

A Case for Using Locally Relevant Case-based Instruction in Recreation Education

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Abstract

Recreation is an applied field, like medicine, business, and law. These applied fields are replete with complex and ambiguous problems that are constantly faced by practitioners. As educators, one of our curricular goals should be to prepare our students to handle complexity and ambiguity in decision-making and problem-solving. It is common for practitioner oriented fields to use case-based instruction (CBI) to teach such skills. In CBI, entire courses are structured around an intentional sequence of cases. This approach offers both key advantages and notable limitations. Through the process of converting a core recreation course to a case-based format, the authors decided to write cases based on problems and issues in the local recreation industry. These locally-based cases seemed to provide additional advantages over pre-written options. This paper introduces recreation educators unfamiliar with CBI to this approach, and shares an experience of writing and using local cases in a case-based recreation course.

Keywords: case study method

Introduction

Recreation is an applied field, like medicine, business, and law. These applied fields are replete with complex and ambiguous problems that are constantly faced by practitioners. As educators, one of our curricular goals should be to prepare our students to handle complexity and ambiguity in decision-making and problem-solving. To teach such skills, the fields of medicine, business, and law use a variety of pedagogical approaches. One of these is, often, case-based instruction (CBI). While this approach has been advocated for park and recreation education (e.g., Bannon & Busser, 1992; Van der Smissen, Moiseichik, Hartenburg, & Twardzik, 1999; Wilhite & Keller, 2000), it remains underutilized and poorly understood. Therefore, the intent of this paper is twofold: (a) to introduce recreation educators unfamiliar with CBI to the advantages and limitations to this approach, and (b) to share experiences with writing and using local cases in a case-based recreation course.

Case based instruction occurs when an instructor introduces course content in a narrative, story-telling fashion, in a real setting and related to the content of the class, with the intent of having students apply their own background knowledge, discuss the case with each other, use decision-making and critical thinking skills, and consider many different perspectives to find a solution to the case's meaningful problem. CBI might be contrasted with using a shorter, less complex case as a descriptive example or providing an opportunity for discussion of class content. While this use of case studies has merit, it should not be confused with entire courses structured around an intentional sequence of cases, where the instructor expects students to have expertise and expects students to bring this expertise into the classroom. In addition, in CBI, the use of supplementary material and sophisticated analyses of any case exhibits is considered the norm. CBI offers several key advantages to more didactic educational methods, but it also offers some additional challenges and limitations.

Advantages and Limitations of Case-based Instruction

One of the primary advantages of CBI is its ability to offer classroom experiences that emulate real work situations. Faux (1999) asked students if they believed that case studies were effective. The students replied the CBI method was generally effective because it helped them to apply knowledge, made them think on their own, and the students could see themselves in future situations where they might be facing comparable problems. Mayo (2002) stated that, "as a teaching method, CBI has been shown to bolster meaningful learning by successfully bridging the gap between theory and practice" (p. 66). One benefit that students gain from a case study learning environment is that they start to have real and meaningful experiences inside the classroom that will affect their future professional lives (Faux, 1999; Mayo, 2002; McNaughton, Hall, & Maccini, 2001).

Labuda (1999) and Faux (1999) found that because of the realistic nature of case study problems, students were more motivated to learn and put forth meaningful effort into preparing, writing, and discussing cases. Faux (1999) explained that students are willing to put forth extra effort because they are able to fundamentally see the application of theory to real life situations. As students were more motivated to learn the material and their environment consisted of applying theories learned in class to real problems, they were better able to use theories to applications when tested in a classroom setting compared to students who were instructed using a lecture technique (Mayo, 2002).

Another advantage of CBI stems from the open dialogue and social interactions that occur in a case-based class. As the discussion unfolds, students learn how to express their own ideas and, perhaps, how to persuade others to appreciate their own point of view. The process of discussing different solutions to the problems results in at least two primary benefits for the student. First, the students learn that other valu-

able perspectives exist and that it is important to appreciate their peers' ideas and thoughts (McNaughton et al., 2001). Second, students learn to critically evaluate their own and other solutions to a problem. Often, students will combine individual perspectives to arrive at a final solution that is logically better than any one individual developed on her own (Mayo, 2002). Student's personal experiences are valued and, in fact, critical to the educational content of the course. The quality of the dialogue and the classroom interaction can increase if students have some specialized knowledge on the course topics or if the cases can be tailored to content familiar to the students.

The student-driven dialogue also helps to make CBI courses fun to teach. The instructor is often afforded an opportunity to hear and participate in intelligent and informed dialogue on a number of topics. Even the most well-prepared instructor will sometimes be surprised by the direction a case can take because of the breadth and depth of the student's experience. With proper preparation, changes in direction can be pleasant, refreshing, and sought out rather than feared and avoided.

The open format of a case-based course provides another advantage: immediate feedback. As students express ideas and concepts, their accountability is public and the feedback about their reasoning (faulty or sound) is immediate. They do not have to wait for an assignment to be returned; classmates are already testing, praising, or debating their ideas. This type of immediate feedback and public accountability is lacking in more traditional educational approaches where the course instructor may take days or weeks to provide feedback from a singular perspective.

While cases have several key advantages to be leveraged, they also have some inherent limitations. The open discussion format forces the instructor to deal with potentially new group dynamic issues as classmate differences can try patience and make tempers flare. This format also means giving up some control over the course content. While unanticipated topics that arise naturally from discussion are often valuable and relevant, they are sometimes unanticipated by the instructor, and may not be entirely compatible with the course goals. Therefore, the instructor must make sure that the case's teaching objective is being met and not too much time is spent on tangential topics while still validating the students' willingness to participate.

One of the greatest limitations that instructors who use CBI face is the amount of instructor time that is required for preparation and grading. Generally, instructors spend substantially more time and effort in preparing for a case study class than a lecture (Graham & Cline, 2001; McNaughton et al., 2001). Instructors must understand all of the different ways that students may choose to direct the class discussion and then be prepared to teach the material in a meaningful way through questioning students' logic (McNaughton et al., 2001). Locating and/or writing cases that are appropriate, relevant, and palatable also involves a substantial time commitment. For recreation education, appropriate cases are still lacking, and creative instructors are often

forced to adapt cases written for another discipline or to write their own cases. Both of these options can be time-consuming. Faux (1999) estimated, from speaking to case writers, that it takes experienced authors an average of twenty-one hours to develop and write an introductory case, and more complex cases can take weeks to develop. In addition, assessing the students' performance is more difficult and time-consuming. Because each student is bringing different background knowledge to his/her understanding of the case, each student's perspective will be different. Teachers need to grade on the quality of each individual student's logic, and this level of grading requires more time and effort than grading objective tests (McNaughton et al., 2001).

In addition to CBI taking more instructor time, sometimes more traditional methods are better suited for certain learning objectives. Cases are rarely efficient and only sometimes effective transmitters of declarative knowledge (Graham & Cline, 2001). While readings and lectures remain the preferred methods of teaching declarative knowledge, through the use of the "lecturette," which is discussed later, cases can provide an authentic medium for learning factual information. Second, cases are not very good at teaching specific techniques. Exercises are better for this. Such exercises and examples, however, can be used in conjunction with cases to effectively teach techniques. This offers the advantages of combining an opportunity to learn the techniques with, presumably, an opportunity to immediately apply the techniques in the case analysis. The hope is that, through this process, the students will not only learn the technique, but will be able to apply it in future situations. Ultimately, the appropriateness of the case-based approach remains dependent on the desired learning outcomes for a course.

An Example of How Local Cases Can be Used in Recreation Education

In the spring of 2002, the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism at the University of Utah was awarded a small intramural grant to create a series of cases to integrate into the undergraduate curriculum. This grant funded a graduate teaching assistant to locate or write the necessary cases, with faculty oversight and assistance. As the strengths and weaknesses of the case approach were assessed, five courses were identified that could potentially use cases and one course was to be converted from a project-based to a case-based format. Several of these courses were required of all undergraduate recreation majors, and the course to be entirely case-based was required for the students in the Leisure Services Management option. It was clear to both the department and the university that this initiative had the potential to make a significant impact on the quality of the undergraduate experience in our program. The department and university anticipated that students would learn to apply classroom theory in real world situations through using cases, and thus be better prepared to enter the job market and be successful.

As it is difficult to specifically assess the impact of a single case integrated into an existing course, this article will focus primarily on the example provided by the

course converted to an entirely case-based format (i.e., CBI). This course is currently titled "Business Analysis Techniques in Parks, Recreation, and Tourism" and is a senior level course designed to synthesize content learned in earlier course work and apply it to actual problems. In its original format, the course was largely focused on the students conducting and writing feasibility studies on substantial ideas applicable to parks, recreation, or tourism. This approach was generally considered successful and the course consistently achieved its targeted learning outcomes. A large percentage of the students, however, could never see the applicability of undertaking such a large project, and the actual final products, the finished studies, were inconsistent. While some groups completed studies of extremely high caliber, some groups were comprised of students with diverse interests and differential levels of motivation, and their projects were shallow patchworks.

The initial hope was that, by shifting to a case-based format, many of the benefits of the case method would be realized and the course would be able to better address the differential interests of students by covering a range of cases on diverse topics. Cases were sought that would connect with students' interests while targeting the intended course outcomes. The initial intention was to write some locally-based cases and to identify and use some pre-existing cases relevant to recreation education. While some good sources of recreation related cases do exist (see Table 1), the nature of the course to be converted to an entirely case-based format necessitated complex, problem focused cases that required considerable analysis. It soon became obvious that writing these cases for a recreation context would be necessary.

TABLE 1

Sources of cases useful for recreation education

<i>Source</i>	<i>Additional Information</i>
Bannon, J. & Busser, J. (1992). <i>Problem solving in recreation and parks</i> (3rd ed).	This book contains nearly 200 cases that are centered in the parks, recreation, and tourism field. These cases range from several pages in length to one paragraph. Each case is followed by a set of discussion questions. The 4th edition to this book was released in spring of 2005, and contains 71 cases focusing on park and recreation administration.
Harvard Business School Cases (www.hbsp.harvard.com)	Harvard has assembled a database of cases that focus on a variety of business issues. Many of these cases are designed for MBA students; therefore, the cases are complex. A typical case consists of eight to ten pages of text and includes several exhibits. The cases often require students to perform calculations and analyses. While these cases are extensively used in business schools throughout the world,

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finding cases that focus on recreation can be difficult and requires extensive searching within the database. Teaching notes are included with each case. Copyright to use Harvard cases range from \$2.50 to \$12.00 per case copy.

Havitz, M. (1995).
Models of change in municipal parks and recreation. A book of innovative case studies.

This book has sixteen cases that focus on public parks and recreation. The case problem is presented and followed by solution adopted by the agency. Information is also provided about how the solution affected stakeholders in the community. The cases are primarily descriptive and offer students limited opportunities to test and explore their own solutions to these problems. However, assignments could be structured to encourage problem exploration.

The Electronic Hallway
(www.hallway.org)

The Electronic Hallway is a database of cases. These cases are contributed by instructors, business trainers, and others that teach using the case study method. The Electronic Hallway's cases typically are two to three pages with limited exhibits. These cases typically do not require quantitative skills to successfully complete them. The database consists of cases on a variety of public policy/administration related topics, and it can sometimes be difficult to find a case that focuses specifically on recreation.

Van der Smissen, B.,
Moiseichik, M.,
Hartenburg, V. &
Twardzik, L. (1999).
Management of park and recreation agencies.

This textbook has several cases that are related to each chapter. The cases range from one paragraph to over a page in length. The cases are introductory level and present opened ended problems and discussion questions. Most of the cases do not require calculations and do not involve exhibits.

Wilhite, B. &
Keller M. (2000).
Therapeutic Recreation cases and exercises
(2 ed.)

This book contains cases that center on therapeutic recreation. Each chapter is followed by eight to thirteen cases that range from a couple of paragraphs to several pages. Each case also contains a list of discussion questions to help guide discussion and references that add insight into the case topic. Some of the cases also include teacher aids, such as in class exercises or role-plays that can be used to further explore the information found in the chapter and case.

Writing the Cases

Before writing any cases, the course objectives were mapped onto potential problems and issues of interest. Cases were needed that included issues and problems in recreation businesses and public agencies that involved a diversity of marketing, management, and financial decisions. In addition, these problems and issues should be set in the local recreation industry. Using the department's advisory board, existing contacts, and a few cold calls, cases were written on a variety of topics for ten organizations: (a) a regional tour company, (b) a public golf course in a neighboring county, (c) an independent travel agency, (d) a full-service hotel adjacent to the Salt Lake convention center, (e) economic impacts of recreation in a seasonal resort town, (f) a paintball franchise, (g) a corporate adventure training company based in Park City, (h) a local community recreation center, (i) a climbing gym looking to expand into the area, and (j) a destination marketing organization for the state's skiing industry. While each of these cases was written to achieve a targeted course objective, most have a variety of feasible content and process objectives.

After the organizations agreed to participate in the case writing process, the case developers sought to learn as much as possible from existing documentation (brochures, websites, financial statements) and hypothesized about several potential issues that would make an interesting case. An interview outline was then prepared, and the contact person (interviewee) was given some time to prepare the information before the actual site visit and interview. The interviews were taped to allow the interviewer to concentrate on the broader content without losing details or exact quotes.

The goal of writing the cases was not to outline and describe everything that the organization did; instead, the goal was to create a compelling narrative that ended in a problem that the organization faced. Actual case text was written to have enough information so the students could analyze the problem, choose a possible solution, and have sufficient support to build a rationale for his/her decision. The intent was to require students to combine the course content with their personal experience and pre-existing knowledge to build their rationale and support their solutions for the case problems. By using locally based cases, readily available secondary information (e.g., municipal population data or information on the state's tourists) could be referenced in the case rather than included. The hope was that interested students would then look more deeply at facts relevant to the case.

Writing the cases was both rewarding and challenging. It offered unprecedented insight into how some recreation businesses and agencies work. However, it took a significant amount of time and energy to write a case that included enough detail to be interesting, but left room for speculation. The ideal case allowed for multiple interpretations and enough facts to support alternative positions. This balance was not easily achieved. In addition, the editing required to produce a final product useable in class remains a challenge.

After the cases were piloted in the classroom, the feedback from the students and the instructors was integrated into a revised version, which was then sent to the original interviewee for final comments or additional feedback. The process allowed for both content errors or omissions corrections to be made, via the interviewee, and to address points confusing to the students. Readers considering authoring cases might want to see Linder (1994), Richards and Baksdale-Ladd (1997), Roberts (2001), and Stringer (1999) for constructive guidance before they begin.

Lessons Learned through the Conversion

While the case writing was a challenge, converting a class to a case-based format also warranted considerable thought and effort. While such a conversion includes many of the normal challenges of preparing and implementing any new course, there were also some clear differences. The most obvious differences involved changes in student preparation, classroom instruction, presentation of the course content though the authenticity of the case problems, and grading.

Preparing the Students

Teaching a course that utilizes case studies looks very different from the students' perspectives. As the teacher is more of a facilitator, it sometimes appears that the instructor is not "teaching" in the traditional sense. The differences in teaching style between lecture and CBI was addressed with the students pre-course expectations by having the students generate two lists: one of their roles in this type of class and one of the instructor's roles. This process allowed for clarification between the roles and format of a case-based course and a more didactic format. While each class is different, Figure 1 shows a list of expectations generated by the 2004 class during this exercise. Once this was complete, it became a kind of behavioral contract for the class – that is, after adjustments were made, both sides became accountable to these expectations.

Students

- Read the cases
- Come to class
- Offer constructive criticism
- Be open minded
 - Appreciate the diversity
- Be respectful
- Expect to contribute
 - Be prepared
 - Offer educated opinions, not ones without basis
- Do not be afraid to take risks
 - Comment or ask questions regarding either the cases or the class in general

- Be respectful of class time
 - Do not waste time
- Actively listen
 - Try to add to the discussion and connect to comments
- Encourage participation of others
- Enjoy the class –it should be fun
- Learn
- Be aware of your level of contribution (this refers to a handout I use that refers to the level of contributions in case studies courses –these level range from “participates freely, well prepared, makes significant contributions” to “forget it” (the opposite).

Instructor

- Have goals and objectives
- Ensure progress towards these goals and objectives
- Keep the discussion focused
- Bring expertise to the course topics and class
- Create a comfortable atmosphere
- Come to class
- Be prepared for class
- Provide timely feedback
- Do not assume that the students already know everything
- Be available for help outside of class
- Summarize and tie the discussion back into goals and objectives for the course

Figure 1. Student's expected roles of the students and the instructor in a case studies course.

Role modeling and the initial establishment of a classroom community were also important. The first few class meetings were critical as they provided an opportunity to establish the class as interactive and the instructor and teaching assistant as approachable and respectful. One example of how this was done was to have the students complete a quick background survey on their experiences with topics relevant to the cases and the course material. Reviewing these publicly over the first few classes served several purposes: (a) it allowed the students to get acquainted with each other, (b) it allowed us some insight into the background of the students so that we could assist the students in building connections with their past learning and experience, and (c) it provided the instructors an opportunity to draw attention to the rich level of experience and expertise in the classroom. Emphasizing the rich level of experience both established classmates as valid and important sources of knowledge and established that these experiences should form the basis of substantial student centered contributions during the course.

Along with establishing the value of student contributions, the instructors sought to establish some basic parameters that would be useful for the class.

Instructors tried to get the class to understand that once an idea was put forth, it was no longer solely the student's idea, but rather it now belonged to the class to defend or debunk. This seemed to allow more open discourse to flow by removing some of the risk from presenting dissenting ideas and by reducing the tendency for students to steadfastly defend only their own ideas. Another ground rule that was established and monitored was that comments should generally link to the current idea on the floor. This helped to keep the topics connected and discouraged students from forcing points or opinions into otherwise productive discussions. However, some students had very interesting points that might have gotten lost if not acknowledged at some point. The instructors approach to this was to solicit additional thoughts and concerns at natural lulls in the dialog –this was especially important if critical content from the case remained untapped.

Before the full-length cases were started, the class, as a whole, analyzed and discussed a short case during class time. This clarified the expectations and reinforced the roles and parameters of the course in a less threatening environment.

Another major consideration was how best to ensure a desirable level of pre-class preparation. The instructors' preference was to encourage cooperation and collaboration on the analysis, but to ask that each student turn in his/her own written case analysis. It was obvious from both class discussion and the written assignment when the preparation was inadequate. Answers to open-ended questions were shallower and more difficult to solicit.

Facilitation as Instruction

The instructor's role was viewed as one of maximizing the learning potential of the case. This might mean helping students to identify some of the more salient factors in the case; it might mean asking questions that encourage connecting or contrasting these factors; it might mean encouraging deeper inquiry on topics with deeper content; or it might mean assisting the students in understanding factually and contextually relevant information necessary for deeper inquiry.

The facilitator played a critical role in the flow of information. Commonly the quiet needed an invitation to speak; often the outspoken needed encouragement to save their comments. As keys to the case emerged, the facilitator needed to encourage their exploration, encourage contrasting them with other ideas already on the floor, and encourage further testing of these ideas. Most of these objectives can be addressed through reflective statements and open-ended questions based on the class discussion. For additional information on classroom facilitation techniques, interested readers should see Barnes, Christensen, and Hansen (1994) and Miller and Kantrov (1998).

Build on the authenticity of the case

One of the keys to engaging the students in the content seemed to be tying the cases' issues and problems directly to the course content, to students' local experiences, and to the lectures and exercises. Exercises designed specifically to assist with a specific case analysis were more enthusiastically embraced. Local cases allowed more interesting connections and discussions. For example, one of the cases written and used was on the Salt Lake City Hilton. Four students in the class either had or currently worked for the Hilton or one of the major hotels in its competitive group. On the case involving a community recreation center, employees of four of Salt Lake's major public recreation facilities were able to voice their opinions, and the case on the tour company had one student who worked for a direct competitor of the company and three others with substantial experience in local tour-related businesses.

Some additional energy was needed to prepare a variety of mini-lectures or "lecturettes". These were critical to clarifying topics of confusion at opportune times or as teachable moments arose. There are certain times during a case studies course that the class as a whole discovers some aspect of a case that it generally does not understand and is now inherently interested in comprehending. When students needed to understand how things worked to "crack" the issue or address a problem within a case, suddenly the class came to life with questions seeking clarification. Not only were they interested and motivated to learn about the content, but they were already applying it to a "real" situation in the case. What students did not see, that educators readily understand, is that having several potential lecturettes available on demand requires both substantial knowledge and preparation on the content area(s) covered by the case.

Grade what is important

After each case, the instructors faced the task of grading. The dilemma was how to fairly compare each student to a common criterion when many different students use different processes to arrive at different answers. First, it was necessary to determine what aspect of the case was important for the students to take to their professional careers. Often the answer to this question was not the more easily graded declarative knowledge presented in the case; instead, the procedural knowledge learned from the case analysis was more valuable. Regardless of the specific goal, once the desired teaching outcomes of a case were understood, an assessment rubric was developed based on the desired outcomes. The generic rubric was consistent with McGlaughlin's and sought clarity, completeness, internal consistency, coherence, evidence of considering multiple options, and evidence of use of external resources (as cited in McNaughton et al., 2001). The use of this rubric allowed the instructors to approach each student's evaluation from a common perspective. While there was commonly not one correct answer, some were better reasoned than others. In addition to the graded written case analysis, a student's in-class contribution to the case

discussion and analysis was also a graded product. Grades were recorded after each class period rating the students on the overall value of their contributions to the specific case analysis.

Evaluation of this project

While a variety of discussion and analysis formats were used, the goals and advantages of the case studies approach were largely realized. The students did seem to benefit from the case-based format. They seemed more motivated, appeared to value diverse opinions, showed respect for dissenting views, gave and received feedback, and indicated that they were learning a great deal from their classmates. The cases seemed even more successful than anticipated because they were all written on local organizations or companies and had a distinctively local flair. This heightened the students' interest, allowed them to connect with the case, and allowed them to contribute factual information from the community to the class discussion, as one would be able to do in a real life situation.

Course evaluations, while certainly limited in their generalizability, were uniformly more positive than in previous years when the same instructor had taught this course using a project-based format. Two notable improvements were the percentage of students agreeing with the "helpfulness of the course material in meeting the course objectives" (100% agreed or strongly agreed compared to an average of 73 % over the previous two years) and "effective presentation of course content" (100% agreed or strongly agreed compared to an average of 77% over the previous two years). In the qualitative course evaluation data, the case studies were overwhelmingly considered to be "a positive addition to the class," a "great representation of what occurs in the real world," and "the cases really helped to apply knowledge." Other students echoed more specific reasons for enjoying the case based approach. "I really like this format. It's much better to work with real business scenarios instead of fake companies." "The case studies were helpful in applying the information we learned in class. The case discussions always gave me new ways of looking at other solutions to the case." Of the criticisms offered for course improvement, not a single comment suggested retreating from the CBI format.

Conclusion

If our goal as recreation educators is to provide students with opportunities to learn and practice ambiguous decision-making processes for complex problems, then CBI should be a part of our educational repertoire. Other applied fields commonly employ this approach with great success and research has shown that CBI can increase student motivation, students' abilities to retain and apply knowledge outside of the classroom, and students' abilities to apply theory to practice. It is the authors' suggestion that choosing, adapting, or crafting cases that are especially relevant to the course and students can further enhance these benefits.

While one of the reasons for writing the cases for this project was the limited selection of recreation cases that required substantial analysis, the unanticipated benefit of the local connections seemed to support the idea of writing or customizing cases. Students possess an immense amount of contextually relevant information from the local area that can make the discussions rich and energetic. The addition of this information, well beyond the scope of what a case or instructor can hope to provide, makes the cases and the discussion more "real." This approach is more representative of a real life situation, and seems to create more open and interesting dialog based on a diversity of perspectives. Custom cases need not be long or complex to foster valuable discussion.

While the case based approach offers a variety of advantages for recreation education, cases are time intensive to effectively prepare and use in the classroom. Pre-course planning, in-class execution, and post-class grading and assessment all offer novel twists. The case studies approach to recreation and leisure content is not easier, but it can be rewarding and can actively assist recreation students to learning and applying course content in a contextually meaningful way.

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