CASEing the Chick

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Research shows that the professional schools of law, medicine and business have used case studies to gain a deeper understanding of a particular principle or problem (Miller et al 1998). Law schools have studied legal **cases** since the 1870's. Atlas (1999) contends that the core of the Harvard Business School is the case method. Cases allow group interactions, discussions, and opportunities to experience the process of developing solutions.

The use of case study in education presents an opportunity for the instructor to integrate theory and concepts with practical applications. It allows students to extend their cognition of learning in analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information. Students critically analyze concepts, generate and organize ideas, make comparisons, draw inferences and problem solve Chance (1986).

Utilizing case studies in an educational setting mirrors the situation cognition learning theory. This theory posits that knowledge is co-produced through activity in which it is developed and deployed, Brown et al (1989). Educators often separate the knowing what from the knowing how and assume that knowledge is independent of the situation in which it is learned and used, Brown et al (1989). The research work of Brown et al (1989) promoted a learning environment of cognitive apprenticeship that embraces learning in activity and make purposeful use of the social and physical situations. Integrating case studies into the classroom allows students to apply theory and to acquire a better understanding of how businesses use theory and concepts to manage daily operations and to forecast short and long-range goals. Students are able to synthesize such understanding of the concepts and the situation in which it was used and make an evaluative judgment with solutions, which may vary depending on the interactions. Brown et al (1989) believes that each situation

determines how a concept or theory will be applied based on how individuals perceive and understand the community in which it is used.

Further, the use of case studies gives students an opportunity to engage in a domain conceptual culture. Students experience the domain culture through activities that are connected to the field. The Lave (1988) ethnographic studies compared the learning of students, ordinary people, and practitioners. This study found that ordinary people use the apprenticeship method to learn. The practitioners and the ordinary people behaviors were similar. Both groups deployed activities related to the work culture where they were able to negotiate meaning and construct understanding. The work activities were guided by work related issues and problems, and solutions were resolved within the constraints of the work environment. The study also found that the ordinary people group was skilled at solving problems within the framework of the context that produced them. Lave (1988) posited that it is critical that the group share the burden of defining and solving the problem within the task environment and respond in real time. The adequacy of the solution becomes apparent in relation to the role it must play in allowing the activity to continue, Brown (1989). The researchers also proposed that there is a necessary relationship between the problem, the solution and the learning process. The problem and solution cannot be separated from the context in which they are embedded.

Miller (1998) theorizes that the use of case studies allows students to base fundamental concepts in practical application, confront problems, and exemplify narrative knowing. This author further believes that cases may be viewed as a change agent in education, Miller (1998).

The use of case studies shifts more of the responsibility of learning to the student. Students learn from their analyses,

investigations, peers, and view multiple perspectives of solutions. Huff et all (2000) contends that students are able to learn from mistakes that are made in a risk free environment, gain the use of decision making experiences across a broad spectrum of organizational settings, and understand the blend of course integration.

Cases may be typed as singled focused, multi-disciplined, open-ended, comprehensive, vignette, or authentic. The Chick-fil-A- Case is an authentic type case. Characteristics of an authentic case are that it engages the learner in activities that require the learner to problem solve, think critically, discuss collaboratively, and work in a team environment. The Chick-fil-A- Case presented an operational problem faced by businesses. The Point-of-Sale (POS) system used by the franchise was aging and a new system was needed. While there were many specifications required of the new system, it was necessary that this system could communicate with the current information system and meet short and long-range information systems goals. Chick-fil-A administration worked diligently with educators to provide the background information for the case. Information Technology executives met with educators to explain and discuss the current system, demonstrate prototypes of the three proposed systems, and identify the minimum specifications of new system. A planning meeting was held at corporate headquarters in Atlanta, GA. This meeting gave educators an opportunity to view the information technology infrastructure, tour the training facilities, and visit a local store. This in-depth visit provided additional information for the case and gave educators a holistic perspective for the development process. Chick-fil-A IT executives gave untiringly of their time working as systems expert consultants during the case development. This type of participation validated the technical

information of the case. These experts spent an enormous amount of time and gave a valuable 'in-kind' contribution to education. Chick-fil-A Corporate also supports education through internship programs.

A business – educator alliance was formed from this case development process. Research supports this type of partnership in that it not only establishes an alliance, but it provides opportunities for students to apply theory to real-world situations. There has been a movement in recent years to establish a link between business and education with the "adopt the school programs" in the Pre-K-12 sector and internship programs in higher education settings. Businesses and educators must continue such programs. Businesses seek employees who are highly skilled, adaptable, and well rounded. Students who have experienced the use of case studies and worked in internship possess these qualities.

Higher education, universities and community colleges, must also strengthen the articulation of curriculums to provide a cohesive integration of the majors. Businesses and educators must continue to work towards more integration so that students can understand the value and responsibility that each entity provides in contributing to the educational process.

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Linda Theus is an Associate Professor at Jackson State Community College in Jackson, TN. She is a 25-year veteran teacher in the areas of computer applications, databases, college orientation, and foundations of education. During her career, she has served as department chair, worked with various college committees, is certified DACUM Trainer (Developing A Curriculum) with business and industry, and has served as a principal investigator with an NSF grant. She has completed all course requirements for her doctoral studies in Leadership with an emphasis in Higher and Adult Education at the University of Memphis. Currently, she is researching the congruency of learning and teaching styles of faculty and students. Further research of teaching methods of full-time and adjunct faculty will be studied. Analysis of student success based upon grades earned and learning style modes will be examined. Particular emphasis on pedagogy and application of these two groups will be studied.