

[THEME 2: OPTIMIZING LEARNING THROUGH INNOVATION]

# **Making Case Discussions Dynamic & Dealing with Ethics in Teaching**

**Linc. Fisch**

**Educational Writer and Resource Person  
Retired College Teacher**

**Lexington, KY, USA**

## **Abstract**

Case study methods are becoming increasingly common in higher education. Key elements for success in using them are developing and presenting engaging cases, involving students actively in processing the material (often through discussions), and effectively managing the process. The centerpiece of this workshop will be study of a short case, “The *Very* Dedicated Professor,” which typifies the potential ethical dilemma generated by (1) the desirability of encouraging students to examine and act upon their values, and (2) the danger of advocacy and indoctrination. This experience will demonstrate interactive case techniques and will provide a basis for examining case design, presentation alternatives, and other important aspects of the process. Issues of values and ethics are legitimate educational goals, and it behooves teachers to incorporate activities (often the study of cases) into their courses that help prepare students to deal with resolving ethical problems, as well as for precluding their occurrence. Since teachers must ensure that their own behavior is above ethical reproach, the workshop will also explore and examine ethical principles applicable to teaching.

**Suggestion:** Invite one or two of your colleagues to work sequentially through the material on this website with you. Your discussions and interactions will significantly increase the benefits for all of you. You can spread this activity over several 30 to 45-minute sessions.

## Exercise 1, Objectives

(one minute)

Before proceeding further, list three or more personal objectives you have with regard to this workshop.  
What benefits do you hope to gain from it?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

We will return to these objectives later in the workshop.

The following material generally patterns the sequence of activities I would program into the workshop. Essentially, you'll be "walking through" the process. Consideration of the case not only demonstrates the use of interactive processes in studying cases, but it also illustrates a workshop on dealing with certain key ethical issues in college and university teaching. Additionally, a context is provided for examining the effective facilitation of discussions. Toward the end of the website material, branches are provided to move in any of these three directions—or to all of them, in turn.

A succinct description of teaching and studying cases interactively can be accessed through the link to the Ad Rem article [Dynamic Cases](#). You may wish to do this now, or you may defer it until later. You have the same choices with regard to another article, [Credo Brevis](#), which lists some key principles that often inform my design of educational sessions, be they classes or workshops.

Incidentally, any of the materials linked to this website may be copied and used for non-profit educational purposes, provided that appropriate attribution is made to the source. Of course, I'd appreciate your letting me know whenever you do so.

*Linc. Fisch*

## Before the workshop actually begins

An essential feature of teaching with cases interactively is the presentation of the case as a “staged reading,” in which volunteers are selected to read the lines of the “script.” For cases that are relatively short (less than a page), individuals sometimes can be invited to do this as the workshop participants begin to arrive. It helps if they look the part of the role they are to read, but this is not critical. Neither is speaking or acting experience, but such background can help. A sentence or two to describe their characters can be sufficient. For longer cases (in my opinion, none should be longer than two pages) such as “The *Very* Dedicated Professor,” I like to recruit volunteers farther in advance of the session so that they are able to read the case and absorb the nature of the role they are playing. (For example, in connection with the IUT workshop, I would probably have asked Bill McKeachie or Peter Seldin to read the role of Dr. Webb.) In such cases, I frequently prepare a brief list of [suggestions for readers](#). (Some cases—not this one—call for a narrator’s role.)

One of the fundamental [pointers](#) for conducting workshops is to arrive early and make sure the room is set up in such a way as to accommodate the activity one has planned. For workshops that involve using cases interactively, this includes arranging the space to facilitate discussion and interaction, such as arranging chairs in subgroups (or around tables) if possible—or planning how to incorporate subgroups if the seating is inflexible. A cleared space that simulates a small stage is needed to accommodate the readers of the case; preferably, this should be on the longer side of the room so as to minimize the distance from the readers to the back of the audience. Whatever items (table, chairs, etc.) needed for the simulation, as well as the minimum of props, should be arranged.

At the point of beginning, the facilitator greets the participants and informs them that volunteers from the group will present the case as a staged reading. I usually ask the participants to form subgroups so that they can quickly begin to react to the presentation. I prefer subgroups no larger than six or seven persons, with the number of groups being a multiple of the number of readers—for example, three subgroups in an audience of 12 to 20 or so people, six subgroups in an audience of 25 to 40 or so people). Allow no more than a minute for the people in the subgroups to get acquainted.

[An *option* I sometimes exercise, if the total audience is 20 or less (or in subgroups if it larger than that) is to quickly ask participants to speak in turn, each giving (1) a name by which they prefer to be called, and (2) a particular insight, talent, or perspective that they bring to the session. (In some instances, I substitute a particular question or issue that they bring.) In addition to getting names out quickly and having everyone speak (if only for a moment), this illustrates the diversity that people bring to the session, a characteristic that I always like to celebrate—as I am careful to inform them.]

I like to give the subgroups some sort of focal assignment to which to direct their attention. With interactive cases, this usually is to focus on one of the readers (I assign a particular one to each subgroup) and think of *questions* you might like to ask that person or *suggestions* you might wish to make to them, if you had a chance. Then the readers take their places and the presentation begins—sometimes accompanied by my clapping my hands (simulating a movie clapstick) and saying, “Roll cameras... Action!” (But you may not want to get that dramatic or hokey.)

**Note:** The time from the greeting to the action is critical; it should take *no longer than two minutes*—or no longer than four or five minutes if the option is included. You want to get to the meat of the session with as little delay and ado as possible.

## Case presentation and processing, stage one

At this point the readers present the case by reading the roles they are assigned. The audience members may follow the case on a handout I have given them, if they wish. I usually suggest that they focus on the readers (who may sometimes vary slightly from the text) and use their [case handout](#) only for reference later. I take a seat in the audience. When the readers conclude and the audience applauds (sometimes I start it myself), the readers stand, bow if they wish, and return to their original subgroups.

I remind the audience members to turn into their subgroups and spend no more than *five minutes* in an initial discussion, sharing the questions and suggestions that they would like to present to the reader to which they have been assigned. I try to control the time rigorously, since the subgroups could continue much longer than five minutes, thereby sapping time from other important activities. And they need not focus exclusively on their specified task; the assignment is merely to help them collect their thoughts and ensure that sufficient attention is paid to each of the readers prior to the next stage.

If you have not already done so, download and print out the [case handout](#), read it, and then consider this exercise.

### Exercise 2, Questions

(four to eight minutes)

List two or three questions or suggestions you would like to present to each reader, if you had the chance.

a. To David Archer:

b. To Dr. Browne:

c. To Dr. Webb:

Here are some samples of the questions and suggestions that might arise from the subgroups:

- For David Archer: Do you really know that all class members feel as you do?  
Did you ask Dr. Webb for examples of projects that have been done  
in previous years in this course? If not, why not?  
Did you read the course syllabus? Was this assignment mentioned there?  
...
- For Dr. Browne: Does the college have a policy on situations like this? Have you read it?  
Would you consider going with David to talk with Dr. Webb?  
Should you refer this situation, instead of digging more deeply into it?  
...
- For Dr. Webb: Does this assignment really fall under the purview of the course?  
Are you aware of the risks that you are asking students to take?  
What were the results of projects in previous years?  
Would softening your language be less intimidating to students?  
...

## Case processing, stage two

The central activity of the interactive case process now occurs. The readers again take their places and begin to reprise the case. But the critical difference this time is that the other members of the workshop may interrupt them at anytime by saying STOP! and, having been primed by their five-minute discussions, doing one of the following:

- a. Asking one of the readers a *question*.
- b. Making a *suggestion* to one of the readers.
- c. Making an *observation* about the action to the audience.
- d. *Replacing* one of the readers and trying to modify the behavior for the “better.”

Once the readers begin the reprise, the first interruption usually occurs quickly. If it does not, I may have to initiate the first break in the action. Upon hearing a reader’s response, I may at times ask another reader to react to that response. Usually, facilitator intervention need be no more than minimal, since the audience members and readers are soon responding rapidly among themselves without further stimulation. Much of the learning occurs in this stage of the process. (Often, I physically slide back a bit from the others in the group, subtly signaling their greater responsibility for the learning.)

In order to give you a bit of flavor of the interaction, here is a short scenario similar to what might occur (although it’s hypothetical, it is based on previous runs of the case):

- Participant 1: STOP! David, do you really know that all class members feel as you do?  
David: Well, I haven’t talked with all of them, but I think they do. I know some do.  
Participant 1: Don’t you think it would be better to check that out first before you raise the issue with another faculty member?  
David: Well, I suppose so. But that shouldn’t have to be my job. It takes up my time.

Participant 2: Dr. Browne, David seems a bit shy. Would you be willing to accompany him to a conference with Dr. Webb about this situation?

Dr. Browne: Uh... Hmm. I'm really not sure that's within my responsibility as an advisor.

Participant 3: Why not? Aren't you supposed to be helping your advisees?

Dr. Browne: Uh... Yes... but only about courses and such stuff. And I'm not certified or trained in personal counseling.

Participant 3: Yes, but this *is* about a course in which he's enrolled. Surely, you must have a handbook that suggests how to deal with this kind of situation. And you also could refer him to the college's counseling office, couldn't you?

Participant 1: Wouldn't it be better to check policy in the handbook before leading David on and getting yourself more involved in the problem?

Participant 4: I'd like to ask Dr. Webb how he'd feel if a student and an advisor came to him with this kind of concern... Dr. Webb?

Dr. Webb: That would be rather unusual, I think. But I would treat them cordially and hear them out. Why should I view it as a threat, if that's what you're getting at? I have absolutely nothing to hide.

Participant 5: Why unusual?

Dr. Webb: I've been including this project in the course for five years, and I've never had a complaint before. In fact, many of my students have said it's been the most valuable activity of the course. I don't know why a student would object to it—unless he is totally naïve about society's problems, or just doesn't want to do the work, or maybe is a political Neanderthal...

Participant 6: Dr. Webb, do you think perhaps that your language is sometimes...uh...a bit...uh...comes across stronger to students than perhaps you intended it to be?

Dr. Webb: Not at all. I feel strongly about things. I don't mince words. I'm honest. I don't try to represent myself as someone I'm not.

Participant 2: But could some people consider that as inflammatory speech, an attempt to indoctrinate students to your way of thinking—an ultra liberal viewpoint?

Dr. Webb: Inflammatory? I'm not sure what you mean by that...

Participant 2: Well, you referred to “mealy-mouth bystanders” and “decadent world” and “triumph over the forces of corruption” and “re-mold” students...

Dr. Webb: You surely aren't arguing that the world is not decadent and full of corruption, are you? I share Burke's belief that evil will triumph if good men (and women) do nothing. Inflammatory language? I think not. Maybe *colorful*—I had a second undergraduate major in creative writing. But not inflammatory.

Participant 7: But do you think you should *re-mold* students to a liberal viewpoint?

Dr. Webb: If you look in the catalog, you'll note that this *is* a *liberal* arts college. Our mission is not to “certify” graduates with degrees, but to *change* them into leaders and responsible citizens. *Liberal* arts means *liberating* people from the bonds that restrain them from contributing to the improvement of our world.

Participant 8: I'd like to return to David... Did your roommate get permission to tape classes?

I know you'd like to hear more dialogue, but in demonstrations, we sometimes have to move on in order to accomplish other things. At this point, I think another exercise might be useful for you.

### **Exercise 3, Simulation**

**(five minutes or more)**

If two or three of you are going through this process together, let one person assume the role of any reader and have the other person(s) ask some of the questions and suggestions that may have been framed in Exercise 2 (or ask other questions), with the "reader" responding as though this were an actual dialogue in a workshop. Do this for each person in the group that is accessing this website with you.

If you are going through this process solo, assume whatever reader role(s) you wish and responded to the questions and suggestions that you jotted down in Exercise 2.

**Reminder:** You don't have to do the exercises on this website, of course, but if you take time for them, your benefits will be closer to those of the actual workshop experience—especially compared to just reading or glancing through this material.

At least, the preceding dialogue (and exercise) may have given you a brief taste of what a discussion of this case may have been like. Notice that the facilitator seems to have played no role except that of listener. This is not always true; sometimes the facilitator needs to guide the discussion in subtle ways by perhaps infrequent, yet strategic interventions—often by [posing questions](#) to the participants. For example, interventions such as these might be appropriate in certain circumstances:

I'd like to hear a little more about what you're saying. Would you elaborate just a bit?

Chris, the statement Dana just made seems at odds with your position. Can you respond to it?

We seem to have two separate issues here: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Which one should we focus on more at this moment?

What are the actual behavior implications of what you just said?

How many of you encountered a similar problem? ... What have you done about it?

Do we have anything more to say on this topic, or should we move on to \_\_\_\_\_?

A few minutes ago, a question of *intent* was raised, but we sort of slid past it. Would it be worthwhile to return and deal with it a little more right now?

What might be some of the ethical concerns about that behavior or policy?

Note that by-and-large the above are [questions that encourage responses](#), thus moving dialogue forward and toward a more meaningful experience for participants.

There are other times when a facilitator's discrete intervention may be indicated. For example, when sufficient time may have been spent on discussion following a particular interruption, it may be appropriate to say "Perhaps it's time to get back to the case and let the readers continue from the place where they were when interrupted." Or it may be appropriate to fast-forward to some other place, saying "Let's jump to where Dr. Webb is talking about clearing the design of a project with him."

Additionally, a facilitator (being a skilled listener and monitor of the discussion) may wish to pose a parallel situation that could be productive—by saying, for example, "Suppose that David is indeed discussing a possible topic for his group's project with Dr. Webb. Let's see how that conversation might develop..." The two readers are thus invited to role-play this scene, with the action again being subject to interruptions by audience participants. Alternately, two members of the audience could be invited to play out such a situation.

Now, for a few moments, let's put ourselves back into the discussion of the case. Suppose it's progressing actively, many participants are asking good questions and making good suggestions, valid points are being raised and noted, and the dialogue has not exhausted the topic at hand. But, no one has yet chosen to replace any of the readers and attempted to play the role in what is thought to be a more effective way. Should the facilitator urge that a replacement take place?

That's a real judgment call. If things are going well enough without a replacement, perhaps one could let things continue as they have been. On the other hand, replacement really re-energizes participants, frequently leads to new perspectives, and gains the insights that can accrue from role-playing—particularly if another replacement chooses to play a second new role against the first replacement. So, let your judgment be your guide; if you can encourage a replacement naturally in response to what someone has just said, it may be well worth the effort. Consider the following:

Participant 9: Dr. Webb, would you consider softening your words just a bit and perhaps giving students a few examples of projects that have been done in the past to ease their fears?

Dr. Webb: I already gave them several examples in the syllabus. Maybe they should read it more carefully. I don't know what you mean by "softening my words."

Participant 9: Well, you may want to repeat those examples and ask for questions from students about possibilities and...

Facilitator: Maybe you'd like to show how that might be done—by taking Webb's place...

Participant 9: Oh, no... [others encourage...]... well, OK...

Dr. Webb II: Uh... These projects should take place on the third weekend in April, so group leaders will want to have their conferences with me by April first. Focus might be a display on animal rights, or a pilot project on discrimination in retail stores, or a survey on environmental issues—there have been myriad topics in previous years. If a project doesn't seem to have potential for significant impact, I'll ask you to revise it. More likely, you'll be inclined to want to do too much, and I'll suggest ways to cut it down to a more doable size. I also want to ensure that what you propose is well within the bounds of the law and the goals of the college. For example, in the past, proposals such as picketing might have impeded traffic, and I wouldn't want students to be subject to—

Participant 5: STOP! Dr. Webb, do you think any of these projects need to be run by the human subjects committee? —just to be safe...

Participant 1: STOP! Too... Do you know that a lot of visitors will be on campus that weekend, and the college could be embarrassed?

Participant 3: Dr. Webb, did you deliberately plan the projects for when many people would be on campus?

Poor Webb *Secundus*—he’s getting dumped on even more than was Webb *Primus*. He probably has good answers to these challenges, but we had best move on.

#### **Exercise 4, Replacement**

**(five minutes or more)**

Select any of the three roles in the case at any point you choose and play the role in a way that you think may be more effective than in the printed case. Informally write out the statements you might employ as that person. You may do this with more than one role, if you wish. If several of you are going through this website together, you may wish to select various roles and play them against each other for whatever time seems productive for you.

### **Case processing, stage three: The end game**

A major decision in any discussion—and especially in one that employs interactive case strategies—is when to conclude the discussion and to make a transition into compiling ideas, highlighting what participants have learned, summarizing, identifying what actions might result from the experience, putting things together, or whatever else you may have programmed as you move closer to the end of the session. This decision is even more critical in interactive case teaching, because the discussions tend to surge on and on—well beyond the time that may have been allotted to them. It’s easy for a facilitator to be deluded by thinking “This is great! Everyone’s involved! So many good ideas are coming out!” and slip beyond a point of diminishing returns.

Don’t wait for the discussion to begin dragging. Don’t wait until every possible topic has been covered. Don’t wait for every last issue to be resolved. Don’t wait for signs of restlessness among the participants. Be assertive (if only for a moment in your gentle facilitating persona) and declare that even though the discussion could continue much longer—and it might be fun if we did—it’s time to move on in order to consolidate what we’ve learned from this workshop. Explain that you think this is more important than exploring every last nuance in the case—or talking ourselves nearly to death. (Frame the explanation in terms that are the most comfortable for you and the group, of course.)

Presentation of stimulating data should always be followed by some processing of the material. That’s why it was important to follow the case presentation with discussions of various sorts. Similarly, processing of material should always be followed by some sort of consolidation, a putting of things together. This does not mean that matters must be brought to total resolution. Indeed, I think it is preferable to only partially resolve matters—or to only begin the consolidation. This allows

participants to take the workshop experience with them and to continue processing and learning long after the session has officially ended.

There are many ways to take this step. I like to put the major responsibility on the participants, rather than to assume it myself. Principally, that's because they learn more in the process and have more ownership of the outcomes. Further, they often can do it better and more thoroughly than I might. My inclination usually is to go back to smaller groups in which each person has more opportunity for contributing than they would have in a large group. Then I follow this with an activity that shares the productivity of the several subgroups.

In the workshop at hand, I'd likely return to the subgroups that met early on and ask them to spend about ten minutes trying to agree on suggestions for resolving any problems they identified in the course of the workshop and—perhaps even more importantly—to try to frame guidelines or principles that would help preclude the occurrence of such problems in the future

This is a good place to say a few words about the amount of time to allot to an activity of this sort. It certainly is true that the subgroups could profitably spend much more than ten minutes on this assignment. However, limiting them in time helps speed their work, and it also helps move the entire experience ever forward—without eliminating important elements. It's OK if they don't come up with all possible guidelines that could be extracted from the discussions. It's OK if they get off on a tangent and overlook some key possibilities. Other subgroups may have other tangents, but collectively they may cover the territory pretty well. The important objective is for everyone to have opportunity to engage the issues, to learn from that engagement, and to be energized for continual further learning. Any educational session that accomplishes that is a winner, to my way of thinking. (It really doesn't matter that after one session they don't arrive at a complete, polished set of policies that can be adopted *verbatim* by the entire university community. That kind of outcome that can be achieved only through intense, thorough, widespread discussions among affected parties over long periods of time.)

So the subgroups have met for ten minutes. With a timer or other obvious signal (just raising a hand may suffice), I call the participants back into a committee-of-the-whole and “harvest” the results of their discussions. This can be done in several ways. Each subgroup could have been given a blank transparency and a pen so that they can list their results. Then a representative of each group in turn can briefly comment on the results while the transparency is displayed via an overhead projector. (You can tell that I prefer low-tech processes.)

Another way is for the facilitator to ask each subgroup in turn to state one guideline, continuing around and around until most of the key results are collected and written on a transparency or newsprint. (Writing on a transparency is quicker, but only one frame can be displayed at a time, whereas newsprint sheets can be taped on a wall and viewed *in toto*. Ah, it's another judgment call.) In any procedure, it helps to ask for one or two assistants from the group so that the facilitator isn't discombobulated by simultaneously listening, thinking, interpreting, writing, and posting.

It can be very useful to review the results from the subgroup discussions with an eye toward discerning particular emphases, relationships, generalities, priorities, and the like. In addition, a compilation of items such as these can be distributed later to the participants via e-mail; it's a good way to help ensure continuing awareness of the subject—not to mention extending the learning of the workshop.

By now, you can probably anticipate what I'm going to suggest next. Indeed, it would be well worth the time and effort for you—and any colleagues who have gone through this website with you—to take a few minutes to list the particular outcomes, guidelines, cautions, and suggestions that come to mind as a result of your advancing this far in the subject.

### **Exercise 5, Ethical Guidelines**

**(ten minutes)**

In a limited time period (say, ten minutes), frame guidelines, principles, and policies that your study of this case has suggested would be useful to establish, follow, or at least keep in mind regarding the issues that are embedded in the case and its accompanying materials.

Here, to stimulate your thinking, are a few examples that have emerged from previous workshops with this case:

If a policy on handling complaints about professors does not exist in my institution, we should discuss and establish one as soon as possible—and publicize it appropriately.

Academic advisors should be trained in how to use referral resources that are available.

The university should give examples of what issues are appropriate for inclusion in courses and what are not appropriate in order to guide faculty members.

Insofar as possible, problems should be resolved at or near the levels where they occur, rather than being pushed to higher administrative levels.

At this point, there are three paths for you to consider:

- A. If this were a workshop focused primarily on the teaching and study of cases interactively, or if that is your main interest, you can now move forward to **More about cases**.
- B. If you are particularly interested in exploring a few additional matters dealing with discussions, you can jump to **More about discussions**.
- C. If you want to explore ethical issues further than has been done so far, you can branch to **More about ethics**.

If you wish, you can choose to meander through more than one route—eventually, they all lead to **Workshop closing**. Or you can go directly to the closing now.

## Branch A: More about cases

A question I'm frequently asked during a session such as the one just portrayed is "Do you have any cases on \_\_\_\_\_?" (substitute almost any topic imaginable). While many cases are available in certain disciplinary areas, as well as concerning teaching itself, it's not likely that a case with just the right slant exists in the field of that person's interest. My reply usually involves a quick litany of the [characteristics of cases that engage participants](#)—brief, incomplete, open-ended, realistic, visual, emotional, and the like—and [suggestions for writing](#) one's own case—base it on a real situation, etc.

The tradition in composing cases has been largely different from the characteristics that I list above. Frequently every last jot and tittle of a situation is incorporated so that the person dealing with the case has to separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak, analyzing complicated circumstances with an eye toward coming to potential resolutions. I'm not disparaging that approach, for it's quite appropriate for many circumstances in the business world and other settings where life is just that complex.

I think my approach is more appropriate for situations that arise suddenly and often require immediate responses from the individuals involved (also a common fact of life). The vicarious experience of studying a case can help a person become better prepared to act if ever thrust into a similar situation, as well as conditioned to preclude certain problems. A relatively incomplete scenario allows participants in a workshop session to more easily transpose the circumstances to their own particular frames of references. Short, impactful cases allow participants to quickly get to the heart of the matter. They also are easier to write, as well as to revise for adaptation to a variety of contexts. A case of this type can be well employed as an instant introit to an extended case of the more traditional longer type.

I'd classify "The Case of the *Very* Dedicated Professor" as being on the verge of being too long. Many of the cases I've written are much shorter and just as effective (note that the excerpt appearing on the first page of this website might do quite well in this regard). They can even be just a paragraph. You can access a [few examples](#) of these by clicking on the link. And they are a number of [alternatives](#) for presenting cases and other triggers that can energize participants and generate discussions quickly.

For a workshop a few years ago, I asked participants to submit questions and concerns in advance so that I could incorporate time in the workshop directed to them—or otherwise respond to them. Some of your additional questions may be similar to theirs, and you can find my responses by accessing the link to [frequently asked questions](#).

Among recent good resources on case teaching is the *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, vol. 13, no. 2 & 3, 2002 (<http://ject.lib.muohio.edu/>). David Rosenthal, editor of this special issue on "Issues in Case Method Teaching," states, "The authors...represent the case method as a vibrant approach to learning. They show it to be growing in popularity and application by its representation in various disciplines, by its use with technology, and by the sensitivity and efficacy of its adherents. In short, the case method clearly demonstrates how much better we can learn when we all pull together."

If you have questions about writing and using cases in teaching that haven't yet been answered by this web posting, please feel free to contact me via [e-mail](#). And if you are writing a case and would like me to glance over it and make suggestions, I may be contacted in the same way.

You may now select another branch or jump to **Workshop closing**.

## Branch B: More about discussions

If this had been an actual workshop in which facilitating discussions was one of the main focal points, I would now reveal a little secret to the group. I would tell them that just before the beginning of the workshop I had enlisted two pairs of participants for a special assignment: Each pair was asked to keep notes on the nature of my interventions in the discussion, particularly regarding the nature of the questions that I asked in the course of the workshop. (Having participants work in pairs so that they can quietly discuss entries in their log of notes enhances productive outcomes of this strategy.) I give them the handout on [questions that encourage responses](#) as a guide, but I'm interested in other questions, as well. They may also make an assessment as to whether or not the interventions were useful. The brief reports from these two pairs of observers then become the basis for discussion of the usefulness of using questions to guide discussions.

This discussion can naturally segue into a more general dialogue in which I frequently put myself on the line by focusing on discussion-guiding behaviors I have exhibited that seemed to be effective, as well as those that might be improved. (There usually is no dearth of examples of each, but at times I deliberately try to include a few instances of negative behavior—such as briefly overlooking persons on one side of the room who are trying to join the discussion.) And yes, I may very well have quietly enlisted another two pairs of observers to keep track of these things. Reports from primed observers may reveal things that might go unnoticed by others who are deeply immersed in the activity.

Since many of the participants in the workshop have used discussions at least occasionally or have been in discussions themselves, here is a good place to further tap the myriad resources in the room by simply asking for suggestions of effective practices that others have experienced.

As with any activity that produces a lot of ideas, it's important to compile and consolidate the results. Plan to display the ideas appropriately (newsprint, transparency, PowerPoint frames, etc.) and review them for patterns, themes, and trends. Try to assess which might produce optimal results with minimal investment of time, effort, and cost. In this process, try to find easy ways for participants to retrieve the outcomes without spending all their time taking notes, rather than thinking about the ideas. This could be done by having a few scribes responsible for recording various sections and/or arranging for some post-workshop distribution of the material.

Of course, it's not likely that a facilitator can anticipate every last possible eventuality in a discussion and have a ready response available for it. I find it helpful to keep in mind a fundamental set of [seven principles](#) that inform my behaviors when I'm facilitating discussions. You might well determine your own set of guidelines and principles to inform your discussion efforts.

### Exercise 6, Discussion Principles

During the next two or three weeks, carry a 5 x 7 note card with you and write down items that you think would comprise an appropriate set of guidelines and principles to inform your efforts in facilitating discussions.

You may now select another branch or jump to **Workshop closing**.

## Branch C: More about ethics

Immediately prior to the opportunity to select one or more branches, this workshop had arrived at a point of consolidating participants' experience by proposing various guidelines and principles that might apply to ethical situations encountered in college and university teaching. This would naturally lead to consideration of [codes of ethics](#) in general, as well as a particular set of [ethical principles](#) developed several years ago by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and widely distributed among institutions in Canada and the United States.

It can be very salutary for colleges and universities to establish such codes to generate ethical climates on their campuses and to apply them to the resolution of ethical problems. But codes are often general statements—as they should be in order to not become legalistic and invite observing the letter of laws, rather than aspiring to the spirit of ideals. And [ethical practice](#) is a dynamic concept that continually responds to on-going experience, just as do the practices of law or medicine—or of teaching, for that matter. Further, [ethical dilemmas](#) are common, and few, if any, have cut-and-dried, simple resolutions. John Dewey said it well: "A moral principle...is not a command to act or forbear acting in a given way; it is a tool for analyzing a special situation, the right or wrong determined by its entirety, not by the rule as such."

Delving into the ample [bibliography](#) available, particularly *Ethical Dimensions of College and University Teaching*, can enhance one's understanding of ethical matters. In that 1996 Jossey-Bass sourcebook, [Karen Hanson's chapter](#) "Between Apathy and Advocacy: Teaching and Modeling Ethical Reflection" is particularly relevant to "The Case of the *Very* Dedicated Professor."

You may now select another branch or jump to **Workshop closing**.

## Workshop closing

Closings, endings, exits, conclusions, finales—by whatever designation—have drawn attention and commentary from diverse observers (among them William Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, Julius Marx, and Lawrence Peter Berra). While a *grand finale à la Tchaikovsky* with cannons and church bells certainly endures in one's memory, my own preferences tend toward more subtle endings, although I hope with similarly memorable effect.

Closings and [exits](#) for instructional sessions are even more important than openings and [entrances](#). They require careful planning, as well as carefully preserved time to carry them out. They can bring the subject of the session to heightened focus and embedded deeper in mind, and they should leave the participant not only wanting more, but motivated to continue independently. Further, they should incorporate opportunities and plans for action to occur as the result of the session. That's a large order.

I often chose to end sessions with what I call a hearing-every-voice exercise. I would employ that for this workshop on interactive cases. I distribute a half-sheet of 8.5 x 11 paper on which are three items:

1. What are the most useful ideas/concepts/techniques you have encountered in this workshop?
2. What new things will you do in your teaching or other work as a result of this workshop?
3. Anything else that you want to say...

Participants are asked to respond to whatever items they wish, but to not sign the form. Legible writing is suggested because portions of the responses may be read anonymously in the group. After an appropriate time, I collect the forms and redistribute them in a way that helps ensure that persons are not likely to get their own forms. Then participants in turn read whatever they wish from the forms. (If the group is larger than 20 or so, I break it up into subgroups of appropriate size and the readings occur in the subgroups; each subgroup then may choose several to read aloud to the larger group.) For the most part, I try to not comment on the responses read, except for making “accepting” gestures. On occasion, however, I may suggest an extension of a remark, note patterns that may be inherent in the responses, or encourage others to consider actions similar to one that’s been stated. This is a decidedly “soft” ending, but it seems to serve all the purposes that I hold for a closing. If it fits the occasion, I may program in, as participants are leaving, a final element of playing appropriate music—more likely inspiring and emotional *à la* Bernstein and Copeland than dramatic Tchaikovsky and Beethoven.

### **Exercise 7, Reflection & Planning**

**(five minutes)**

Please respond to these items:

1. What have been the most useful ideas/concepts/techniques you have encountered in the course of perusing this website?
2. What new things do you plan to try in your teaching or other work *in the next month* as a result of this experience?
3. What new things do you plan to try *in the next academic term*?
4. Anything else that you want to say...

Post these responses near your desk to remind you of what you plan to do.

**Option:** If you wish to forward your responses to me via e-mail, I will be happy to read and comment on them. If a sufficient number of persons communicate with me about this exercise, I’ll compile their responses (with no names associated therewith) and post them as an addendum to this website.

## End notes

**Follow up.** I try to compile the responses of the hearing-every-voice exercise and distribute them by e-mail a week or two later to the participants in order to prolong the effects of the workshop. I hope this reminds them of their planned action and reinforces it, and I also hope that others' responses may infect them with their resolve. I also like to include an additional article or reading that will encourage them to continue to engage the topics of the workshop.

**HEV variations.** In exercise 7, you see one variation of the hearing-every-voice strategy I suggested in the text immediately preceding it. Many others can be designed to meet particular purposes in summaries and/or sharing ideas for action as a result of a session. The HEV technique can be used in other instructional situations in order to bring out voice not often heard in the class and to focus attention on a topic as a trigger for discussion. I've used it at a luncheon by asking participants to complete the stem "*How* one teaches speaks so loudly..." and then have the responses read after redistributing them. In another instance, the items to which participants responded were "(1) What things prevent me from fully exercising my philosophical assumptions in my teaching? and (2) How might I be able to overcome these constraints?" Such approaches always enhance ensuing discussions.

**Questions.** You may have wondered why I didn't reserve time for questions from respondents during the workshop displayed on this website. I consider my inviting questions to be an important part of any instructional session, and I do include time for that in actual workshops. I usually program it at about the three-quarters point (say, during stage three earlier on this website or just before the several branches) in order for it to not detract from my carefully timed closing. It helps to program some flextime toward the latter part of the session in order to accommodate sufficient time for both questions and closing.

**Commitment to action.** I usually propose that each workshop participant engage in a particular action in the near future after the session. I might specify any one of these as a follow-up to the workshop that's the subject of this website:

1. Write a case (no longer than a page) in your own discipline that could be taught interactively.
2. Identify the major personal beliefs and values that underlie your academic efforts.
3. Enlist two of your colleagues to work through this website workshop with you.
4. Share the materials of this workshop with members of your department and other colleagues.
5. Organize and conduct a workshop on your campus with regard to teaching cases interactively.
6. Propose and initiate on your campus a program of regular discussions on ethics in teaching.

### **Exercise 8, Action**

**(time variable)**

During the next *three months*, carry out any one of the above actions or any other that's consistent with their intent. Notify me by e-mail that you have accomplished this task; no details are necessary.

**Length of this workshop.** If you have stayed the course of this website material, you very likely have a prime concern: How in the world could this workshop have been contained within a 150-minute block of time? The answer, of course: It could not be thus contained. An agenda this extensive might not even have been contained within a full day. Websites permit a completeness that's not possible within the real-time constraints of conference, campus, or fifty-minute hours. In reality, when fitting material into conventional time slots, there is almost always this question: How much dare I leave out? It's not just a matter of time availability. Daring to [leave things out](#) may serve important educational purposes such as allowing learners to “get into the material themselves” or to search out some of it on their own. In the workshop at hand, a lot of material may be accessed through links. If this web material had been a live workshop, I would have tried to ensure that there was sufficient time for a reasonably adequate demonstration of the interactive concepts and techniques, for processing and consolidating the experience, and for sending participants away at least still energized (and maybe even a little bit inspired). Beyond accomplishing those objectives, anything else would have become unexpected dividend, though gratefully appreciated.

**One final matter.** Early in this website (Exercise 1) you were asked to list the objectives you held for this workshop. It's now time to revisit what you hoped to accomplish as a result of your engaging this material—either directly, by means of accessing linked material or other resources, through discussions with colleagues, or as a result of other individual effort and thought on your part.

### Exercise 9, Objectives Revisited

Review the several objectives you jotted down in Exercise 1 and identify those that have been accomplished to your reasonable satisfaction. If some have not been accomplished, look back over the website text, linked material, or other resources mentioned; perhaps additional attention to one or more of these may result in your coming closer to what you hoped to have gained. If some matters are still unresolved, please feel free to contact me by [e-mail](#) so that we might explore further options that might be useful to you.

Our virtual time together has come to an end. While it's likely not to have been as productive as if we had been together in an actual workshop (especially one that emphasizes interaction), I hope you've found it to be of some value nevertheless. I know that I've gained much more from developing this website than I had anticipated in advance. If you have benefited from it, my effort will have been fully worthwhile. I welcome any feedback you may wish to give me.

And I wish you well in all your good efforts in the future.

*Linc. Fisch*

## ~~-----Addenda-----~~

From time to time, other material relevant to the topics of the workshop and the website will be added.

Your suggestions are welcomed.

1. The overall theme of the 2004 IUT Conference was Optimal Teaching and Learning: Achieving Higher Education Excellence. One of the sub-themes was Optimizing Learning through Innovation. The Ad Rem article “The Art of Optimizing” briefly addresses the nature of [optimizing](#) and how the process occurs.
2. Many of the concepts included in this workshop are dealt with in a paper “Triggering Discussions on Ethics and Values: Cases and Innovative Case Variations” that appeared in a special issue on ethics and values of *Innovative Higher Education*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Winter 1997. Please see this source if you seek a single comprehensive statement on the subject.