Cases/Role-Playing/Jigsaw - A Teaching Technique
for Exploring Multiple Perspectives

There are many teaching techniques that get students engaged by having them discuss and apply course content. Using case studies, having students role-play, and employing cooperative learning strategies are a few examples.

Cases are narratives that address realistic issues, based on actual events or contrived, that provide a basis for student discussion.

Role-playing has students assume the roles of characters in a fictional setting. Players take responsibility for acting out these roles within a narrative, either through literal acting or through a process of structured decision-making or character development.

The Jigsaw technique is a cooperative learning strategy that has students interacting with others in groups to develop and refine their understanding of some issue. Students meet in a home group, disperse to join different second groups, and then reconvene in their home groups (thus, the jigsaw designation).

The following teaching technique, created by a journalism professor at the University of Hawaii (Brislin, 1995), is a combination of the above and can be used with any topic having multiple perspectives. It involves some preparation and will probably take an entire class period so it is not a technique to be used without careful planning or one that would be used many times during the semester.

1) Assign a case for the students to read (with supporting documents if desired) that provides sufficient information on the topic to allow for a rich discussion. This could be a hypothetical case that you have written, one that you acquired through some educational resource, or one that you constructed based on some news event. A second option that you could use is, in lieu of a pre-written case, is to provide the students with materials and references (for example, news clippings or web links) that you have assembled for them to study. A third alternative is to have students research the topic themselves. If this alternative is chosen, you might want to assign a short paper for an individual grade summarizing what was read or researched to ensure that each student brings sufficient information to the group.

2) In class, create equal sized groups of 4-6 students. The number of groups depends on the number of perspectives that could be taken in the case. Assign each group member a number.

3) Assign each group a role based on the characters in the case and/or the different perspectives. It is probably best not to assign the roles prior to class to ensure that each student has the broadest understanding of the case.

4) Each group discusses the case from their assigned character or perspective. Allow up to 10 minutes for this activity.

5) Reorganize groups by student number so that new groups result each having at least one member from each perspective.

6) Students in these new "jigsaw" groups argue the case for 20 minutes by presenting the perspective of the role they are playing while considering and analyzing the perspectives of the others.

7) Students then return to their original groups and share the perspectives they received in their jigsaw groups that may have made them rethink their original position. Allow up to 10 minutes for this activity.

8) The exercise could culminate with a class discussion about the topic. Each student, having now heard multiple perspectives on the issue, could be assigned to write a short position paper (in class or as homework) on what stance or action he or she would personally take in this case writing the paper as themselves and not the role that they played.

For example, if an environmental issue were to be addressed, students could argue from the perspectives of a member of the general public, a representative from a business company, a scientist, or a politician. This technique lends itself well to disciplines that address multiple points of view whether the issue is medical, political, economic, ethical, or some other discipline-specific topic.

Brislin, T. (1995). Active learning in applied ethics instruction. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*. 6 (3): 87-95.

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