING THROUGH CASE CONSTRUCTION

SNAPSHOT

Students familiar with case study analysis construct their own cases to capture a specific ethical question. They then lead their classmates through the case. This case construction activity gives students the opportunity to stump one another with new ethical dilemmas in a civil, focused fashion.

SPOTLIGHT

This activity turns the table on the classic case study analysis by putting students in charge of creating their own cases. The task of actually producing an original case based on their assigned themes makes them engage more closely with the pertinent ethical issues. In the process, they must make choices about such elements as what constitutes an ethical dilemma, what features of the context (e.g. character identities) make it easier or harder to resolve the dilemma, and what values guide possible solutions. As a result, they are not only engaging more closely with the material and synthesizing it with their peers but are also developing an appreciation for the nuances of ethical reasoning and identifying the challenges of applying it to real-life scenarios.

LESSON PLAN

Goals:

- Tap into students' creativity by having them make connections between course content and everyday life.
- Have students anticipate potential responses and adjust their cases to preempt these assumptions.
- Have students practice moderating a discussion.
- Have students practice case analysis and critical reasoning skills.
- Have students engage in difficult, self-guided conversation with one another.



Class:

ETHRSON 42: Sex and Ethical Reasoning

Background:

This activity was designed for an introductory course on the ethics of sex, gender, and sexuality. The first half of the semester focused on theoretical groundwork and the second on practical application. During this more applied second half (~5 weeks), students undertook case analysis in their sections. In the penultimate section, students

THINGS WE LIKE

This activity packs a punch. Whereas the traditional case study analysis activity primarily engages students' reasoning skills and possibly their ability to make real-world connections, this activity also advances effective communication and moderation skills, ethical reasoning, clear and careful argumentation, and the ability to discuss sensitive topics with maturity. The group case construction also functions as a peer-to-peer teaching exercise that enables students to synthesize the material in their own minds and to identify and work through gaps in their understanding with their peers.



constructed their own cases. **From early on, the instructor and students had established classroom norms and practices to facilitate safe, critical conversations.**

Procedure - Before Class:



Students should be familiar with case analysis before beginning this activity, either from having used cases at other times in the semester or through a short presentation preceding the assignment.

Students are expected to have completed the readings before class. The instructor comes with a presentation listing several guiding questions for students to consider as they design their cases.

Procedure - During Class:

1. Review successful case study elements
 - A. The instructor leads a quick class discussion based on the question, "What have been the general characteristics of the case studies we've discussed in lecture and section?"
2. Introduce activity and divide class into two groups
 - A. Based on the readings, the instructor picks two different themes to focus on and projects relevant questions for each on the board. The class is divided into two groups, and each is assigned one theme.
 - B. Students are instructed to work with their groups to design a case based on the questions or themes provided.**
3. Solo writing/brainstorming
 - A. The class has 10 minutes to independently brainstorm ideas for their cases.
 - B. Some prompting questions for the brainstorm include:
 - a. What questions most interest you?
 - b. What scenario best captures that question?
 - c. What might the narrative arc or dialogue look like?



WAYS TO ADAPT

In classes where the subject matter may be sensitive or become contentious, such as this one, a sense of psychological safety and comfort is a prerequisite for having inclusive, productive dialogue. Developing a classroom culture that serves as a safe space for discussions of the kind this activity invokes can happen in a variety of ways. At a minimum, the instructor should establish norms, e.g. about assuming best intentions and pursuing respectful disagreement, and enforce them diligently. You can also communicate to students that they should feel free to leave the classroom if a topic they don't feel comfortable discussing arises.

WAYS TO ADAPT

You can also build up to this activity by having students engage with case writing in shorter assignments before undertaking a full-blown case design. So, for example, you might have students respond to cases that you assign elsewhere in the curriculum by, among other things, designing alternative ways the scenario might have gone, modifying the scenario to bring out a different ethical issue, or writing a follow-up scenario that sequentially follows from the original. This can push students to think more deeply about case analyses they are already undertaking, and it's a fun way to engage their imagination more regularly.

THINGS WE LIKE

The collaborative dimension of this activity is one of its greatest strengths. Students work in what could end up being quite a large group—half the class—to discuss and design a case. The group format facilitates discussion of different interests, concerns, and approaches, and the resulting case speaks to the expansive range of views in the room. This is particularly important for cases invoking ethical dilemmas, where students' diverse backgrounds so thoroughly inform their perceptions of the right answer.



- d. What information might add complexity to the case?
- 4. Group case construction
 - A. Within each group, students choose a scribe (to record notes) **and a moderator (to lead the case study).**
 - B. Students share their independent brainstorms, collectively agree on an issue, and work to create a case (one paragraph long).
 - C. After the case is completed, the scribe sends the instructor the case to be added to the PowerPoint.
- 5. Group case analysis
 - A. After each group adds their case to the slide, the moderator reads the prompt out loud.
 - B. Each group conducts a case analysis on the other group's case.
- 6. Whole class discussion
 - A. The assigned moderator leads the other team through the case analysis and fields questions.
 - a. Initial question: What ethical concerns are raised? What should the characters do?
 - B. After the other team finishes the case study, the original team explains the basic premise of their case and the themes they hoped would come up. If anything was left out, the original group raises it.
 - a. **Reflective question: What, if anything, would the group change after hearing the other group's interpretation?**



Find specific examples on the handout [HERE](#).

Procedure - After Class:



The instructor set up a Canvas page where unfinished discussions could continue. Students could also use this page to post any brainstormed ideas that were not selected for the full case study.

This activity was submitted by Lucy Ballard.

THINGS WE LIKE

The role of moderator incorporates other important learning goals into the activity. Many students will find themselves in careers that require them to present their work or their group's work to others—students, colleagues, external audiences, etc. The moderator practices not only communicating the final product of the group's deliberations but also using guided questions to convey the points the group most wanted to emphasize from the case study. Being able to communicate the thought process behind it to an audience seeing the case for the first time is a challenging but powerful presentation skill.

WAYS TO ADAPT

Have students write a revision of the case to reflect the changes they would make after hearing the other group's interpretation of it. This assignment, which can take place either in class or as homework, can give students the opportunity to think through the case independently of their groups and to demonstrate the approach they would take to designing the case, guided by the feedback they received from the case study exercise. This reflection advances the learning goal of metacognition.

THINGS WE LIKE

Setting up discussion boards, such as this one, enables instructors to keep the conversation going outside of the classroom. It helps students feel that their voice is being heard, especially when class periods are short and not everyone will be able to share all their most pressing thoughts, and it facilitates the continuation of critical dialogue on topics that warrant more comprehensive treatment than they can often be given, given instructors' time and resource constraints. Students often report that some of their most insightful learning moments happen in peer conversations outside of class about the material, and this feature of the activity helps trigger those moments.

