

## PREFACE



### CASE STUDIES

by William M. Timpson & Debra K. Holman

Traditional approaches to instruction push us to set goals and objectives. We lecture. We identify underlying concepts and build tree diagrams that explain specifics. What's different in this book is that we embrace controversy in all its messy, complex reality—the conflicting claims, the debates and disagreements, the ambiguity and the frustrations—around diversity, conflict, and sustainability. We do this for two reasons. First, we want to address inherently complex and controversial issues for what they are. Second, we want to embrace opportunities for developing critical and creative thinking about them.

Reality is complex and so are our emotional reactions. To find that space where we are thinking clearly and communicating effectively will require some skill at taking a step back, reflecting, and analyzing—what psychologists refer to as metacognition, or thinking about thinking. Case studies allow for this kind of reflection and perspective-taking. In *Meta-teaching and the Instructional Map*, Timpson (1999) describes it this way: “Problem-based learning (or case-based learning) is an approach to instruction . . . where students will eventually move into roles calling for a great deal of critical and creative thinking about real and inevitably complex problems” (87).

### WORKING WITH CASE STUDIES

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Years of research, development, and practice with case studies at Harvard in the Business, Medical, and Law Schools provide compelling reasons for using them in instruction and learning (Barnes, Christensen, and Hansen 1994). We know from our own professional experiences

with case studies (Sprain and Timpson 2012; Timpson and Holman 2011) that such work allows for higher level thinking in the cognitive domain as described in Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al. 1956). Specifically, case studies provide students the opportunity to apply their knowledge to real world examples, to deepen their understanding through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Cases can stimulate conversation and deepen the examination of the material for students and instructors alike.

The challenges can be invigorating, exactly what various developmentalists have long championed. Kohlberg (1963) asked instructors to develop dilemmas that would engage students in deep discussions around moral choices. This kind of intellectual and emotional investment in issues could, he argued, serve as the catalyst for growth in moral thinking about controversial issues. Piaget (1970) used various categorization tasks to assess progress along a continuum of logical reasoning and argued for teachers to create rich and stimulating environments for students.

Case-based learning does not just happen. For instructors to serve as effective guides, they must be skilled with a range of communication models. There will be times when direct instruction is appropriate, when material must be presented in clear terms. Rather quickly, however, a case will plunge students into the heart of a compelling issue with all its varied arguments, subtleties, and contradictions. Value differences can surface. Here is when deep listening, empathy, and other communication skills are important in order to consider issues without devolving into aggressive, submissive, or other counterproductive responses.

## OVERVIEW FOR CASE STUDIES

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In editing this volume of cases on controversial issues for teaching on sustainability, conflict, and diversity, we wanted to produce a work that could be used by instructors across the disciplines and at different levels of the curriculum. We wanted to encourage higher levels of student engagement, the development of their problem-solving abilities, and opportunities for self-discovery that come with problem- and case-based learning (Barrows and Tamblyn 1980; Hmelo-Silver 2004; Timpson and Doe 2008).

Each case includes a description of the *Current Situation and Central Question(s)*—the issue, problem, or concern impacting sustainability, creating conflict, or affecting diversity. Information related to the *Background* of the situation is then presented, followed by additional *Questions for Discussion* to encourage readers to think more deeply about the situation and consider ways in which it might be addressed or resolved. *References* are selectively provided as supporting material for instructors and students wishing to delve more deeply into the case. The *Appendices* contain *Supplemental Materials*—selected instructional options, further questions for discussion, evaluation tools, and additional reference materials—which can be used in the development of lessons plans and navigation through the case study process.

When reviewing the cases and supplemental materials, instructors may find that the *Diversity* chapter incorporates cases that can be readily utilized with students ranging from middle school through college. Comparatively, many of the cases in the *Conflict* chapter may be best suited for use in classrooms of college-age students. Finally, the *Sustainability* chapter, in grappling with subjects related to teacher training and campus operations, may be best suited for use in teacher education at the university level, or in professional development activities for those in the field of education.

## DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCE

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Maya Angelou once said that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength. Know that the writers in this volume come from different walks of life. Among the contributors, there is a scholar of peace and reconciliation, a number of elementary and secondary school teachers, international students, postsecondary instructors, and a journalist. While the writers differ in many ways, including gender, age, expertise, national origin, first language, and religion, they share commonalities in working with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and partners in developing case studies for teaching sustainability, conflict, and diversity.

In editing the cases that became this book, we found similar themes about human nature as viewed through diverse lenses. We became deeply engaged with the writers' experiences and their wrestling with real world complexity. We hope that you will want to explore these cases and controversies yourself and thereby deepen your own understanding and engagement with diversity, conflict, and sustainability.

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