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Case Study as an Active Method of Teaching Business English

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Abstract

The article deals with the problem of using active methods of teaching on the example of case study. The notion of active methods of teaching, the description of case study, stages of preparing case studies are given in the paper. The article contains several case studies on business English. Case studies are stories. They present realistic, complex, and contextually rich situations and often involve a dilemma, conflict, or problem that one or more of the characters in the case must negotiate. The peculiarity of active methods of teaching is that it develops practical and critical thinking. This helps the students not only to memorize and render the material which was given by the teacher but involves them in the process of active thinking and practice. Case studies give students practice identifying the parameters of a problem, recognizing and articulating positions, evaluating courses of action, and arguing different points of view.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, cross-cultural communicative competence is the basis of methodical requirements of teaching. It is considered as a unity of linguistic, communicative and cultural components. Therefore, as a function of language pedagogy, along with some information tasks, such aspects of teaching that should determine the possibility of providing adequate communicative behavior in the country of the target language and the acquaintance with value reference points, typical for parties in contact, are conceptually included. To achieve this goal, modern active methods of teaching are used. Among them are: cooperative learning, design technology, centered on students learning, distance learning, the use of the language portfolio, the tandem method, computer and audiovisual technology, and technology «case study».

2. Author Artwork

2.1 What is a good case study

The majority of students, studying for a degree in economics and management are probably familiar with the method of case study. For the others, case study is something not very clear. At the same time, the case method is increasingly being used not only as a teaching method, but also as a method of staff selection.

Case studies are the scenarios that apply the concepts learned in the classroom in the "real life" situation. Usually they are presented in narrative form, and often include problem solving, links to some course readings or raw materials, and discussions by groups of students, or the whole class. As a rule, the case studies are more effective

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when they are presented sequentially, so that students receive additional information depending on the situation unfolds, and can continue to analyze or criticize the situation or the problem. (Herriet, 2014)

According to Professor Paul Lawrence, a good case study is: “the vehicle by which a chunk of reality is brought into the classroom to be worked over by the class and the instructor. A good case keeps the class discussion grounded upon some of the stubborn facts that must be faced in real life situations.” (Lawrence, 2010)

Whereas in the area of business, law and medicine case studies are used most widely, this method of teaching may as well be an effective instructional technique in many other subjects. As an educational strategy, case studies have a number of advantages. They “bridge the gap between theory and practice and between the academy and the workplace”. (Barkley, 2005) They also give students opportunity to practice recognizing the problem parameters, identifying and articulating ideas, assessing options for actions, and arguing different points of view.

Teaching professionally oriented communication using the above mentioned technology requires that both the teacher and students possess a number of developed professional communicative abilities. They are:

- a) ability to perceive and evaluate the information coming in both verbal and non-verbal form;
- b) ability to carry out diagnostics and analysis of the problem;
- c) ability to formulate and logically construct a statement in compliance with the rules of language;
- d) ability to take part in a discussion;
- e) ability to participate in collective decision-making.

Case studies vary in length and detail, and can be used in a number of ways, depending on the case itself and on the instructor’s goals.

The process of case creation is a complex educational system and is carried out in several stages:

1. Formulating of didactic purposes. At this stage the place of the case in the structure of the training course is determined. The aim should be clearly formulated, without much of terminology.
2. Working out a case layout.
3. Gathering of relevant information.
4. Building a model of the situation.
5. Selecting a case genre.
6. Writing a case text.
7. Diagnostics of accuracy and efficiency of a case.
8. Implementation of a case in the process of teaching.

An effective case study is one that, according to Davis (1993):

- tells a “real” and engaging story
- raises a thought-provoking issue
- has elements of conflict
- promotes empathy with the central characters
- lacks an obvious or clear-cut right answer
- encourages students to think and take a position
- portrays actors in moments of decision
- provides plenty of data about character, location, context, actions
- is relatively concise. (Davis, 1993)

2.2 Main steps of a successful case study

In spite of the fact that there are lots of variations in how case can be used, these six steps provide a common basis for how to conduct the discussion.

The first step – give the group enough time to read and think about the case. If the case is long, give it as a home task with a set of questions for a group to consider (e.g. What is the essence of the case? What are the alternatives of actions? What are the main obstacles the central character is facing?)

The second step – introduce the case and give some instruction for how to approach it, how you want students to consider this problem. (e.g. You are the members of an advertising campaign for one of the product or services. Present your campaign to the management concerned.) Break down the stages you want participants to take in developing the case. (E.g. First....., Secondly....., Finally) If you want your students to concentrate on certain information, specify it (e.g. I want you to ignore the political views of the countries)

The third step – form groups and monitor them to be convinced that all the students are involved in discussion. Dividing the whole class into smaller groups encourage everyone to participate and interact with each other. Thus, it

is a great idea to formulate the task of each group very precise. (e.g. Tell the group that they will each be preparing a mini- presentation on one of the companies. They should also prepare to talk about the information in the analyst's report in their own words.) You may also distribute the roles inside each small group (e.g. The student playing the role of Hugo Whitman should chair the meeting. Another student should take notes about the discussion, and even there may be role cards for every student.) So even very timid students could have an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.

The fourth step - make groups present their solutions: when students know they are in charge of producing a mini-presentation, analysis decisions to present to the class, they will be involved in the discussion with greater sobriety. Write their conclusions on the board so that you can return to them in the discussion that follows.

The fifth step - ask questions for clarification and to move discussion to another level. One of the most important points for a case-based discussion leader is to guide the discussion and probe for deeper analysis without over-directing. As the discussion unfolds, ask questions that call for students to examine their own assumptions, substantiate their claims, provide illustrations, etc.

The sixth step - synthesize issues raised. Be sure to bring different strands of the discussion back together at the end of lesson, thus students can see what they have learnt and so that they have some feedback from their work. The job of synthesizing need not necessarily fall to the instructor, however; one or more students can be given this task. (<http://www.cmu.edu>)

Some variations on this general method include having students do outside research (individually or in groups) to bring to bear on the case in question, and comparing the actual outcome of a real-life dilemma to the solutions generated in class.

2.3 Examples of case study

The first case refers to the topic "Trade"

The title of the case is "Marcus Guitars"

Brief description: US distributor Marcus Guitars wants a Spanish guitar maker to manufacture a range of guitars under the Marcus name.

Specification of the case:

The Kim Guitar Company (KGC) in Seoul, South Korea, makes electric guitars for Japanese manufacturers and distributors in Europe and the US. It creates its own branded products but also makes guitars to distributors' specifications.

A major US distributor, Marcus Guitars, has contacted KGC about marketing a range of guitars under its own brand name for the Californian market. Marcus Guitars is a well-established company with an up-market image. It has had no previous dealings with KGC. Marcus' owner, David Green, plans to put two models on the market: the Marcus MG300 (the most expensive model), the MG400 and the MG100. The body of the guitars will have an experimental shape as well as advanced technical features. Marcus' guitars will appeal to any musician who wants an instrument with a distinctive sound and exotic appearance.

It is now early January. KGC has agreed to manufacture the guitars for Marcus, even though it is a very busy time of the year for them. The two companies have had some initial correspondence by fax and now a face-to-face meeting is required.

Several points of the contract need to be negotiated. KGC's owner, Jerry Kim has flown to San Francisco to meet David Green. At the meeting, the Marketing Director of each company will be present. The purpose of the meeting is to make a deal acceptable to both sides, and which could be the basis for a long-term relationship.

You give task to the students that they should negotiate as either:

- The KGC team: Jerry Kim and Marketing Director (read your information file on the card)
- The Marcus team: David Green and Marketing Director (read your information file on the card)

Guidelines: the group should be divided into 2 teams of their choice; the teacher should give time (20 minutes) on the distribution of roles, the study of background information, the formulation of strategy and tactics of behavior during negotiations. Teacher's role is reduced to monitoring and, if necessary, to assist the teams. After that, the students roleplay negotiations, discuss questions.

For homework, students are encouraged to write and send a fax to the following problem situation:

As the owner of either Marcus Guitars or 1 KGC, write a fax summarizing the points agreed during the negotiation. Indicate any terms of the contract requiring discussion or clarification.

The second case refers to the topic "Innovation"

The title of the case is "International Leatherwear"

Brief description: This case is based on the competition in the invention of a new product, the discussion of ideas and the presentation of the product.

Specification of the case:

The International Leatherware Association (ILA) represents leather goods manufacturers and retailers. One of its main functions is to promote the use of leather for new products. Each year the Association awards prizes to companies with outstanding new ideas. Companies send a detailed product description and a marketing plan, and the four best proposals are selected. These companies then present their product concepts to a panel of judges. The presentations and awards are televised and the event is broadcast worldwide (Cotton, 2001)

Task:

Your company is competing for the ILA's top prize. You believe that you have an outstanding idea for a new leather product. Read the Case study documents. Then, prepare your product presentation and present it to the rest of the group. Answer any questions they may have. When you are not making a presentation, you are a member of the judging panel. Decide who should get top prize. (You may not vote for your own product concept.)

Guidelines: the group should be divided into teams of their choice; the teacher should give time (30 minutes) on the distribution of roles, the study of background information, the development of a new product and to prepare the presentation. Teacher's role is reduced to monitoring and, if necessary, to assist the teams. For the successful implementation of the project the students are given recommendations on the development of the product as well as guidance on the presentation.

For homework, students are encouraged to write an article to the journal to the following problem situation:

The editor of your company's in-house magazine has asked you to write a short article about the leatherware competition. Include information about some of the products presented at the event and mention who received the top prize. Say whether you think the judges made a good choice (Hall, 2001)

These cases, and many others are offered to students of economic specialties of TPU throughout the course in Business English.

Summarizing the above mentioned, it should again be noted that the method of case-study provides students with an excellent opportunity to apply creatively the language material on the basis of their professional knowledge and to allow students to adapt to the real and potential situations. Being an interactive method of teaching, it won a positive attitude on the part of students, who see it as an opportunity to take the initiative, to feel self-sufficiency in the development of theory and mastery of practical skills. It is also very important that the analysis of the situation has quite a strong impact on the professionalization of students, promotes their maturation, and generates interest and positive motivation to learn (Pokushalova, 2011)

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