



Tools for Using Case Studies

Questions for Reflection and Comparison of Cases

Use these questions to compare findings across both studies:

1. How would you characterize the teaching experience of the two teachers with regard to individual and collective learning and practice?
2. What can we learn from these two case studies about the kinds of leadership that support instructional change in service of increased student achievement?
3. What data matters to whom, and how can we collect, analyze, and distribute data effectively to people at all levels of the system?
4. What do these case studies suggest about how a system can build coherence while at the same time granting authority and responsibility to individual schools to make significant decisions that affect student achievement?
5. What does “district support” mean and what does it look like when schools take diverse approaches to ensuring that their students learn? What is an equitable distribution of resources when both students and schools have different needs, and how should this be calculated?
6. What structural changes need to be made as instructionally diverse “best practices” take hold across the system? How will the system meet non-traditional logistical and learning demands arising when, for example, a school adopts inquiry- or project-based learning initiatives as a primary mode of instruction?
7. What cultural or structural (or both) changes need to be made as teaching, learning, and leading become increasingly collaborative? How can a system incorporate time for collaboration and the development of adult learning communities at all levels during the normal workday?
8. How can a system build a culture of mutual accountability that is not primarily hierarchical and that recognizes accountability as multidirectional rather than vertical?

District Case Study Group Discussion Protocol

The two case studies presented here outline issues of instructional practice and school system alignment. We do not draw conclusions in the text but rather describe in detail one teacher's practice and the systemic elements that support and inhibit his or her efforts to improve his or her teaching. We leave it to readers to examine the cases and draw conclusions. To assist in this process, we provide here a protocol that can be used to help you and your colleagues sharpen your analytical skills, hone your problem-solving abilities, and challenge yourselves to think and reason rigorously.

How to learn from a case⁶

The use of the case method calls for individual preparation as well as group discussion. Although no single method works for everyone, here are some general guidelines to help you prepare to use a case study:

1. Read through the case study quickly, noting the introductory paragraphs and concluding paragraphs, the internal sections and subheadings, the exhibits at the end of the case, and the self-study questions. Ask yourself, "what is this case about and what kinds of information am I being asked to analyze?"
2. Read through the case (including the exhibits) again, slowly and carefully, noting key facts, questions, disconnects, etc. Ask yourself, "what do I see happening in this district?" Be sure to note evidence from the text.
3. Read through the case again and put yourself in the role of the teacher, assistant principal, and district administrator. Ask yourself, "would I make the same decisions? What would I do differently?" Note your observations.
4. Develop recommendations for the district based on your analysis of the issue and supported by evidence from the case. Ask yourself, "If I worked in this district, what would I change? What would I keep? What would my next steps be?"
5. Discuss your findings with others using the protocol on the next page. Listen for other perspectives.

⁶ Adapted from Hammond, J.S. (1976). *Learning by the case method*. Boston, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Protocol

Facilitation: This protocol can be used with groups of different sizes. Adjust accordingly. The protocol takes about two hours (20 minute break included). Participants are seated in groups of 5 to 8 at small tables.

Roles: Whole group facilitator, table group facilitators

Process:

1. *Introductions/Set norms* (5 minutes)

Participants introduce themselves and their role in the school system.

Facilitator discusses norms for the table:

- Listen for understanding
- Ensure your perspective is shared (all perspectives are important)
- Allow for disagreement (the goal is to understand different perspectives, NOT to reach consensus)
- Stay in the case (cite evidence from the case rather than from personal experience)

2. *Naming Observations* (10 minutes)

Participants take a minute to look back at their notes in preparation for sharing what they observed in the case study.

Facilitator asks:

What did you observe in the case study? Use direct evidence from the case (try not to draw conclusions yet, just state evidence for your observation, e.g., "I observed that the district has a literacy initiative.")

Facilitator notes observations on a flip chart using a bull's-eye graphic organizer with three concentric circles: the innermost circle for classroom, the middle circle for school/house, and the outer circle for district. Observations should be noted in the appropriate circle.

3. *Sharing Perspectives* (20 minutes)

Facilitator asks:

In looking at this graphic organizer and at everyone's observations, what most stood out for you in the case?

What appear to be the connections/disconnections between and among the strategies at each level?

Participants first reflect individually in writing on the observations in the graphic organizer. (5 minutes)

Participants share their perspective (without responses/conversation from other group members).

After all perspectives have been shared, participants discuss their perspectives.

BREAK (20 minutes)

4. Looking at the Bigger Picture (40 minutes)

In two groups at the table, participants draw a diagram or picture of how the district's strategic work is playing out in the system. (15 minutes)

At the table – share the diagrams/pictures between the two groups. (25 minutes)

Facilitator asks the group to discuss:

What is the impact of the connections/disconnections on the teacher?

What are the implications of the connections/disconnections at each level of the system?

What do these diagrams (and your discussion about them) suggest about the potential leverage points/places to build on the red flags/areas of concern?

5. Individual Reflection (10 minutes)

Participants reflect individually in writing on these questions:

Where did we see ourselves in this case study?

What did we see/learn from this case study that can assist us in our work?

What are our next steps?

6. Whole Group Reflection (15 minutes)

Participants discuss their individual reflections and debrief the process.