

Using Case Studies in Teaching Career Counseling

Linda J. M. Holloway*

Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Psychology and Counseling, Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, Alabama, USA

***Corresponding Author:** Linda J. M. Holloway, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Psychology and Counseling, Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, Alabama, USA.

Received: March 17, 2017; **Published:** April 06, 2017

Case studies give professors the opportunity to take real life situations and allow students to critically analyze them based on their field of study. Case Studies have been used in academia for quite some time in various disciplines such as, business, law, history, psychology and counseling just to name a few. The students are able to apply theory to the case scenarios. Case studies can be either long or short depending on the objectives of the assignment. You will want to ensure that you tie your case studies to the overall learning outcomes and objectives of the class.

As a teaching tool, case studies give students a first-hand opportunity to experience the real-life application of textbook theories and methods. Students are given the opportunity to engage in a dialogue about problem solving and the ability to utilize their critical thinking skills. There are a variety of ways in which professors can obtain case studies. For example, case studies can be obtained online or in textbooks where authors have written prepackaged case studies to meet the needs for your classes. Several professors create their own case studies, thus, allowing them to be tailored to meet the needs of what they hope to accomplish for their learning module. Davis [1] stated that in order to create a good case study, the following elements should to be included:

- The story is highly engaging
- Thought provoking issues are raised
- There is an element of conflict
- The main characters evoke sympathy
- There are no clear- cut answers
- Students are encouraged to think and take ownership of their position
- Characters are having to make decisions
- Provides sufficient background information about character(s)
- Clear, consistent and relevant

Having a framework as to how to use case studies in class is very significant to the group discussion in order to avoid them turning into shop- talk sessions. To do this, it is necessary to 1) Organize the class into small manageable groups with clear, concise instructions, 2) Ensure maximum time is allotted for students to thoroughly work through the case studies, and 3) Periodically, check-in with your students to make them aware of the amount of time they have available to avoid running out of time and not being able to properly analyze the case studies.

It is a good idea to allow the students to have their own personal time keeper. This is an individual who will keep the group working within their allotted timeframe. Recommend that each group have a facilitator so the group stays on task and completes the assignment. The next person will be the co-facilitator serving in the role to balance out the facilitator; keeping him/her on track and ensuring everything runs smoothly and on point. The group would need to designate a recorder, the person who takes notes and records the information for the group. The next person the group needs to designate would be a spokesperson. This person has been designated to take what the

recorder has written and provide that information to the entire class. Also, the individual selected to carry out this task will need to be prepared to give the class an overall summary of the case study. The roles are designated to keep the members actively engaged and not allow members to relax, and ride on the coat tails of the remaining members in the group. Students are able to build confidence working in a group on case studies. They realize that they are not alone and have other members in the class who might be struggling to understand many of the concepts they have not grasped. When students realize they are not alone in the learning process, it helps to improve their self-esteem making learning much more fun and rewarding.

Career Counseling is a very challenging to teach at the graduate level. Often, students are not excited about the rigors of learning about the various theories and career assessments. So, providing students with scenario- driven case studies with real life situations can pique their interests and keep them engaged. The Career Counseling Case Book published by the National Career Development Association is an excellent resource that provides case studies which assist with bridging the gap between theory and practice [2]. There are a total of 40 case studies within the book. These case studies cover the entire human life span which is encouraging because it gives students the opportunity to see career development amongst various age groups.

Case studies, as mentioned earlier, are an excellent way to allow students to develop habits of utilizing their critical thinking skills. Critical analysis involves examining the client's background history, identifying the client's overall problem-client conceptualization, and weeding out any ethical or legal issues and applying multicultural counseling skills. Assessments can play a huge role in career counseling so students need to know what test, if any, to give their clients. They also need to know why and how to analyze the results of those tests.

Students are given the opportunity to develop a treatment plan for each case study. The importance of students working in groups Enable them to discuss ideas among their peers cannot be emphasized enough. Students are given the opportunity to explore what theory as well as what counseling techniques works best and why.

The following are examples of case studies that I have created. I have successfully used them in my graduate career counseling classes. The students must be able to thoroughly analyze the case studies by using the following guide lines:

- Background History
- Description of the present Problem(s)
- Diagnosis
- Develop a treatment plan
- Intervention
- Theoretical framework
- Counselor's Recommendations

Also, it is a good idea to have each group role play their case study.

Case Study

House Husband

"Please help! I have a job and do not want to obtain a job outside of the home. We both agreed I could stay home and care for our three children".

"Please help me. I really love my wife and kids. I am doing all I can to keep things afloat with a 7-month-old, a 9-year-old, and a 10 year-old. We have been married for 10 years. We got married right out of college".

The husband is extremely depressed and feels like his wife does not appreciate all the work he does. She thinks that all he does all day long is watch T.V., play games, and hang out with the boys. She honestly does not understand all the work that goes into being a stay- at-home dad. Also, her friends and family speak negatively about me because I stay home with the children.

1. What are your initial thoughts about this client's request for career counseling assistance?
2. What are the issues the client is facing?
3. How would you proceed in the sessions to follow? What type of career-counseling techniques or activities would you suggest and why?
4. What are some short-term goals you would use to assist this client?

Case Study

Show Me the Money

The wife makes more money than her husband. She is constantly belittling him and telling him that he needs to get a better paying job. She expects him to pay 50% of all the household expenses even though he makes less money than she does. This has been going on for about five (5) years. The husband is at loose ends and he can't take any more. He states he really does love his wife of 12 years dearly and would love for his marriage to work. His wife makes him feel useless. The husband enjoys his work as a mechanic, which he has done for over 15 years. He becomes extremely angry during counseling and shouts very loudly and aggressively that he was a mechanic when he met her and will always be a mechanic! He states very emphatically that he does enjoy his work and likes working with his hands. Thus, his problem at home has been impacting his job performance. As a result, he has not been getting much work done. He states he feels his wife wants him to have a job with a suit and tie but that is just not him. Hey, I love working on vehicles and sometimes I really feel like she is embarrassed to tell people my occupation. My wife is a corporate lawyer, but if I was not paying and encouraging her to go to school, she would not be a lawyer.

Please help me! I feel like my back is against the wall and I do not know what to do. We hardly talk unless we are shouting at each other and it's usually about money. Needless to say, we hardly do anything romantically any more. I feel emotionally abandoned. You know I am wondering if it's really all about the money. I thought about doing something else but I don't know what else I can do.

1. What are your initial thoughts about this client's request for career counseling assistance?
2. What are the issues the client is facing?
3. How would you proceed in the sessions to follow? What type of career-counseling techniques or activities would you suggest and why?
4. What are some short-term goals you would use to assist this client?
5. What are some long-term goals you would use to assist this client?
6. What career counseling theory applies to this client and why?

Case Study

Dream Job- Location

The wife has been offered her dream job in Houston, Texas but she nor her husband want to leave Huntsville, Alabama. This is his hometown where he grew up and most of his friends still live here and his family. The husband is very involved in the community and serves on many boards around town. The husband has a GS-15 job at Redstone Arsenal, which he truly enjoys. He has worked his way up the ranks from a GS-7. Thus, the wife came to Huntsville to pursue her education. She met her husband in college and they got married right out of college. Overall, on scale of 1 - 10 and 10 being the highest, they both rate their marriage as 9.9. They have two children, one is in the 9th grade and the other is in the 11th grade. The husband sees no reasons to relocate; however, the wife really would like to take her job of a lifetime in Houston as a chemical engineer at a major firm where she will be over the head of the department making at least six figures. She really loves her family and would like to take this job. She is completely torn.

Please help me! I do not know what to do. I truly love my husband of 18 years but I feel like everything about our marriage has been about him and the children. I have sacrificed so much! I know his family is here, etc.; however, I do not have any emotional ties here in Huntsville except my husband and my children. Why does this have to be so difficult? She starts to cry uncontrollably.

1. What are your initial thoughts about this client's request for career counseling assistance?
2. What are the issues the client is facing?
3. How would you proceed in the sessions to follow? What type of career-counseling techniques or activities would you suggest and why?
4. What are some short-term goals you would use to assist this client?
5. What are some long-term goals you would use to assist this client?
6. What career counseling theory applies to this client and why?

Case Study

Lost Job!

A 46-year-old male has lost his job due to his plant closing and moving overseas. He has worked at this job for 22 years. He works on the assembly line to help build Toyota cars and trucks. He really loves his work. He has only a high school education. He currently has two children in college, one is a freshman and the other is a sophomore. His company pays for them to go the college. His wife works at the local Wal-Mart in the deli. There have also been rumors of their laying off people at her job. They have always depended on his income to live the lifestyle they currently have, which is modest at best. Since the husband has been informed about his lay off in the next 90 days, he has become distant. He has started staying out after work and going to happy hours. He has never been a drinker. His temper is short both at home and at work. He feels like life has dealt him a bad hand. He's wondering why after all these years his company, along with several other companies, are moving overseas putting many Americans out of work. The company has agreed to give people half of their pension pay. He knows he can apply for unemployment. He states this would not even begin to pay his mortgage. He and his wife have \$15,000.00 in their savings. He's really worried how they are going to make it. He has just bought his wife a new car. Additionally, about a year ago he purchased the children a car so they would have transportation while away at college. Recently, his mother-in-law has taken very ill and has moved in with them. He feels like the world is crashing in on him. He talks about how he suffers from headaches, which he has not had in the past. On the last doctor's appointment two weeks ago, they told him his blood pressure and cholesterol were exceptionally high so they had to put him on medication(s).

Please help me, I do not know what to do. I do not want to lose everything I have worked so hard for. I do not know how to tell my children they might not be able to continue college. They are really smart children. My wife and I have always wanted our children to complete college since we did not get a chance to go. I feel too old to look for a new job. To tell you truth, I am not even sure where to begin. I really do not have any talent. All I know is how to build cars and trucks. Can you help me?

1. What are your initial thoughts about this client's request for career counseling assistance?
2. What are the issues the client is facing?
3. How would you proceed in the sessions to follow? What type of career-counseling techniques or activities would you suggest and why?
4. What are some short-term goals you would use to assist this client?
5. What are some long-term goals you would use to assist this client?
6. What career counseling theory applies to this client and why?

Case Study

Disabled Worker

A 56-year-old male factory worker got into a terrible accident on his way home from work. He is paralyzed from the neck down. He was the sole bread winner for his family. His wife does not work. She has been suffering from depression over the last three (3) years. She has

tried working little odd jobs but found the pressure of the jobs was too hard to bear. He is currently in rehabilitation wondering how he is going to make it. He still wants to work and to be able to provide for his family. He has a high school education. He did one year of college majoring in Psychology. He left because he felt like college just was not for him. He has been working at the factory for a little over 19 years and prior to this job he worked at FedEx. Also, prior to the accident he enjoyed body building in his spare time. He has won several competitions all the way up to nationals.

Please help me!

1. What are your initial thoughts about this client's request for career counseling assistance?
2. What are the issues the client is facing?
3. How would you proceed in the sessions to follow? What type of career-counseling techniques or activities would you suggest and why?
4. What are some short-term goals you would use to assist this client?
5. What are some long-term goals you would use to assist this client?
6. What career counseling theory applies to this client and why?

Case Study

Confused Worker

A 27-year-old female who finished her Master's in counseling five years ago has become confused as to what she wants to do with the rest of her life. She states that she enjoys counseling but she knows this is not what she wants to spend her life doing. She just recently got married within the last seven (7) months. Her husband was employed. He was working at the local Cheddars restaurant as a bartender, but he got fired for hitting one customer in the face for calling him out of his name. So, they are having financial problems and have fallen behind on their rent and several other bills. She would really like to look for a different type of job and wants to make more money than she currently makes. She just found out that she is pregnant about a week ago; hence, she has no idea what she really wants to do. She feels like she is stuck in this dead beat job as a youth probation counselor. She states she has some other counseling jobs but really did not care much for them either. I really do not know what I want to do with my life, she sobs. I feel so foolish going to school all this time only to realize counseling is not what I want to do. I never knew your work could impact your personal life like your marriage and all. I honestly didn't think I would be experiencing marriage problems after only 7 months. I am happy to be pregnant. I know what you're thinking -- my husband can try to get a job. He goes looking every day but nobody is hiring a lot of bartenders these days.

Please can you help? I feel like the ground is slowly slipping from under my feet. I cannot ask my parents for help. They were not excited about the idea of me getting married. Needless to say, my dad did not support me getting a Masters in Counseling. He told me I would not make any money. Yes, my parents have always helped me financially but now that I am married, they told me I am on my own. In their defense, they did pay for my wedding and gave us our bedroom furniture. Overall, they have been really nice to us even though they do not like my husband. They have stated that I will always be their child. We cannot ask his family for help because they are strapped for money too. I am so confused and really need your help. I cannot tell whether I am coming or going.

1. What are your initial thoughts about this client's request for career counseling assistance?
2. What are the issues the client is facing?
3. How would you proceed in the sessions to follow? What type of career-counseling techniques or activities would you suggest and why?
4. What are some short-term goals you would use to assist this client?
5. What are some long-term goals you would use to assist this client?
6. What career counseling theory applies to this client and why?

Using case studies to teach career counseling is a great way to keep students engaged and to ensure that they are able to bridge the gap between theory and application. Students enjoy case studies because it allows them to be creative, think outside the box, and give them an opportunity to work with real life scenarios which people are faced with in today's world. This is critical because it addresses and trains students who are confronted with a form of cultural shock or confronted with issues and challenges by scores of people in this society. Simply because they have been exposed to case studies which deal with what their clients are experiencing, the students' confidence is built once they leave the class. They feel better about working with clients who are experiencing issues they have been trained to deal with. By no means will students encounter in a simulated situation every issue one might experience in the real world. However, it does allow for students to be exposed to work related situations and have the opportunity to practice freedom of judgement in a safe environment amongst their peers. There is no better place to make mistakes while gaining the knowledge they will need as a therapist than in a classroom setting with their professor instructing them. Students are afforded the opportunity to role-play and learn as much as they can in a classroom setting [3].

Bibliography

1. Davis B G. "Tools for Teaching". *San Francisco: Jossey-Bass* (1993).
2. Spencer GN., *et al.* "The Career Counseling Casebook (2nd edition)". *National Career Development Association* (2013).
3. Barkley EF., *et al.* "Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty". *San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass* (2005).

Volume 3 Issue 1 April 2017

© All rights reserved by Linda J. M. Holloway.