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Understanding and Implementation of Case Teaching Method

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Abstract

As a kind of teaching method, case teaching method has its own practical value and scope of application. In practice, it mainly consists of some links such as “knowledge preparation”, “case arrangement” and “provoking guidance”. Knowledge preparation could be implemented through a variety of forms and the teaching process that is prepared for analysis has its unique feature. Cases can be selected from the aspects of “event level”, “fact capacity” and “understanding degree”. And they would endow natural events with the educational significance. Setting questions teachers could stimulate students’ interest of analysis. And during the process of analysis, it is supposed to lead students use topic concept to analyze these questions around the cases.

Key words: Case teaching; Knowledge preparation; Case arrangement; Analysis guidance

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INTRODUCTION

There is no denying that people catch the meaning of “case teaching” literally, therefore most people would implement

this teaching method with their preliminary understanding, thus failing to fulfill its proper function. Given this fact, it is helpful to analyze “concept background”, “practical value” and “application scope” of case teaching method, and to explain and standardize its specific links, which can deepen the theoretical understanding and further the practice of the method.

1. COMPREHENDING PRACTICE OF CASE TEACHING METHOD

Concept background: thought basis for the emergence of case teaching method. In the traditional teaching and learning process, people pay more attention to the imparting of knowledge than to student’s learning, more to the memorization of knowledge than the incentive of the student’s creativity. Therefore the case teaching method can not be fully valued in such occasion. In traditional education, many teachers indeed use cases for promoting students’ understanding of new knowledge. However, “using cases in teaching process” is not actually the case teaching method. Teachers regard cases as a kid of aid, which obviously shows that they do not profoundly understand “case teaching method”. As a widely-implemented teaching method, case teaching method inevitably needs a widely-accepted idea of education to match it. New curriculum reform makes people to respect learning experience of the students, pay more attention to the training of students’ innovation capability, and treat the students as active participants rather than passive recipients in the teaching process. Based on such idea of education, case teaching method would be a kind of “teaching method” rather than an “aid” of the traditional education, and its inherent educational function would be brought into play. Thereupon, as a “teaching aid” or “a teaching method”, case teaching method would have two different properties. And they might be distinguished from each other according to

their role and status in teaching. As a kind of “teaching aid”, the cases would be inferior in the teaching processes. Teachers usually take examples from their own experience to assist teaching, so there is a strong chance that whether they could bring the educational role of case teaching method into play. As a kind of “teaching method”, “case” is the core of teaching activities which is carefully selected and arranged by instructors. Therefore, its educational function would be brought into play.

The practical value: The case teaching method overcomes shortcomings of the current education. As a result of the education reforms and the efforts of educators, teaching methods have obtained the unprecedented development in contemporary times, and the new teaching method at home and abroad are numerous. However, new teaching methods might highlight the students’ interest but greatly reduce the efficiency of teaching; may also attach great importance to the cultivation of student’s exploration spirit but ignore teachers’ leading; and might emphasize student’s initiative while excessively depreciate teachers’ position in teaching. Most Popular new teaching methods underline students’ role too much in the teaching process and it inevitably produces some drawbacks. As far as it that is concerned, case teaching method focuses on the initiative of students, that is, inspiring them to explore nature, society and themselves, meanwhile stresses the leading role of teachers in teaching activities. Therefore, it overcomes the defects of the new teaching methods in contemporary and it is favored by educators for its unique practical value. How does the case teaching method overcome drawbacks of the contemporary teaching method and thus become irreplaceable? Case teaching method means that teachers organize and carry out their teaching with cases, the core of the process, which, however, is not the scientific knowledge which students do not know completely, but the experience and events which teachers and students are familiar with. Thus, teachers and students can exchange views equally with their own understanding of the knowledge. In this way, neither students nor teachers are the center of the teaching process. And then it could overcome the shortcomings of teaching methods in practicalism education without being students-centered, and it could also eliminate the drawbacks of teaching methods in traditional education without being teacher-centered.

Application: The areas that the case teaching method can be carried out effectively. Case teaching method has lots of advantages that have been stated above, yet it cannot be widely applied because of its limited areas. Because case teaching method emphasizes students’ active participation in teaching, and it would help them to acquire knowledge and develop forward in analyzing

and discussing these cases, whether students have the related experience to understand cases has become the premise of implementing case teaching method. Accordingly, cases should not exceed the possible areas of students’ experience. Cases from a field which is completely unknown to the students could neither arouse their interest, nor lead them to analyze the cases. Within “the possible area of students’ experience”, case teaching method is mostly applicable to experience field with clear categorization. Because in such field, case can reveal the essence of some type of experience more clearly and case teaching method can function more properly. In the “experience field with clear categorization”, case teaching method is usually applicable to experience events that have attracted students’ attention. If case could be selected from experience events that students have concerned, it would be bound to stimulate students’ interest in learning, and make students preoccupied in the teaching process.

2. KNOWLEDGE PREPARATION OF CASE TEACHING METHOD

Mode of knowledge preparation for case analysis. The implementation of case teaching method should take students having the related knowledge as a prerequisite, which is indispensable for the analysis of the cases, and then the teaching will eventually become teachers’ self-directed and their “monodrama”. Modes of carrying on knowledge preparation are various, and the modes usually taken in the teaching practice are this: Firstly, go on knowledge preparation by learning text. Teachers usually tell students about the topic before explaining it, and organize students in groups to gather relevant information around this topic. And then, before class each study group shares the information concerned with this topic to everyone, and they together complete the knowledge preparation of the case analysis. Secondly, prepare knowledge by tracking the relevant cases. It would make students pay attention to and track the progress, final outcome and influence of the case by understanding other relevant cases. In this way, it would be more convenient to implement the knowledge preparation. However, in fact, the two ways above are not appropriate to be implemented frequently because students lack lots of time in preparing knowledge. Therefore, the most practical knowledge preparation is teachers’ instruction. This is the third way of knowledge preparation, namely, to directly help students to prepare knowledge by teachers’ impartment. But it is necessary to notice that this kind of knowledge preparation have its own characteristics and are different from the lecture method.

The knowledge-transference for analysis. In the process of case teaching method, when teachers are instructing their students for knowledge preparation, they need to understand where it is different from the lecture

method. There are three differences between them. First, they have different degree of knowledge explaining. Lecture method requires instructors to explain knowledge clearly and comprehensively so that students can obtain them without thinking and exploring. However, knowledge explanations in case teaching method do not require teachers to do so. On the contrary, teachers need to set aside a lot of blank and blind spots for students to explore. These explorations constitute the main body of teaching. Second, the position of students is different. In lecture method, students only need to be passive listeners without active participation, in which students are in the object status of teaching. On the contrary, in case teaching method, students are not passive listeners but active participants. Their analysis activities constitute the main body of teaching activities, and instead, teachers turned to be subsidiary in students' activities. Third, knowledge impartment share different proportion in teaching activity. In lecture method, knowledge impartment is almost the whole teaching activity. The instructing process and teaching-learning process are essentially the same, and the finishing of delivering means the end of teaching. However, the knowledge impartment in case teaching method is just a preparation for analysis, which is a kind of strategy not the purpose. Finishing instructing knowledge is just a beginning that is far from accomplishment. Because of the differences that have been stated above, the paper will call the knowledge-transference that is prepared for analysis as "auxiliary instruction" in order to distinguish it from the normal teaching method.

Teaching skills of auxiliary instruction. In order to actualize knowledge preparation without excessiveness, auxiliary instruction should pay attention to the following points. First, when talking about the teaching content, the priority should be given to the basic theories. The knowledge that teachers impart in auxiliary instruction is supposed to be more inclusive so that students can be applied to specific cases. Therefore, auxiliary instruction should mainly emphasize the explanation of the basic theories, which are of strong generality and could contain as many cases as possible. Second, teaching method should take structuralism as guidance. In the teaching-learning process, teachers need to lay emphasis on the arrangement of relation between knowledge, for the structuralist knowledge is helpful for students to carry on case analysis. Thus, they can find out the connection among the knowledge of the cases and gradually enlarge their structure of knowledge. Third, the teaching should be focused, concise, and clear. The dispersed content is not advantageous for students to absorb the knowledge rapidly. The more concise and clearer explanation is, the more confident students would be of using knowledge to analyze cases

3. SELECTION AND ARRANGEMENT OF TOPIC CASES

The Nature of topic cases. As mentioned before, the cases are the focus of the case teaching method. Thus, selection of cases is the essential part of the whole teaching process, which concerns the success of teaching and reflects the educational outlook and the teachings of teachers. Although cases play an important role in the case teaching method, yet so far few scholars have special discussion on cases in depth. In this regard, it is necessary to have a brief analysis on cases before discoursing the selection and arrangement of them. The case teaching usually takes a topic as one unit, so the selected cases are always topical cases. And people tend to analyze topic cases from both longitudinal and transverse dimensions. And the longitudinal dimension is presented as "event level". Event level could show us the content of the topic cases including the kinds of events, the connections among events and the background or the topic of the event. A good case often has more than two event levels because the knowledge of students can be activated by the presentation of different event level. A transverse dimension appears as "fact capacity", which refers to all the basic facts that the topic case contained. The larger fact capacity is, the more complex the case would be. The capacity of a good case should not be too large, or it would be difficult for students to understand and analyze. In addition to the above two dimensional, there is also a "understanding degree" which reflects the distance of topic case and students' experience. A high understanding degree is a sign that students already have experience similar to the event in case.

Selection of topic cases. When selecting topic cases, teachers should consider characteristics of its event level, case capacity, understanding the degree and its own nature at the same time. Generally speaking, the less amount of knowledge the topic contains, the more complex case should be. For example, teachers could select a case that contained three event levels or more due to the richer basic facts included in it. In this way, students could make the most use of the knowledge they have learned, which is quite beneficial for students to master and apply the knowledge, and also quite good to improve their learning positivists. On the contrary, if the topic contains a large amount of knowledge, teachers should select as simple cases as possible. Thus, event levels that a case contained should be within three levels, which would contain less basic facts. Otherwise, students would be confused and think that they do not have enough knowledge to cope with those questions in cases, and consequently, it would exert a negative impact on learning for students. Moreover, in terms of "understanding degree" teachers should choose cases with a high degree of understanding, because students are familiar with this kind of cases and once students successfully analyze these cases with

their knowledge, they would feel a stronger sense of achievement. Nevertheless, according to the teaching contents, teachers can also choose topic cases with different degree of understanding. Generally speaking, in the method-centered case teaching, people could choose cases with a low degree of understanding while choose cases with high understanding degree in the knowledge-centered case teaching.

The arrangement of topic cases. In case teaching method, teachers value internal educational value of case and do not emphasize the authenticity of the case. Therefore, cases themselves do not need to be true. Moreover, teachers need to finely process the topic cases that they choose to explain the teaching process. Why topic cases usually need to process? The reason is that any of the natural events is incidental in its event level, case capacity and understanding degree. The internal property in these coincidences may not be conducive to teaching. Therefore, these events are required to be “trim” accord with the teaching content and the students’ knowledge and experience. It can be concluded that to arrange the cases is to make a natural event educational, helping the students improve themselves. As for the arrangement of topic cases, three aspects should be taken into account, which are the event level, case capacity and understanding degree. Of course, although the authenticity of cases is not the key point in teaching activities, yet teachers need not to particularly point out the non-authenticity of cases, for such a description is certainly not helpful to stimulate the students’ interests in analysis.

4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF TOPIC CASES

Presentation of topic cases. Topic cases can be presented in a variety of ways, including the text, oral form, situational simulation, video, and so on. The different presentation forms should be compatible with the nature of the case itself, and its form and content should also be matched. Specifically, the topic case that presented in texts should not be too large in its event level and actual capability, or it might bring about the overmuch textual content and reduce the practical interest of cases themselves. Once a case has become boring, it is difficult for the teacher to carry out teaching activities. In addition, the text form is more suitable for cases with low understanding degree because text form is helpful to students’ understanding and memory of the unfamiliar concepts and experience in those kinds of cases. The cases that presented in oral form usually require a clear level and a strong logic. In fact, no matter how many the event levels are, as long as the logical links the various levels are close, it is suitable for oral form. Situations simulation form is mainly applicable to the topic cases with some experience that students are unfamiliar with and low understanding degree. Cases

presented by simulation forms can help students to have a better understanding of new experience context. When applying video forms, the first thing in need is to have a suitable educational film, and teachers themselves also need to editing video. Video form and situational imitation are slightly similar. Generally speaking, cases with low understanding degree could be applied in video forms.

Motivation of case analysis. Setting up questions is the basic way to motivate students to analyze cases. Questions can help students to start brain storming about the cases and arouse their interests to study and analyze. Asking question is the best way of motivation. Meanwhile, in the case teaching, setting up questions is divided in different levels. The lowest level is asking students questions directly. Questions in this level are always isolated and not related to cases. Sometimes they are unbenefited to stimulate students to analyze the case, and even make students feel nervous. For instance, in university, when asked this kind of question, some students are so nervous that they always keep their head down. Therefore, direct rendering question is detrimental to stimulate students’ interests in exploring and analyzing questions. Actually, in case teaching method, teachers usually prefer situation questions. It is a kind of question which combines questions with situations. Setting up questions in situations is not only conducive to students’ understanding of the case, but also is helpful for instructors to consider over the case itself. However, situation question is not perfect. The shortage is that the questions interspersed in context tend to hinder students to have a whole understanding of the case. And it would make students analyze and think over the case with insufficient understanding, which would result in some biased conclusions. Generated question is of a higher level and standard than that of situation question. Generated question means that the question is not presented directly or contained in some specific situation. It refers to that the question is finally generated with the complement of the case statement. Unlike situation question, generated question does not affect the presentation of cases. And teachers always stimulate students’ interests and exploring desires in the process of stating cases, so a lot of students are eager to express their opinions after teachers’ statement.

The guidance of case analysis. In case teaching, teachers have an obligation to guide students analyzing cases. Otherwise, it is quite difficult for students to well grasp the theme and analyze cases logically, which would definitely exert a negative influence on case teaching process. The guidance of teachers is reflected in every link of case teaching. In presenting topic cases, teachers need to help students to clarify event levels and make sure that students understand all basic facts included in the topic cases. In addition, teachers are required to help students to integrate their knowledge and experience with the case,

which would make students get a well understanding of the case itself and the questions it contained. On one hand, when students analyze cases, teachers should guide students to distinguish topic events from background events. In practice, students are usually dwelt on the small details of background events, which would waste time in class and would not benefit students in mastering knowledge. Therefore, teachers should guide students to grasp topic events and do some in-depth analysis so that students could benefit more from it. On the other hand, teachers should also guide students to use academic concept in this topic to analyze cases. The problem often appeared in case teaching is that students have learned knowledge about the topic after all kinds of preparations and understood some basic concepts, however, they don't apply these concepts in specific analysis, but selecting some daily expressions from their experience to analyze cases, which would not achieve the teaching purpose. Thus, it is quite critical to guide students to apply topic concepts to analyze cases. Furthermore, an essential problem is that whether teachers need to guide students to arrive at a unanimous conclusion in the case analysis. In fact, the key of case analysis lies in that it could help

students to acquire knowledge and master professional skills. Thus, whether a unanimous conclusion could be got is not significant. If they could draw the unanimous conclusion, it suggests the instructional meaning of knowledge; if they could not achieve the same conclusion, it also reveals that anything would contain rich and complex logic, and the two aspects are indispensable faiths for students.

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