# **Tips for Crafting Problem Stories**

From: CIEL session “Spanning the Space Between Your Class & the Real World: Crafting Informal Problem Stories for Student Groups” with Julia Hengstler, Faculty of Education, Vancouver Island University, May 12, 2017.

# **Crafting Your Problem Story:**

Think about the thematic sections of one of your courses and how they relate to practice in your field: What have they been designed to teach students to do properly? What have they been designed to teach students to navigate or avoid completely? Create a story about a situation when things are about to go wrong-- or are going wrong—for a practitioner at a level appropriate to your students’ range of knowledge and skill at that particular point in their study. Draw from your repertoire of problem stories. These may come from your own practice, your scholarly knowledge, collegial knowledge, etc. These stories can be an amalgam of all three; they may be fully “real” or constructed from smaller pieces of reality. Your course content, activities, etc. to this point should stand as direct preparation for students to give a “good” practitioner response to the problematic situation you describe.

* Identify the relevant course theme(s) to which your story will apply;
* Identify the course objectives that should be reflected in the story;
* Create your problem story:
  + Describe the “who”: key/important people, organizations, institutions, etc. involved—and their relationships if any.
  + Describe the “what”: describe/define an open-ended problem related to your course objectives or content (e.g. what you’re teaching students to navigate or avoid); describe the actions that have contributed or caused the current situation; what constraints/facilitators are at work.
  + Ask students how to resolve the situation: decide how you want students to frame their responses—will students describe what *they* might do in a situation given what they know? Will they advise a colleague in this situation? Act as a consultant? Supervisor? Etc. Do you want them to present a range of possible options or commit to a particular course of action?

# **Create Your Assessment Framework**

Develop an assessment framework that can clearly be communicated to students:

* Identify any “foundation knowledge” students should have mastered before attempting to respond to the problem.
  + Create an individual pre-requisite component & assessment for this material if desired.
* Identify any “group” behaviour that should be evidenced if using problems stories as a group activity
  + Create requisite components & an assessment for this material if desired.
* Require students to support their course(s) of action with reference to course materials, prior knowledge, personal experience, logic, frameworks such as cost/benefit or advantage/disadvantage, social justice, etc. as appropriate.
* Ask students to pose any questions they might still have, or points around which they would have liked greater clarity.
* Ensure the assessment “sub sections” come together to form an integrated assessment whole and fit within your overall course assessment scheme.
* Decide how you would like to debrief and share students’/groups’ approaches, viewpoints, logic, remaining questions, etc.

# **Now Reflect on Your Story & Edit**

Review your problem story. Maybe share it with a trusted fellow practitioner or colleague read for comment. Does your problem story:

* Have obvious connections to your course objectives and content?
* Relate to realistic issues or problems practitioners would face “in your field”?
* Provide enough contextual details?
* Include too many irrelevant details that could distract students from the main task?
* Relate to outdated information or is it irrelevant given today’s standards, situations or problems?
* Provide clarity to students regarding grading and participation guidelines?
* Have adequate time allotted for completion within a class or course schedule?

# **References:**

Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning. (n.d.) Teaching with cases. Vancouver Island University. Available from <https://ciel.viu.ca/sites/default/files/teaching_with_cases_1.docx>

Centre for Learning Enhancement, Assessment, and Redesign. (2017). Pedagogical principles of using case studies. University of Northern Texas. Available from: <http://clear.unt.edu/pedagogical-principles-using-case-studies>