The Washington Center Casebook

This casebook was produced by the Case Writing Group of the Evaluation Committee of the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education. Please feel free to copy and use these cases, but please do acknowledge who produced them.

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ISSUES INDEX

It is our hope that the following set of questions might aid you in selecting cases for specific issues and interest groups. If, as you use these cases, you see other questions or concerns that might be addressed, please contact the Washington Center.

Since case studies are typically used as vehicles to encourage participants to make and defend judgments, our questions are often phrased as “shoulds.” Clearly, what should be done about a given situation in one context will probably be different from what should be done about a similar (or identical) situation in a different context, so we do not intend the questions to imply the existence of a set of “right” answers. We intend them only as aids, and we hope that you enjoy exploring them and the many “shoulds” that can be derived from them as much as we have.

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An Introduction for Case Leaders:
A Guide to Learning Communities Case Studies

Introduction by Dwight Oberholtzer, Pacific Lutheran University

**Hopes** The Washington Center Casebook on Collaborative Teaching and Learning is an invitation. We hope that its cases, sifted from the experience of collaborative learning faculty throughout Washington state, will arouse curiosity about collaborative education, stimulate new teaching teams and programs, encourage conversations among administrators, and put many groups to work designing solutions to intriguing instructional, interpersonal, and administrative challenges. We also hope that this second edition of the Casebook will be especially useful for the spectrum of leaders in the national collaborative learning movement who discover it at the National Learning Communities Project website: http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu. We trust that a positive experience with these cases and their power to illuminate rough spots along the path will ease the entry of new teams into collaborative instruction as well as uncover practical ideas for veterans to try.

Our greatest desire, though, is that the case discussions will emulate the collaborative learning process at its best, creating a supportive community of discovery, an energizing exchange of divergent ideas and realistic solutions, and the enjoyment, even the unexpected revelation, of fresh, productive insights that no single individual could produce alone. What “no single individual could produce alone” is the hallmark of successful collaborative experience. As a case leader, you can make the conversation lively and purposive. As you set up a case session, we hope these introductory notes will offer you helpful ideas as well as more confidence in your case leadership abilities.

**Relevance** The Casebook can benefit a collaborative learning program in several notable ways. First of all, reflecting on how collaborative the caseworking session was can lead to improvements the next time around. These lessons can be exported to improve classroom collaboration among students and also among faculty teams. In addition, a series of case discussions might generate enthusiasm about casework, as it did at the Washington Center (the Center), and seed program courses with cases or reorient a whole program around problem-based learning. The briefer cases might simply be useful as an hour energizer in a longer faculty meeting or you might approach a potentially explosive program issue obliquely by first raising it through a case that’s similar. Based on their experience in a collaborative learning classroom, faculty might write cases themselves for discussion at a longer program retreat. Taking another tack, cases can be useful not just in underlining the importance of evidence-based decision making but in illustrating the role that ambiguity and the lack of evidence play in decisions. On a more general level, casework is a synthesis, a “coming to judgment,” which powerfully demonstrates the insufficiency of singular viewpoints. Finally, cases can reveal their own limitations – and the limits of unapplied knowledge – by pointing to the need for collaborative action after the talk has ended.

You can imagine other ways in which the Casebook’s 17 cases can be useful to your collaborative programs. Seven of them deal with teaching and learning issues; five reflect team-
building dilemmas; and five illustrate general administrative challenges. It is tempting to suggest that administrative cases should be used with administrators, team-building cases with teams, and so forth. However, we’ve found that a mix of participants – faculty, teams, and administrators – travels more varied terrain together and opens doors of communication, especially between faculty and administrators. A good case discussion within such a diverse group also raises the hope that few real life problems are beyond the help of truly collaborative conversation.

**History** In 1991, when we began writing cases, we didn’t suspect that it would become a positive addiction. We had been gathering since 1987 as the Washington Center’s Evaluation Committee to explore various approaches to assessment appropriate for collaborative learning. Barbara Leigh Smith and Jean MacGregor surprised us at one of our meetings with “The Case of the Dethroned Section Leader.” Taken from Roland C. Christensen’s *Teaching and the Case Method*, the actual experience of working a case caught our attention. Before, as Pat Hutchings records in her *Using Cases to Improve College Teaching*, “Most of us just didn’t really get it.” In Barbara’s words, “We weren’t quite sure what a case was. The experience of a case and case discussion persuaded us that the method worked and that we could use it.” Ours is a common experience your college can share.

The continuing spark until this day, though, has come not from using published cases but from writing our own. The cases in this collection all emerge from troubled waters, from teaching and learning dilemmas that we couldn’t put down at the end of the term. That is what gives them their life. Even though they are usually composites rather than actual situations, they still retain the energy of lived experience. In designing the Casebook and in making it stretch beyond our own personal experiences, we also leaned on “Gleanings,” the record of debriefing interviews in collaborative learning communities throughout the state. Such conversations with faculty pressed us to think beyond immediate classroom issues and to take up administrative, institutional, and team-building topics as well. In addition, a series of two-day retreats has fed our case-writing habit. They have provided us the time for intense case review and for the testing of fresh drafts on Evaluation Committee members who couldn't escape for the evening.

**Field testing** Such informal field-testing in a variety of settings has given us greater confidence in the cases. Although we have used others, “Whose Agenda?” has gotten the most attention. Charles, the case’s macho protagonist with the handlebar mustache, spoke his mind to faculty groups at the first National Cooperative Learning in Higher Education Conference in San Pedro, the Center’s own annual learning community conference in Seattle, and the American Association for Higher Education’s meeting in Washington, D. C. Several others of us have tried “Sarah's Choice,” “Cosmic Bonding,” and “Cultural Conflict Among Students and Faculty in the Classroom” on different campuses. We also watched the larger Evaluation Committee work a possible two-case series, “The Seminar Story,” written by a student, and “Class Decision.” These experiences have reinforced our belief in the evocative power of cases, and they have reconfirmed what Pat Hutchings reports about the effect of cases in higher education settings: Faculty give high marks to the experience. Cases seem to bring great satisfaction whether someone is starting out in a new collaborative team, teaching the first course in a learning community, or making an unexpected career of it. Field-test insights appear in the notes for specific cases and can give you direction for leading discussions.
Assessment

The Casebook is part of the Center’s wider efforts, beginning in 1985, to improve the quality of undergraduate education in Washington state. In 1987, the state legislature started funding assessment efforts in all Washington colleges, and this further fueled grassroots faculty efforts to understand how students learn. Cases about teaching and learning are particularly useful in the assessment conversation because their first question usually is, “What is really happening here?” Within a classroom, what are the academic performance issues, student attitudes, affective obstacles, or intellectual levels? What can be said about the instructor’s skill, style of questions, clarity of presentation, or appropriateness of learning goals? The cases themselves may not offer ready answers to such questions, but they provide a collaborative strategy for diagnosis – much like what a team of medical professionals might apply to a patient they have in common. In “Whose Agenda?” for instance, how might Ed, the teacher, find out how carefully Charles and the rest of the class has read Women's Ways of Knowing or whether all the men agreed with Charles’ anti-feminist reasoning? How well has the group process training earlier in the term prepared the class for a conflict-laden discussion? These are all preliminary assessment questions on their way to formal measurement strategies.

In fact, an instructional discussion series of several cases could focus exclusively on learning assessment in varied settings. Good assessment draws from a full tool box. How might Ed in “Whose Agenda” best find out what is actually happening in his class? In focusing upon evaluation issues, the Center’s handbook Assessment in and of Collaborative Learning nicely complements this Casebook. Turning to the Handbook, would Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) work best for Ed here? What are the potential benefits – and detriments? What of Rita Smilkstein’s simpler strategy to “just ask students what is going on?” But how might Ed ask them most effectively? And do students know all of what is going on? Indeed, cases always include assessment issues. It was our puzzlement over what was really happening in our classrooms (or within team relationships or inside administrative offices) that prompted writing many of the cases. Assessment puzzles promote case writing; written cases strengthen the assessment conversation.

Purposes

Serious discussion planning around assessment or any other issue should address the session’s goals. If you don’t know your destination, how can you know if you have arrived? As you begin to prepare a case, then, one of the first questions to ask is, “What do I hope the session will accomplish?” The goals can be modest or more ambitious. Participants themselves, of course, have their own version of that question, and it can be chilling: “What was the point of the last two hours?” In our own experience, field-testing has uncovered a variety of worthwhile outcomes – including the unplanned ones. For instance, among faculty who have not talked much together about teaching or are not yet a cohesive group, a case might be used simply as a prompt for sharing similar teaching stories. In “The Collaboration Conundrum,” Jeannette’s student team has broken down. “I don't want my grade to be lower because I’m working with students who don’t get it – or just don't care,” she complains. A question for the case discussion might be: “Does this remind you of challenges you have had when groups fail, and how did you address them?” The goal here would simply be to deepen the felt sense of connection among the participants by exchanging experiences, not to debate how well a person handled the situation. Also, because the Center’s cases can prompt thoughtful debate over a teacher’s best course of action, your over-arching goal might be to improve reflective instruction. Finally, a case represents a sample of one in the on-going analysis of learning and links usefully to what Ernest Boyer has termed “the scholarship of teaching.” Cases can chronicle and reflect such scholarship.
William and Margaret Naumes’ *The Art & Craft of Case Writing*, for instance, demonstrates how professionally advanced case writing and the use of cases can become.

In our own work, however, we have emphasized the following outcomes:

**Outcomes**

1. To explore teaching and learning issues generic to collaborative settings,
2. To analyze administrative challenges to the institutionalization of learning communities,
3. To discover and voice alternative, even conflicting perspectives on a common issue,
4. To improve judgments made not only in collaborative classrooms but in working with a teaching team,
5. To change case insights into modest improvements in one's own teaching, and
6. To promote informal case writing itself for the added perceptiveness it will bring to the teaching-learning process.

Still, the best purposes are your purposes. Not only will they aid you in assessing the success of your session, they can serve as a general preparation guide as well. And it might be quite useful occasionally, devious thought, to have a case discussion with no outcomes in mind beforehand at all. Different purposes, though, promote distinct case leading strategies and require the devising of questions to match them.

**Guidelines** If you are leading a case for the first time, the following process will help focus your mind.

**Steps to Successful Case Discussions**

1. First of all, invite a colleague(s) to help lead the case with you – or not.
2. Secondly, choose a case that attracts you and addresses issues relevant to your group.
3. And, finally, develop a session plan to provide resources and direction. The session plan is your biggest, most profitable investment and might include:
   
   A. A general structure to provide overall direction,
   B. A bank of discovery questions,
   C. Strategies to record comments at various stages,
   D. Methods and questions in reserve to invigorate a slumping discussion,
   E. A design for applying case insights to next week's teaching practice, and
   F. Brief opening and closing comments.

This may look like a daunting list, but, not only will the planning stimulate your own interest in the case, it will save you the possible embarrassment of “winging it” in public. We have watched leaderless groups read a case cold and talk it through by themselves or slog through with a poorly prepared leader only to hear at the end that the session was “directionless and flat.” A well-conceived plan held lightly will help you avoid such learning experiences.
As part of the preparation process, imagine the profile of the group with which you will work beforehand. One strategic question to ask is: Are the members comfortable with or able to welcome strong differences of opinion? Disagreements can deepen the conversation immeasurably – but also release interpersonal heat, even longer term forest fires. Newly-formed groups may profit more from the sharing of unchallenged ideas than from an intense, structured evaluation of each other’s opinions. As a leader, choose cases and plan questions with your group’s leanings in mind. As the conversation develops, your follow-up comments or questions can partially shape the outcome – and, if necessary, modulate the discussion’s thermostat. What follows we hope will make the planning process more transparent.

1. Will you work with a colleague?

**Partners** Depending on the size of the group, you may want to fly the session solo, but you may also want to display your collaborative wings more publicly by working with someone else. Either way can work well. Of course, working with another person means designing collaborative sessions around discussion themes, questions, and questioning strategies as well as sharing the responsibilities. You may want to introduce questions and keep the conversation moving, while your partner watches the time and summarizes before shifting themes. Dividing the responsibility between leading the discussion and recording the comments has benefits, too. At points you may also choose to divide the larger group into two, with each of you leading a section on a separate topic or question. Later, the two groups could combine their findings – or debate them. In leading the discussion, working alone may be more efficient, but partnerships automatically form a two-person network. If you are concerned about institutionalizing case-based teaching conversations, several of these networks may build a foundation for institution-wide change.

An intriguing question for any collaborative program is: “What does ‘good collaboration’ look and sound like?” It would be surprising if everyone agrees on the answer, as several of our cases suggest. Collaborating well with colleagues does not simply mean teaming up with another case leader, nor does running the case solo necessarily mean the discussion will be less collaborative. But, although both are collaborative activities, conducting an orchestra is not the same as raising a barn. As master case leader Chris Christiansen points out in *Education for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership*, the instructor who “lays out a step-by-step outline for the discussion” invokes a different style of collaboration than one who “invites students to set the agenda for the day’s discussion.” Which end of the spectrum do you wish to promote with faculty?

If you would like to be less the obvious conductor of the discussion and more its background facilitator, breaking the larger group into subgroups increases the amount of participation and, potentially, the probability of wider collaboration. Here any effective small group strategy would be welcome, although with casework you should give particular attention to these questions:

- Does the group have a welcoming, task-oriented leader and an uncensored conversation?
- What, specifically, is the group to accomplish by what time?
- How will key ideas be remembered?
- How will each group's findings be efficiently reported to the larger gathering?
• Will these findings fit seamlessly and coherently into whatever the next step in the conversation will be?

As the session facilitator, you may want to use overhead or printed questions and directions to which each group can easily refer but, whatever you decide, all with the intention of raising a barn, not enlarging a junk yard.

2. What case(s) will you use?

**Choosing** In selecting a case, trust your own responses. A case that has slightly unsettling but important questions for you, a dilemma that has no obvious solution, issues that attract your attention – all signal a good puzzle for others to unravel, too. As Clyde Herreid of the National Center for Case Study Teaching in Science has emphasized, a case with legs also has drama and suspense. Bringing a few colleagues in on the selection may improve the decision. For help in case selection, the Casebook’s Table of Contents summarizes the central themes while the Issues Index organizes cases under pressing questions for collaborative learning. We believe both will help select an appropriate case. “Sarah’s Choice,” for instance, has intriguing teaching team fireworks. “Whose Agenda?” goes to the heart of how collaborative learning communities share responsibilities. “Julie’s Dilemma” spotlights institutional threats to collaborative classrooms and programs. “Midterm Reflections” raises the disquieting meaning of individual instructor evaluations in team-taught courses. “Camp Stories – Part II” addresses veteran faculty who are skeptical about collaborative learning. For an intriguing twist you might create a two-case series, reading Sarah’s viewpoint in “Sarah’s Choice” first, for example, and then Sam’s in “Sam’s Problem” second. Sarah and Sam were not a team made in heaven, but they represent the issues for many failing partnerships. As a rule, if a case raises a list of questions for you, it probably will for other faculty, too. And take heart in the promise that well-thought questions can bring even the dullest case alive – although we have no samples in the Casebook for you to practice on! With questions that capitalize on their ambiguity and tension, all of the cases make for lively talk.

3. What will the session plan be?

A. Overall four-stage structure

**Direction** For all of their benefits, conversations about teaching at the faculty club lunch table are not good casework. To avoid such pleasant rambling, one of the first things to do in a session plan is to create an explicit framework that will provide the discussion direction and a sense of forward movement. Otherwise, faculty might internally complain, “Why are we going in circles?” Most cases will take two hours, including the important matter of identifying personal teaching applications at the end – which is a lot of time to go in circles! Our most productive groups have had between seven and 15 members. Groups below seven don’t seem to be as imaginative, and those above 15 don’t promote full participation. In devising an effective structure, time-tested models have much to offer. One reason case teaching at the Harvard Business School today has survived so well since Dean Edwin Gay introduced it in 1908, is its problem-solving, “laboratory” method. A century later that method is echoed nicely at the National Center for Case Study Learning in Science at SUNY, Buffalo, to mention just one, and,
more generally, at The Center for Problem-Based Learning at Samford University. Although other variations work, the following straightforward, four-step format sets up a good laboratory experience with practical applications at the end:

**Framework for Laboratory Experience**

1. An assessment of the problem situation (40 minutes)
   - Questions and strategies for finding out “what’s really happening here” and “what are the facts”
2. A review of possible solutions. (30 minutes)
   - Questions and strategies for generating the decision-maker’s options
3. A justified decision or judgment (20 minutes)
   - Questions and strategies for choosing the best solution and for explaining justifying reasons
4. An application (15 minutes)
   - Questions and strategies for applying case insights to one’s own teaching, administrative work, or team relationships

In a two-hour session, this allows time for brief opening and closing comments and for the initial group reading of the case. Because the transfer from case discussion to improved practice is fragile at best, the fourth step adds a level of practical action. A generic question at this stage might be: “What has the case discussion prompted you to change or improve in your work this week?” However you prepare, though, do not underestimate the usefulness of a written overall session structure. If a problem-solving framework appears pedestrian and clunky, the benefits are actually in the surprising discoveries the group makes at each step. One of the first may be that the group isn’t facing a clear problem or even one problem at all but rather vague and puzzling discomforts difficult to name. Another revelation, which may appear later, may be that the case suggests not so much a problem to be solved as a challenging process to be skillfully faced or managed. The mix of highly imaginative and motivated faculty along with effective discovery questions can conjure up the magic you desire. An overall four-stage structure – problem identification, solution review, decision justification, and application – will provide continuity and a sense of wholeness to the journey.

**Planning: When is enough enough?** The appetite for planning varies considerably. That was a lesson the Washington Center’s leadership teams learned when they worked together on field-testing at conferences. One team member might vote for a lot of planning, another for much less. Isn’t this true, too, in collaborative learning teams? In practice, it is not always clear how much either extensive planning or minimal planning pays off in a case discussion because the two are seldom compared side by side. To complicate matters, success at a session is usually measured only informally, for instance by the leader’s sense of how enthusiastic or insightful the participants were.

What’s most clear is that the zest for planning among case leaders is a measure of their inclinations and preferences. Some feel most comfortable with the kind of systematic inquiry that considerable planning promotes, while others prefer less planning and the open-ended exploration that a spontaneous discussion creates. How can a person argue with the benefits of
either approach? If you are leading a case solo, such preferences don’t matter – except possibly to some differently-minded people at the session. But, if you are teaming with a colleague, they may cause disagreement. In some teams, one leader willingly bends in the other’s direction. In other teams it’s agreed that one style predominates in planning step 1, another for step 3. Time or other work constraints aside, the amount of planning is also often proportionate to the amount of psychological comfort it provides a leader or to how much she/he wishes to orchestrate the outcomes. Both are understandable; neither is inevitably bad. As with many oppositions in life, a gesture toward balance is best.

Simply put, a case needs enough planning to plot the session’s general course and to fill the leader’s tool box. Effective follow-up questions, so crucial to exploring the conversation’s unpredictable eddies and backwaters, can be either planned or invented on the spot. In the end, “what’s enough planning” is in the mind of the beholder, but planning of whatever kind should avoid creating either a preordained lock-step march or an aimless one. A well-placed assessment question at session’s end about being “prodded too much” or “guided too little” may indirectly capture the effects of too much or too little planning, as will a direct question about how much planning seemed to go into the session. As you plan, adding a self-reflective question like, “Am I planning to meet my needs alone or those of my quite diverse group as well?” may also aid in knowing when enough is enough or when enough is not enough.

B. Bank of discovery questions

**Unpacking** Artful unpacking is the heart of case discussion. Discovery-promoting questions invigorate, unsettle, and deepen the process, calling out a creative diversity of opinion. In “Camp Stories – Part I,” the new Chair of the English Department may need to address Denny’s negativity, but allowing the group to rush in with their personal first judgments or advice about “Denny’s problem” won’t uncover much new or more fundamental in the case such as the blindspots of high student self-esteem, which Pat and Chris in their enthusiasm may be overlooking. As the leader, you will be designing questions to slowly reveal before the group the many hidden ingredients necessary for a more inclusive and responsive judgment. If the questions are right, many participants will experience the process as an almost joyful series of surprises.

For instance, Fran is the part-timer in “Cosmic Bonding” who appears to be causing most of the difficulty. Her commitment to teaching seems limited, and Sue believes, in spite of the Dean’s recommendation, that Fran’s teaching skills are thin. As the apparent troublespot, Fran’s viewpoint may not get serious group attention. However, the question “What’s happening here from Fran’s standpoint?” will open several new windows – as well as hopefully improve Sue’s eventual judgment. The discussion can make one of casework’s most important points: Empathizing with others improves our decisions because it generates more relevant information. One revelation may be that Fran is not unprofessional as much as she is under stress and over-committed. And, as a part-timer, she is underpaid. Seeing how collaborative teaching appears to her (complemented by information gathered from the question, “And how does Sue view the situation?”) will reveal a fuller, richer picture and more clearly focus the key problems for resolution. Even though Sue may still cringe at the greater burden she carries and wish to forget Fran and charge off on her own, knowing more about Fran’s fragmented life and empathizing with her view will make their collaboration more probable. Your central challenge is this: Can
you design questions that will take surprising, revealing twists? Can you assist your group to see what they have not yet seen, to think what they have not yet thought? Can you keep track of agreements the group reaches, for instance in “Cosmic Bonding” about pay inequalities, where the case as written does not speak explicitly?

**Questions** Preparing a bank of inventive questions will go a long way toward a successful session. Some questions, though, are for immediate withdrawal – making up the probable session outline – while others are cash reserves for unproductive silences or exhausted topics. The questions at the end of cases in the Casebook will help, but, if you mentally dig into the underlying and hidden issues beforehand by living with the case yourself, you can write some others that track new territory and sometimes create productive disagreements. Diversity is the key. When the case discussion serves up a full, well-spiced menu of differing opinions, casework comes alive. If the dissent is well digested, the solutions will be more inclusive and satisfying. Here are several generic question types that can be used to shift the angle of vision and will be especially useful in revealing a case’s complexity at step one, the fact-gathering stage.

**DISCOVERY QUESTION TYPES**

1. **Shifting Character Viewpoints**

Focusing on another case character’s view can lead to new discoveries. In “Sarah’s Choice,” a question might be, “Now that we have looked at how frustrating the situation appears to Sarah, how does it appear to Sam?” (“Sam’s Problem,” a case that might be paired with “Sarah’s Choice,” develops Sam’s perspective more thoroughly.) Shifting among case characters is one of the most illuminating of the strategies because it forces empathic imagination and widens a sense of what matters in the case. Revelations from initially unsympathetic characters like Sam stretch the group mind. Empathizing with particular student voices may also be uncomfortable at first, but appreciatively developing an unsympathetic student character's view encourages faculty to expand their awareness of how students think, learn, and feel.

2. **Changing Abstraction Levels**

Preferring one abstraction level restricts a case discussion. In “Cosmic Bonding,” the question, “How does it appear to Fran?” may encourage only responses that are overly general and abstract. One way to avoid unrelieved high abstraction is to keep discovering material in the case text. “In what paragraph of the case did you find that?” is often a question that opens an overlooked doorway. Thinking about information-gathering in step 1, another strategy is to ask a concrete question directly about what a case character said or did. For instance during fact-gathering in step 1 in “Cosmic Bonding”: “When Fran replies, ‘Well, you know I’d love to, Sue, but I don’t have time to correct their English homework, or even the English on their biology homework. Besides, I think that’s your job,’ what might she be feeling and thinking?” Down the line, short of firing Fran, it seems a justifiable case solution will need to address her discomforts. Specific quotations from any of the cases can redirect and enliven the discussion – as will questions designed to veer away from the ground level of these details to the more general, abstract considerations. Depending on a faculty group’s learning preferences, discussion can get stuck in either the abstract or the concrete. A good discovery strategy is to cover both because introducing a less-preferred level will come as a surprise. For instance, in “Cosmic Bonding” the
abstraction level might be raised by asking: “How do Fran’s feelings relate to the general role she is playing in the team?”

3. Digging More Deeply

If given time and sometimes direction, faculty are often skilled at working beneath the surface. In “The Seminar Story,” rather than stop with listing the possible solutions in step 2, dig into a specific option by asking, “What are the benefits and shortcomings of option five, that the faculty leader not speak for the first 20 minutes of the session?” The more abstract question, “How do you assess the suggestion that the leader not speak for the first 20 minutes?” might elicit general advice and not reveal the specific downside (or the upside) of the option at all. A benefits-shortcomings question uses two shovels to move more soil. Using two, not one, is a key to digging more deeply. Making distinctions – even basic ones such as between benefits and detriments – introduces more enticing complexity and more careful consideration. What illuminating distinctions have you discovered in your teaching that might bring light for someone else during the case discussion? For instance, thinking of distinctions applied to “The Seminar Story,” are Leon’s functioning goals as reflected in his lecturing unconsciously at odds with the program’s public goals for seminars? Are the students more helped by their desire to be inspired than by Pat’s desire to participate? Is Pat in conflict with Leon who wants him and the seminar to know something while Pat wants to be able to do something?

4. Shifting Time Frames

Redirecting the group’s attention to a previous or subsequent time can prompt new discoveries or issues. In “Whose Agenda?” a question that connects with an earlier period might be, “What may have happened in the first two weeks of the course that influenced the general avoidance of conflict with Charles?” Even though such time travel may push beyond what the case explicitly describes, shifting to an earlier period turns attention to the social history, to a set of previous decisions, which the classroom conflict now echoes. Such looking backward connects to the possible causes of Charles’ outburst, to the major influences now disguised from view. Additionally, linking the first two weeks with the current class session promotes a more integrated, inclusive analysis and may reveal an important clue toward resolving the present conflict. It reveals as well how the group conceives of earlier causes or influences and their effects. In “Whose Agenda?” a review of the past can also raise generic questions about the importance of beginnings. Are the first two days of a new class as crucial as the first two minutes of a new relationship?

5. Another Intellectual Level

Bloom’s hierarchy of intellectual skills – or another similar, inclusive framework – suggests new landscapes by highlighting undiscovered approaches to a case. In “Julie’s Dilemma,” for instance, a question can move the discussion from solutions to applications: “What lessons from the case discussion might we apply to the institutionalization of learning communities at our college?” Or from analysis to evaluation: “Of the many issues we’ve listed that Julie faces, what is the most important one to deal with next? And why?” Cases are descriptions, reflecting one of Bloom’s crucial but, for our purposes, introductory levels. Because of its four-step structure, casework always moves to what in Bloom’s terms are the higher, more advanced levels of
analysis and evaluation. On the other hand, if the group’s ungrounded solution misses a case’s crucial descriptive facts, the discussion has advanced too quickly. Comprehensive frameworks such as the Bloom hierarchy and the questions they prompt help recognize and correct one-dimensional or imbalanced conversations.

6. Unexpected or Avoided Issues

Depending on the group, faculty may even avoid some issues that you know are key pieces to the larger puzzle. In “Sam’s Problem,” when Sam expresses indirect admiration for teachers who know “exactly what they are doing” and who have “control over the classroom,” what unexpected affective issues may be at stake for him? What if Sarah were to point them out to him as emotional blindspots? Sam or those reading the case might not suspect at first that emotion would be an issue for him. For those who expect it automatically, maybe it’s not. But from what do “control needs” spring, someone might ask? Raising affective issues here might open new doors. On the other hand, the conversation may avoid the legitimacy and effectiveness of structure in the classroom because “Sam obviously is obsessed with control.” The point is to linger with the case yourself long enough before the discussion to uncover what might be unexpected or avoided issues and to raise them if appropriate. And such planning may give you the joy of understanding a case at levels you won't have time in the actual session to share.

This is all to suggest that drawing from a range of question types expands the group’s envelope of attention and invites both exploration and novelty. In addition to being a boost to critical thinking, casework encourages fresh approaches to seemingly routine events. It can introduce faculty to “the creativity I never knew I had.” Organizing discovery questions along the path from problem identification, to solution review, through decision justification, and, finally, to application gives the session coherence and direction.

C. Recording strategies

**Boardwork** The actual discussion process is fluid and dynamic. We suggest you plan ahead for how newsprint or chalkboard summaries might focus, stabilize, and make public the group’s emerging mind – with all of its creative quirks. At one level, such a composite record of individual insights creates a powerful symbol of collaborative activity. At another level, it records hard-won group agreements for later reference rather than argument. Sometimes participants do the actual writing and erasing. Summaries that are faithful to the contributor’s words – even direct quotations – have a marked impact. In our field tests, for instance, faculty have noted that faithful board summaries symbolize an open, safe environment free of censorship and hidden agendas. What follows illustrates how such summaries might be integrated within a problem-solving format:
BOAR D W ORK FOR COMING TO JUDGMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions for Each Step</th>
<th>Potential Board Summaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. What is really happening?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the situation appear to each character?</td>
<td>List of descriptive words or key issues for each case character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do the different viewpoints compare?</td>
<td>List focused upon key disagreements as well as agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the key problem(s) or issue(s)?</td>
<td>List of suggested problems or issues which discussion clarifies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. What are the options?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can the judgment-maker learn from the other characters’ views?</td>
<td>List of lessons or concerns that might make the eventual judgment more inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What realistic solutions does the judgment-maker have?</td>
<td>List of options that survive criticism for being “impractical”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the costs and benefits of each solution?</td>
<td>List of options with benefits and shortcomings of each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. What is the judgment?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which solution is wisest and why?</td>
<td>Summary of “best” solution(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What values does the judgment(s) reflect?</td>
<td>Cluster of values underlying each judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What might the lessons for collaborative teaching and learning be?</td>
<td>A list of case implications or teaching principles that might be ranked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the key purposes of boardwork is to structure information for comparison. Eventually, vertical lists and two-category comparisons can no longer carry the weight of deeper analysis. Plotting information in a circle (or in some other shape) which allows closer comparison or displaying comments along a spectrum rather than in dualistic categories like “benefits” and “costs” will more fully illumine complex topics.

Although these suggestions give a good sense of case development and boardwork, don’t learn too much from them. Some may not work well in your situation, and the actual case discussion will thwart rigid agendas. Many leaders will write out only a list of case options or solutions, often with a way to note which ones the group eventually finds most defensible. Others who use breakout groups will have each generate their own boardwork, often at the case leader’s direction. However, straight jackets are never fashionable, and we know you will treat these suggestions as reliable but not mandatory. If any of our options inhibit lively exploration, use your own better ones. On one occasion during our field-testing, a painfully honest workshop participant complained that the boardwork and our general, stepped approach to case discussion was like a noose around his neck. Cases may be breathtaking, but we didn’t intend them to be life-threatening! Still, the persistent challenge is to combine open-ended, creative inquiry, which our workshop critic understandably wanted, with appropriate direction and a public record, which
is what he felt stifling. An equally difficult matter is to be sensitive to when boardwork focuses and improves the conversation and when it clogs and deadens it.

D. Process strategies

**Reaching** A bank of discovery questions gives direction and depth, but it does not address the pace of the discussion or the importance of follow-up. The current may be strong, the conversation unpredictable, but the goal is to stretch the group’s mind beyond expected destinations. Three strategies will foster success:

- LINGERING WELL
- EXPLAINING MORE
- ENCOURAGING DISAGREEMENT

Beginning with the first, a case discussion leader is always internally asking the question, “Does this topic still hold hidden insights or should we move along?” To linger well is to know how the imagination works and to hang out a bit. Invention may wait just on the other side of boredom or even apparent exhaustion, after everyone believes they can’t think of anything more useful to say. As some group workers claim, it is often after the second group silence that an arresting idea appears. The unanswerable question beforehand always is: Will the revelation be worth the wait? Unplanned quiet periods for free writing, alert daydreaming, or a silent bathroom break for everyone may indeed pry open an insight treasure chest. However, lingering well is not “just waiting.” It is standing silent long enough, but with a question powerful enough, to evoke originality.

**Explaining more** could also be called “explaining more than you are aware you know.” Much of significance may be beneath the surface of current attention. By stretching to explain ourselves, we engage those semi-conscious imaginative processes. The questions, “Would you say a little more about...?” or “Would you clarify what you mean by...?” (even or especially when the comment was already clear) are gifts. A question may be slightly unnerving, but it can provide an opportunity to stretch one’s way into new territory – to the individual’s and the group’s benefit. However, if you don’t skillfully follow up with an “explain more.” the opportunity will probably be lost. As Charles Derber has pointed out in his book *The Pursuit of Attention*, most conversation is devoted to expressing one’s own opinion, not to nurturing the unformed ideas of another. When you don’t intervene with an encouraging comment like, “I’m interested in what you mean by....,” conventional conversation patterns may dominate, and someone else will quickly break into the spotlight, leaving the first person as well as the group short of a discovery.

Since many people avoid conflict or do not know how to handle it productively, mentoring disagreement is the most volatile of the three stretching exercises. As a case leader, you know, however, that disagreement is required. Without such diversity, the case conversation goes flat, the solutions are less complex, and the final judgments less inclusive and more unrealistic. Since many groups will look away from conflict, you may need to name it to use it. For instance, “Whose Agenda?” raises fundamental questions about how the teacher’s role should change if faculty are going to collaborate meaningfully with their students. As the instructor, Ed is trying to be “quieter than ever” in class and to “allow student voices [to] develop around key issues.”
Charles seems to have taken up the invitation but now is dominating and polarizing the class. The question, “What should Ed have done earlier in the semester to avoid this situation?” will undoubtedly prompt disagreements. These differences of view can be used to reveal the complex balancing act between leading and listening that makes up collaboration and to underscore how formidable the shift to mature collaborative forms of learning can be. Although well intentioned, being “quieter than ever” about group process skills may derail effective collaboration among unskilled students, just as being louder than ever can dampen it after the skills have been learned.

How can disagreement and conflict become productive? The trick is to leverage the sparks between rival viewpoints to expand and deepen the consideration without fueling interpersonal animosities. An old sociological truism is that “we tend to dislike the people with whom we personally disagree.” A key strategy for breaking up that destructive pattern is to make the exchange less personal by:

1) moving the debate out into the group, and
2) letting everyone advance both sides, not just their initial position.

You might stop the debate momentarily, for instance, and add, “Terry, that’s an intriguing difference you’re having with Adrian. We can learn a great deal about collaboration at several levels, I think, by working with your disagreement. You just said that Ed has 'abdicated his responsibility' as teacher and hasn’t given the class any direction for how they should resolve conflicts like they’re having. And you said just before, Adrian, that the students have avoided their responsibility 'to allow all voices to be heard.' You added, too, that the class wouldn't have been truly collaborative if Ed had stepped in earlier in the term and 'exerted his authority' by setting up the rules. The teacher seems to play a different role in each of your collaborative classrooms. Let’s put your major concerns on two pieces of newsprint and have us all join the discussion by adding to the lists. Then we can see which insights we might take from each side to build a more complete understanding of collaboration.” Thinking of resources, David and Roger Johnson’s *Creative Controversy* is a masterful and amazingly practical handbook for working skillfully with disagreements like this. Essentially, you are applying what I have called the “shifting viewpoints” strategy to Terry and Adrian, but the Johnsons – who are leaders in the cooperative learning movement – take work with disagreements to the level of a teaching art form.

Orchestrating a case to benefit from conflict takes some nerve – and ability. It treats casework as a form of generative peacemaking. To benefit most from conflict, though, a case group needs to value dissent and be willing to linger with it. Lingering well, explaining more, and encouraging disagreement are actually overlapping strategies, and they call for a self-effacing leader who is willing to initiate the right follow-up questions for others to answer. Preplanning a case trajectory is a must, but insightful, on-the-spot follow-up is the case leader’s most effective tool. Most small groups left to their own devices don’t have it.

E. Applications to practice

*Applications* Do the insights from case discussion promote actual improvements? That is an open question. Some would say “not necessarily.” In working a case, we are experimenting with critical thinking, but, as Elizabeth Hawthorne suggests in her “Case Study and Critical
Thinking,” skill at case analysis need not transfer into the classroom or improve interpersonal relationships. As Wilbert McKeachie would say, learning is maddeningly “domain-specific.” A faculty case discussion about collaborative learning may not transfer out and become improved teaching the next day in a different setting. Yet, Judith Kleinfeld’s research, as Pat Hutchings reviews it in *Using Cases to Improve College Teaching*, offers hope. According to Kleinfeld, teacher-education students using the case method showed “significant gains” in “analyzing complex pedagogical situations” when compared with students who used “substantial discussion but not cases.” Rookie teachers who themselves wrote cases developed more complex and sophisticated reflections on teaching. But, again, do people who do casework and think more reflectively also become better teachers? It is not inspiring conversations or more complex thinking that we are after, as beneficial as they may be, but rather the improvement of learning in collaborative settings.

We don’t have a complete road map for this terrain, but we do know what our final destination should be. To nudge the discussion a bit closer to the practice of teaching – or to administering a program – and to build upon the enthusiasm that casework generates, we would suggest that you consciously reach for applications in the final period of the case session. Thinking of the classroom, “What has the case reminded you of that might improve your own teaching or the students’ learning next week?” is a good generic starting point. A specific method for uncovering applications – one that will appeal to the group’s different knowledge-creating styles – is to list six areas on an overhead for possible reply. They build upon the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a well-known psychological instrument for illumining personality preferences and represent questions that faculty with different learning preferences would ask in applying the case discussion to their teaching. If the case is primarily about administrative issues, the questions can easily be redirected in that direction.

1. Given what you've been thinking during the discussion, what is a *practical activity* you might try next week in your class?
2. What *new possibility* for designing next week’s classes do you see based on the case?
3. What *principle of good teaching* and learning does the case suggest that you want to re-emphasize next week?
4. Next week, again remembering the case issues, how could the educational *experience of students* be improved?
5. What *potential pitfall* does the case prompt you to avoid next week in class?
6. What is a *question remaining* from the case you would still like to explore next week?

Fifteen minutes for addressing application questions will work well, and don’t consider it wasted time. One of the most persistent reported benefits of faculty case discussions is the chance “to hear other people’s ideas” and “what they have tried.” Such sharing around applications can be started by having each participant choose from the list above and do a bit of free writing. A few volunteers might share what they have created. The written comments could also be later distributed or used to build the next meeting’s agenda. One or two people might be asked to briefly write up the results of their application afterwards for the newsletter, for a program discussion, or for a case they might write. And you might note a particularly ear-catching improvement where you’d like to call the person later to find out what happened. If you hear several people concerned about a similar topic, that may help set the program’s agenda for the next gathering or for grant-writing.
Although more time-consuming, dyadic interviews can also be effective. After pairs of participants interview each other about application possibilities, reports to the whole group can come from interview notes, from “what your colleague said to you” rather than from “what you told your colleague.” Mirroring another’s ideas often takes more mental muscle than repeating what you already know. To make the group conversation livelier, you might ask that the interview report be of “an intriguing idea that begs for more explanation,” “the most novel idea you heard,” or, in appropriate settings, “the suggestion you resist the most.” Rather than becoming an energy drain at the end of the session, interview reports like this can recharge the discussion and link it to practical, day-to-day practice. Recording the responses for later distribution to a casework network or developing a particularly puzzling question into a semester-long study group may also turn individual, even isolated case sessions into institutional processes.

F. Opening and closing

**Opening** What would you like the opening of your session to accomplish? “What you don’t want,” Pat Hutchings wisely advises, “is to begin on a flustered, uncertain note.” It is better to set the stage purposefully and with care. If the group is small enough, brief introductions all around that go beyond name, rank, and serial number will warm up the room for strangers, while colleagues familiar with each other might enjoy hearing what prompted people to attend. If it’s the first case meeting, it would be wise to note the advantages of casework and to describe how the group will benefit. Explaining what your role is and how it will complement the group is another good option, while being clear about the ending time will endear you to some. Having a sense of humor will endear you to everyone.

After reading the case, some may quickly decide what the central character should do to “solve” the presenting dilemma. You should deflect that rush to premature judgment by emphasizing how worthwhile casework uncovers surprising, at first veiled complexities. Reinforce the point with an example from your own discoveries in the case. Framing casework in this way as an unpredictable inquiry and underscoring the importance of doing the diagnosis before writing the prescription will set the appropriate tone. Then, after a comment about turning up the microscope’s resolution, you can take the first step with a well chosen question designed to find out what’s really happening in the case.

That means you might suggest a review of the case voices, beginning possibly with the least sympathetic character. This encourages imaginative empathy and echoes Barbara McClintock’s strategy in biogenetics for “leaning into the kernel.” In “Camp Stories – Part I,” for instance, an entry might be, “So much of what’s happening in the case depends on the viewpoint. Would someone be willing to take on Pat’s voice and describe the issues, disagreements, and general situation as she might understand them? Including how she might see Denny and the Chair.” Others in the group can add to Pat’s view from their reading. Assuming that Pat represents one side, next add Denny’s perspective by asking a similar question. Or cut to the problems to be solved by asking what Pat and then Denny want changed. A newsprint or board summary of each character’s answers side-by-side will make it easier to work out a solution when you get to it in step 2 and 3 which is agreeable to both. A final judgment on the case will be hard to justify if either side is ignored. Notice, though, that most groups, even after an analysis like this at step 1,
will still later leapfrog at step 2 to potential solutions which do not directly address or incorporate a key character’s concerns, even though they were spread out plainly during fact-gathering in step 1. That’s a very intriguing oversight usually worth noting, and it’s only one of many provocative issues in decision making you will discover as the group works through a case. If you open by amplifying several case voices, you and the group will also be surprised at how varied is the ability to empathize and look through another’s eyes.

**Closing** What are your purposes in closing the session? Whatever you have planned, make it short. If the group is sufficiently diverse, the case will not neatly conclude with one common judgment. Neither will the work applications in step 4 reveal a clear pattern. Still, asking someone to summarize the session or holding out ten minutes for a lengthier debriefing can provide a good sense of temporary closure. One of the best ways to end, however, is to name explicitly the good things that happened. An enduring complaint from students who hate discussions is, “They’re a waste. I never get any notes.” Without tangible notes and with the rewards of good conversation largely kept private or subconscious, you would do well to call attention to the group’s accomplishments and to the benefits of collaborative analysis. One of the most visible items to applaud is the boardwork and the surprising creativity it symbolizes. In addition to being an empirical, common record of the group’s ingenuity, it is testimony to the larger and underplayed fact that groups can create greater diversity and more insight than single individuals working alone. Someone may even recognize how your unseen background planning and ability to lead without getting in the way served the group well. Another blessedly simple ending strategy is to pinpoint and to applaud the ideas you did not conceive yourself and ask a few others to do the same. Whatever you choose, casework best demonstrates the power of learning communities when its interpersonal contributions are recognized.

A second element worth naming is how good collaboration can lead to increased appreciation. Although it is part of the glue that holds people together, thanking is a lost art. We don’t publicly appreciate each other’s contributions enough – or in a manner that is actually rewarding to the recipient. Yet, because of the discussion’s variety and richness, many people may leave the session not only more appreciative of their colleagues’ insight but emotionally closer to them as well – no small fringe benefits. These benefits may not be widely shared, however, if they are left publicly unnamed. You might set aside several minutes for the group to express its appreciation to each other for specific contributions. Expressing thankfulness often fosters it. In many cases, you will be simply drawing out what has already been privately thought. And, as a session leader, you can also promote future discussions by typing a selection of the most memorable boardwork for distribution, along with a well-chosen article on an important issue that the case conversation uncovered.

**Regards** Preparation for the session will do wonders in assuring success. Yet, the richness of experience participants bring to a case and the keenness of their judgment will carry your own preparation long distances – especially if you prepare key questions ahead of time and have a talent for follow-up exploration, too. We hope this iteration of the *Washington Center Casebook on Collaborative Teaching and Learning* helps to evoke continuing reflection on collaborative education as well as on the institutional relationships that support it. Our students will learn more skillfully and more enthusiastically as a result. Echoing what Ernest Boyer has said in his *Scholarship Reconsidered*, you are an important part of the larger effort across the country to strengthen teaching practice and the scholarship of collaboration.
Selected Written Resources


Selected Electronic Sources

Herreid, Clyde Freeman. “DON'T! What Not to Do When Teaching Cases.”
http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/projects/cases/teaching/dont.html

Herreid, Clyde Freeman. “Return to Mars: How Not to Teach a Case Study.”
http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/projects/cases/teaching/mars.html

PEW Charitable Trust’s Case Teaching in Science Project: National Center for Case Study Teaching in Science at SUNY, Buffalo.
http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/projects/cases/case.html

PEW Charitable Trust’s Problem-Based Learning Project: Samford University.
http://www.samford.edu/pbl/pbl_main.html
Whose Agenda?

A main focus of the five-credit humanities course was on learning and ways of knowing. It was a new course in the curriculum, and ideas of student-centered learning were important concepts in the course. One of the goals of the course was to create an atmosphere of student involvement where students will actively take charge of their learning, assuming responsibility for the humanities class and the other classes in which they are enrolled. Using techniques which gave students responsibility in the classroom, the class was designed to provide opportunities for students to raise these concerns around issues of their own learning from methods of teaching to books read for a class.

One of the texts was *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky et. al. When selecting the text, Ed, the instructor thought that the book seemed “perfect” to examine a framework of learning and also expose students to narratives concerning a variety of people’s histories as learners. Ed was an experienced instructor who had used seminars for quite a few years and included introductions to seminar and methods of seminaring at the beginning of many of his classes, including this one. However, for this class, he wanted to try to be “quieter than ever” and, in keeping with the theme, allow student voices to develop around key issues in the class.

During the second and third weeks of the quarter, students were given the assignment to prepare group presentations of the first seven chapters from the book, which covered the scheme of learning presented in the book.

When the book was first introduced and the assignment of the presentations made, a student, Charles asked, “This isn’t one of those books about feminism, is it?”

Charles was a man about 26 years old who had a blonde, handlebar mustache, and often sat in the back of the class wearing a long, brown leather coat and leather cowboy hat sort of pulled down over his forehead. The male instructor considered begging the question and beginning a discussion about how members of the class defined “feminism.” However, the question from Charles came at the end of the class’s time period. Also, Ed had a feeling that this particular hourly section of the class would need some preparation in the form of background reading to have a valuable discussion on the topic.

So the instructor said, “This book covers many topics. One of the reasons I selected it as a text was because I considered its applications for learning to be universal. In your group work, as you report on the first seven chapters, use the time to explore agreements and disagreements with the text. We want to explore what the text means to you as we look at its focus on learning and knowing.”

Other schemes of development were covered as the students prepared their presentations, including Perry’s work at Harvard. Ruth, a thin woman in her mid-thirties who was working toward a degree in Social and Human Services while moving through some tough procedures in court to adopt a ward, asked why a study with such a limited number of subjects could be applied as universal. The class spent some time on this point, the instructor agreeing with Ruth that
Perry’s “he,” accepted readily as universal, did not include as large a segment from different economic backgrounds as did “she” in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*.

This point was emphasized, but seemed to make little difference to some in the class. When introductory reading began in the book, some of the men seemed to share Charles’s adverse reaction. A row of seven to eight sullen men, chairs backed up to the back wall of the classroom, formed daily.

While students were working to prepare their presentations, people were shifted into different groups, so the line at the back was broken up during those times. However, the group of men did retain a mumbling, troubled mood.

During this time, Charles raised his hand and said, “This book seems prejudiced to me. I can’t really identify with the examples because it prejudges all men.”

“Your presentations would be a good time to examine different views of the book from within your group. Feel free to cover both things you agree with and disagree with about the book,” he told Charles and the class.

The presentations, though, did not reveal any of the discontent. Nevertheless, after they were over, again the sullen row formed in the back of the class.

“We’ll look today at Chapter 8 and the book as a whole,” the instructor announced, “but as we planned, we will hold a seminar discussion. Let’s form a circle.”

The circle was formed, and the instructor felt he was on a tightrope of sorts. He wanted to get the issue on the table so that it could be addressed, but was concerned that there might be a verbal flood of whining once the discontent was uncorked. If there was such a flood, he hoped students in the class would address it, since he thought it would not be particularly valuable for him to “rush to the rescue.” From their presentations and writing, he knew that some students in the class were ready to defend the book against various criticisms.

With some concern, the instructor began, “Well, was anyone bothered by anything about the book? What could be changed?”

Ruth raised the question of family in the book being only defined as “mother and father.” She said the current family structure was not like that of families of the women in the generation(s) being interviewed.

A few men in the class used this as a segue into the issue of the book being one-sided and not having their viewpoint. Soon the men in the class dominated the agenda, and the book was being roasted on the grounds Charles had raised earlier.

The instructor argued with himself about whether to step in and press his agenda. The women in the class were now silent. Some were glancing at each other with a look that Ed interpreted as, “Well, here we go again.”
The instructor worried that he had helped to stifle comments by raising the idea of objections to the book. Also, he knew that anyone in a position of being oppressed must pick and choose their battles. Maybe a five-credit humanities class was not worth the effort. On the other hand, he thought that if he handled the attack and no one else spoke, nothing was being gained in terms of students building their own connected voices, an important theme in the book and in the class. The 50 minute class had 25 minutes left.
Whose Agenda?

Discussion Questions

• What are the issues here concerning teaching and learning?
• What do you suppose Charles is thinking, or the other men who sat in the back?
• What might Ruth be thinking? What do you suppose other women in the class are thinking?
• How do you think the instructor sees what is going on?
• What should the instructor do next?
• Suppose the class ended on this note?
• What differences would it make if this occurred during the eighth week as opposed to during the third week?
• What are some ways to think about student-centered learning in the light of this case?
Whose Agenda?

Case Field Notes

“Whose Agenda?” has been field tested many times. Our experience suggests that the case is best discussed with facilitator and a recorder, as leaderless groups do not as effectively or rapidly probe the depths of this case. What has worked best to provoke a rich discussion is for the group to first focus on the “issues” and refrain from discussing “solutions” initially. Faculty in all of the field testing tended to begin by criticizing the teacher, and making suggestions about what he (Ed) should do or should have done. The facilitator can keep reminding the groups to focus, not on the individuals in the case, but on the issues.

When small groups have identified issues and are reporting them to the large group, they are put on the board or on butcher block paper and posted in clear view. This helps participants remember them in the next small group discussion when they are asked to examine these issues through the various perspectives of Ed, Charles, Ruth, then the silent students. The point of this stage of the discussion is to better understand each character and what might be motivating them. Repeatedly returning to the text of the case is a useful way to focus discussion on the evidence/clues at hand. At this point, participants often demand more information about each player. A reminder here is that we often find ourselves in situations such as these when we know even less, yet we act or react. While it’s always better to have more information, for the sake of discussion, we can continue.

The most satisfying discussions of this case are those that spend the last twenty-five minutes focusing on what can be done. This brings participants back to those solutions they were listing at the beginning, and many discover that after looking at the issues from various perspectives, the solutions are not as simple as they appeared at the onset. Many groups initially blame the teacher for what looks like a bad lesson plan and the usual solution is that he should have structured it better so that no apparent conflict took place. Eventually the discussion turns towards a more complex analysis of the dynamics of the situation, the potentially productive role of conflict, and the ambiguities and tensions inevitably involved in student-centered instruction.

Issues which generally emerge are:
- the meaning of student-centered instruction
- power struggles between students and teacher
- choice and presentation of materials
- gender clashes
- student and faculty responsibilities

When moving into the final part of the discussion when options are presented and put on the board, the facilitator can help the group be more precise and concrete in their suggestions. For example, when a participant suggests that “building community needs to take place in this classroom,” encourage the speaker to say how. The value in this part of the discussion is the sharing of techniques used by participants to accomplish goals. Another suggestion for the last ten minutes is to put participants in Ed’s place with ten minutes of class time left. What would they do if they were Ed?
The Seminar Story

As a senior transfer student with a new found interest in wildlife biology and not much formal education in the sciences, I entered the college feeling that the best course of action would be to get my feet wet in an introductory level coordinated studies program. Nonetheless, I was a well-seasoned student and looking for a challenging program with students and faculty members who shared my passions for biology and education. The program I entered was geared towards lower division students with an interest in environmental sciences. For the seminar component of the program, the large class of 50 students was divided into three groups, with one of the three faculty members assigned to each group.

A few weeks into the program, I expressed concerns to my seminar leader Ted, who also happened to be the coordinating member of the team. I explained to Ted my feelings that the seminar was becoming stagnant and a bit on the lazy side. Attendance was dropping, and many students were clearly not reading the assigned books.

Ted said, “I think your concerns are valid, Pat. In fact, Leon and Steve (the other two members of the team) and I spoke the other day about the seminar format and decided to make some changes. Why don’t you wait until next lecture and we’ll put it to the group.”

The following week after lecture, Ted announced to the entire program that the faculty members had decided to rotate the seminar leaders in order to change the “chemistry” of the groups, and allow the students to encounter different faculty members’ perspectives. Leon, one of the other professors, would be my seminar group’s new leader. This sounded like a great idea to me. From what I had gathered in an entertaining lecture, Leon was always excited and seemed to have a huge wealth of knowledge and experience. After lecture, some of my classmates and I were chatting casually about this change. Everyone seemed excited by the idea.

The next day, I entered the seminar room eager to discuss the reading, Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*, and see if any changes would occur in the seminar process. I was excited to relate Leopold’s ideas about natural history to the overall theme of the class, the rain forest’s environment. I sat down and waited for the rest of the students and Leon.

Leon started, “Why don’t we begin by listing points of interest from the book.” Immediately, many of my classmates began to express a dissatisfaction with the book.

“Well, what bothered you?” Leon said. Norma, from across the room, stated, “Leopold was boring, and draggy. And besides, what does this book have to do with the rain forest anyway?” Other students uttered similar feelings.

I couldn’t believe it! I was certain that this book would bring about an interesting seminar discussion. But at least Leon was there. He would bring new insights to the seminar.

Everyone seemed to be waiting for Leon to take charge. I too expected Leon to jump right in. We were all interested in hearing his comments. Leon closed his book and placed it on the floor.
beside his chair. He began to tell us about his own experiences as an observer of natural history while following the migratory paths of the monarch butterfly in Mexico during the early nineteen seventies.

Everyone showed an interest, and Leon continued, “It was a once in a lifetime experience. It was common knowledge that monarchs migrated south for the winter, but no one knew where they went. The discovery of their congregating in huge flocks was stupendous.”

Almost everyone around the room was amazed, but I began to feel frustrated. Leon continued his story about his journey to Mexico and promised to bring in slides for his next lecture. Leon’s monologue turned in many directions and eventually it came to a topic related to the book.

He posed a question: “So, what do you think Leopold was trying to say?”

Now quiet, the room filled with silence – no response. I wanted to say something, but I felt that my question about Leopold was so pedestrian compared to the expertise of Leon.

After what seemed to be the longest twenty seconds ever, Leon uttered, “Well, Leopold was trying to say...” His self-answering soon took off into yet another long-winded story. Everyone was riveted. The story and the story-telling were so good.

Eventually, the two hours allotted for the day’s seminar were just about over. Leon quickly rose from his seat and left. Stephen, one of the obviously more excited students in the class, turned to Norma and said, “God, I can only hope to know as much as Leon. He’s so brilliant!”

Norma responded, “Yeah, and what a great lecturer.”

I broke in and said, “How can you be satisfied with today’s seminar? We didn’t even talk about the book for two minutes. And Leon did all the talking!”

Stephen turned and said, “We can read and talk about the book anytime. I want to hear about our professors’ experiences.”

Frustrated, I left the room to go home. Later that evening, my roommate and I were discussing my disappointment with Leon and the seminar. “Keith, what do you suggest I do?”

“Why don’t you go and talk with Ted your old seminar leader. Wasn’t he helpful last time you went to see him?”
The Seminar Story

Discussion Questions

- What are Leon’s strengths as a teacher?
- What is Leon’s role as a seminar leader, and why would he not want to change?
- What did Ted, Leon, and Steve talk about during their meeting?
- Based on their solution, what did they see as the problem?
- What does Pat, the narrator, see as a great seminar?
- How could the seminar be made more effective?
Class Decision

Francine is a shy but dedicated student in a course with twenty-four students and one faculty member. This is her first quarter in a comparative religions course and she has trouble making sense of the reading. On the first day of class, when everyone was introducing themselves, she was embarrassed about her thin background in religion and her lack of seminar experience in comparison to the other students. Now, several weeks into the course, Francine is starting to comprehend the readings better, but still feels that the seminar is difficult to follow. The conversation changes so quickly that she can never seem to find the appropriate moment to throw in her ideas. Even more frustrating are the times when she begins to speak and someone else jumps in – she can’t get a word in edgewise.

She talks with a friend from outside the class who says, “Why don’t you try splitting the seminar into two groups. It would give you more space and a chance to participate in the seminar. In fact, in my last seminar we tried splitting, and everyone thought it worked quite well.”

At the beginning of that week’s seminar, during the fourth week of the quarter, Francine knows what she must do.

Francine’s classmates are chit-chatting casually at the beginning of the seminar. Francine blurts out, “What do you all think of us splitting up into two groups and seeing how it goes?” A few people, including her faculty member Tom, turn and look in Francine’s direction, but continue to talk. Francine, almost shouting now, says, “Let’s see a show of hands of all those who want to try splitting!”

Harold, a student across the room, doesn’t raise his hand but states, “Well,... if you really want to split, I kinda guess I’ll go with that.” No one else speaks and the seminar begins in the usual manner.

Francine, now frustrated, talks to some of the quieter students after class about her idea and the classes’ reaction to it. “Jeanette, do you think we should split the seminar? You told me last week that you thought something needed to change, and that not enough students, including yourself, participate in the discussion.”

Jeanette responded, “I think it’s a good idea but it seemed as if nobody else supported the idea.”

Francine says, “Well listen, I’ll go and talk with Tom in his office about the matter and we should both talk to some of the others and get some support for our next meeting.”

Later that afternoon Francine went to talk with Tom in his office. “Tom, I really think that many of the students want to split up and try seminaring with smaller groups. What do you think?”

Fatherly, Tom responds, “Listen Francine, the seminar is the time that students get to run the show. It’s not my place to make you all split up. Why don’t you either wait until everyone wants to do it, or better yet, talk with some of your classmates and try to get some support.”
“I’ve done that and the people I’ve talked with like the idea.”

Quickly, Tom says, “Great. So bring it up again at the beginning of next week’s seminar.”

On Tuesday, at the beginning of seminar, Francine gathered herself up carefully and posed the question: “I think that it would be a good idea to split the seminar in half in order to allow more people to participate.” One of the more domineering students, Vincent, immediately snapped, “Look, I know what you’re implying, but the problem isn’t the students who are participating. You quiet students should just speak up. I like the seminar this size. If we split, then half of us will miss what the other half is talking about; and where would Tom go?” Francine looked around the room for some assistance from her classmates and Tom, but no one looked her way. Stony silence.
Class Decision

Discussion Questions

- What are Francine’s options now?
- How might Francine organize support?
- What is the nature of Francine’s problem?
- How does Vincent view Tom’s role?
- Is Tom’s role as conceived by Vincent a productive one for the seminar?
- Is Vincent’s view of this role productive for the seminar?
- What are Tom’s motivations in playing the role he does?
Seminar Story and Class Decision

Case Field Notes

These two cases were written by a student who spent a quarter observing seminar interaction. They either can be used as a pair or as single cases. Since these cases reflect student observations about some of the dynamics of seminars, we think they are especially appropriate for student discussion as well as faculty discussion.

They were field tested by fairly experienced faculty, some of whom easily dismissed them with the observation that the “teacher needs training.” When working these cases with faculty groups, a facilitator might ask how that training might be done, in order to help the group reflect on how easy it is to say what should be done vs. the difficulty in outlining the steps required. A provocative and specific question could center on how such training might be designed and implemented and why it often doesn’t take place. We suggest that at least an hour be allowed for thorough discussion of each case, with “Class Decision” being discussed before “A Seminar Story.” It is also useful to consider the questions which are posed at the end of each case, and have the group concentrate first on the issues raised by the case, then various points of view of the principal characters, before coming to options or solutions.

Issues that surfaced during the discussion were:

- various ways of conducting seminars
- teacher training for seminars
- student training for seminars
- group formation
- communication to students of faculty goals
- differences in student developmental levels
- differences in teacher/student styles
The Group That Wasn’t

As far as Jill was concerned, English 201 had begun in a very strange way. The assignment for the second day of class was to bring a copy of that morning’s newspaper, and when class began the teacher told the students to gather in groups of five. Jill found herself looking at four strange faces. “Look through the paper and choose one company that is mentioned in an editorial or news article,” they were instructed. ‘Your group’s task will be to write a single research paper on a strength or weakness of that company. I expect everyone in every group to participate fully in every step of the research process, and while we will discuss the research process in class, much of your learning will come from each other. Some of you are probably old hands at research papers, and others may never have written one, but I want you to learn a process that even the old hands may never have been through, and the best way you can do that is in a hands-on exercise with the help of other people. You will be graded on this project. You will also do an individual research paper, and this group project is your chance to gain experience in the company of others before you solo.”

A business paper in an English class? The teacher explained that he had chosen that assignment because the sample research paper in their text dealt with a business, but it still seemed strange and a little scary to Jill. She had no interest at all in business, and while she knew that 201 focused on the research paper, she had expected lots of help and direction from the teacher, not some group project. This was her second quarter in college, and the only writing she’d done was for English 101. Still, she was eager to learn how a research paper was written, and she thought there might be something to this idea of group members teaching and learning from each other, though she didn’t much like the thought that other people’s work would influence her grade. She also had trouble visualizing her role in the group.

Almost before she knew it, two of the group members had chosen a company, and when the others seemed to agree, Jill murmured her assent. The two who seemed to lead the group, Kathleen and Tom, were apparently experienced and capable writers, sure of what they were supposed to do in the library and sure of how a research paper ought to be written. They were especially knowledgeable about the subject as well, for they were returning students, people who had worked in the business world for several years before entering college. Further, they were both in their junior year and had both written papers for classes other than English classes. Jason was about Jill’s age and, like Jill, had never done any library research before.

Jason didn’t seem to feel at all confident about his writing ability, but he also seemed ready to let Kathleen and Tom do most of the work. He was much more concerned with his grade in the class than with whether he learned how to write a research paper. The fifth group member was about 35, had just changed jobs, and had yet to get his work schedule and child care arrangements straightened out. He wasn’t sure he could attend every day and thought he might even have to drop the class. Jill wasn’t even sure of his name.

On the day scheduled for library orientation, Kathleen and Tom skipped the session, going instead to the main section of the library to use the computerized indexes and build a working bibliography, and at their next group meeting they handed Jill and Jason an assignment: “Get
these three books and take notes on them. Since what’s-his-name isn’t here, we might as well just divide his work among us.” “Wait a minute,” Jill had protested; “I don’t even know how you got the names of these books. Could one of you show me?” “Look,” Tom said, “I barely have time to do my school work as it is. If you didn’t learn it from the librarian, I don’t have time to teach you. I just want to get this paper out of the way.” Kathleen was kinder, but the message was the same. Jason seemed pleased that his job had been made so simple.

So Jill struggled with books and notecards, trying to make sense out of the handbook’s instructions on notetaking, trying to make sense out of the books she’d been assigned, and trying to work the library’s computers to see how Kathleen and Tom had found their information. Because of their schedules, the only time they could meet as a group was when the teacher gave them class time, and in every group meeting, it seemed that Kathleen and Tom were at least two steps ahead of her. Before she knew it, she was reading a rough draft that they had written.

As the due date for the paper approached, Jill made an appointment with the instructor. “It seems like I’m being left out of this and I’m not learning anything,” she said. “I want to contribute something to this paper, but it seems like this is going to be a paper written by two people. When I want to put my ideas in, they say, ‘Oh, this is the way it needs to be done,’ and my ideas get ignored. The paper is almost due and I don’t think I’ve learned anything.”
The Group That Wasn’t

Discussion Questions

• What are the issues in this case?

• Put yourself in the position of each of the characters. What are you thinking or feeling?

• What might the parties – teacher, group members, other classmates – have done to make this a productive learning experience? Is it too late to salvage anything from this experience? Or is it already a productive learning experience that should be left alone?
The Group That Wasn’t

Field Notes

An earlier version of this case has been used twice with English 201 students as an introduction to some of the pitfalls in group work. Having the students identify the issues (and listing them on the board as they do so) seems valuable in that students often articulate problems they have encountered in other groups and find that many in the class have shared those experiences. This helps students understand that while they may feel alone in their problems, they are not alone.

Asking them to empathize with the parties in the case seems to lead to some thoughtful responses to the question about what should have been or might still be done.

Sometimes students in groups that encounter problems after having worked this case are quicker to discuss the problems with their group members or with the instructor than they have been in times past, and being able to compare themselves with, say, Jill or Kathleen makes it easier for them to initiate a conversation.
The Collaboration Conundrum

When Jeannette arrived for the appointment she had requested, Ann was surprised by the anxiety that Jeannette seemed to be experiencing. She wondered whether the decision she and Mario had made to both be present for all student appointments had been a good decision. Maybe meeting with two instructors created unnecessary stress for students or at least for this student.

Mario was also surprised by Jeannette’s apparent anxiety. During the first three weeks of the quarter, Jeannette had appeared to be a student who was both capable and self-confident. She made thoughtful contributions to class discussions and seemed comfortable both asking questions and bringing up points that differed from those of her peers. But in this situation, she was clearly uncomfortable.

Hoping to give Jeannette whatever time she needed to express her concerns, Ann asked her how things were going this quarter.

But Jeannette was ready to come right to her point. With stern resolve in her voice, she said, “I can’t do this group project.”

Resisting the urge to say, “Oh, I’m sure you can,” Mario instead asked, “What part of this project seems to be insurmountable right now?”

“No one else in the group understands the task,” Jeannette began. “We haven’t had one meeting with everyone who is supposed to be in our group. Lee has not been to any of the meetings, and both Margaret and Tina have missed more than one.”

“It sounds to me like it might be time to look at your group contract,” Ann offered. “What did you include in the contract about attendance?” Jeannette looked exasperated. “We don’t have a group contract. Lee and Tina and Margaret just thought we should all do our best and be understanding about missing meetings. We don’t have a regular meeting time or a hypothesis for our research project on anxiety disorders either. And no one else in this group has had the research paper class or even college composition. I need an ‘A’ for this course, and I don’t want my grade to be lower because I’m working with students who don’t get it – or just don’t care. I don’t have time to do it all myself, but I don’t know what else to do. I just want to do my own work and get my own grade.”

“I understand what you’re saying,” Mario said as he picked up the course syllabus. “But as you know from this syllabus, this class has an SP designation. That means that we will be using speech skills – in this case interpersonal and group skills – as ways to work with the concepts of abnormal psychology and fiction. One of our goals for this project is that you develop your abilities to work collaboratively.”

“We know that working in groups can be very frustrating,” Ann added. “But we believe that you will learn more by working together than by working alone.”
“I don’t see what I can learn from anyone in my group,” Jeannette replied. “And I think I have good interpersonal skills. I’ve been in the work world for 20 years. I work with the public 20 hours a week or more right now. And I have raised a family.”

“They certainly didn’t expect to have to accommodate other students when I signed up for this course. Right now I’m working extra flights for the airlines and my daughter has just moved into my home with her two-year old son. I really don’t think I can accommodate anyone else.” By now, Jeannette was in tears.

Struggling with what to say or do next, Ann picked up the syllabus that Mario had looked at. Among the learning outcomes listed on the syllabus were at least three that the group project was intended to address:

To develop an appreciation for the complexity of causes of abnormal behavior and experience greater empathy through discussing case studies as well as works of fiction.

To work effectively in groups of various sizes to accomplish various tasks.

To apply interpersonal and writing skills to group research paper.

Ann looked from the syllabus to Mario and asked, “Mario, do you think that you and I need to spend some time discussing this in our planning meeting today? “I don’t think so, “Mario replied. “I think that Jeannette and her group need to work this out.”
A Matter of Right and Wrong

Part 1: The situation

Some years ago I taught at a small private school. Most of the students were first generation college enrollees. The institution fostered a climate of rethinking in which we examined our curriculum and enumerated the kinds of student outcomes we wanted to achieve. The faculty was flush with ideas but frustrated by administrative signals which alternately flashed “Go” and “Stop” when it came to their implementation. Several faculty became thoroughly confused as to whether the administration really wanted change or not.

The Business Division chair was not personally interested in teaching in my program which had four faculty members. Moreover, he divided faculty between “workers” and “queen bees.” Researchers were the “queens” while the rest were “workers,” designated to take up the slack for the queens by teaching an unbelievably large number of students with far too many contact hours. This contributed to the drift within the Business Division which enabled students to graduate without effective writing, speaking, quantitative or collaborative skills.

One of the problems facing our program was that we had too few staff for the number of options we offered. The business program had a largely non-functional health administration specialization in the catalog. There were various alternatives for reform. Among others, we could pursue a more general route or develop this more focused concentration which would take advantage of the college's health sciences programs. Alternatively, if we chose general business education, what should be emphasized?

I felt the time was ripe for an attempt to empower students and I thought our curriculum issues were a perfect vehicle to do so. I convinced the chair that I should teach the senior seminar. Rather than run a simple subject-oriented seminar as had been past practice, I decided that I would turn the class into a collaborative research project that would culminate in student recommendations for curricular improvement. I hoped that students would use this seminar as an opportunity to take charge of their own learning and to integrate research with team-work. My colleague, Deb, advised against my course of action. She told me that she had learned from experience that our students were not prepared for this kind of responsibility. I took this as a personal challenge to show that our students could, if given proper support and encouragement, demonstrate their capacity to do responsible work.

At the first class meeting, I told a wary group what they were about to embark upon. I explained that education was more than memorization and that in this class they could actually accomplish something significant, something they could be proud of. Carlos, in the back of the room, looked down and smiled as if to say, “Yea, sure.” Kirsty and Ellen giggled and rolled their eyes at each other. Kevin, my computer jock and stalwart student, breathed it all in. It was an okay start, but I was going to have to do more to win them over. I knew that these students had never been taken seriously at this college. Their input was not sought nor respected. When I got Kevin on the campus committee for computer planning it created a precedent that was not warmly greeted. But worse than not being taken seriously our students had rarely been challenged. As a
consequence they wrote poorly, seemed unsure of themselves, and lacked perspectives that graduating seniors should have.

The tides in the class ebbed and flowed. One day I thought I had them with me, the next day I was sure I had lost them. Repeatedly, one student or another asked me what we were going to do, as if they did not really believe that we could pull this off. I tried to impress them with the importance of their activity. I could have measured the rise in George’s eyebrows when I told the class that the administration would be given a written copy of their report and that there would be a public forum in which to present their findings.

After brainstorming, we laid out a preliminary blueprint of what had to be done. I asked what kinds of information we would need and how we could get it. Some of the students volunteered to research how other college business programs were organized. Others agreed to survey our students to find our what they liked and what they disliked about the present program. Still, others would interview the administration and faculty to find out their views.

As the weeks went by Kirsty, Ellen, and Carlos often seemed bemused. I didn’t know why. Didn’t they get it or didn’t they really believe there were other ways to run a business program? Innovations in education were important. Didn’t they think that schooling could be different. We had class discussions on what was going on elsewhere and why. We talked about the general kinds of reforms which were taking place on campuses like Hampshire and Atlantic College – colleges where students evaluated themselves and helped define their own curriculums. We talked about internships and about running a club to gain business experience.

The talk was fine, but I felt their work was dragging. It came in only very slowly if it came in at all. Although they were seniors, most of the students had never really done a major research project. I took them down to the library and had the librarian show them how to look up periodicals and find information. We talked about the team process and the demands new types of work places were creating. When the students researching business alternatives reported that their findings were slim, we talked about organizations that might have made recommendations for educational reform. They listened and spoke, but they didn’t seem to connect with the idea that they were going to have to find materials that were not in the library. The students were not taking charge of this project the way I hoped. When they floundered they did not get back to me. Perhaps, I shouldn’t have been surprised when their written work failed to arrive on time, I wondered if the project was not, as Deb indicated, too ambitious? Had I set expectations so high that they did not feel comfortable consulting me outside of class on how and where to proceed? And their initial steps didn’t seem very successful. Although one group had met with the president of the college, they were not satisfied with the answers they got. They were now hesitant to schedule an interview with the financial officer but they did not tell me.

Finally, I decided it was time for a heart-to-heart. I talked about how important it was not to be a passive learner. I talked about learning by doing. I talked about responsibility. I talked. Suddenly Kirsty got up and stormed out of the room. She was totally frustrated. She’d been working on the statistical survey and she hadn’t gotten much cooperation from her group. When we talked about the kinds of questions she could ask and measurements we could make, I tried to help, but it I wanted her to do more on her own and to work out the problems she had with her
group. I gathered from her friend Ellen, that Kirsty had been talking to Deb, the professor with whom she was closest, but Deb could not be particularly supportive of our project as, in fact, she believed it was hopelessly ambitious. Kirsty wouldn’t talk to me for two weeks.

Pushing and prodding, I finally managed to get a written report from the various subgroups two weeks before the end of the class. They were poorly written and weakly researched. The statistics from the survey did not actually support the conclusions the students reached. Still the work was something, and I decided I had to go with it, so I read it and made suggestions for improvements. We talked about the forum in which the students would make their oral report and started to get ready for it.

In the meantime, the dean of the college was invited to talk to the class about the administration’s plans for the business program. He addressed the class in a mature manner. However, the school was in the midst of its seemingly perpetual budgetary crisis and consequently, the Dean was not in position to reassure the students that the college could even continue to support the present program, never mind expand and energize it. Members of the class asked a few questions and seemed to appreciate having had the opportunity to speak with a high official from the college. Still, the news had an unsettling effect upon the class. I overheard Ellen say to Kirsty “I knew they wouldn’t listen to us.”

When the final week came the students were to make their report. I felt like I was pulling teeth. George and Carlos came in late. Several students were absent. The team leaders were recalcitrant about rewriting their reports to make them stronger and more coherent. When it came time to set up the final presentation, no one volunteered. Carlos said he would be out of town. Joe said he had to work on the day of the presentation. Ellen also, told me that she could not make it. All this in a class of 14 students!

I went home with a knot in my stomach the day before the presentation. It was apparent to me that they just did not care. At the same time they had a slipshod piece of work they going to present in a public forum which would yield them a level of authority they did not seem to appreciate. I was totally depressed. The students had created a study of the institution which had little research grounding or validity. I didn’t mind that report was critical, but I wanted it to be valid. What could I do? Should I let them present the work and discredit themselves, or should I revoke the platform I had created?
A Matter of Right and Wrong

Part 2: What happened?

After I had thought about the matter for a while, I decided it was best to call off the public presentation. After all, they just didn’t care. The students had not taken ownership of their report. They had not earned the right to make this presentation. The next day, knowing I would not see them before the class time when they were scheduled to make their address, I posted a note indicating that the presentation was canceled.

That evening, at an end of the year party, most of the students acted as if nothing much had happened. I explained, that I would take responsibility for designing a class that was beyond their capabilities and that the grades would not be punitive. Kirsty who had never really forgiven me, suddenly sat next to me and discussed her plans for the summer and graduation. We had not had a light conversation for months. However, when Kevin, the student who loved to work with computers, walked back with me to school from the beach party, I could tell that, at least in his case, I had not done the right thing. He literally cried while asking me how I could do this.

I said, “I didn’t think anyone cared. No one really seemed to make any effort.”

He burst out shrilly, “I, I, I! That’s the problem. You didn’t have the right. It was our project.”

“It seemed to me that no one cared.”

Kevin muttered softly, “I was beginning to look forward to it.”

I answered, “I just didn’t know.”

Once again, but more quietly, he responded, ‘You didn’t have the right.”
All Work and No Play

Rosewood Community College had been looking for someone to fill their tenure-track position who was versatile enough to teach all levels of English and who had experience teaching in collaborative settings. Judith fit these qualifications, was passionate about teaching and energetic to boot. She spent her first quarter teaching and learning about the curriculum at the college, always putting out feelers for potential teaching partners for a learning community.

Toward the end of her second quarter, Judith overheard one of the veteran instructors at the college, Michael, talking outside the division office with Mark, a newly tenured faculty in business. From what she could gather from their conversation, they’d been wanting to link up their political science and business law classes for a couple of years now, but had yet to do this. They were discussing the possibility of trying to link up for sure next year. Judith was ecstatic. Here were two people interested in collaborative teaching and learning, two people just waiting for the right catalyst, who just needed a little extra encouragement to finally take the plunge. She had found her teaching partners.

Judith approached Mark and Michael soon afterwards and they had several discussions about which classes would be best suited for linking. During spring quarter, they decided to propose a 15-credit learning community which combined Business Law 250, Political Science 201 and English 101. Much to their surprise and delight, their proposal was accepted. They were immediately sent off to a planning retreat and they were even given small stipends to spend time developing the course during the summer.

Because of conflicting travel plans, it was difficult for all three of them to meet together in the summer, so in the four weeks before the start of the fall quarter, they worked feverishly to develop the syllabus, the assignments, and some class activities. During this time, they were told that, due to disagreements among the deans of their divisions, the enrollment cap for the course had been set at 95. At last check, actual enrollment was 85 students. Mark and Michael were not very concerned about this change because the enrollment for each of their regular classes usually ran around 40-45 students, and overall, this community would allow them to teach fewer students than they normally would. Judith, however, was worried.

Twice in the weeks before classes started, Judith approached her dean, Allan, about the number of students in the community. She expressed concern that she wouldn’t be as effective with this many students as she could be. Marianne pointed out that 85 students were roughly the same number Judith would ordinarily have in her regular teaching load of three composition courses. She praised Judith for all the work she had done, saying that she was especially glad to see Judith working on developing learning communities since this was one of the primary reasons she had been hired. The administrators at the college, Allan said, were counting on this learning community to be a real showpiece for the school. On both occasions, Judith left the dean’s office with a heavy heart.

Two weeks before the start of fall quarter, Mark, Michael and Judith met again to finalize plans. Throughout this meeting, Judith tried to persuade her colleagues to pare down their list of
assignments. Yes, they would normally expect a lot of work from students in their individual classes, but the level of thinking required of students in this learning community as well as the sophistication of the tasks was higher. After much discussion, Mark and Michael reluctantly agreed and took out several assignments.

One week later, with time running short, the three of them sat down to what they hoped was their last planning meeting, at least until after classes got underway. They reviewed the shortened list of assignments. So far, Mark said he would write and grade half of the four multiple-choice and short-answer exams. He would also be grading group homework from roughly 16 groups, collected five times over the quarter. For his part, Michael would be writing and grading the other half of the four exams, his questions being multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank. He would also grade a set of problem-solving notebooks, approximately seven to ten pages from each student, collected once during the quarter. From each student, Judith would collect and comment on six five-page papers, three two-page problem-solving essays and a short research project roughly five to six pages in length. Judith was still worried.

Judith: “I’m still concerned about this workload for the students. We can barely keep track of all the assignments ourselves. How are the students going to be able to coordinate so many projects in a given week, let alone actually find the time to do them all?”

Mark: “I thought we already made this decision. Besides, we can’t just keep cutting back and cutting back. This is supposed to be the equivalent of three separate five-credit classes. How can we keep the academic integrity of these classes if we don’t ask as much of these learning community students as we do our other students?”

Michael: “Yeah. I keep thinking about the people who accepted our courses for transfer to the four-year institutions. What would they say about us asking for so much less work?”

Judith: “But quantity of work is not the same as quality. And besides, I’m also concerned about what this list of assignments means for my own workload. I don’t think it’s possible for me to give useful feedback on this many papers for this many students. Students need to get feedback as soon as possible after they have written their papers in order for the feedback to be useful and relevant. I can’t return their papers fast enough with this kind of paper schedule.”

Mark: “That’s only 85 papers per week roughly. You don’t think you can get that many read in a week?”

Judith: “I don’t just read them Mark. I have to give constructive feedback so that they can improve their writing. It usually takes me about 20 minutes to read and make comments on a five-page paper. With this kind of paper load, I’m looking at 28 hours per week of paper grading alone. The class itself meets three hours a day, we meet for an hour or so to organize, and I need to do my own prep for class. Add to that the five to six hours of reading papers every day that this workload dictates and I’ll have a nervous breakdown by the fourth week.”
**Michael:** “How come it takes you so long to grade a paper? When I read papers, I just use little editing symbols and show them where they screwed up their grammar. If you did that, then maybe you’d only be spending 10 minutes or so on each one.”

**Judith:** “I don’t just edit students’ grammar. I work with content and organization and development of ideas and style and voice and all that stuff. When we started talking about putting this learning community together, we were excited about how each of us works in our individual classes on critical thinking and reading skills. I was under the impression from those conversations that you understood that I do a lot more in my courses than edit students’ grammar. I try to teach them to think.”

**Michael:** “Well, I suppose we could all read the papers. I just don’t feel I can teach them about fixing their papers. Maybe Mark and I could read them for content and you could read them for mechanical things.

**Judith:** I can’t just read them for grammatical errors. Good writing is good thinking and good reading and good organization and good support and good…”

**Mark:** “But I thought we brought you on board this learning community so you could take care of the writing part for us. We lecture and give students subject matter so they can write papers for you, right?”

**Judith:** “Frankly, I thought we were all going to take some responsibility for teaching students to write, just as we were all going to help students learn about how political and business activities are intertwined. I thought that’s what we talked about.”

**Mark:** “But you aren’t teaching business or political science.”

**Judith:** “But I just developed writing assignments which integrate our disciplines in an intelligent way. You both told me that they worked very well for what you wanted the students to learn.”

**Michael:** “But I don’t think reading papers about our disciplines is the same thing as being able to teach about them.”
All Work and No Play

Discussion Questions

- What has lead up to this situation?
- What inequities are present here?
- What fears are at work here? From what do they stem?
- Put yourself in the position of each of the characters. What are you feeling?
- What could the administrator in this situation do to help this team to be successful?
Midterm Reflections

Mary, Joyce and Bruce were teaching a new coordinated studies course combining General Biology, English Composition, and Introduction to Sociology. Mary had taught science courses for 10 years and was responsible for the biology content. She had taught in a coordinated studies format twice before, both times with Joyce who had previously taught traditional English classes for 15 years. She and Mary had been on the same coordinated studies team twice before. Both were tenured and had found that coordinated studies was a way to revitalize their teaching. Bruce had taught part-time for three years in traditional sociology courses. This was his first time teaching coordinated studies. Bruce was new to coordinated studies but he had expressed eagerness to increase his chances of getting on a tenure track. All three teachers enjoyed reputations as good teachers and their classes had been popular with students.

Class was over one more time, and it was time for a team meeting. Mary, Joyce, and Bruce began perusing the midterm class evaluations which they had just collected. Joyce and Mary had previously used open-ended narrative evaluations and SGIDs focused on the entire coordinated studies program, but this quarter Bruce convinced them to use a form like the machine tallied forms used in traditional classes. The only difference was that each question was asked three times, once on a scale of one to five on such things as knowledge of the subject, ability to explain things, fairness of assignments, use of A/V materials, etc. Other questions were asked about the course as a whole. Students were invited to add any narrative comments they wished. Student signatures on evaluations were optional. Silence descended as each read a portion of the evaluations and then traded off.

Joyce became flushed as she read. Silently she thought to herself,

“I believe I’ve been doing a very good job this quarter, but it isn’t reflected here. What went wrong? It looks like Mary isn’t faring any better than I am, but look at Bruce. They seem to think he is ‘God’s gift to students.’ This is embarrassing; I’m the most experienced teacher here, but you couldn’t tell it by looking at these.

So what’s going on here. It appears that Mary and I didn’t sell this group on alternative ways of teaching and learning. We worked hard to devise active learning activities instead of just letting them be passive blobs. The worksheets which we required them to do in preparation for classes were a lot of work for them, I know, but we sure could see the difference in their preparation. We’ve required a lot more reading and writing than they expected, I guess. I thought we developed a lot of good ideas for collaborative learning activities. I believe the student group presentations develop some very important skills.

Bruce always was rather resistant to these alternative activities and ended up lecturing even though it seemed that he agreed on alternatives during our team meetings. Students certainly like Bruce’s lectures. He is entertaining and students think he has charisma. It seems most of the students really bought into Bruce’s authoritative manner of presentation. They wanted the “right answer” and he didn’t mind letting them think he
had it. I got tired of trying to give a different viewpoint. He had a subtle, and sometimes not-so-subtle, way of putting down my ideas. He sure didn’t hesitate to speak with authority about my subject area though. He really used his brief journalism experience to give the impression that he was an expert in composition.

Another thing that bugged me is his tendency to make teasing comments, often around gender or personality issues. They seemed so innocent and often very funny; I often didn’t really feel the barb in them until later. He always listened disarmingly when we called these remarks to his attention. He seemed so accepting of our constructive criticism, but nothing ever changed. Well, I for one, wish this quarter would go away but we still have the second half to go. What can we do to make the second half better than the first?”

Mary read and felt like she wanted to leave. Her thoughts ran on,

“Why did we decide to read these together? Apparently the students didn’t appreciate all the creative, innovative things we were trying to do. It looks like they just want to be lectured at by a charismatic ham like Bruce. I believe in what I’m trying to do, but I don’t think I can continue if I don’t get any more appreciation than this.

Look at the way they rated our knowledge of our subject areas. From this you would think that Joyce and I are incompetents but Bruce has the corner on truth. I don’t think he ever said, ‘I don’t know.’ I had counted on more students seeing through his authoritarian manner, but I guess he was more convincing than I realized. There are an unusual number of young and immature students in this class. I suppose that has something to do with it. At least it is encouraging that some of the more mature and more competent students have given Joyce and me better marks and seem to be less impressed with Bruce.

I do understand how someone like Bruce can sway students. I still tend to question my ideas when they differ from those of someone speaking with authority. I suppose many of these students don’t realize that people who speak with authority aren’t always right. I’m still angry about the time I quietly showed Bruce documentation countering what he said in class. Wouldn’t any honest teacher correct his error? I guess not. I wanted to save him the embarrassment of correcting him in class. I still can’t believe he was willing to leave the class with the wrong information. Boy, do we have a big job ahead of us! I’ve been concerned about these things and have tried to talk to Bruce about them, but it never seems to change anything.”

Bruce read and began to smile. He thought,

“Maybe coordinated studies isn’t so bad after all. I haven’t found it that great an experience, but apparently the students appreciate me as much as they always have. Hmm, it seems from these evaluations that Joyce and Mary could learn a thing or two from me. I know now that I certainly never want to teach with a couple of females who are buddy buddy with one another. I really felt like the odd man out. They expected me to
take all the flack from them about my supposed gender biases, but they didn’t mind
digging me as the representative of all men.

This further supports my idea that a well prepared lecture is the best way to teach.
Students need a reliable authority figure giving them a good grounding especially in the
introductory subjects. This class particularly, because of their youth and immaturity, need
to hear solid facts, not a bunch of ‘sometimes this and sometimes that’. They just end up
confused. It really bugged me to see Joyce and Mary wasting all that valuable class time
and leaving students more confused then educated.

Let’s see about the few evaluations that aren’t so positive. These are signed, I see. Hmm,
every one is by some of the best students in the class. They don’t seem to have as much
confidence in my level of knowledge and ability to stimulate critical thinking. Oh well,
you can’t win them all!”
Midterm Reflections

Discussion Questions:

• How would you assess this team?

• What needs to happen during this team meeting?

• Did this team use the right evaluation tool for the situation?

• What evaluation instruments might the team consider for end-of-quarter evaluations?

• What are the advantages and disadvantages of separately evaluating teachers versus a broader evaluation of the course?

• How might the differences in the evaluations of the teachers be accounted for?

• How accurate are student evaluations?

• What needs to happen during the second half of the quarter? Whose responsibility is it to see that those things happen?
Sarah’s Choice

Sarah Cohen was jubilant. “At last! A chance to be in the classroom with a colleague whose standards and energy I admire; a chance to learn new ways of looking at an area of my own discipline that would help me become a better teacher of both speaking and writing; a chance to appreciate someone who has a reputation for using current events to bring his course material to life – this is bound to be professionally rejuvenating!” She felt quite heady that morning as she approached Sam Metcalf with the idea of joining her in a coordinated studies program; they would be blending his Informal Logic course with her Public Speaking course. Her choice of partner, her choice of courses were perfect! All that remained was to convince Sam.

Because all the faculty in her department were senior to her, because of budget constraints and student needs, Sarah had taught mostly prewriting courses or core courses in composition and speech. Twice before, she had informally investigated the possibility of being involved in coordinated studies on other campuses, but in both cases, her request had been denied. She had watched faculty from other community colleges create plans for such courses at two different spring planning retreats, so she had some notion of the myriad of options available to her and her partners. When the president of her college announced his decision to permit a coordinated studies course on campus, she was eager to create a proposal.

For a long time she had wanted to work in more depth on the persuasion unit of her public speaking class. She was confident of the informative section and usually managed to get impressive performances from many of her students. She knew that she had no trouble identifying fallacies in students’ written work, but she needed practice spotting them in speaking situations where students were presenting prepared arguments on subjects of their own choosing. Being in the class with another faculty member who was trained to identify fallacies as he heard them would help, she was sure. A few years ago, she had mentioned to Sam the possibility of one-day offering logic and public speaking as a coordinated studies effort, and he had agreed that the combination would be an exciting one for students.

It was on this wave of optimism that Sarah persuaded Sam to join her. He confessed he had been casting about for a project that would give his tenure review committee something fresh to talk about. After all those years of part-time teaching, he had one more year of probationary status left. Offering the first coordinated studies program on campus might just do it.

Sarah assured him that she had a lot to learn from him. She knew he had a reputation for being head-strong and that he tended to take a dim view of small group work, but she was counting on the areas they had in common – mutual respect, high standards for student performance, and a willingness to spend time with students outside of class. She was confident that her own ability to facilitate small groups would carry them over the rough spots.

It wasn’t until the planning retreat in mid-May, after the yearly schedule had been adopted and the course was slotted for winter quarter, that Sarah began to realize she may have had a way of looking at this new venture that wasn’t shared by Sam. At the retreat, during the time devoted to team planning, he wanted to begin with the curriculum plan – what should we do week one? She
wanted to discuss sources – what would we want the students to read? They felt stuck after they had shared their individual course objectives. So Sarah tried to broach the subjects of process and content.

“What if, after the students read some primary text, we ask them to tell us how they think the argument was designed? They will not be totally in the dark because we can show them some examples of different kinds of arguments before we assign the reading.”

“Are you kidding? It’s hard enough for them to understand the material in the textbook! They’d be lost trying to plod their way through any original work!”

“What if we let them try it, Sam! What if it got messy, and they were confused? What if we let them come up with the questions, and let them try to figure out the answers, too?”

“And then what? What happens after we waste two whole sessions watching them get it all screwed up?

“Well, they can’t be off track for long if we ask them to support what they have to say with references to the text! They’ll create their own system of checks and balances. We stand by them; we appreciate their efforts and insights. Who knows? We might even learn something!

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute! You’re asking rank beginners who’ve never had a philosophical discussion in their lives to be collegial? There are less than a handful of people in my class smart enough to ask an intelligent question let alone engage in academic discourse! You’re kidding, right?”

“Look at it this way, Sam. You won’t have to work so hard to get your lectures ready. You let them do the work. We can develop strategies to encourage them and decide when and how or whether to intervene based on what we see happening. It’s very likely they’ll come to discover what you want them to know on their own. We can be their cheering section!”

Sam rolled his eyes. “I’m sorry, but I have to make sure these people have the basics. If they’re supposed to have informal logic by the time we’re finished with them, then I have certain things I have to get across to them. I can’t be waiting for them to ‘discover’ course content! I need to take these people through a textbook. Without it, they’ll be lost!”

So, Sam had slammed the door on the idea of having students seminar on primary sources, but Sarah wasn’t about to let the idea drop. She thought his objection was based on his not having a clear enough notion of how a seminar could work. She knew he didn’t trust himself in that arena, but she thought that if he had more information from others who had tried this approach and been successful at it, he might be persuaded.

When they broke for dinner, Sarah sought the advice of two faculty kibitzers she knew. After she explained the dilemma she and Sam were in, one of the kibitzers suggested she find another teaching partner. She wondered how practical that was. There was no other philosopher on campus. She was committed to the course combination. Besides, there was the practical matter of
her administration only permitting 13 credits for the combined courses. Both instructors would be required to teach an additional five credits each for a total of 18 contact hours. Who would agree to teach an extra three contact hours for nothing? As she mentally reviewed the roadblocks, she heard the kibitzer agree to talk with Sarah and Sam after breakfast the next day.

That morning, the three-way conversation quickly became heated, just what Sarah had wanted to avoid. The kibitzer had suggested that an interesting text they might consider looking at was Belenky, et al’s *Women’s Ways of Knowing*. She was using it in the context of an example of what had been tried in the past. Sam felt trapped and manipulated. He began shouting; defending the academy’s choices of thinkers worth studying. (None were women.) In the face of such threats to his academic integrity, Sam became vitriolic. Sarah felt embarrassed for him and for herself. She didn’t let the tears come until she was walking the trail to her cabin to pack.

Back on campus the next day, Sarah’s first stop was at the office of the head of her department. “I don’t think this is going to work,” she said “We had a hard time at the retreat. We are very different.”

“You’re right, you are!” he said. “That’s what makes you such a good team.”

“I think that would be true if I felt we could talk with each other about our different approaches, but we had such a hard time.”

“Well, you have lots of planning time ahead of you. You’re going to be teaching here this summer, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Sam will be too. You’ll have all summer to work on it! The president is anxious to see this fly.”

With that, he wheeled back to his typewriter. Sarah had heard the message: her department head didn’t want to deal with the difficulties she and Sam were having trying to become a team. She walked back to her office, determined to find ways to work with, or, if worse came to worse, around Sam.
Sarah’s Choice

Discussion Questions

- Were Sarah’s perceptions of what she and Sam held in common helpful to them in working together?
- Why did Sam agree to teach this course with Sarah? What separates these two faculty?
- How are Sarah and Sam oriented as instructors?
- What criteria should instructors use to choose a partner for coordinated studies?
- Why is this team isolated in trying to work this out?
- What could their department head do to support both faculty in their strengths and weaknesses?
- What tips would you offer a colleague interested in team teaching in choosing a teaching partner?
Sam’s Problem

“I don’t think I’ve ever been so frustrated by a teaching situation in my life.”

Sam Metcalf sighed and shook his head as he slumped into his chair. He had just returned from a day and a half at a planning retreat to which he had gone with some reluctance. Sarah Cohen, a speech and composition teacher who was a good dozen years his junior, had been after him for some time to offer her public speaking course with his informal logic course as a coordinated studies program, and he had finally agreed. Still, he had been a little surprised when Sarah announced the retreat. “What’s to plan?” he’d asked, but when she launched into a description of some program offered at another community college, he was trying to leave his office to get a quick lunch before his next student appointment, so he’d just said, “Oh, OK, register me.”

“What on earth happened at that retreat?” Sam’s wife rarely heard him use the word “frustrated.”

“This woman wants to design a completely new course,” Sam said as he shook his head with amazement. “What does she think I’ve been doing for my entire teaching career if it hasn’t been designing the courses I teach? And where does she come off with the idea that she can tell me what books I need to use and how I should teach? Every one of those people at that retreat seemed totally convinced that the entire concept of college teaching needs to be thrown out and replaced with group gropes and all this touchy-feely garbage. All I could think was, ‘You’ve gotta be kidding,’ but they weren’t!”

“Well what does she want you to do?”

Students always gave Sam high marks. As a young teacher in the late sixties and early seventies, he had experimented a little with group work and other “alternative modes of teaching,” but they’d never seemed to work. As a student, he’d never had much respect for teachers who didn’t seem to know exactly what they were doing and who didn’t have control over the classroom, so it hadn’t taken him long to go back to the methods that he’d always admired. He had worked out exactly what concepts and terms students needed to know at the end of a logic course, and he had carefully constructed lectures, discussion questions and tests that would give them that knowledge. Publishers’ reps could count on him for a precise, detailed description of what he wanted in a textbook and of exactly why he chose one text over another. While his syllabus might vary somewhat from quarter to quarter, his courses varied only slightly from the day-to-day schedule he handed out at the beginning of the quarter. Students knew exactly what was expected of them and they (or at least those who were paying attention) did all right in his courses.

“Oh, nothing significant,” he responded sarcastically. Just throw out my text and come up with a list of ‘original sources’ for students to read. You know, Plato, Aquinas, Mill, Descartes, people like that. My God, has she ever tried to take community college...
students through texts like that? I looked for ten years for a textbook that doesn’t completely lose them, and I happen to know that the author is retiring next year. I don’t know what I’m going to do when it goes out of print.”

“Maybe you ought to write your own.”

“I’ll tell you, I’ve seriously thought about it, but throwing these students to Wittgenstein is throwing them to the wolves, and I won’t do that to college freshmen. Those people can’t fight their way through the editorials I bring in from this stupid newspaper, let alone find problems in the cogito, ergo sum argument. And that’s the kind of thing she wants them to try to do, right off the bat!”

“So why did you ever agree to teach with her to begin with?”

“Look, you know, I know, she knows, and the students know that I’m a damn good teacher, and I’d always gathered from my students that she is too. I’ve been criticizing these courses without content for years, and I thought that pairing my course up with one might give me a good chance to examine my ideas, and besides, the dean himself told me that the administration wanted to make sure our first ever coordinated studies was a success. What am I supposed to say to that?”

Though Sam had taught for a long time, it had been as a part-time teacher, often juggling jobs at various schools up and down the freeway in order to make ends meet. Finally, the philosophy man at this school had retired, and now, near the end of his tenure review period, Sam had a chance to display his expertise in a more public way.

Winona had no response.

“‘Seminars,’ she says. Seminars? Any philosopher, any scholar worth his salt, spent his whole graduate education in seminars, but we were ready for them! We had the background: we’d been taught how to analyze an argument, then we’d read the original texts and the critics of the texts, and then and only then were we asked to make some kinds of judgments about those texts. And that was in the days when they had standards for college admission! You’re gonna put a fifty-year-old returning housewife and an eighteen-year-old special education high school graduate in a seminar? You’ve gotta be kidding! But that’s what she wants to do! Those people simply can’t survive that, and we owe them something better, given that the law has decreed their right to attend college. I know I have to teach to the people who end up in front of me and hope their performance doesn’t embarrass me in whatever class they end up in next. If she wants to use seminars to teach whatever they teach in speech, she’s got my permission if she needs it.”

“Why not just go to the dean and tell him you want out, that pairing the courses is a bad idea?”

“Sure, go to the dean near the end of my tenure review and tell him I can’t do something he wants done. Why don’t I go to the president and the board while I’m at it.”
Winona knew that Sam’s sarcasm was a sign that he was deeply troubled.

“Can you maybe find some compromise? Maybe you could let her try a seminar and see for herself that it doesn’t work. After all, if she’s used to teaching these, what’d you call them, ‘courses without content?’ you might be able to show her some good teaching techniques if you first let her see that you’re willing to try some of her ideas.”

“I’ve tried from the beginning, to get her just to sit down with our syllabi and talk about what we want to cover from day one. I don’t know, maybe she’s scared to do that because she doesn’t know how to plan a course week-by-week, day-by-day, but I might be making some inroads. She seemed a little less reluctant by the end of the retreat. If she doesn’t have some other agenda going, I might be able to talk her into doing some real planning on the basis of what I need to accomplish in my half of the course even if she’s not sure what she wants to do in her half.”

“What do you mean, ‘some other agenda’?”

“Well, by the morning of the second day she’d called in one of the “facilitators” or whatever they call them, and the very first thing she did was to start talking about this *Women’s Ways of Knowing* book. If she’s just trying to pull off some feminist coup she’s got the wrong guy, but if she’s serious about using this program to teach logic to people who desperately need to learn it, I’m still willing to try to pull it off. We’re meeting again Thursday, and I guess we’ll see how it goes.”

“Poor dear. Can I fix you a drink?”
Sarah’s Choice and Sam’s Problem

Case Field Notes

This pair of cases was written by two people to present two ways of looking at a learning community situation in which the incompatibility of team members have become almost insurmountable. They have been field tested in various settings and ways, usually with the group reading and discussing one case, followed by the other. The facilitator can work on having the group explore each perspective, as they represent two polarities often found on any campus. One field testing involved group role-playing of each character, but an observation from a participant was that it enhanced the stereotyping, i.e. the characters evolved into even more radical postures of the inherent differences they already possessed. Another time, participants were divided into two groups, with each group receiving one or the other of the cases. Only during the discussion did each group realize that the others were speaking from a different perspective. This was considered less successful than a discussion exploring fully each position.

The audience has usually included both faculty with no team teaching experience and those with considerable team teaching. When the case was used at the Washington Center retreats which are held each spring for new teams to plan their curriculum, the cases were especially helpful for faculty who were about to enter their first team. They raised issues about what makes a team work that previously hadn’t been considered, important questions about how faculty can be better prepared for team teaching and how administrators help or hinder this process. They also raise fundamental questions about what is required to work together: do we need to be best of buddies or are there intermediate comfort zones that suffice for a good working relationship? Sometimes, groups demanded more information, but as always, it became clearer that every specific detail was not crucial to the discussion.

Several issues emerged from the discussions:

- the different styles of the team members
- the on-going debate of content vs. process
- the motivation for joining learning communities
- the role of administrators in forming and maintaining teams
- the reluctance of some faculty to join communities and whether or not they should be encouraged to
- the expectations of eager participants and how realistic they are

Teachers with no team teaching experience seem to have more trouble with the cases in terms of their believability and with the Sam character in particular. Two surprising elements of the field testing were that 1) the gender issue seldom surfaced during the discussion and 2) rarely did discussion turn toward the role of the administration. While the administrator character is not well developed in the case, a productive discussion can focus on the role of administrators in supporting innovation. After the identification of issues, the most useful part of the discussion listed “tips” to colleagues and administrators to help teams have a more successful experience.
Cosmic Bonding

Sue was starting to feel annoyed again as Fran began her typical biology lecture. She was using the overhead transparency of the internal organs in the human body, reading off each name as she pointed to each organ. She then spelled each word out loud, sometimes mixing her letters, which Sue had to correct. The students in this pre-nursing developmental learning community had enough trouble with the spelling of everyday words, let alone biology vocabulary.

“And here is the kidney,” said Fran, pointing to the familiar shape. “K-i-n-d-e-y.”

“Make that k-i-d-n-e-y,” interrupted Sue as students groaned. What’s with this dame? she wondered to herself.

Fran darted a glance at her. “Did it again! Thanks for paying attention Sue,” and continued on to the next organ.

It was the third week of class, and Sue and Fran were together in the classroom for three hours a day with the group of thirty students who had declared an interest in one of the health programs but whose writing sample placed them in one of the developmental classes rather than English 101. Many of the students also had poor study habits and complicated personal lives which interfered with studying and class attendance.

It was Sue’s third time teaching in the pre-nursing learning community, each time with a different part-timer, and the first two experiences were invigorating and unique. The part-timers brought new ways of seeing and worked with such enthusiasm that Sue gained new respect for each one. She enjoyed the community model and believed that it was helpful to this population, especially in the support it offered, and the way in which it helped students make connections. However, even though she loved teaching in an interdisciplinary program, it was intense work; she was tired and wanted a break. But Nell, the last part-timer, who was supposed to be the carry-over team member in this quarter’s class, had accepted another, more permanent job at the end of last quarter, leaving no experienced teacher in the learning community for this quarter. When approached by the chair, Sue reluctantly agreed to step back into the team because she hated to think of two new faculty having to hastily throw something together in two weeks. Now, she was regretting it, and feeling guilty that she did.

As a full-time faculty member whose main interest was in preparing pre-college native and non-native speakers for mainstream classes, Sue thought that the coordinated studies folklore of how teams bond by some kind of spontaneous combustion was not just unrealistic but self-indulgent. She snorted (to herself) as she listened to college-transfer teams rave about the ecstasy of working with like minds and kindred spirits. In learning communities combining basic skills with vocational programs, it was enough of a problem finding some body to team up with, let alone someone to bond with. The notion of finding a teammate who believed in and responded to the same cosmic forces seemed far-fetched.
Yet, at this moment, watching Fran bumble and stumble through another ill-conceived lesson plan, Sue yearned for some sense of camaraderie, rather than the hostility she felt for the new team member. She had to remind herself that this particular team was going to need more energy to make it work, or it was going to explode. At least, Sue was going to explode.

Fran came highly recommended by one of the deans at the college. She had just received her MA in biology from a nearby four-year college and was job-hunting. She had some experience tutoring undergraduates and claimed to have experience in communities. As with all the other part-timers in learning communities on this campus, she was hired pro-rata and considered temporary full-time. It was a good opportunity for part-timers looking for full-time work because for each pro-rata quarters, they were paid one-third of a full-time salary, but they were limited to two quarters per year pro-rata.

When Sue agreed to take over the community for yet another quarter, Nell and Fran had already done some preliminary planning. When she asked Nell what she thought of Fran, Nell indicated that she hadn’t gotten to know her too well, but she seemed pleasant and easy to work with. By the third week, Sue realized that Fran’s classroom experience was next to none, and she seemed not to have the vaguest idea how to teach biology, let alone integrate it with the teaching of basic English reading and writing skills. To make matters worse, Fran’s time seemed limited, and when Sue wanted to meet for an hour after class for at least twice a week at the beginning of the quarter, Fran was evasive about why she was unable to do so, and rushed through the preparation time when she was able to meet. Fortunately, they were scheduled to meet that afternoon, after the kidney correction.

“Hey thanks for keeping tabs on my spelling” said Fran as they sat down in the teacher’s lounge. “I think there’s something I should tell you.. I was hoping I wouldn’t have to, but I think I’d better.”

What now? thought Sue.

Fran continued. “Actually it’s not a big deal, just that I’m a little dyslexic. You probably guessed at it with all the little spelling corrections you’ve had to make on my work.”

Of course. Sue should have suspected it but had been too busy. She sat dumbfounded and speechless. Fran was right, it wasn’t a big deal and Sue didn’t mind correcting a few spelling errors. But combined with Fran’s inexperience in teaching and her lack of time commitment to planning, it pushed the final limits of Sue’s patience. As the experienced member in the learning community, she knew she had to guide the planning and help Fran learn how to run a community, but she didn’t think she should be expected to do all the planning for the class and supervise teacher training as well.

“Look, Fran, I simply can’t be checking your work all the time. I have enough to do with the students, plus, I need to count on your being able to work with their problems in English.”

“Well, you know I’d love to, Sue, but I don’t have time to correct their English homework, or even the English on their biology homework. Besides, I think that’s your job. But the fact is, I
really can’t talk about this now because I have to run to a 1:30 appointment,” Fran said as she got up to leave.

Fran has had just about enough of Sue. Maybe she had more experience in teaching and in learning communities, but she sure seemed bossy. She was always wanting to plan daily activities at least a week in advance and didn’t like any suggestions Fran tried to make. She acted like she knew everything. “Let me show you how we should do this in the community.” or “Here’s what you need to know about seminaring.” Fran wanted to tell Sue that when she needed help, she would ask for it, but she couldn’t even do that. Sue kept bombarding her with coordinated studies stuff.

“Wait a minute; today was our planning day!” Sue tried not to yell. “We need to plan out not just the rest of this week but next week as well.”

“You go ahead and just tell me what I need to do. Besides, you always know what we need to do and I can’t seem to do anything right, according to you, so you go ahead and do it,” snarled Fran. “Furthermore, my time is even more limited now that I’ve found another job.”

Fran hadn’t planned to find another full-time job so soon, especially one that she was hoping for, in a medical supplies company. She had been grateful when the pro-rata position at the college opened up, because she needed immediate full-time work in order to pay back her college loan. She had done some team-teaching as a TA in the university biology department, and the learning community at the college sounded similar. She figured that by the time she finished her first quarter of teaching, a better, more permanent position would open up. If not, she could go another quarter before the pro-rata limit kicked in.

“WHAT? What about this class?” By now Sue was fuming.

“Oh I can still meet this class for the three hours a day that we’re scheduled. My other job is flex time, in the afternoon.”

“But Fran, you’re full-time for this quarter. That includes a certain number of hours on campus plus a commitment to plan for this learning community. We can’t do this without planning together. I admit that some of your lesson plans haven’t sat well with me, but only because I’ve been working with this population for a long time and I didn’t think they were the best way for these students. We just have to work at it more.”

“All right, I can’t meet you to plan in the afternoons because of my other job, but I can come in to school at 6 A.M. and we can meet at 7 A.M. daily if you want to.”

Sue threw her hands up, “No, I don’t want to meet at 7 A.M. That’s too early for me. I have two young children to get off to school, so it’s out of the question.”

Sue bit her lip and wondered what to do next. She thought, “Am I supposed to build my schedule around hers?”
Cosmic Bonding

Issues for Discussion

• How does Fran see the situation?
• How does Sue see the situation?
• What are some reasons for having an experienced team member?
• What some reasons for having a new team member?
• Who apprises new team members of responsibilities and methodology?
• What are some advantages/disadvantages of teams of full-timers?
• What are some advantages/disadvantages of teams which include part-timers?
• Are there certain things about learning communities that all team members must know or do?
• If so, what are they?
• What can the administrator do about
  • Building teams
  • Faculty burn-out
  • Faculty rotation
  • Part-time/full-time issues
  • Sustaining programs?
Cosmic Bonding

Case Field Notes

This case was field tested with seasoned collaborative learning faculty and administrators who took one and a half to two hours to identify and work through the issues. A facilitator can lead the discussion so that perspectives of both faculty members are explored, as it is important to recognize the validity of the two points of view. It may be useful for participants to identify some reasons why the team is not working but discourage them from dumping on either one or the other teacher. Instead, help the group identify an issue, then discuss options for proceeding as a team.

Some of the key issues are:

a. how teams get selected
b. how part-timers participate in communities
c. how team members negotiate misinformation
d. how experienced members help first-timers without being oppressive

For c and d above, encourage participants to be specific about how-to’s and list them on the board.

This case could be used as faculty in-service for those presently teaching in learning communities to help surface other tricky intersections at which faculty invariably arrive, then discuss possible options for proceeding. It could also be used with administrators involved with learning communities to discuss ways of identifying and encouraging potential team members.
Camp Stories - Part I

The English meeting had just started and the Chair was, making announcements. Denny sighed. “Can’t these announcements be printed and put in my mailbox? I can read,” he thought to himself, as he did at the beginning of every meeting. He started correcting the student papers he always brought with him to these faculty meetings.

The Chair watched him uncap his purple pen and felt the customary wave of annoyance. Then she proceeded.

“For this meeting, we agreed to discuss how we evaluate students’ performance and move them to the next level. From talking to some of you, it appears that sometimes students get moved into your classes without the entry level skills you require. So what can we do?”

The discussion began immediately and loudly, jumping back and forth across the table.

“Just move them back to the class they came from. Don’t teachers need to be accountable to colleagues? I never pass on a student who hasn’t completed my requirements.”

“What are your requirements?”

“To pass out of my English class onto the next, students need to be able to write a short, coherent three paragraph, one-page response paper with a minimum of grammar, spelling and punctuation errors.”

“What do you mean by minimum?”

“What about ideas? Do you give any weight to ideas? What if it’s a mechanically perfect, truly boring paper? Sometimes you can get the glimmer of fascinating ideas imprisoned in the technicalities of English grammar. I’d rather move up the student who has something interesting to say rather than the one with not one good idea but who expresses that vacuum in perfect English.”

“What about the student who doesn’t follow the guidelines of identifying a thesis statement at the onset, supporting that statement in the second paragraph, then coming to a conclusion? Is there any room for allowing for different patterns of organization?”

“What about rhetorical considerations? Aren’t they in the curriculum? Anybody going to talk about them?”

Denny looked up around him over his glasses from his stack of essays. “Here we go again,” he thought. “If I have to sit in another round of rehash...” He turned off his hearing and went back to his papers.
Denny was finishing his twentieth year in the English department. Life on campus had started to lose excitement around his seventh year, when he realized that despite all the talk about pedagogy and methodology, teachers went back to their classrooms, closed the doors and continued doing whatever they wanted. The only thing that changed over the years was standards. Over his career, he had watched as standards dropped and faculty made fewer and fewer demands, looking for any excuse to pass students on. Some even accepted papers replete with fragments and run-ons, calling it “style” or “voice”!

Denny on the other hand had gained a reputation over the years as a hard-nosed, tough teacher who gave out few A’s, but whose students learned where a sentence began and ended, when to use the subjunctive, how to punctuate to perfection. They not only learned all the transition words, but how to use them, could differentiate a simile from a metaphor and even include one or two in their papers.

He confessed that he experienced renewed hope around his twelfth year of teaching, when a new division Chair was hired. She seemed a breath of fresh air over the old Chair, a crusty dinosaur steeped in the Classics who had great disdain for any hint of innovation. In fact, she and Denny had locked horns over his proposal to use language experience for first year writing classes.

“Students need impeccable models of writing.” she intoned. “How else can they know those sublime heights to which they must aspire?” She was always careful to avoid prepositions at the end of even her pontifications.

But those days were long gone for Denny, when he actually attended workshops to learn different ways to teach, and debated the merits of various methodology. In fact, he was beginning to believe that the old battleaxe knew what she was talking about, and now when he thought back to the old days, they glowed golden and fuzzy.

The saccharine voice of the Chair brought him back to the meeting.

“Maybe before we talk about evaluation of students and what we teach, we need to reflect on how we teach. Perhaps the how will help us get to the what. Let’s consult with some of our new faculty members who are just brimming with new ways for us to think about teaching and learning.”

It was the new Chair, although she wasn’t new anymore. In fact, she had gotten old very quickly, and Denny early on found himself frustrated with her excessive need to process information in her quest for consensus. The faculty met with her endlessly and seemed never to decide anything, but went around and around the topic of the month, looking from every possible angle at some small cog in the machine which made the department run (or not). She wanted to revisit policies that even he had been eager to discuss for the first time ten years ago, but not again. It seemed to him that sometimes they actually arrived at a decision, but later, no one could remember what it was, or if they could, no one could remember it in the same way. After a few months, Denny began to suspect that the new Chair was just like the old one, with very strong ideas and quite set in her ways; she just went about it differently. She appeared non-directive and made everyone feel like they were part of the “process”, but in fact, Denny concluded after the
first year of meetings, the faculty dissected and discussed issues until they arrived at what the Chair wanted to do. Sometimes, when they didn’t get there, the Chair then implemented her own decision by not making one.

“Hunh!” snorted Denny to himself. “I may be slow but I’m not stupid. This isn’t consensus. It’s camouflage.”

Furthermore, the Chair had a way of making new faculty appear like prophets from a promised land. Don’t all newcomers love to wallow in what they perceive as scintillating professional discussions? And Denny remembered a time when even he partook. But now when Denny checked in to what they were saying, it was the same old saw: team teaching, teacher-less classrooms, power to the oppressed. Denny had come of age in the 60s and he knew this stuff. He concluded it was new to only newcomers because they hadn’t heard it before, or they were so young they hadn’t lived it either. But nothing annoyed him more than some ink-still-wet-ont-the-diploma, know-it-all, bright-eyed optimist fresh out of graduate school who started talking about what they, meaning old timers, should do to rejuvenate their teaching.

“Students need support in as many ways as we can provide. It seems to me that the pedagogy of collaborative learning is the best venue to structure this support.” perked Pat. “If we can just give students a sense of belonging, a voice in their education, this will build self-esteem and they can succeed!”

“But what does this have to do with writing?” whined Denny.

“Well,” chirped Chris. “You need to find assignments that speak to students, that demand their interaction with the material. Then you’ll see that they can and will not only write, but with eloquence and purpose!”

What Denny hated most of all was how the newcomers smiled while speaking slowly and carefully to him, as if addressing a senile old uncle.

“But what about subject-verb agreement? Does that come with self-esteem?” inquired another one of the old-timers.

“Maybe, maybe.” The new teachers turned to each other and nodded vigorously, heads bobbing like plastic dogs that sat in the back windows of 1970 Chevys. “Anything’s possible when students are turned on!”
Camp Stories - Part II

The Chair felt her customary wave of annoyance as she watched Denny uncap his green pen to correct compositions at the beginning of the English Department meeting. Susan almost wished he didn’t show up at meetings rather than sit there like a steam vent, puffing occasionally with dissent. His presence puzzled her; he seemed so detached yet she knew he was an effective teacher, if student evaluations meant anything. He seemed so sure of himself, acted as if he had all the answers, and Susan could barely tolerate his arrogance.

She had always been somewhat on her guard with him, for when she took over the department nearly a decade ago, the retiring chair warned her about Denny. “He’s one of those renegades, always wanting to do things differently, always thinking his way is the best way. Not that I would want to stifle his creativity or anything, but he can be disruptive. Keep your eye on him.”

The old chair had been in place for a long time, so Susan only half paid attention to the advice. She knew how easy it was to feel bruised by years of dealing with the same old issues and people, and she wanted to opportunity to start over. With a department of 17 full-time faculty members and nine of them old-timers, she couldn’t afford to write them off, at least not at the beginning. Besides, Susan was confident that she could bring a new perspective to the department. She wanted energetic and creative faculty and decided she would try to encourage Denny to contribute his ideas. She knew he had a terrific reputation as a teacher and intensely loyal students. Perhaps his carping was a result of feeling left out. She also heard on the grapevine that he had wanted to be chair but didn’t apply when the job opened because he knew he couldn’t get a recommendation from his old boss.

At the same time, she was aware that she needed to establish her authority, so she proceeded cautiously at first, gathering allies among those she thought might support her.

Susan wanted to give her department the opportunity to know more about national trends in educational reform. “With the excellent people we have,” she thought, “we can really be leaders. They’re already good teachers. They would benefit from knowing more and getting in touch with colleagues elsewhere. It will help us develop a better sense of community and purpose.” Susan had been hearing more and more about collaborative learning and envisioned the department heading in the direction of learning communities or at least linked classes. When she had the opportunity to send two faculty to a workshop to learn about collaborative learning, she thought carefully about whom to send, and decided on an assertive woman who was a new-hire and an old-timer who was not known as a mover and shaker. “Maybe this will revive him, and at least he won’t fight me.” Susan thought.

When they reported back at the next meeting about the workshop, she watched especially the old-timers and noted their negative reactions, especially to Tammy, the new-hire who was very enthusiastic, just as Susan knew she would be. But even John surprised her by returning with glowing reports and even a dim spark in his weary eye.

Denny had many questions and fired them off in rapid succession:
“How is this pedagogy different from team teaching? How does each teacher cover his or her curriculum? How do you decide whom to teach with? How do you know it works?” Then, to Susan, “How did you decide who would go to the workshop? Why didn’t the rest of us know about it?”

His reaction was just as Susan suspected it would be and she was expecting him to challenge her, so she was ready.

“For this first round, we could only afford to send two people, but it’s my hope that everyone will have an opportunity to teach collaboratively. I think you might learn something from it too,” she said as she smiled at Denny, thinking to herself, “I wonder if he would like to be involved?”

“For this first community, Tammy and John will work together with Social Science to develop an offering for the fall and winter. We hope the rest of you will look for ways to link up with other disciplines.” She already had in mind whom she would pick for the next team.

Over the next few semesters, as learning communities picked up steam on campus, she encouraged all faculty to participate, and provided support for those who expressed interest. Six other faculty went to a national conference on educational improvement the following semester, and new resources for the department were purchased and circulated. Despite this effort, the old-timers remained withdrawn and almost defiant in their stony resistance. Even John dropped out of collaborative teaching after two quarters. Susan wondered whether he was the best bridge to the senior faculty. Once she’d overheard Dwight and Joan, two other veterans who had cornered him in the halls, asking him questions about collaborative teaching. They seemed curious, but skeptical, and his responses to them were lukewarm. And Denny never came forward despite Susan’s regular written invitations to the faculty to participate.

It didn’t matter because enrollment continued to rise and all divisions were hiring regularly. Susan made sure that the new-hires in her division were open to learning communities and saw to it that they taught in one their first year. She even encouraged part-timers to participate and looked for ways to pay them extra for planning time. It got to where she didn’t have to even think about ways to involve the old-timers. Now, she spent more energy looking for ways to retire them.

She gave all newcomers the same advice: “Be open to new ideas and collaboration. Some of the old-timers will try to discourage and dissuade you, but don’t pay any attention to them. Sometimes I think they’ve just been around too long.”
Camp Stories - Part II

Discussion Questions

- What are the dynamics between old and new faculty? Why?
- What can old faculty do about this?
- What can new faculty do about this?
- How can administrators affect these dynamics?
- Should administrators try to get all faculty to participate?
- If so, how? If not, why not?
- What about issues of authority?
- How can faculty deal with them?
- How can administrators deal with them?
Camp Stories Part I and II

Case Field Notes:

These cases were written as a collaborative effort in order to present two perspectives: Part I, written in the voice of the old-timer Denny, and Part II, written from the point of view of the Chair. They have had limited field testing separately in several small groups of faculty and administrators. A suggestion for working the case is to allow for at least two hours and present both cases, one at a time. In field testing we found that discussants are often hardest on people in similar roles (faculty are hardest on faculty and administrators on administrators) so trying to equalize the discussion for the sake of a balanced understanding of all perspectives is important.

As with all other cases, the facilitator can guide the discussions by encouraging participants to talk about the point of view of each of the parties: old-timers, the newcomers and the Chair.

Issues which surface are:

a. old-timer ennui and burn-out
b. newcomer naivete and enthusiasm
c. collaboration between old-timer and newcomer
d. administrative role in faculty polarization and balance

After a list of issues surfaces, list on the board participants’ concrete suggestions for dealing with each of the various perspectives. This is an important task which gives participants options for dealing with issues rather than just a forum for airing disgruntlements.
Possible Problems in Placement

They had returned for fall quarter to find almost no one enrolled for the program, and all three teachers had spent hours in registration, convincing students that they should enroll in the 15 quarter-credit English 101, literature and history coordinated studies block. And their efforts had been successful; the class had filled. For the most part, the students were new to the college – most were new to any college – and had been unsure of just what they were signing up for. The clincher for most had been that they could sign up for three courses that were required for the AA degree when nearly every other composition, humanities or social science option had long been closed.

Now the students had been given their syllabi, assigned to seminar sections, introduced to each other, the course and their books and, at the end of the third day, were ready to plunge into the course, or at least most of them were.

The first three days of English 101 were always devoted to a departmental exam, and the fact that a 101 course was part of a coordinated studies block did not exempt it. Every student had two days to write an essay in response to a departmentally chosen prompt, and the third day was devoted to a departmental reading. Students with low scores were advised to drop English 101, and the department’s experience had been that those who did not drop seldom completed the course successfully, although there was little experience with coordinated studies, this being only the second time such a course had been offered.

Jan and Bill had reviewed the scores and reread the essays of all 60 students in the block they were teaching with Harley, the historian. However, three of the essays showed such major writing problems that it seemed unlikely their authors could successfully complete any of the planned papers or essay examinations, and the three instructors had agreed (and written into the syllabus) that the same grade would be given for all three courses. Jan and Bill saw a dilemma: they could, either implicitly or explicitly, encourage the three students to remain in a fifteen-credit block they were likely to fail, or they could urge them to withdraw and try to fill a new course schedule from the slim pickings of the last day of registration. The student information cards they’d filled out on the first day showed that all three students were in their first quarter of college, and all were on financial aid.

“You guys are too tender,” was Harley’s response later that afternoon. “They’re either college material or they’re not. They deserve a chance to pass or fail, and they’re registered for the course so they have that chance. Let them sink or swim.”

“Nonsense,” Jan replied. “If they fail this block, they fail their entire first quarter of college. We talked them into enrolling to begin with, and if we can predict they can’t pass, we owe it to them to help them find some alternative. The problem is that the developmental courses are so full that we probably couldn’t find them a full schedule there.”

“So we either let them flunk here or transfer them to economics or biology and let them flunk there, is that it? Our only obligation is to tell them they’re likely to have trouble and that they’ll need to work extra hard. If that doesn’t motivate them, what else can we do?”
“Well, at the very least we need to talk with them.”

When they gave the papers back the next morning, each of the three problem papers had written on it a request that the student schedule an appointment with Jan, whose work in the composition program had led to many such counseling sessions, and two of the students did just that immediately after the class period. The third simply vanished.

When Mike came for his appointment, Jan was impressed. Mike was 26 and had a wife and two young children. He had recently been laid off and had started school in hopes of becoming a history teacher, so he was particularly excited about enrolling in this block. His high school GPA had been only 2.3, but he hadn’t been motivated, he said. Now things were different. He acknowledged that his writing skills had never been good, but said he was willing to work hard. His reading score was slightly above average, and he said he loved to read. They agreed that Mike should stick with the course and maintain close contact with Jan, the teacher of his seminar section.

Phyllis seemed a different story. About Mike’s age, she had been divorced for two years and was going to school because she couldn’t think of anything else to do. She thought her high school GPA had been “about a high B,” and she was certain she could do well in this program. “I just never do well on surprise tests,” she said of her performance on the writing test. “I’ll get along fine in this course.” Everything about her spoke of competence and confidence – the way she dressed, the way she spoke, the way she walked. But Jan sensed a bravado she had seen before in weak students, and she felt uncomfortable after Phyllis had left.

All any of them knew about Betsy was that she looked to be about 19 and that her essay indicated that she’d grown up in a small, isolated town near the Canadian border. A call to the assessment office showed that her reading score was very low but that her high school GPA was just over 2.5. She missed class the day after the essays had been returned, and while she attended on the two days following that, she managed to avoid contact with any of the three teachers. By now the options had narrowed – registration was closed and the only courses available were the open enrollment labs, none of which fulfilled anything but elective credits toward a degree. Finally Harley, to whose seminar section Betsy had been assigned, managed to catch her after class and ask her to make an appointment with Jan. She assured him that she would do so, but missed the next day’s sessions altogether.

The quarter was more than two weeks old before Betsy made it in to see Jan. The girl was almost painfully shy. Speaking softly and patiently, inquiring about the girl’s family and background, Jan managed to elicit some information about Betsy. She had, she said, done almost no writing in high school and had understood very little of the assigned reading for this course. Her tribe was funding her to go to college, but she wasn’t sure what she wanted to major in. Just 18, she had graduated from high school the summer before, and although she had worked hard in high school, she didn’t think she’d learned much. She was pretty sure that the coordinated studies block would be too hard for her, but she needed to finish 12 credits to keep her funding. She’d be willing to transfer to almost anything in order to do that, but she was very much afraid that college was going to be much too hard for her.
Cultural Conflict Among Students and Faculty in the Classroom

ISP 105, Intercultural Communications, is composed half of international students whose native language is not English, and the other half native-speaker students. The ESL students come from all over the world with either immigrant, refugee or foreign student status. The native speakers are mainly from Washington state, with a handful from other parts of the US. They are mostly Euro-American, one of whom is blind; there are four African Americans, three Asian Americans, one Mexican American and one Native American. The ages of students range from 18 to 45; some are single parents; several are open about recovering from chemical-alcohol dependency and one acknowledged that he was gay.

The content is developed around the variety of cultural backgrounds represented in the class, elicited with questions such as: What are some educational expectations in your culture? What is your family structure? What are their expectations? Which language or language variety do you speak at home? Throughout the quarter, the teacher works on improving communication among students and between student and faculty.

Scenario #1

No matter what the teacher does to mix students around in the physical space, it invariably happens that they re-segregate into ethnic groups.

The African American students are sitting together on the one side of the room, apart from the Ethiopian students, one an Amharic speaker, the other Tigrina. They are not together either. The Asian students are lined up against the back wall, facing the teacher. The only Asian group with more than one student is the Vietnamese, and they sit together at one end of the row, often speaking in Vietnamese. The Asian Americans sit with either the Euro- or African Americans; a Latina and the Mexican American find themselves often in the middle of the room but rarely talk much with each other and if they do, in English because the Mexican American speaks very little Spanish. The Native American and an Afro/Euro-American don’t confine themselves to any space and take whatever seat is available. The Euro-Americans gravitate toward the sun and sit by the window, on the opposite side of the room from the African Americans.

In the fourth week, the teacher points out the configuration and students seem surprised. After all, this is a class about intercultural communication. Following a discussion, some of the students want to try to integrate; others balk, but all become quiet when the blind student says that she feels left out because she doesn’t belong to any group in the class and feels ignored by most of the class.

- What’s going on here?
- What would you as the teacher do?
Scenario #2

The teacher invites guest speakers in order to increase the understanding of American culture and fill in gaps. One day, a survivor of the World War II Japanese internment camps in the U.S. spends an hour describing the camp situation as well as the indignities and injustices he and his family experienced.

After class when the speaker has left, Jun, a student from Korea, approaches the teacher and quietly says, “They deserved it, those Japanese.” When the teacher asks him to explain further, he says, “Do you know what the Japanese did to the Koreans during the War?”

• How does Jun see this situation?
• How can the teacher respond?

Scenario #3

In the 10th week of the quarter, one of the Euro-American students tells the class about the refugee family she helps to host. Annie, who chews tobacco in class and wears a nose ring, argues that too much time is spent making a big deal of the need to be culturally sensitive. Her position is that we should mainly be honest and forthright about who we are, even with our flaws and prejudices, and not try to hide them or pretend that we are someone else. She says that when visiting the refugee family that she hosts, she walks right in, talks real loud, puts her feet up. This Asian family simply accepts her as she is, just as she accepts them. The blind student in the class interjects that she would not be able to take Annie to meet her grandmother, because Annie is too “oddball.” Some of the other students nod and murmur agreement. The teacher sees that Annie’s eyes are filling up with tears.

• What would you do if you were a student in this class?
• What can the teacher do?

Scenario #4

During a full class discussion around mid-quarter, one of the African Americans comments on the difficulty in discussing anything in this class, because “the White folks hog the conversation and the Asians don’t say anything.” One of the Euro-Americans shouts that “somebody’s got to keep the discussion on track and going.” A Vietnamese student who attended an American high school chimes in that she only talks when she has something important to say and “anyway, it’s the African Americans who talk too much during class.” The other students say nothing.

Discuss some options for the teacher who desperately needs your help.
Cultural Conflict Among Students and Faculty in the Classroom

Case Field Notes

These scenarios have been field tested with groups of newly-hired college teachers, as in-service training at community colleges with and without many students/faculty of color, and in classrooms with students. Although the scenarios are brief, they generate lively discussion, more so among teacher groups than students. A minimum of two hours should be allotted for small groups to discuss the set, one scenario at a time, then report out to the large group, which then generates more large group discussion. Student groups have gotten through these discussion in an hour, perhaps due to their reluctance to voice strong opinions or statements about these highly charged issues, especially when classrooms reflected a similar make-up in terms of the student population.

A facilitator can guide the discussions so that the following issues surface and are explored:

Scenario #1
a. definition of “group”
b. group segregation vs. integration
c. definition of diversity

Scenario #2
a. historical gaps
b. ancient hostilities

Scenario #3
a. cross-cultural knowledge and tolerance
b. acceptable behavior

Scenario #4
a. stereotyping

In all of these scenarios, it is important to get participants to explore their own “gut” responses to each situation. A worthwhile goal is to create a safe place for faculty and students to bring out some of their deep-seated fears and concerns without others judging them loudly and harshly. Sometimes participants will try to avoid the discussion, claiming to need more information. Our response has been, while encouraging teachers to learn as much as possible about students, we need to acknowledge that most of us cannot know everything. In fact, we often find ourselves in these situations and are forced to think on our feet and do something (or not) at that given moment. Assure the group who thinks these scenarios constitute the wildest fiction, that these situations have occurred in various classrooms, times and places. For those who protest that students in their classrooms do not even closely resemble those in this class, remind them that according to census projections, their classrooms will look more and more like this one.

It has been useful for participants to end discussion of each scenario with a list of suggestions for what the teacher can do next.
Well, It’s the Same Material, Isn’t It?

Philosophy instructor Randy has just returned to his campus from a conference on collaborative learning. He is excited about the possibility of putting together a coordinated studies learning community course at his community college. At his first opportunity he calls his friend Diane, a physics instructor.

“Well, it’s the same material, isn’t it?"

After listening to Randy explain his idea, Diane suggests that they expand their coordinated studies course to include literature. Getting Randy’s agreement, she contacts her friend Paul, an English instructor. Paul expresses excitement about working with her and Randy. Following several more phone calls, the threesome agrees to meet at the end of the week to talk further.

Friday afternoon finds Diane, Randy, and Paul in animated discussion about the virtues of learning communities. This leads to a robust discussion about how they might team teach their three courses together under a common theme. Three hours later they have a theme, a rough outline of topics, and an agreement to individually work out more details over the weekend.

On Monday morning, Diane gets a call from Paul. She can hear the concern in his voice. “Diane, I spent the whole weekend working out ideas for our course and came to work this morning really excited. I went in to share my ideas with my dean, and I’m worried that he might have a problem with me and Randy being involved – something about class sizes. Randy says to ignore the dean and push full speed ahead, but I don’t want to proceed without the dean’s approval. Diane, tell me what you think we should do?”

“Well, first off, I think your right in saying we can’t ignore the dean. Perhaps we should meet with him to discuss the issue. But if we are going to do that, the three of us need to get together beforehand to figure out a strategy. We need to figure the dean’s concerns and then find a way to meet those concerns. Perhaps we can even suggest some alternatives. You know, the word on your dean is that he is a ‘NO first’ kind of a guy who eventually caves in under pressure. Let’s us three get together this afternoon. I’ll call Randy.”

Paul begins the afternoon discussion by summarizing what he thinks are his dean’s concerns: “The differences in class sizes between philosophy and literature seems to be the big deal for Daniel. He realizes that all three courses need to be of equal size since the same students will register for each. But I think he is unwilling to raise the course capacity of 34 in literature or to lower the course capacity of 40 in philosophy. When I explained that the ideal student-teacher ratio in a learning community is 25-to-one he looked at me like I was crazy. The whole encounter so disappointed me that I left without asking for reasons or suggesting alternatives. I just don’t know what to do.”
“Well,” suggests Diane, “why don’t we try to anticipate his concerns and then approach him with some responses and possible alternatives. For example, if his reason for not wanting to lower the capacity of philosophy is a concern about Randy’s faculty student ratio – and I can imagine my dean might have a similar concern – Randy and I could each volunteer to take on an additional class without pay. In that way we could offset. . . ”

Randy interrupts Diane mid sentence with an emotional “Wait a minute Diane! You and I can’t devote the necessary attention to planning and teaching this learning community if we take on an additional teaching load. Instead of making excuses or paying penitence for teaching in a learning community, why don’t we look for benefits peculiar to learning communities which would offset the dean’s concerns? Other courses and programs run with low enrollments. Perhaps lower enrollments in learning communities can also be justified. There appears to be many benefits for students, and we as faculty will certainly profit through working together. Paul, I know you have done some reading on learning communities, what do you think of this line of reasoning?”

“I seem to remember reading several articles on this topic. I’ll go up to my office and get whatever I can find and bring it down.”

Materials in hand, Paul returns and the three faculty spend the rest of the afternoon preparing for their meeting with dean Daniel. At the conclusion of the meeting, they have a list of what they take to be the dean’s concerns and their responses to those concerns, including an outline of virtues and benefits of learning communities.

The following afternoon finds Randy, Diane, and Paul in dean Daniel’s office.

“I really think this ‘team-teaching’ stuff is great” explains Daniel. “These learning communities are on the cutting edge of education, and you three are to be commended for your innovation. However, as I told Paul, I do have some concerns regarding class capacities – in particular, with the philosophy and literature courses. As you are aware, those two courses have quite different class capacity limits. Philosophy has a ceiling of 40, and literature 34. The literature course needs to remain at 34 due to the extensive and essential writing component, and with the number of students who want or need philosophy, I just don’t see how we could reduce the class size to 34. And Diane, with a capacity of 40 in physics, I’m sure your dean would have the same concerns about physics that I have about philosophy. I realize that a difference of six students in one course doesn’t seem like much, but with the three sections of these two courses needed for the learning community, the institutional impact would be 36 students – practically enough students for an entire course! Again, I want to commend the three of you for all your planning, but I just don’t see how the college can justify the expenditure.

For what it’s worth, if it were my decision to make, I’d say go ahead and offer the course. But the VPI wouldn’t approve – especially given the recent budget cuts. After all, the students can get the same material by taking the three courses individually. You would have to cover the same material, wouldn’t you?”
Well, It’s the Same Material, Isn’t It?

Discussion Questions

1. Are courses which are parts of learning communities and individually taught stand-alone courses similar enough kinds of things to make valid comparisons (like the budgetary comparisons brought up by the dean)?
   a. What benefits might the faculty list that accrue to students enrolled in a learning community that may not accrue to students enrolled in individual stand-alone courses? And, if there are such benefits, do they outweigh or counter-balance the budgetary concerns the dean raises?
   b. What about faculty? What benefits might accrue to faculty involved in learning communities that would probably not accrue to faculty teaching traditional stand-alone courses? And, if there are such benefits, do they outweigh or counterbalance the budgetary concerns raised by the dean?

2. Is the material covered in three stand-alone courses the same material covered in a team-taught learning community? How might Randy, Diane, and Paul respond to this comparison?

3. What additional reasons or arguments could the faculty give and on what points could, or should, they negotiate?

4. If the material covered in learning communities is significantly different from material covered in the individual courses which go to make up a learning community course, what implications might this have for courses which are prerequisites for advanced courses?
Julie’s Dilemma

The learning community program had been operating at Cascade for five years. Participation patterns had only changed gradually. The English faculty were out front, as they were on all issues. The science faculty – ever the “high content types” – remained stand-offish. Interest among the other faculty in the humanities and the social sciences had gradually increased, but there were lots of faculty who loved team teaching and they tended to form a stable core of committed learning community teachers.

Some dissatisfaction with learning communities started to surface about a year and a half ago. One group of faculty critics thought that too much “content” was being sacrificed, while another faction seemed most concerned about whether learning community faculty were carrying their load. Some thought that the English faculty were quick to encourage other disciplines to compromise on the amount of content, while they themselves insisted on covering the entire English Composition curriculum. Some faculty on the outer fringes complained about cliques in learning community teams and being rebuffed when approaching others to form teams. Another issue was about whether or not new faculty should be immediately encouraged to participate in learning communities.

Yet it was hard to tell whether these were the real issues, because some of the critics were chronic complainers. But they weren’t the only ones complaining. Those of us who supported learning communities also had a list of issues. For one, the administration seemed to give constant mixed messages. On the one hand, they’d say “we value learning communities,” but then they could never come up with more resources or even ask us how the learning communities were doing. It made me think they were just paying lip service, riding high on the latest bandwagon. They also praised the sharing of power between faculty and students in learning communities, but failed to see how the notion of community and power-sharing applied to them.

All the faculty supporters thought the effort needed more leadership and better support in terms of recruitment and advising from student services. We met and agreed that at the very least, having a faculty coordinator would make learning communities better organized and more secure.

Finally, after several years of haggling, the administration had reluctantly agreed to appoint a faculty coordinator. The job was designed with one-third release time and a two-thirds teaching load. Since I had been on at least one team a year and participated in the many discussions about assessing and improving learning communities, I decided to apply. While I wasn’t exactly sure what the job entailed, I was confident that I could do it. Besides it was time to put my money where my mouth was. I know that faculty always got accused of grumbling about what’s wrong but disappearing when it was time to work to set things right.

Five weeks after I submitted my application, I was notified that I got the new position. I remember being excited and on cloud nine, yet now, eleven months later, I wasn’t so sure that I was the right person.
Somewhat naively, I had thought I could solve most of “the issues” overnight, as if I really even knew what the issues were. I remember thinking that organization really needed improving. That was one I could handle. Everyone acknowledged that if I did that well, I would have accomplished a lot.

So for starters, our advance publicity got much better. For the first time, we’d put out a brochure showing all the learning community programs for the entire year. I was working hard to keep the advising office well informed, so that improved, though we still had problems there. I’d arranged visits for out-of-town people who wanted to visit our learning communities. I’d put together a nice packet of materials to give them an overview of our efforts. I’d attended statewide meetings to learn what others were doing, and I’d tried to pass the information on to others.

But now as I faced my first evaluation conference with Dean Walker, I had nagging doubts about how I’d even conceived my role and how he was going to evaluate me. After attending the last meeting of learning community coordinators from around the state, it was clear that some of the others had much broader responsibilities. Compared to them, I looked like a go-fer. Maybe my focus on organization had been too narrow. The dean had always voiced his strong support and he was always friendly, but he hadn’t given me much direction. We never had regular meetings, just occasional chats in the hallway.

Maybe I wasn’t being assertive enough, but I didn’t know how to raise my concerns without looking like I don’t know what I’m doing. How do I talk about issues that now seem to be in-between everyone else’s responsibilities and mine, without looking like I’m trying to infringe on other people’s territory? How do we fit the learning community effort in with other initiatives like assessment and cultural pluralism, or are we faculty who work in learning communities the first ones to see the connections and overlap here? Then there are all those questions I get asked when teams are planning, about class size and part-timers and faculty replacement. Am I expected to know about these things, but how can I if I’m not involved in the broader curriculum planning meetings? Should I be asking the dean about things like budget cuts and FTEs? What is my role and how should I raise this issue?
Julie’s Dilemma

Discussion Questions

1. What does Julie believe her responsibilities are?
2. What of importance was left undone? How might this be determined?
3. What is the role of the coordinator ideally? What jobs need to get done to administer learning communities and whose job is this? Rank order the responsibilities.
4. How should the role of the coordinator fit into the overall college administration? Is the coordinating structure for learning communities adequate? How might it be improved?
5. If you were the dean, how would you assess Julie’s performance as coordinator?
6. What is meant by “carrying their load” when the faculty complain about learning community faculty? How might this be defined in an institution truly committed to student learning?
7. How might the learning community coordinator be more of a bridge builder between the administration and the faculty?
8. Break into two groups based upon your role as either an administrator or faculty member and discuss what each should do. Report back to the whole.
Some References on Cases


