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# Using an Integrated Approach to Case Studies In Order to Enhance Critical Thinking

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**Thinking**

While my "regular" job for the past twelve years has been serving as a director of library services for Johnson & Wales University, I have also been teaching for the past four years for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Masters in Library & Information Studies program and simultaneously assisting with Johnson & Wales' faculty development committee. So, the project/concept I'd like to share here is an outgrowth of a variety of interests and activities.

Harvard University sponsors a multitude of leadership institutes and activities targeting many different university administrative roles. One of these institutes which they co-sponsor with the Association of College and Research libraries and I had the opportunity to attend in its 2003 iteration is a week-long camp which focuses on the use of case studies. Aside from the canned case studies provided to participants all members of that year's group are required to bring with them a summary of a case they have been involved in. They are also instructed to read the book *Reframing Organizations* by Bolman and Deal. The larger group is then broken into smaller teams with the goal of analyzing each other's case based on the concepts in the Bolman and Deal text. I believe the model used with this group of administrators can also be applied to graduate students and that this model significantly enhances the quality of the students' learning experiences and fosters critical thinking skills.

Since my students who are enrolled in Library Administration and Management are not experienced administrators I have them begin their "case study group project" by interviewing an experienced librarian with a problem or by documenting a problem they

were involved in (some work as a paraprofessional in a given library). Simultaneously, they are required to read *Reframing Organizations* which emphasizes the need to view problems from four perspectives: political, human resource, structural, and symbolic. We spend significant class time discussing what is meant by these perspectives and applying these approaches to cases found in *Library Journal*. Once their cases are completed and I have reviewed them (I do this based on some feedback I received from the second class I did this with that suggested I help some folks with the clarity of case summaries.) they then pass the case to their assigned group of three or four other students. They must then choose at least two frames and write an analysis with recommendations for each group member's case. I then dedicate an entire class period for them to meet, verbally share their feedback, and engage in a discussion of each case. Lastly, they are required to write a reflective paper with an emphasis upon responding to the feedback they received and why or why not aspects of it seem to make sense or not. While it is a group project they are graded on their individual efforts in writing a case, providing feedback, and carefully considering what they have learned. In addition to grading the project I have also asked students each time how they would improve the assignment and how valuable the project was to their learning for the course. I have made minor tweaks as a result (such as the one mentioned above) and the project has always rated high with the students as to its value for their learning.

I wanted to share this assignment because I think the concept is easily transferrable. As I point out to the class, while I do like the *Reframing Organizations* text another text could just as readily be used. Other examples would be Furlong's *Conflict Resolution Toolbox* which would require students to pick one model to apply to each

analysis or DeBobo's *Seven Thinking Hats* which would likewise provide seven different possible approaches to looking at a problem. In my mind, the more important thing is to get them interested on a deep level with something relevant to practice (again, this approach could easily be applied in other disciplines) and also to provide a structure or framework for them to work with (e.g. frames, thinking hats, problem solving models). Furthermore, I think that the peer to peer aspect of this is critical as well as the students are allowed to try their ideas with others who are at a similar level of skill and experience.

References

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2008). *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*. San Franscisco: Jossey-Bass.

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