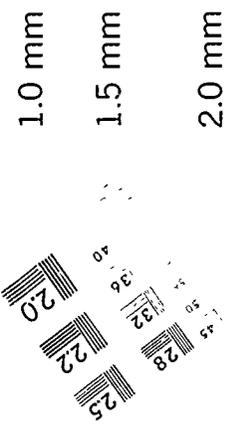
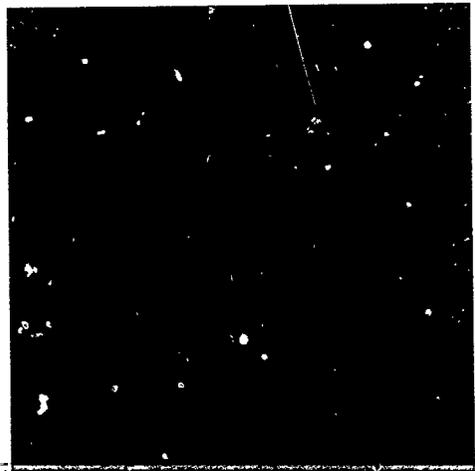
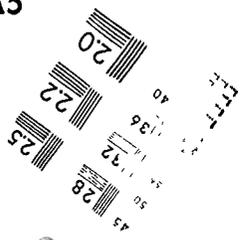


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ABSTRACT

C. Roland Christensen's 13 sessions on "Teaching and the Case Method" are discussed. This collection of cases and readings on teaching with the case method in graduate professional programs and in the liberal arts is a statement of the rationale, methods, and recurring problems of the case method. It has much to say, also, about teaching and learning and about serious discourse concerning teaching and learning. Professors have invented many social conventions, such as the myth of academic freedom, to cover the lack of serious attention to teaching and learning. Direct scrutiny of a colleague's teaching is considered a violation of basic academic conduct. Another useful convention is the myth of the "art" of teaching. Sentimentalization of good teaching provides a way to recognize those who thi. k seriously about teaching without challenging those who don't. Christensen assumes that the principle "how we teach is what we teach" forms the basis for a critical and systematic view of teaching and learning, with teaching seen as the creation, in concert with students, of a model of critical thinking, understanding, and action informed by knowledge. (SM)

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# How We Teach Is What We Teach\*

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AAHE

by *Richard F. Elmore*

with an introduction

by *AAHE President Russell Edgerton*

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At the Harvard Business School one recent Wednesday afternoon, I dropped in on thirty faculty members participating in C. Roland Christensen's seminar Teaching by the Case Method (a commitment of thirteen 90-minute sessions). They were deep into a discussion of "the case of the puzzling student" . . . a complicated professor-student relationship with a familiar ending: the student had sent her final paper by overnight express, but—or so she said—it had been destroyed in a truck fire. What to do?

Was it appropriate to verify the claim by checking with the company? Should it make any difference that the student's father had recently died of cancer? That her family had endowed the university? Was the professor's own willingness to slip deadlines earlier in the semester part of the problem?

And so it went. Gradually, under Christensen's deft questioning, issues about when and where lines are drawn, when "nonacademic" considerations come into play, and a dozen deeper issues of obligation, trust, and respect were on the table. The seminar itself was a model of the kind of intense and

caring preparation and the "knowledge of skill" that go into effective leadership of group discussion.

The case method has played an important role in the education of lawyers, doctors, and business-people. Why not in the education of teachers, and in the on-going education of professors as teachers? In Christensen's hands, cases are used to bring out generic issues cutting across the teaching of all subjects. But they could also illuminate ways to overcome difficult teaching problems within the disciplines, such as how to get across the theory of relativity or the concept of supply and demand.

Case studies could represent an important, relatively new approach to faculty development. But, as Richard Elmore's essay, beginning on page 12, suggests, the real issue is not one of technique, but of whether we are willing to take teaching seriously—as a subject for analysis and critical discussion. That such an attitude *has* been cultivated at the Harvard Business School, and is apparently spreading at the Harvard Medical School and beyond, should give hope to all of us who see a need for more powerful teaching.

—*Russell Edgerton*

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quoted approvingly by Christensen, "What the faculty have to cultivate is activity in the presence of knowledge. What the students have to learn is activity in the presence of knowledge" (p. 16).

Active learning occurs when teachers inspire, encourage, and provoke students' engagement in the construction of knowledge. Learning is not recall; learning is the active use of ideas to solve problems. Teaching-as-telling, therefore, is not simply a neutral way of transmitting the stuff; it conveys a passive and uncritical view of learning that removes the student from the role of active problem solver.

Most university professors subscribe to the ideal of students as problem solvers. Christensen and colleagues define a pedagogy that implements that ideal, and it is quite different from the pedagogy that is practiced in many university classrooms.

### **A new language**

The cases and readings in this collection are designed to provide the intellectual basis for a model of university teaching based on active learning, but more importantly, also to provide a new language of critical discourse about teaching and learning.

For Christensen and his colleagues, teaching is a legitimate topic of critical discourse and analysis. Analysis, even at the level

of mundane details like sequencing, pacing, initiating discussion, determining the order in which students will be called upon, does not trivialize teaching.

On the contrary, analysis creates a language for discourse about teaching, not unlike the language that academics use to criticize one another's research. From this discourse grows heightened attention to more and less effective ways of actively engaging students in the creation of their own knowledge.

Case studies of teaching are one way of fostering this critical discourse. They encourage analysis of a common set of facts, rather than of one's own classroom performance. The cases



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in this collection raise the full range of practical problems involved in encouraging active learning, including the typical objections raised by partisans of teaching-as-telling toward teaching methods that rely heavily on student discussion. The intrusion of blind prejudice, divergent questions, interpersonal conflict, domineering participants, and a number of other issues are framed in a way that encourages serious thought but focuses on solutions.

Interspersed with the cases are a number of articles about teaching, learning, listening, responding, conceptions of knowledge, and critical discourse about teaching, which are surely the most useful and comprehensive collection on these topics available in one place.

The cases, readings, and teaching notes grew out of the experience of the Harvard Business School faculty with the case method of teaching, and more specifically, out of the experience of Christensen, and others, in conducting seminars for a variety of audiences about effective teaching at the undergraduate and graduate professional levels. Hence, all the materials have been field-tested with a variety of audiences.

With this collection, Christensen and his colleagues have, in effect, issued a challenge to university professors, and especially to the faculty of graduate professional schools. That challenge is, first, to take teaching and learning seriously enough to subject it to the same level of scrutiny as research, and second, to develop models of teaching that treat students as active agents in the creation of their own knowledge. ■

### Note

*Teaching and the Case Method: Text, Cases, and Readings*, by C. Roland Christensen, with Abby J. Hansen. Boston: Harvard Business School, 1987.

*Teaching and the Case Method: Instructor's Guide*, by C. Roland Christensen, with Abby J. Hansen and James F. Moore. Boston: Harvard Business School, 1987.