

Advantages and Barriers to the Case Study Method in Dietetics

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Learning Outcome

- To describe the utilization of varied teaching methods, and more specifically the advantages and barriers of use of the case study method in dietetics.

Research Questions

- Is there a difference in frequency of methods used by dietetic educators?
- Will there be differences in perceived advantages and barriers to case study method?
- Is problem based learning appropriate for didactic programs?
- Will there be perceived differences in the time required for the teaching process using case studies?

Relevant Literature

- In the case study method, process is important along with outcome.
- Critical thinking is a process that does not come naturally. It must be learned.
- Problem-based learning (PBL) has a primary function to motivate learners.
- Case studies are most effective when the learner has a base of knowledge from which to work.

Methodology

- The subject names were obtained from a current Didactic Programs in Dietetics (DPD) list. Inclusion criteria for participants was that they were actively participating as a DPD Director and had a current e-mail list. 150 names were randomly selected as potential study participants.
- The study took place between April 23rd, 2002 and June 24th, 2002. All potential subjects received a reminder questionnaire 1 ½ weeks after 1st contact.

Methodology

- The questionnaire was administered by e-mail to 150 potential participants.
 - 15 questionnaires were returned by e-mail system
 - Of the 135 DPD Directors solicited, 33 (24.4%) responded, generating 28 complete surveys.
- The questionnaire was designed by the researchers.

Results

- Frequency of use of methods varied.
 - 82% using lecture in all courses. Other methods used included discussion, case study, demonstration, PBL, actual experience, and role playing.
- Critical thinking ranked highest (1.32 ± 0.48) among advantages, followed by:
 - Recognition of multiple solutions (1.46 ± 0.51)
 - Self-directed learning (1.57 ± 0.57)
 - Higher order reasoning (1.71 ± 1.01)

Results

- Time was the primary barrier to using case studies, confirmed by responses to an open-ended question,
- Cronbach reliability coefficient was strong for the questionnaire at 0.7682 for part 1 and 0.7653 for part 2.
- All respondents agreed that PBL using case studies is an appropriate teaching methodology for use in a DPD program.

Conclusions

- There are many teaching methods that are currently being used in didactic programs.
- Case study method promotes higher order learning, therefore, efforts to overcome barriers are worthwhile.
- Dietetic educators should consider the benefits of moving towards a more active learning style in the classroom.