Cases within cases

Transformation and context

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Case-based and problem-based teaching is the current innovation in teacher education perhaps because reflective practice is seen to equate with the most desirable pedagogy. It has been claimed that cases are effective in four main ways: learning is active, it is reflective, it is collaborative, and it occurs in an environment valuing reflection. The purpose of this study was to investigate the transformational process of learning through cases and to explore assumptions about how preservice teachers learn through case analysis in a case-based teacher education course. The results showed that individual, small-group and whole-group student reactions to cases were markedly different and influenced student collaboration and reflection. This result has major implications for how case analysis should be structured in teacher education. As well, the results supported the efficacy of using case analysis in teacher education courses – especially in their contribution to metacognitive and transformational aspects of teacher education student learning.

INTRODUCTION

To know something is not just to have 'received' information but also to have ... elaborated on it and questioned it, examined it in relation to other information they have learned, related it to other knowledge, and to 'build knowledge structures'... in this way, knowledge becomes truly generative ... and can be used to interpret new situations, to solve problems, to think and to reason, and to learn. (Resnick & Klopfer, 1989)

The purpose of this study was to investigate the transformational process of learning through cases. This research is testing assumptions about how preservice teachers learn through case analysis. Case-based and problem-based teaching is the current innovation in teacher education, perhaps because reflective practice is seen to equate with the most desirable pedagogy (Shulman 1992). It has been argued that the inherent complexity and multiple layers of cases correlate to the ill-structured domain of real-life teaching situations (Shulman 1992). In particular, Morine-Dershimer suggests cases "are presumed to promote learning by encouraging prospective teachers to confront their own (tacit) beliefs and values as they analyse issues and suggest strategies for dealing with realistic problematic educational events" (Morine-Dershimer, 1996).

Shulman (1992) has claimed that cases are effective in four main ways: learning is active, it is reflective, it is collaborative, and it occurs in an environment valuing reflec-

tion. In addition Hatton (1995), in a review of the literature, has indicated that through case study, issues can become more vivid through real-life situations, trigger more lively discussion, promote an understanding of the tentativeness of educational solutions, and encourage analytical approaches to teaching and learning and foster shared responsibility as groups cooperate in problem solving – "novices learn how to frame problems, interpret complex situations and identify decision points and possible consequences" (Johnson, McRobbie & Baer 1991, p.1).

Despite these claims there is limited research providing support that case- and problem-based study is effective (Anderson & Bird 1995). In particular the research of Anderson & Bird demonstrated that cases may reinforce existing beliefs, values and attitudes and that students may not identify with the teachers professional roles in the case scenario (Anderson & Bird 1995). As well, Morine-Dershimer (1996) has identified that students' responses and reactions to cases are influenced by the structuring of the seminar group during the consideration of the case.

In this paper we report some tentative findings that have emerged during the first year of the implementation of the Master of Teaching program at the University of Sydney. This study was designed to both examine the influence of group structuring on students' case perceptions and at the same time explore the efficacy of the case study approach.

In particular the specific aims of this study were to:

- explore the strengths of the case study approach
- examine the processes of collaborative and cooperative learning in a preservice course which was based on problem and inquiry principles and proceeded with a case approach
- examine if differences between individual, small and large group reactions that have been reported in the literature also occurred in the Australian context
- analyse the transformation process that the case was designed to engender in the preservice teachers (including confrontation of beliefs and values, and the role of preservice teachers' prior learning and experiences).

THE MASTER OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH

The Master of Teaching is conceptualised as a case-based course. It uses an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based approach arising from the presentation of a range of different kinds of cases over two years of study. The cases provide the main framework for the course, rather than one fragment which has been the practice in other programs trialling this kind of approach (Morine-Dershimer 1996). The cases on which the course was based were intended as example situations rather than professional exemplars and were selected to promote reflection and transformation. In each phase of the program students were encouraged to adopt a socially critical and reflective approach to the profession. Students were introduced to a variety of modes of teaching and learning based on actual school contexts. They built on these experiences to develop their own teaching styles and rationales for teaching practice. Direct observation of and experience in a range of school

and community contexts, and the use of a wide range of information and instructional technology also featured in the program.

MASTER OF TEACHING STRUCTURE

Course components are built around two major studies. In Study 1, from which the case in this research was drawn, students were grouped in multidisciplinary teams with both primary and secondary working together. Staff were also teamed so that students worked with two members of staff. Study 2 focused on the particular curriculum area that students taught – in the case of primary the six Key Learning Areas mandated for children from kindergarten to Year 6. The cases were conceptualised in different ways at different stages of the course.

In Phase 1, which ran for the first eight weeks of the program, study was based around four 'triggers': communicating, knowing, curriculum, and social context of education. Students framed their own questions after the presentation of stimulus material, for example videotapes of classroom interaction, collaborative activities and print material. In Phase 2, students were introduced to more detailed case material written by classroom teachers reflecting teachers' concerns and issues within their school contexts. Contributors were teaching in a range of Sydney and rural schools across kindergarten to Year 12. They included executive staff and beginning teachers.

Students spent time analysing these cases, researching relevant policy documents and related research and resources, and formulating a response for possible plans of action.

MASTER OF TEACHING STUDENTS

The students in the two groups in this study (Groups 5 and 11) had completed an undergraduate bachelor's degree in their proposed area of teaching speciality and had been accepted into the two-year end-on Master of Teaching degree, a preservice teaching qualification. Three of the students had other postgraduate qualifications and three of the students had honours degrees. The average age of the students was 27 and a significant proportion of them had extensive workforce experience – often in other professions. Other characteristics of the student groups are set out in the Table 1 below. There were 26 students in all, seven primary and 19 secondary. The secondary group included all Key Learning Areas except science. For this component of the course primary and secondary students worked together on a range of cases drawn from both primary and secondary contexts. A significant proportion of both groups were parents. Both groups were of similar size and composition.

Table 1. Student group characteristics

	Group 5	Group 11	Total	Total%
Teaching Area				
Primary	2	5	7	27%
Secondary KLA (Key Learning Area)				
English	1	2	3	12%
Maths	1	1	2	8%
LOTE	3·	3	6	23%
HSIE	3	2	5	19%
ARTS	3	1	4	15%
TAS	1	0	1	4%
Total	**14**	**12**	**26**	**100%**
(Parents	3	2	5	20%)

THE MASTER OF TEACHING STUDY 1 COURSE

Students attended a biweekly seminar program of approximately two hours' duration each. In addition weekly focus sessions provided resource input for the themes of the course. The 15 cases chosen for this 12-week phase of the course focused on these five themes:

- Teacher knowledge, beliefs, planning and decision-making.
- The teacher as manager.
- Student learning and development.
- Teaching and planning for student diversity.
- The curriculum: whose knowledge?

Furthermore, in examining each of the 15 cases for this phase of the course, students were encouraged to follow a generic model of case analysis which included:

- defining case issues/problems
- examining case perspectives and engaging in critical appraisal/analysis of the case knowledge, and policy documents relevant to the case
- recommending and justifying a course of action
- analysing the likely consequences of such actions, including relevant work in the students' teaching portfolios.

Prior to examining the case reported in this research the students in both large groups had examined five cases over a two-month period. They examined these cases in a variety of ways and formats, both individually and in small and large groups. They had given presentations and analysed the cases using the generic model for case analysis. During this process the students took considerable responsibility for their own learning in context:

> starting where the learner is at with a real life problem or challenge, then seeking to make sense of what is happening through use of existing capacities or cognitive frameworks, interacting with others involved in dealing with the same set of issues and then seeking other sources of guidance and insight which will assist the process and ensure that change and learning occur. (Fraser, 1993)

After analysing the case reported in this study the students continued with a further three case analyses. In addition students chose one case on which to base an extended written report, using the generic case model, from the 15 available. Twenty-two percent of the students subsequently chose to write about the case examined in this research.

Also, through individual e-mail accounts all students had access to the Internet and the World Wide Web. Importantly for this case, the students also had access to the Faculty of Education's Koori Centre, an Aboriginal education centre which provided resources, courses and community liaison facilities for teachers.

THE CASE

The case used in the research was Case 15 in Phase 2 of the course (this case is attached as Appendix 1). This case was prepared by teachers and lecturers from the Koori Centre. The case described classroom and school situations from these teachers' professional experiences. All of the cases were developed by a series of meetings and workshops where teachers examined samples of previous cases and had the opportunity to discuss their potential cases with colleagues and staff teaching in the course. Two of the other cases also presented some issues about Aboriginal education.

The main student assessment task of the course was a case analysis where students were asked to select one of the 15 cases and present an analysis of research, policy and theory related to the case and suggest possible resolutions to the case's problems and dilemmas.

THE STUDY DESIGN

As in Morine-Dershimer's study (1996) the researchers were attempting to 'trace the social exchanges' of preservice teachers in small and large group discussions. This involved identifying "the transformations that occur as they 'appropriate' certain ideas (changes in interpretation from initial to final reaction) and to explore the factors associated with both 'saliency' and change (that is peer impact) and the way the interactions were planned and managed" (p.16).

The study was designed as a three-step process. In the first step data were collected from two groups during one session in their regular seminar meetings. Data collection consisted of students individually providing written responses to a series of questions about issues in the case. After reading the case they had 30 minutes to complete their written responses.

After individual consideration the students in the next step shared their initial reactions in small groups of three to five students for approximately 30 minutes. These small-group discussions were based on the same set of questions that were considered individually. After discussion the small groups were asked to provide a written consensus of their discussion. Group 1 provided an overall summary consensus for its small groups while each participant

in Group 2 provided an individual summary consensus for each of the small groups they were in. Using Morine-Dershimer's method (1996) the study design made it possible to track an individual's reactions to the case and their reactions in their small group. This method involved asking students to react to the case in writing as individuals and to code this reaction so it could be traced from individual to small and whole group.

In the next step students took part in a whole-group discussion. Again using the Morine-Dershimer method (1996) the students were asked to identify the key issues arising from the whole-group discussion. Again, it was possible to track students' individual, small-group and whole-group responses. However, the whole-group discussions were undertaken in different ways by both groups. In one group students were asked to identify the three key points they derived from the discussion. In this group the whole-group discussion was managed by the seminar leader – an experienced teacher. In the other group the whole-group discussion was managed by the students without a seminar leader. In this group the students were asked, prior to the discussion, by their seminar leader to record the main points of the whole-group discussion.

It was proposed that in the second phase of the study the results of the initial analysis would be returned to the two group student leaders for their comments. After discussion with the student leadership, general discussion of the analysis and findings with both whole groups would take place. These discussions occurred after an extended period of practicum in schools and all the students in both groups were asked to indicate how and why their views on the case questions may have changed.

In addition the case writer was interviewed. She was shown the analysis and findings and was asked for her reactions to the student responses. This was to gain another perspective on the student responses. The case writer was interviewed to gain an understanding of the anticipated reasons for preparing the case and to inform the case writer about the preservice teachers' perceptions of the case.

The six questions to which small and large groups and individuals responded were:

1. With which one of the people in this case do you identify most?
2. What is the greatest problem faced by the person with whom you identify most?
3. Whose behaviour in this case would you wish to change the most? Why?
4. What theory, research, policy documents and professional reading do you need to find to make more informed decisions about this case?
5. If you could change one aspect of the person with whom you've identified most what would it be?
6. What are your resolutions to the broad issues raised by this case?

These questions were developed to promote an understanding of the themes of the course that this case highlighted. Students were to explore teachers' roles, curriculum design, meeting the needs of diverse learners, classroom management and learning as well as teacher knowledge, beliefs, planning and decision-making.

DATA ANALYSIS

The individual, small-group and whole-group responses were analysed to identify varia-tions in reactions that occurred. The questions accompanying the case analysis were devised to reflect the categories of information which the study sought. These coincided with those established in Morine-Dershimer's study (1996):

* *issues* identified in the case
* *feelings* expressed about the case
* associated *experiences* indicated
* principles, *resolutions* and actions planned about the case
* *metacognition* – reflections on approach.

A series of codings were used to examine these categories. Within these broad categories, however, many student responses were exhortations about appropriate actions and behaviours. These exhortations and commands and suggestions contained elements of issues and feelings together.

Four of the categories reflected Morine-Dershimer's approach in examining the transformation that occurred when the students analysed the case. A fifth category – metacognitive information – was added to identify a significant aspect of the course design which promoted the reflective practitioner role. The researchers separately coded the responses to increase coding reliability which reached 95 percent.

RESULTS – FROM INDIVIDUAL TO SMALL-GROUP REACTIONS TO THE CASE

The following results are reported by examining the individual small-group and large group reactions to each of the six questions that students analysed about the case. This allows a clear tracing of the variations for each response context .

Question 1: Identification

Individual reactions

There were five main actors in the case scenario – the teacher, the student, the Aboriginal education assistant (AEA), the principal and the pupil's guardians. Students were asked with whom they most identified. Individually, the majority of students identified with the AEA or the pupil in the case – the individual identification is illustrated by the fol-lowing table.

Table 2. Identification

	Student	*AEA*	*Teacher*
Group 5 (N=14)	22%	64%	14%
Group 11 (N=12)	58%	33%	9%
Total (N=26)	**38%**	**50%**	**12%**

Very few students identified initially with the teacher, whose behaviour was at the centre of the case. The coding of the student responses revealed that the main categories were issues (meeting individual students' needs) and associated experiences. Student responses to the question of identification have raised specific issues in relation to empathising with characters in cases compared to the professional roles of teachers within them. Although a considerable portion of the course had aimed to sensitise the students to meeting the needs of individual students and to understanding the learners' perspective, as preservice teachers who had completed five months of a course based on developing teaching roles it was expected that they would have identified with the teacher at the centre of the case, who was struggling to implement a new educational policy. Furthermore, although the course was designed to assist students to understand individual pupil needs it seemed that prior experiences were the determining criteria for much of the identification. For example, all the parents in the course identified with the student in the case. The AEA represented both the student's perspective and authority in that the AEA was assumed by the students to have a deep knowledge of the Aboriginal pupil's learning needs and situation. Thus most of the responses about the AEA still identified the student dilemma as the main concern.

Small-group reactions
Discussion in small groups resulted in students shifting their identification from their individual selection. In five of the seven small groups students identified more with the AEA compared to their earlier individual identification with the student in the case. The discussion record indicates that all students shared their ideas, particularly on the matter of singling out the child (which was central to the case) and blocking communication with the AEA. The child's needs were seen as central by all groups. In this case the students assumed that the AEA would be the advocate for the student. Interestingly, individuals from two groups did not shift at all from their identification stance. According to Morine-Dershimer (1996, p.10) "one of the expectations of case discussions is that participants will expand their own understanding by exposure to the varied perspectives of others". In addition Morine-Dershimer has identified three modes of expansion: sharing with others (interactive), being influenced by others (influential), and listening and adapting to new ideas (generative). In these small-group discussions, interactive and generative case expansions were the most apparent. The course adopted a generic model of case analysis which involved discussion of case issues raised by students. This allowed students to develop generative and interactive skills prior to this case. As a result interactive and generative expansions were often observed but it was difficult to identify influential expansion.

Whole-group reactions
In one whole-group discussion (without seminar leader) there was a major shift in identification. In this group the whole-group discussion focused on the teacher and identified with the teacher's situation where she was trying to incorporate an Aboriginal policy perspective into the curriculum. Comments like, "Can identify with the teacher as it seems a likely situation" and "Can see myself making the same mistake" suggested students' changing identification.

In the other whole-group discussion there was no evidence of a shift in identification from the small-group reactions. There was, however, more recognition of the management problems that the case raised in the school. These comments reflect the school and community domain rather than the classroom domain. This group made a number of comments that were coded as metacognitive, such as "this gave us a very in-depth look at all aspects unbiased so we could step back and look at how we may have handled this".

The discussion record shows that individual, small-group and whole-group reflections on cases varied in interactive and generative aspects. Furthermore, students' discussion records indicate that students were using the case to come to an understanding of their beliefs and attitudes in an active, collaborative and reflective way.

Question 2: Problems and identification

Students were asked to nominate the greatest problem faced by the person with whom they identified most. This question was designed to enable students to reflect on the key problems raised by the case.

Individual reactions

For students who identified most with the AEA, most individual reactions integrated identity, the problem and the resolution. These students identified with the AEA who they perceived as having authority/knowledge to solve the problems. Responses included: "trying to get the needs of the student met and doing this in a non-confrontational way"; "helping the teacher understand that although she is trying to be culturally inclusive she is in fact doing the opposite"; "trying to convey to the teacher that although it is a positive step the student does not want to be under the 'spotlight' re Aboriginality". Even though students had identified with the AEA many of their comments related to the teacher's problem. Responses included: "empowering the teacher with cultural sensitivity"; "the teacher will not cooperate, too quick to defend position, the teacher who lacks empathy; "placating the teacher, trying to compromise, keeping the kid in school".

Those students who identified with the teacher mostly nominated problems of teaching from another cultural perspective, for example "problem of reconciling sensitivities to the needs of Aboriginal students and the need to educate non-Aboriginal students". Of those who identified with the student the main problem nominated was that of being singled out from the rest of the class. Here the coding of the discussion record revealed that feelings were the main categories of response as students empathised with the pupil in the case.

Small-group reactions

Despite the initial individual identification the small groups each agreed in nominating the problem of invasion of privacy by being singled out (student), the role of the AEA in pursuing a solution to the situation and the teacher's inadequacies in implementing policy. Each small group focused on the issues raised by the teacher's behaviour. The discussion record was very interactive as students shared these issues.

Whole-group reactions

In one whole group the main problem nominated for this question was difficulty of trying to teach Aboriginality to non-Aboriginal children. There was a wide consensus about this problem. In the other whole group, discussion focused mainly on issues and resolutions to the problems in the case rather than the feelings and associated experiences they brought to the case.

Questions 3 and 5: Behaviour and change

Individual reactions

Despite the fact that students originally identified with the pupil or the AEA, most individual reaction focused on changing the teacher's behaviour. Changes were recommended in developing greater empathy with the child's situation, teaching strategies, cultural sensitivity and communicating professionally with others. Coding revealed that most individual reactions integrated issues and feelings about the case. Also, since the question directed students to consider changing character's behaviour, many of the responses could be categorised as resolutions to the case. In addition, a number of responses were outside the categories employed in analysis. These responses identified the teacher's need for reflective practice and referred to metacognitive issues for the teacher in the case.

Small-group reactions

The small groups responded to the question of behavioural change by focusing on the resolution of the situation according to the issues involved. The categories of feelings were much less apparent, partly as the questions directed the students to focus on resolving the problem. All groups focused on the behavioural changes needed by the teacher irrespective of the person with whom they had identified. This represented a shift from individual categories of response. Two of the small groups identified the importance of the principal's role in managing the situation and suggested that the principal should assist more in developing dialogue in the situation.

Whole-group reactions

In one of the whole-group discussions there was a group consensus that the teacher's behaviour needed to change and this would be achieved by professional development. The group then integrated issues and resolutions to the case.

In the other whole group, responses coincided with the small-group discussion – communication and management being the salient problems. In this group there was more concern about the pupil's emotional state and more feelings expressed, especially in balancing the rights and responsibilities of the characters in the case.

Question 4: Making informed decisions

Individual reactions

In answering Question 4, about the research, policy documents and professional reading identified to make more informed reflection about the case, students included items from the following table:

Table 3. Theory, research and policy documents identified

	Group 5	Group 11	Total
1. Theory and Research			
Cross-cultural relationships	1	0	1
Research AEA and ASSPA responsibilities	4	1	5
Ethnicity and education	1	0	1
Aboriginal children in schools	1	3	4
Individuals in the classroom	1	0	1
Cultural inclusiveness in the classroom	0	2	2
Teacher expectations (nominated author)	0	1	1
2. Policy Documents			
Aboriginal policy document (Torres Straight Islanders) (some don't know exists)	11	10	21
Koori Centre (Implementation) (Guidelines)	3	0	3
Multicultural Education Policy	1	4	5
Welfare Policy (Truancy)	3	7	10
School Policy	3	0	3
ATSIC Policy Documents (Policy Advice)	3	1	4
Principal Responsibilities (Staff)	2	0	2
Teacher Responsibilities (Teaching Strategy)	2	0	2
Legal Responsibilities of Child's Guardians	1	0	1
Classroom Management	2	0	2
Equity Policy	2	0	2
Anti-Discrimination Act	0	5	5
Anti-Racism Policy	0	3	3
Human Rights Act	0	1	1
UN Covenant on Rights of the Child	0	1	1
Integration Policy	0	1	1
Parents/School/Communication	0	1	1

As individuals the students identified a wide range of theory, research and policy documents of which they were aware. They recognised that they would need to access those to make more informed decisions about the case. Interestingly the individuals from the two groups identified different policy documents pertinent to the case. All students had examined the same cases prior to the examination of this case. Clearly the resources identified by students depend on their view of the case and on their associated experiences and prior learnings.

Small-group reactions

One group focused on human rights issues whereas individuals in the other group focused on the school's responsibilities and its management. These different approaches were reflected in the discussions of the small groups in what Morine-Dershimer would term as influential, "where students with strong opinions influence the thinking and discussion of the small group".

Given that students had identified different policy documents, research and theory, the work of the small groups in responding to this question was also generative in that students shared ideas from references – in particular to identify the concepts clustered around student rights, cultural inclusion and power issues.

Whole-group reactions

In the whole-group discussion one group continued to focus on the student welfare policy as well as the Aboriginal education policy. In the other whole group the discussion focused on the teacher's responsibility to consider the child's needs first and foremost.

Question 6: Resolutions to the case

Individual reactions

The question directed students to resolve the problems of the case. As expected, many student responses to the questions were coded as resolutions. Four of the individual responses were coded as feelings and six were coded as issues. There were no responses reflecting associated experiences. The responses identified four main types of resolutions. These were:

- *Communication.* Typical comments: communication between all parties is necessary because they have got out of hand; problems should have been dealt with in the school; possibly ask the student what he/she feels would be best for him/her in this learning situation.
- *Policy implementation.* Typical comments: keep in mind that the best interest of the child is the issue; education of staff needed regarding respect for individuals in their class; consider how this relates to Aboriginal education policy and multiculturalism and multicultural policy; greater teacher awareness needed of student concerns, sensitivities and cultural factors.
- *Management.* Typical comments: the principal should have called a meeting of the AEA and teacher; the school counsellor did not have to be involved; having reached a resolution perhaps they could have included the student; the teacher and

AEA should work more closely together as the child feels more at ease going to the AEA; the child should be the immediate priority, not the Aboriginal perspective brought into the curriculum.

- *Metacognition.* Typical comments: need to do some research – objectives of Aboriginal education, how to enable children to contribute their knowledge to the classroom without focusing exclusively on one child's experience; more research on group dynamics; how to facilitate class-based research; different perspectives in classroom; gain an understanding of the various groups and individuals involved in Aboriginal education; conflict resolution skills; need to read more about minority groups and the introduction of such children into schools.

Small-group reactions

The small-group responses revealed the same categories of resolution as the individual. Overall the sharing of resolutions were interactive as students shared the similar resolutions that they had identified individually. One group decided to seek further resources and clarification from the Koori Centre after discussion – recognising the need for additional external resources and reference to experts in the area to resolve the case. Subsequently a number of small groups took this approach. Hence a generative approach was apparent. The management resolution identified by individuals was repeated in one small-group response as "a need for a whole school approach" reflecting the concerns of policy implementation literature.

Whole-group reactions

Whereas there were individual metacognitive responses this was not apparent in the small group but reappeared in the whole-group discussions; for example, "the class as a whole was highly emotional in reacting to the case study – unfortunately I wasn't able to attend the prior class"; "given the emotions raised, (that) I couldn't resolve any issues apart from identifying with the child's dilemma highlights observer attitudes to group"; "people come to teaching and learning with different biases, knowledge and expectations"; "raised emotions and passions – identification important"; perspective re teaching role: meta-analysis, "this gave us a very in-depth look at all aspects unbiased so we could step back and look at how we may have handled this".

Three students in each whole group responded in the metacognitive category. Communication, management and policy remained the main types of resolutions in both groups.

DISCUSSION

The process of reflection

What are the processes by which cases promote reflection? As revealed in the findings, Morine-Dershimer's processes of interaction, generation and influence work to allow collaboration to be reflective. However, interaction, generation and influence are heavily dependent on the context and focus of the discussion. This study has shown that individual, small-group and whole-group case analysis have varied interactive, generational and influential effects.

While the data analysis showed no difference in reactions of either primary or secondary preservice teachers to the cases, the results presented above strongly supported Morine-Dershimer's contention that individual, small-group and whole-group reactions to cases were markedly different. Whereas individual reactions were more likely to be dominated by empathy and feeling the small-group discussion encouraged interactive and generative learning. In the whole-group discussion a focus on teachers' professional roles and responsibilities in cases developed as preservice teachers discussed the resolutions. This finding has major implications for the way cases are presented. Generic models of case analysis must include considerations of student grouping for discussion.

The amount of shift in identification that occurred in small groups reflects the challenges to assumptions, beliefs and prior learnings that come through collaborative examination of varying perspectives. It is not just the case that is important but the transformative processes of case presentation.

In this study there were six different case analysis questions. Different types of questions for case analyses have different influential, generative and interactive characteristics. For example, in identifying resolutions to the case all different perspectives were considered by participants to be valid. As a result, in responding to a question of this type interaction is promoted. However the question about resources elicited more influential responses. The nature of the questions asked encouraged collaborative inquiry rather than a set solution-finding process.

The role of empathy

It was apparent that when students nominated problems of the case and they identified with the student it was largely a matter of empathy. The coding revealed mainly feelings categories. When students identified mainly with the teachers it was much more a matter of issues and resolutions. It would seem that fully taking on the professional role of the teacher includes understanding the learners' perspective and identifying with the teacher. A comment from a student after a practicum relates to this: "In the case we only saw it from the student's point of view". The findings were also supported by the comments of a student interviewed after the analysis of case study responses and after she had undergone the practicum. There was a shift in her identification from the student to the teacher: "I only see the big picture now – it is difficult for the teacher to respond to the little pictures" that the case exemplified. As a result of this interview the next step in the study will be to compare the individual reactions of students to the case before and after a considerable period of practice teaching.

Policy implementation

Often cases highlight the dilemma of policy implementation in the school setting. Their advantage lies in presenting naturalistic situations. This means that students can examine the context where policies apply and thereby see the real work of teachers and schools. In this way students can identify the aims of policy and the practical and professional pragmatics of implementation. Cases can be said to attach ownership of policy implementation problems to preservice teachers. For example it could be seen from case

study responses that it was often assumed that – someone else "with authority will deal with the problem". This was supported by the fact that students nominated the Aboriginal education assistant as the one who would be most useful in resolving the dilemma. However, despite this identification many of the students discussed behaviour to be changed and resolutions advanced in the case reactions concerning the teacher's practice. Subsequently one of the students encountered a similar situation to the case in her initial practicum and was well aware of the professional demands of the situation. This raises also the question of the extent to which cases are relevant to students' professional induction and how this relevance is to be established. Case study could be said to avoid the impression that policies are sent out by a central authority to be filed away by the schools. Case study attaches real context to policy implementation. As one preservice teacher saw it, "Research is general, the cases were real".

Why was the case written?

> Neophytes should be seeing educational situations as problematic, able to be subjected to a variety of theoretical perspectives, requiring professional value judgements about defensible courses of action. (Hatton 1995, p.9)

To gain another perspective on the efficacy of case analysis the case writer was interviewed. It was indicated that the case was written to raise issues for non-Aboriginal people about powerlessness, authority and racism. The issues in the case were not clear-cut but were designed for preservice teachers to explore their beliefs as "beliefs lead to appropriation and teachers' decision-making is based on their past experiences". The way in which teachers responded to the cultural situation at the heart of the case also raised different interpretations of policy in practical situations and varied solutions to practical problems. The case writer also reinforced the need for reflective practice. In the words of the case writer: "I wanted to bring out that in the early stages of decision-making go with care, be very sure and cautious as much as you can, reflect on the action taken, there is fragility, tension – Aboriginal students are so visible".

The preservice teachers analysing the case assumed that the AEA had authority but the case writer indicated that a major component of the case was the AEA's lack of power and the high expectations placed on AEAs – a clear mismatch between the writer's intention and the readers' reactions. The significant point about case study analysis, that students are not seeking a set solution, was borne out in the case writer's approach that they might perceive a situation but that there was not "one best way to go". In fact what one sees as "the best situation doesn't have the best outcome".

The case writer saw empathy's role as important in addressing this case. The preservice teachers were asked to relate to the effects of the Aboriginal student's experiences and to approach the cross-cultural teaching aspects of the case. A clear policy implementation issue of the case was her recommendation to have a school-based approach to the situation where it is important for all to work together.

Cases and transformation

Cases provided inherent motivation where much learning occurred through participation. The case was successful in achieving the outcomes of reflection and transformation. Through reflection on an unresolved narrative-based case, preservice teachers came to an understanding of their beliefs and attitudes. Thus they came to make sense of their learning, defining and solving their practical problems.

Coding revealed a range of metacognitive comments. Students realised what they did not know and so they structured their own participation forward. This coincides with Ackerman's comments: "At some point, participants begin to think differently – more critically and less self-centredly. They are challenged and inspired to think more deeply about their practice" (Ackerman et al, 1996, p.23).

From this study it can be seen that it is important that the seminar questions acknowledge that the role of prior learning and experience is crucial and require students to move beyond feelings to consider action plans and resolutions that are professionally possible. As Cranton indicates (1994, p.14), "Transformative learning occurs when through critical self-reflection, an individual revises old or develops new assumptions, beliefs or ways of seeing the world". The generic model of case study analysis required this approach.

It has been pointed out that "learning occurs when an individual enters a process of reconciling newly communicated ideas with the presuppositions of prior learning" (Cranton 1994, p.27) – thus their learning is indeed generative. For example, immediately after the study of this case a number of students contacted the Koori Centre and conducted their own series of meetings with Koori Centre staff and studied the role and function of Aboriginal education assistants. One of the groups expressed the broader transformative issue that "people come to teaching and learning with different biases, knowledge and expectations" which they enhance to come to new understandings.

As this course attempts to do and as this research supports, for better prepared teaching we need to encourage preservice teachers to view "learning as the extension of one's ability to make assumptions explicit, contextualise them, validate them and act on them" (Cranton, 1994, p.24).

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CASE STUDY NO. 15

This case study does not refer to a single instance, but brings together a number of similar situations to form a case study for consideration by case participants.

An Aboriginal student in Year 6 goes to the school's Aboriginal education assistant (AEA) and reveals some difficulty in dealing with their teacher. The teacher, who is trying to implement an Aboriginal perspective in the classroom, constantly refers to the child's Aboriginality and uses the child as a 'sounding board' to test the viability of certain exercises.

These instances include: asking the child to describe 'bush tucker', referring to the child's extended family, and calling upon the child to talk about their family life.

The student goes to the AEA to seek some help in coping with these matters. The child's remarks are prefaced with the statement: "If they don't leave me alone I'm gone!"

The AEA goes to speak with the teacher, first of all addressing the need for the teacher to respect the child's privacy and not to place pressure on the student to prove their cultural knowledge. The teacher becomes extremely disturbed, pointing out that they are trying to be 'culturally inclusive'. The teacher then asserts they have the backing of the senior staff in implementing their program and the AEA is trying to undermine their efforts because they are not indigenous.

The AEA tries to explain that it is the child who is the priority in the situation. The teacher then takes the matter to the principal, requesting some form of disciplinary action be taken against the AEA. The principal instructs the AEA not to speak with the child until the matter is resolved and that the student should be referred on to the student counsellor.

The child goes back to the AEA declaring that the teacher now refuses to acknowledge the student's presence in the classroom and this is affecting their progress.

The child's aunt and uncle, who are the student's guardians, come to see the AEA in the AEA's home, asking for help as the child is refusing to attend school. They feel unable to go to the principal because of their past experiences in dealing with education authorities. The AEA proposes that the local ASSPA committee take on the case.

The ASSPA committee meets and discusses the matter. It is recommended that the teacher, AEA, ASSPA representative and principal meet to work out a solution to the problem.

The teacher believes they have been singled out when they were trying to bring an Aboriginal perspective into the curriculum. The AEA has been trying to ease the burden of the child. The ASSPA representative is trying to bring the parents' needs into the picture. The principal is trying to smooth everyone so that the school's public profile is not compromised.

The child hates school and refuses to attend. Ultimately the child transfers to another school but no longer shows any motivation to learn.

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