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The Case Method as a tool to help parenting, family communication and stability

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Parenting is a recognized cornerstone of children education worldwide. Parenting encourages a shared vision in couples that can lead to reduction in divorce rates. Parenting provides savings to governments in terms of eliminating social spending incurred in conflict derived from broken families.

This paper discusses the suitability for Case Method methodology as an appropriate tool to aid in Parenting.

A. The Case Method

Teaching through cases was first implemented at Harvard Law School by Christopher Columbus Langdell,[1] Dean of the Law School in the second half of the nineteen century. It was an appropriate teaching system considering the specific legal and judiciary system applied in the Anglo Saxon environment. Anglo Saxon legal and judiciary system enforces jurisprudence and case law over legal coded articles which are mostly applied in continental judiciary systems.

This new system differed from traditional Socratic lecturing in the sense that students needed to analyze beforehand situations provided in real environments. They should henceforth specifically "put themselves in the shoes of the actor", play the role and make decisions and recommendations.

Success and relevance of discussions and assurance of learning rates drove Harvard to adopt it in the new Business School (HBS 1908). Today, this kind of methodology has been adopted in prestigious universities all over the world. Just to name a few in addition to HBS, we have IESE, the Darden School at the University of Virginia, University of Michigan, Stanford, Ross School of Business, INSEAD, and Richard Ivey School of Business. In addition, case discussion methodology has also extended beyond Western culture and prestigious universities in the far East such as the Asian Institute of Management, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and Asian Case Research Centre at the University of Hong Kong have fully adopted this method of teaching. Using the words of HBS Professor Christensen, "a case is a narrative account of a situation, problem, or decision usually derived from actual experience." [2].

Universities such as Harvard, INSEAD, IESE, Stanford have available data on 'assurance of learning' validated by AACSB and have been accredited by this internationally recognized accrediting institution.

B. Case Method usage beyond Business and Law

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[1] Christensen, C. R. and Hansen, A.J. (1987). Teaching and the Case Method Harvard Business School: Boston

[2] Langdell wrote Selection of Cases on the Law of Contracts (1870, the first book used in the "case" system; enlarged, 1877); Cases on Sales (1872); Summary of Equity Pleading (1877, 2nd ed., 1883); Cases in Equity Pleading (1883); and Brief Survey of Equity Jurisdiction (1905)

Usage of Case Method has spread beyond the basic 'Business / Law & Teacher / Student' environment. Observations on student behavior changes in the fields of communication, team building, commitment and implementation of decisions adopted, have driven several institutions in different disciplines to experiment with this system either in new fields or with new and different types of students such as:

1. Engineering

At the 2004 American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference & Exposition, professors Larry G. Richards and Michael E. Gorman of the University of Virginia presented their conclusions on their experience with this system in the paper 'Using Case Studies to Teach Engineering Design and Ethics'.[3] After developing a set of case studies for teaching engineering ethics, engineering design and environmental issues, all cases have been used in a course on Invention and Design and in other courses offered by our Division of Technology, Culture, and Communications (TCC).

Developing their own conclusions while quoting well known scholars they confirmed that "Cases promote active learning,[4] team-based activities, and the ability to deal with open-ended problems. With cases, students can be exposed to realistic situations such as those involving open ended problems, multiple possible answers, key decision points, and trade-offs. Thus, cases are a natural way to introduce engineering design and decision-making."

The case method also fosters the development of higher-level cognitive skills [5] and [6] it forces students to go beyond rote learning. Cases address problems that require analysis, judgment, decisions, perspective taking, role-playing, independent thought, and critical thinking.

Shapiro reviews several approaches to developing knowledge and skills: lectures and readings facilitate "acquiring knowledge and becoming informed about techniques"; exercises and problem sets provide "the initial tools for exploring the applications and limitations of techniques", while the case method promotes the "development of philosophies, approaches and skills." [7]

Study key conclusions were that:

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[3] Proceedings of the 2004 American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference & Exposition Copyright © 2004, American Society for Engineering Education.

[4] In principle, they are usually critical of learning what clashes with their habitual behavior.

[5] Kolodner, J. (1993) Case-Based Reasoning Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, Inc. San Mateo, CA

[6] Leake, David B. (1996) Case-Based Reasoning: Experiences, Lessons, and Future Directions AAAI Press/MIT Press, Cambridge. MA

[7] Shapiro, B.P. (1984) An Introduction to Cases, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA. 9-584-097

- Cases work best when they are used extensively during a semester. There is a learning curve for both students and teachers.

- Students must be prepared for the case experience. Is the case to be analyzed by individuals, or by a team? Do the students know in advance what role or perspective they are to assume?

- When using cases in a class, it is important to select or write cases to address the goals of the course.

- As a course progresses, the cases should become more complex. As students and teachers become more comfortable working with cases, greater sophistication and better analyses will result.

2. With Board Members

Ken White, Vice President of Communication and Marketing at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business in Charlottesville describes how Board Executives of a firm interact with each other and get themselves to work on a business issue treated differently from a pure MBA perspective:

"While MBA cases are designed to teach students on a particular business skill or principle, cases written for trustees are designed to draw out the board's best ideas."

"One of the reasons cases work is because our trustees fall right back into the pedagogical process they experienced while learning with cases," says Ted Forbes, CEO of the Darden School Foundation.

"Utilizing cases makes for a more open and frank discussion," he says. "It can be an excellent team-building exercise that leads to understanding, cooperation, and a unified agenda" [8]

C. Parenting as the best and most common method for raising children?

Parenting, the most traditional way that families have used over the years to bring up their children, is still today regarded across all societies as the best method on top of any government supported program, of doing so.

As stated by the World Values Survey, 1998-2008, "the vast majority of adults around the world believe a child needs to be raised in a home with both a mother and a father in order to grow up happily. This sentiment is strong in South America; more than 75 percent of adults in Argentina (88 percent), Chile (76 percent), Colombia (86 percent), and Peru (93

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[8] White, Ken, CasesAren't Just for Students (BizED January February 2010)

percent) believe a two-parent home is necessary for a happy childhood. North Americans are less likely to agree to this idea, but still 63 percent of U.S. adults and 65 percent of Canadians affirm the mother-father household as optimal for raising happy children.

(i) Agreement with the mother-father family ideal is even stronger in Europe than in the Americas, with the sole exception of Sweden. There, only 47 percent of adults agree that a child needs to be raised by a mother and father to be happy. Notably, Sweden is the only country in the world where a minority agrees with this sentiment. Agreement with a mother-father ideal exceeds 90 percent in Italy (93 percent, in Poland (95 percent, 80 percent in France (86 percent) and Germany (88 percent). More than three-quarters (78 percent) of Spaniards view this family arrangement as best for children, as do two-thirds (67 percent) of British adults.

(ii) Support for the mother-father family type is nearly unanimous in the Middle Eastern and African countries: Egypt (99 percent), Saudi Arabia (95 percent), Nigeria (97 percent), and South Africa (91 percent). Asian support for children being raised by a mother and father is also strong. Most of the Asian countries profiled exceed 90 percent agreement: China (97 percent), India (90 percent), Malaysia (92 percent), Philippines (97 percent), and South Korea (92 percent); and the remainder exceed 80 percent: Indonesia (81 percent), Japan (89 percent), and Taiwan (87 percent). Australians (70 percent) and New Zealanders (68 percent) express less agreement, resembling Americans, Canadians, and British attitudes on this issue."[9]

D. Parenting as a simple and cost effective system of children education

After the 2011 UK riots in nearly 100 different spots of England and Scotland, an in depth study on why this phenomena had happened was undertaken. Objectives were to analyze the different reasons and take the necessary steps to avoid recurrence in the future. Steps will mean high expenditures from the tax payer over the years to provide individuals promoting these riots with job training and personal education and opportunities to be capable of re-joining the work force in current society.

Astonishingly enough, contrary to widely extended opinions that reasons were economic and crisis driven, the report identified absence of parenting to be the key reason behind it:

"We heard from many communities where people felt that rioter behavior could ultimately be ascribed to poor parenting. In a wide survey of over 900 young people, 58 per cent supported this view. We also heard from some communities about a sense of entitlement among young people. The Panel's view is that where problems exist, the priority should be

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[9] World Values Survey, 1998-2008 NATIONAL MARRIAGE PROJECT (UNITED STATES) INSTITUTE OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY CANADA UNIVERSIDAD DE LOS ANDES (CHILE) UNIVERSITY OF ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (PHILIPPINES) UNIVERSITAT INTERNACIONAL DE CATALUNYA (SPAIN) UNIVERSIDAD DE LA SABANA (CO-LOMBIA) UNIVERSIDAD DE PIURA (PERU)

to focus on how we can best provide support to these families and young people to re-build their lives."

"There is strong evidence that good parenting has a positive impact on outcomes in a child's life. Through an analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study, Demos found that, while background factors such as income, parents' educational qualifications and family structure were also associated with positive early outcomes, it was the parenting approach that ultimately carried the most weight." [10]

E. Communication as an issue in Parenting

Diversity is a discovery of our times and much research is being undertaken in analyzing the differences in communication between males and females. Classical essays such as 14 million copies sold of John Gray's 'Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus' are generating a new set of disciplines based on analyzing and improving communication tools between men and women.

This is of key importance as current historical period is, unfortunately, eliminating opportunities for men and women to find the time to calmly sit and talk.

In addition, the competitiveness of the environment is impacting the very way people place their daily priorities. "Being 'us' frequently becomes a second priority vs. 'me' and 'my career'."

Couples need to have under control all these three elements to be able to overcome all the problems they face.

F. Divorcing couples not much different from non divorcing couples

A study undertaken by William J. Doherty, Professor of Family Social Science, University of Minnesota and Leah Ward Sears Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice (retired) presented to the U.S. State Legislatures, states the following:

"There is a popular assumption among professionals and the public that divorce happens only after a long process of misery and conflict finally drives the spouses to end the marriage. This scenario turns out to be inaccurate for many couples confronting divorce. Sociologist Paul Amato of Pennsylvania State University and his colleagues found that most couples who divorce actually look quite similar to most couples who do not divorce. Most divorced couples report average happiness and low levels of conflict in their marriages in

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[10] After the riots. The final report of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel. Simon Marcus, Heather Rabbatts CBE, Darra Singh OBE (Panel Chair), Baroness Maeve Sherlock OBE.

the years prior to the divorce. It is the minority of divorcing couples who, during their marriages, experienced high conflict, alienation, and sometimes abuse."

"Our results suggest that divorces with the greatest potential to harm children occur in marriages that have the greatest potential for reconciliation." We now know that divorce on average has dramatic effects on children's lives, across the life course. Research shows that divorced fathers and mothers are less likely to have high-quality relationships with their children. Children with divorced or unmarried parents are more likely to be poor, while married couples on average build more wealth than those who are not married, even accounting for the observation that well-off people are more likely to get married. Parental divorce or failure to marry appears to increase children's risk of failure in school. Such children are less likely to finish high school, complete college, or attain high-status jobs. Infant mortality is higher among children whose parents do not get or stay married, and such children on average have poorer physical health compared to their peers with married parents. Teens from divorced families are more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, get in trouble with the law, and experience a teen pregnancy. Numerous studies also document that children living in homes with unrelated men are at much higher risk of childhood physical or sexual abuse. These studies generally adjust for parental education and income, which means that the negative effects cannot be explained by these demographic factors." [11]

All this evidence suggest that good communication between couples, a key objective of parenting, would result in a lower divorce rate leading to lower harm in children education. This in turn would lead to lower government spending in treating conflict and re-installing in society individuals with mental diseases derived from a broken home. Government support for parenting programs would mean "paying now and paying less" than having to solve issues generated by individuals transgressing society rules.

G. Case method usage as a tool for Parenting

Business students and managers graduating from IESE Business School in Barcelona (a partnering institution coming from Harvard Business School and the Spanish Universidad de Navarra) spotted in the late 60's the possibility of extending methodology to family issues and parenting. A group of family parents founded a Non Profit institution called FERT with the aim of making parents discuss family issues between themselves and aid in helping communication between couples.

Reasoning behind it was that:

- Parenting can be taught and learned.

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[11]Second Chances. A proposal to reduce unnecessary divorce. William J. Doherty, Professor of Family Social Science, University of Minnesota and Leah Ward Sears Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice (retired)

- Case Method is a non imposed system but a tool to help in family education including parental communication.
- Parenting preempts children conflict.

FERT program which has subsequently spread to several countries addresses several fields of human and family education. Objective is to anticipate problems early on in marriage and deal with hot issues such as family communication, sexual relations, work life balance, adult routine/boredom, authority, ethics, parents and grandparent role in education, school aid, etc. Cases are not designed to deal with extreme situations that are no longer manageable but to anticipate conflict in the early stages of family development. By doing so, FERT aims at pre-empting family viruses that are the major causes of divorce and family break up.

Case method in parenting is currently being delivered to more than 100,000 couples worldwide every year. Results are being very positive and demand for new courses is continuously increasing as well as geographies where courses are being delivered

H. Success factors

Reasons for success are that methodology takes into consideration that "family issues" are adult issues and therefore being delivered to adults. Although this may seem obvious, there are certain elements based on experience that are proving of key importance in choosing methodology:

1. Adults have fixed habits and resist change if they have no clear reasons to accept it.
2. Self-learning is crucial at this stage. So participation fosters the learning process.
3. Adults want to use everything they've learnt immediately, so they look for the most practical aspects of what they've been taught.
4. In principle, they are usually critical of learning what clashes with their habitual behavior.
5. A person probably learns more when the session focuses on a problem (which is always subjective), instead of a subject (more objective).
6. An environment of physical comfort, trust, friendliness and freedom of expression in the training session facilitates the learning process.
7. In order to learn, adults must recognize their own shortcomings in what they are taught. If not, they learn nothing.

8. When they are interested or have a reason to learn, they are very demanding with whoever is teaching them. [12]

I. Conclusions

1. Parenting, a recognized cornerstone of children education worldwide, promotes children welfare, anticipates conflict and helps in couples' communication and family stability.

2. Parenting can further be learnt and is a field that encourages a shared vision in couples that can lead to reduction in divorce rates.

3. Parenting provides savings to governments in terms of eliminating social spending incurred in conflict derived from broken families.

4. Case Method is a proven academic system in various fields that promotes communication in solving issues generating commitment from students and couples to resolve and anticipate conflict.

J. Policy recommendations

1. Government should analyze costs incurred in reducing and / or controlling conflict derived from broken families as opposed to investment in helping build stronger families.

2. Governments should promote Parenting and parental responsibility through appropriate tools to anticipate and reduce conflict derived from unstable families and children coming from divorced families.

3. Governments should encourage public and private initiatives that use the Case Method in Family Orientation Programs to help in:

   (i) Promoting higher and better communication skills between couples that will result in a reduction in conflict and divorce in families.

   (ii) "Professionalization" of Parenting through supporting programs that make parents aware of their weaknesses and provide tools for improvement.

4. "Pay now pay less" could become a guiding principle for Governments to build a better more human society with happier well educated individuals.

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[12]Principles of Adult Learning. (IFFD)

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