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ABSTRACT

This paper examines what student teachers learn from writing a case about their student teaching experience. An analytic framework was developed to understand what students learn from writing such narratives. It contained six elements: (1) an intention, which formed the springboard for the dramatic action; (2) an initial conceptual map which contained a causal model of the social world, scripts, and images; (3) the experience itself; (4) the interpretation of the experience; (5) a revised conceptual map through which the student tried to make sense of both the initial ideas and the interpreted experience; and (6) questions which the experience raised. Students' thinking changed as they wrote cases. They began with conceptual maps that were rigid, simplistic, and implicit, and ended with maps that were much more complex, contextual, and explicit. Students ended their cases with questions for continued inquiry. Appendices contain figures graphically describing changes in students' thinking through case writing, including examples of changes in the conceptual map over time. Also attached is a copy of the assignment entitled "Writing a Case Study Of Your Student Teaching Experience: What Have You Learned?" (Author/LL)

# Wrestling with the Angel: What Student Teachers Learn From Writing Cases

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## Abstract

This paper explores what students learn from writing a case about their student teaching experience. Students often used case writing to explore moral and spiritual questions which rarely receive attention in teacher education programs. In their cases, they took the perspective of moral actors, not objective observers.

An analytic framework was developed to understand what students learn from writing such narratives. It contained six elements: 1) an **intention,** which formed the springboard for the dramatic action, 2) an **initial conceptual map** which contained a causal model of the social world, scripts, and images, 3) the **experience** itself, 4) the **interpretation** of the experience, 5) a **revised conceptual map** through which the student tried to make sense of both the initial ideas and the interpreted experience, and 6) **questions** which the experience raised.

Students' thinking changed as they wrote cases. They began with conceptual maps that were **rigid, simplistic, and implicit.** and ended with maps that was much more **complex, contextual, and explicit.** Students also ended their cases with questions for continued inquiry.

The case writing assignment transformed the seminar accompanying student teaching from a dull requirement to an experience that was both educative and therapeutic. Some of the cases were published as curriculum materials in order to provide important vicarious experience for future students.

In Genesis we read a mysterious story, the tale of Jacob wrestling with the angel. Twenty years have passed since Jacob deceived his brother Esau and went into exile. During those years, Jacob has changed and matured. He too has been deceived, and he has seen much of life. Now he wants to return and reconcile himself with his brother.

"The time has come to face the past," says Plaut (1980), the great interpreter of the book of Genesis, "and, in doing so, to secure the future." During the night, Jacob wrestles with a strange being--angel or demon or self. He emerges from this struggle with a limp but also with a blessing and with the name of Israel.

The story of Jacob wrestling with the angel can be seen as a parable for the kinds of changes that occur in students when they write cases about their student teaching experience. Like Jacob, the students must come to terms with their past, with their own illusions and failures. In writing their cases, they wrestle not so much with technical questions about teaching as with spiritual and ethical questions about how they have acted and what they can expect from other people. Like Jacob, they emerge chastened, with a limp. By creating significance from a difficult experience, they too faced the future with a blessing.

In this paper, I explore the value of asking students to write cases about their student teaching experience. I describe the case writing assignment I give to students and the way the students' presentations of their cases transform what is so often a less than productive seminar accompanying student teaching. I then present an analytic framework for understanding the kinds of changes that occur in student thinking through writing a case.

Writing a case about student teaching, I suggest, essentially provides students with an occasion to reflect on their student teaching experience and derive meaning from it. The act of constructing a narrative, as many writers have observed, imposes meaning on what otherwise would be mere chronology, event following event (Journet, 1990; Greene, 1990; White, 1981; Kermode, 1966). To create a story we must decide what has been the beginning, the middle, and the end; we must create characters and a plot; we must give what otherwise might be disconnected events unity and point.

Many students, I was surprised to see, use case writing about student teaching as an oocasion to explore a type of question that rarely receives attention in a teacher education program. They centered their cases around moral and spiritual questions,

examinations of their own intentions and motives and the motives and behavior of the people they encountered. Was their teaching driven by self-centered ambition or were they genuinely concerned about the welfare of their students? Who and what was to blame for the failure of a project? Did other Native teachers reject me, another Native teacher, because they were jealous of what I was accomplishing culturally with my students?

The narrative mode, as White (1981) points out in his discussion of narratives in the field of history, is suited to moralizing judgments. The very selection and sequencing of events in a story is often in the service of a moral point (Mattingly, 1991).

But what exactly were students learning through writing a case and how were they changing? Each case was unique. Knowing the students well, I could see how each student used the case writing to continue to reflect on personal themes and issues that had been centers of concern throughout the teacher education program, such as ambivalence about assuming authority, the forging of a female role that reconciled modern and traditional elements, conflicts between the obligations of career and family, fury at the gap between the wealthy and the poor and strong identification with those who lived at the margins.

In his ground-breaking study which has become a basis for reader-response theory, Holland (1975) shows how five different readers can read the same story, like "A Rose for Emily," and create from it five quite different texts. Readers re-creates a text, Holland shows, in terms of their own background, concerns, and personality.

In writing a narrative, even more than in reading a narrative, students create an individual world, no two alike. Thus, I could not answer the question of what students learn from writing a case by counting common lessons. What I began to see, however, was that the structure of students' thinking changed as they reflected upon their experience and wrote a case about it. Students typically began with a map of the world that was **rigid, simplistic, and implicit.** They ended the case with a map of the world that was much more **complex, conditional, contextual, and explicit.** Students often ended the case with new problems, questions they were now asking of experience.

In suggesting that students moved to more complex views of the world through writing cases, I do not want to suggest that their new conceptual maps were necessarily accurate appraisals of reality. Teachers' stories, as Ryan (1981) observes, can be distortions, self-serving pictures of events. People can also think about their experience and draw the

wrong lessons, like Mark Twain's cat who sat on a hot stove and learned never to sit again. Nonetheless, from my perspective, the students' changed views of the world usually accurate representations of teaching. Their views were more accurate primarily because they were more complex. Students were not simply substituting old ideas for new ones, false ideas for true. Their cases set forth enlarged conceptual maps which embraced both the old ideas and the new experience. In their cases, they created a more subtle and fuller vision of the world.

## The Case Writing Assignment in the Seminar Accompanying Student Teaching

Writing a case about student teaching is the final assignment in the Teachers for Alaska program, a certification program with a strong reflective inquiry focus. The program takes groups of 13 to 18 postbaccaluareate students and gives them an intense university and clinical experience. The students spend the fall semester together as one group, and each professor who works with the students spends full weeks with them. Since many of our students do their student teaching in remote villages with Eskimo and Indian populations, we do not have a seminar which meets during student teaching. Instead, at the conclusion of the student teaching experience, all students return to the university campus for a week-long seminar. The purpose of the seminar is partly to provide additional instruction in areas where the students saw gaps in their preparation. In addition, the seminar was intended to enrich the experience of all the students by giving them vicarious experience with other classrooms and communities.

Before the case writing assignment, the seminar concluding student teaching had never gone well. After the initial excitement of meeting old friends and hearing what had happened to them, the seminar had taken the form of presentations by speakers invited to discuss educational topics that the students had identified as special concerns. Both the students and I questioned whether the seminar was worth the investment of a week's time and an expensive air fare back to campus.

The difficulties I was having with the seminar accompanying student teaching are common ones. Examining teacher education programs across the country, Edmundson (1990) observes that students considered these seminars to make little contribution to their teaching and found them less interesting than any other education course with the exception of foundations courses. Furthermore, the study team found little evidence that the seminars accompanying student teaching actually promoted reflective inquiry.

I had been exploring the use of cases presenting teaching dilemmas as a means of stimulating reflective inquiry among education students (Kleinfeld, 1991). Some of the cases I used in the Teachers for Alaska program had actually been written by student teachers. I occasionally employed students to write a case about their student teaching when the students had experienced especially significant and common problems, especially cultural misunderstandings. The cases were published in a case series on cross-cultural issues (Kleinfeld, 1990). Students preparing to be teachers analyzed and discussed these cases, trying to figure out just what had gone wrong and how these problems might have been handled or prevented. The cases of student teaching provided highly relevant curriculum materials for our teacher education program, vicarious experience with the situations that the next group of students would shortly encounter.

Given the recent enthusiasm for student-written cases as a means of developing the skills and habits of reflective inquiry (Grossman, 1991), I decided to ask all the student teachers to write cases about their student teaching experience and present them in the concluding seminar. Since students had studied cases, they were familiar with the case form. A case, the assignment emphasized, was not a mere chronology of events, what had happened to them first, second, and so forth (See appendix for the assignment). A case was a story which centered around a problem or conflict and showed how the protagonist dealt with it. To help students turn their experience into a story, I gave them a version of the basic "story grammar" which has been found to be fundamental to the narrative form (Mandler, 1984).

Writing a case about the student teaching experience is a demanding task. Student teaching is a classic ordeal, a trial of one's competence as a teacher. Most students found it painful and upsetting to think carefully about a difficult experience which they would just as soon pass over. They also found it difficult to look at themselves from the outside as a character in a story. Consider yourself how difficult, and yet how instructive, it might be to write a case about a formative professional experience, to think through exactly what had happened, why, and what you had learned from it.

Each of the 13 students in the 1990 program returned to the seminar with a draft case and with a videotape of their classroom to give the other students a concrete picture of where they had been. Each was given a half day to present the case to the group. After the other students and instructors responded to their cases, they were to revise their drafts.

As students presented their cases, the atmosphere became charged. Students sat at the edge of their chairs, leaning forward, their faces expressing sympathy and strong emotion. As students told their stories, the other students offered stories of their own, verifying the first story, amplifying it, modifying it, contradicting it. Each student's story was interpreted and implicitly placed in a distribution of similar experiences; this was a common experience, an occasional one, an unrepresentative one which required contextual explanation.

My own students' response in this seminar were strikingly similar to Mattingly's (1991) description of the audience response when occupational therapists told stories of their work with patients. When the therapists were describing their clinical cases using biomedical discourse, a language Mattingly terms "chart talk," the audience was respectful but remote. When the therapist told stories:

> The affect of the group changed dramatically. Several leaned forward and focused more directly on the speaker's face. The structure of conversation shifted. During the first half of her talk (a description of Parkinson's disease) the audience was quiet, respectful. Everyone assumed some appearance of listening if distant listening. The speaker was not interrupted. During the second half, the audience paid increasingly close attention to the speaker, mirroring her facial expressions on their own faces in sympathetic accompaniment to the unfolding story. Talk changed from a strict monologue to an increasingly flowing, overlapping dialogue, with nearly all audience members participating in the end. The audience became a chorus, first in largely nonverbal expressions that marked their strongly felt participation in the story, quickly followed by storytelling of their own...(p. 247).

The experience of telling their stories was therapeutic, as well as educative. The students provided emotional support for each other. There were moments of epiphany--as when one student teacher described the way a group of Native students tested and tormented her and a Native student teacher remembered his own participation in such hazing and tried to explain why it happened. Some students who had had relatively tame student teaching experiences expressed envy for those who had experienced more interesting and educative difficulties.

Of great psychological importance as well was the sense that the pain had point, that each student's story contributed to other students' understanding of teaching and cross-cultural relationships. Their professor, they realized, found their cases exciting and important. I indeed asked three students to re-write their cases for publication so that other students could learn from their experiences.

## Developing a System for Analyzing What Students Had Learned from Writing Cases

While the seminar had been exciting, I wanted to see what students had actually learned from writing cases about student teaching. What problems had they reflected upon? What had they come away with?

My first attempt to develop a system for analyzing these narratives was unproductive. I began by categorizing the problems and conflicts the students wrote about and counting how often particular difficulties appeared across the thirteen cases. Not only did this analysis yield nothing of interest. I found the usual beginning teacher problems--difficulties with time management, authority, overly ambitious projects. More important, this analytic approach did not yield a good representation of the nature of the problems themselves.

One student, for example, indeed wrote about "time management"---how difficult it was for him to grade the lengthy homework assignments he insisted on giving his students, how students resented his breaking the unwritten homework code, how little time he had to spend with his wife and children and the domestic difficulties his commitment to teaching caused, his attempt to do a Foxfire-style journalism project with students and how the project had come to nothing because he had run out of time. But this student titled his case The Judas Tree, he quoted Matthew 27, and he identified with the betrayer Judas. His case was not about "time management." His case was about a spiritual problem---his sense that he had betrayed his own teaching ideals. He had given such lengthy homework assignments and done the Foxfire project, he had come to believe, not from any genuine concern for his students but from ambition, his desire to make a showing in the district and get a teaching job.

To classify and count "problems" did not begin to capture the essence of the students' cases and what was distinctive about these narratives. As I read through the cases, I began to notice common features:

1. **The cases were drenched with emotion.** If the stock line for a mystery is "It was a dark and stormy night," then the stock line for a case about student teaching would be "I waited till I got home to cry." The students wrote about their anguish when heroic efforts failed, when other teachers did not support them, when students resisted them. They wrote about their joy when teaching went well and when colleagues took their side.

2. **Many of the cases dealt with spiritual and ethical concerns.** The students were writing about teaching but they were also writing about the kinds of people they saw themselves to be. The stories were filled with explicit and implicit moral judgments about themselves and other people. Mattingly (1991) makes the same point in describing the stories told by the occupational therapists, "There is little or no effort to exhibit a value-neutral stance toward the events depicted..(the narrative) is strongly moralizing" (p.248).

3. **The cases were situated at the crossroads between an inner world of emotions and moral judgments and an outer world of people and events.** The students were not writing about technical teaching problems, the kinds of problems a supervisor and a student teacher might discuss at the conclusion of a classroom observation. Nor were they writing autobiographies. They were weaving stories at the intersection between them.

4. **The starting point for the narrative was typically an intention, a desire to accomplish some good.** The case then traced the vicissitudes of intention. The student teacher took some action which led to an experience and an interpretation of this experience and which then formed the basis for new intentions and actions.

## Changes in Student Thinking Through Writing a Case of Student Teaching

The dramatic action of each case typically began with an intention, but the intention itself presupposed a **conceptual map** of the world. Students had beliefs about causality in the social world similar to their beliefs about causality in the physical world. These beliefs could be described in a series of "if/then" statements: "If I participate in community affairs and don't stay aloof from the Native village, Native people will like and respect me" or "If I teach American history by the textbook alone, then students will be bored and dislike history." The students' conceptual maps also contained scripts of what they should say and do to produce the effects. Students also had images of the "Native community" or the "ideal social studies classroom." Their conceptual maps, in short, were composed of beliefs about causality in the social world, scripts, and images.

Each of the cases the students wrote, I realized, could be analyzed in terms of the changes that occured in their conceptual maps of the world as they reflected upon their experience through writing their cases. Students found out that people did not necessarily react as they expected and what they predicted did not always happen. They tried to interpret this experience, to figure out why what they expected had not occured. Their interpretations led to the development of much more sophisticated models of the world.

Their initial conceptual maps tended to be **simple, formulaic, and implicit.** Students' images of the "Native community," for example, or of the way students reacted to textbook teaching were based on the notions they had developed from education classes or from ideological rhetoric.

Students' revised conceptual maps tended to be much more **complex, conditional, and explicit.** Students realized that they had to make distinctions, to consider the context, to think about the conditions under which their original beliefs were and were not the case. They rarely decided that their initial ideas were simply wrong. Rather their maps developed branches--contexts under which their original ideas did and did not hold true. Participating in Native community affairs, the student decided, might sometimes lead to greater respect in the village but it might also get them into serious trouble. Teaching by non-textbook methods might develop enthusiasm for history among some students, but other students had been conditioned to learn from textbooks and did not like challenging approaches.

To explore what students had learned from writing a case about student teaching, six elements needed to be examined:

1. **Initial Conceptual Map.** The content of this map was sometimes stated but usually needed to be partially inferred from students' intentions and actions. Like a highway map, the conceptual map had a vision of the good--the destination-- and roads leading to it.

2. **Intentions.** Students usually stated directly what they intended to accomplish and this intention formed the springboard of the case.

3. **Experience.** Students described the vicissitudes of their intentions, what actually happened.

4. **Interpretation.** Students offered an interpretation of their experience, an explanation of why their intentions were not realized. The experience and the interpretation were usually joined in the writing, but what had happened could be separated from the student's interpretive explanation.

5. **Revised Conceptual Map.** Based on the interpreted experience, students revised their initial views of the world.

6. **Questions.** Students often ended their cases with questions, sometimes explicit questions. To what extent had their experience resulted from their own personal style and inadequacies? How could they see this type of problem coming the next time? What cues should they be watching for?

In the following examples, I show how this analytic framework can be used to examine the types of changes that occur in students' thinking through writing a case about student teaching. The first example is actually a smaller story within the larger case, a microcosm of the case's themes and concerns. While I have abbreviated each story, most of the language is the student's and is taken directly from the case.

**Example 1: "The Easter Egg Hunt" (Story within the Case)**

Shumayuk was just what Patsy had hoped for---a small Native village with a people and culture she held in high respect, science classes she wanted to teach, and even the possibility of a sled dog race coming through town.

"How could this get so thoroughly bad, this soon?" Patsy asked herself. From the start, she had been in a war with the male high school students, who defied her authority. These boys had never before had a female high school teacher, let alone a female science teacher, and resisted all of the new science activities she tried to introduce. They taunted her by playing sexually explicit and vulgar music at top volume during the lunch hour.

Patsy's student teacher experience had been a series of confrontations with Native parents angry at how she disciplined their children, with the local school custodian who "accidently" locked her out of her room, and with the male high school students.

After Patsy had yelled at the boys for refusing to chase after the soccer ball during a physical education class and for directing her to look for the ball next to the outhouse, one had exploded.

"You're the one who just doesn't understand," he yelled at her. "You just won't understand. WE DON'T WANT YOU HERE!! YOU ARE NOT WANTED HERE! WE WON'T DO WHAT YOU SAY BECAUSE WE DON'T WANT YOU HERE!"

On the Saturday night before Easter, Claire, one of the women Patsy met at church and whose husband was on the school board, stopped by Patsy's room and asked her help in hiding eggs for the village's Easter Egg Hunt. Patsy was happy to help, thinking this would be a positive community activity to join and assist, and what fun it would be for

the young children. Perhaps this could improve her relationship with the village and ease tensions.

Claire especially asked Patsy for help in hiding the "golden egg," wrapped in shiny gold foil and containing a note for $50. About 20 of the 200 eggs they would be hiding had notes for money rewards. Last year, Claire told Patsy, the egg hadn't been hidden well and people found the egg much too quickly.

Patsy was not pleased when she realized she would have to get up at 3:30 A.M. to hide the eggs but decided to go ahead.

As Patsy and another woman worked to hide the eggs around every home with children, she was surprised to find a house with adults gathered on the porch. She asked the young men if they wanted to help hide the eggs but they refused. As per instructions, she hid the golden egg in a remote spot, near some spruce trees by the airstrip.

Next morning Patsy was awakened at 6 A.M. by children begging for hints as to where she had hidden the golden egg. She was dismayed to find that the majority of the eggs had been retrieved not by the children of the village but by the adults. The young men who had been up at 3:30 in the morning watching her hide the eggs had gathered them up, including the ones with money notes.

Patsy was disgusted to think that the adults would literally steal these eggs from the children, especially on Easter. The children kept coming to her, begging for clues as to the location of the golden egg. Some had been searching in vain since 6 A.M. in the morning. The other woman had disappeared. She had gone fishing for the day.

The other teachers seemed to think it was a hilarious situation and said that's the reason why they didn't get involved in village affairs. The teachers said how typical it was of that village, to steal the eggs from the children, that Patsy was their perfect scapegoat, and maybe she would learn never to put herself in that type of situation again.

If the golden egg weren't found by 8:00 P.M., the village council said, Patsy should retrieve it. At 8:00, Patsy, accompanied by a crowd of children, went to the airstrip and pulled the egg. Just then a 4-wheeler sped to the air strip with the driver yelling, "Don't pull the egg! Don't pull the egg! The Council decided you shouldn't take the egg until 9:00."

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Patsy stood there holding the golden egg in her palm. The crowd yelled their disapproval. Now, not only did she hide the golden egg so people couldn't find it, she also disregarded the Council's directions in retrieving it. Who did she think she was, anyway?

Patsy made it back to her cubicle before the tears came. The past 24 hours seemed like a perfect set up to her. Now, instead of improving her relations with the village, and doing something positive, she had succeeded in alienating more people, and found herself much more likely to be condemned. How could this happen? Why can I try so hard just to fail so miserably? How could I have foreseen this? What could I have done to prevent this entire situation?

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This case shows Patsy acting from intentions based on a simple, formulaic view of the world (See Figure 2). She wanted to improve her relations with the village and believed that teachers created positive relations with Native communities when they took part in village affairs, rather than setting themselves apart in the school. Her case represented a continuation of personal concerns about winning the respect and approval of Native people. This motive, while common among education students, was particularly intense for Patsy. In the Teachers for Alaska program, she distinguished herself by frequently directing her questions to the Native students in the class and keeping a close eye on them to see how they reacted to what was going on.

Implicit in Patsy's conceptual map were other concepts and assumptions. Village people, she thought, were especially indulgent toward children. Sacrificing your own needs for the sake of others, she believed, brings approval and respect. Patsy had only one notion of what an Easter Egg Hunt might be like, a model based on her own childhood experience.

After her disturbing experience with the Easter Egg Hunt in Shumayuk, Patsy's conceptual map became more complex. Easter Egg Hunts, she realized, might take several different forms. She had now experienced two very different cultural events, both labeled Easter Egg Hunts. Her concept of "Easter Egg Hunt" had changed to an open, rather than a closed, category. When I asked her if she would participate in an Easter Egg hunt in another Native community, she told me that she would wait and observe for a year or two.

Participating in community affairs, she realized, might bring respect under certain conditions but not others. Her conceptual map had developed branches with one path connecting community participation to good teacher/village relationships and another path connecting community participation to increased alienation and condemnation. As she tried to understand why and how she had been "set up," she returned to the basic themes of her case---the way this traditional village responded to female authority, the undermining of male sources of power and prestige through recent economic changes, her success with the female students but not with the male students in science classes, and the cultural pressures that made the community seek outsiders to be scapegoats.

At the conclusion of the case, Patsy had not resolved these matters. She ended the case with questions: What cues had she missed? What hadn't she understood? How could she have prevented this situation? Patsy had developed problems to reflect on. She was engaged in an inquiry.

To discuss Patsy's case in these analytic terms does not do justice to Patsy's pain in re-creating this experience or to her generosity in opening her experience to others. Every year, in the Teachers for Alaska program, we have two or three teachers, typically women, who undergo a variation of Patsy's experience. Through Patsy's case, we now have a cautionary tale, a way of alerting student teachers to this scenario and a basis for analyzing why these events happen. Patsy's interpretation of her experience is not necessarily a complete explanation of these events. But the case raises questions about culturally appropriate expressions of authority, as well as male and female roles in Native communities, which our students would do well to consider.

**Example 2: "I Had A Mission" (Excerpt from Case)**

With each step I found it harder and harder to hold back the tears that were welling up in my eyes. I reached the house, opened up the door, walked in, and let go a flood of emotions---emotions that had been held back by a dam of pride.

The problem with the American History class had been building for the past week and had come to a climax. Early on, after I began student teaching in Mr. Luskett's high school social studies classes, I made the decision that it was my job as a teacher to challenge students and push them to their potential...not to win a popularity contest.

I had tried just about every innovative idea I could think of to engage the students and make history interesting and relevant to their lives. I used films, guest speakers, cooperative learning projects and especially prepared lectures in my classroom which required hours of work on lesson plans so I would awaken students to the value and importance of studying history. I had pretty much ditched the textbook.

Every night I'd put together what I thought were creative and thought provoking lectures and activities that I would be eager and excited to share with my class the next day. The rewards I received for all my hard work were students who either ignored me, slept in class, did homework, or made rude comments.

FInally I just lost it with the class. I stopped in the middle of the lecture and screamed, "What do you think the purpose of studying history is? Can anyone tell me?"

They just stared, mouths opened, in shock at my outburst.

"Okay," I said then, "we'll go back to using the textbooks. You'll be responsible for chapters 23-31 and the questions at the end of the chapter which will be done during class time. Start now and we'll have a test on Friday."

I had just about given up but decided while tossing and turning in my sleep that night to try to give it one last effort. I decided to turn the tables on my students and have them teach the class....let them see what it's like to prepare and give lessons. We had several chapters to cover, World War I to the present in two weeks. I was concerned about my students' academic training. I couldn't let these students graduate from school having taken American history and not learned about some of the most important historical events of all time. I felt like I had a mission, and I was bound and determined to see it through.

I got up early the next morning and planned out my strategy. Mr. Luskett thought I had put together a great plan. My great idea, however, was never to become a reality because I was never to teach that American history class again. After meeting with Mr. Luskett and the principal, both agreed that I had done a great job. They assured me that my problems stemmed from the time of the year and the fact that I had seniors who were getting ready to graduate and had lost interest in school. They believed I would be better off to discontinue teaching the class for my own mental health. I felt relieved, but at the moment needed to take some time off to pull myself together and asked for permission to leave for the rest of the day.

As I walked home that morning, it was like a burden had been lifted off my shoulders, but I felt a desp sense of disappointment. I asked myself, "Have I failed my students or is it this school or the system that is failing them?" The answer I did not know.

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This student began her American History class with a clear intention and vision of the good (See Figure 3). She wanted to teach students the value of history. She wanted them to understand the significance of critical events in American history and to make history relevant to their lives. But her conceptual map was formulaic and without context. Students would be interested in history, she believed, if she got rid of the boring textbooks. Students wanted to be pushed to their potential and would appreciate her for it.

When confronted with a class of seniors in the spring, she began to see the limitations of her initial world-view. But beyond the obvious problem of time of year, she realized that she had failed to consider a number of other important issues. Many students, she realized, were threatened by new and unfamiliar instructional methods. The educational system had conditioned them to a textbook-and-chapter-questions conception of education. Furthermore, she began to see, many students did not know how to learn from sources other than textbooks, how to synthesize different sources of information. She was assuming that they already had skills that they did not have.

This student ends her case with more than technical questions about history teaching. She has also developed questions about herself as a person and a critical perspective on the entire educational system: Was she too rigid and unyielding with these students? Should she have given in to students' requests to use class time to discuss their personal concerns? Would creating rapport with the students have ultimately been in the service of history teaching? Has the school system itself destroyed students' abilities to be educated?

She has not given up her mission. When she has her own classroom, she says, she will try again. But she will try again on the basis of a conceptual map which takes far more into account.

## Conclusion

Writing a case about student teaching creates an occasion to analyze and interpret what is often a painful ordeal. The student teachers write cases drenched with emotion, cases which often raise moral and spiritual questions that rarely receive attention in teacher education programs. Like Jacob, they wrestle with their angels and come away limping. But they also come away with much more sophisticated maps of the world and with new questions they are asking of their experience.

I am not arguing that it is the case writing itself that creates these more sophisticated world-views and this inquiring attitudes. Many of us reflect on our experience while sitting in our armchairs and also learn from it. But the writing of the case creates an occasion for such reflection on the experience and requires systematic thinking, revealing problems in logic and emotional responses.

The students' cases are not objective, value-neutral analyses. The cases are a moral actor's, not a researcher's, narratives. Many are impassioned, brimming with spiritual problems and moral judgments. But in this cauldron of thought and emotion, students come to terms with their past and create better models to guide them in the future.

**Figure 1.**
**Changes in Students' Thinking Through Writing a Case**

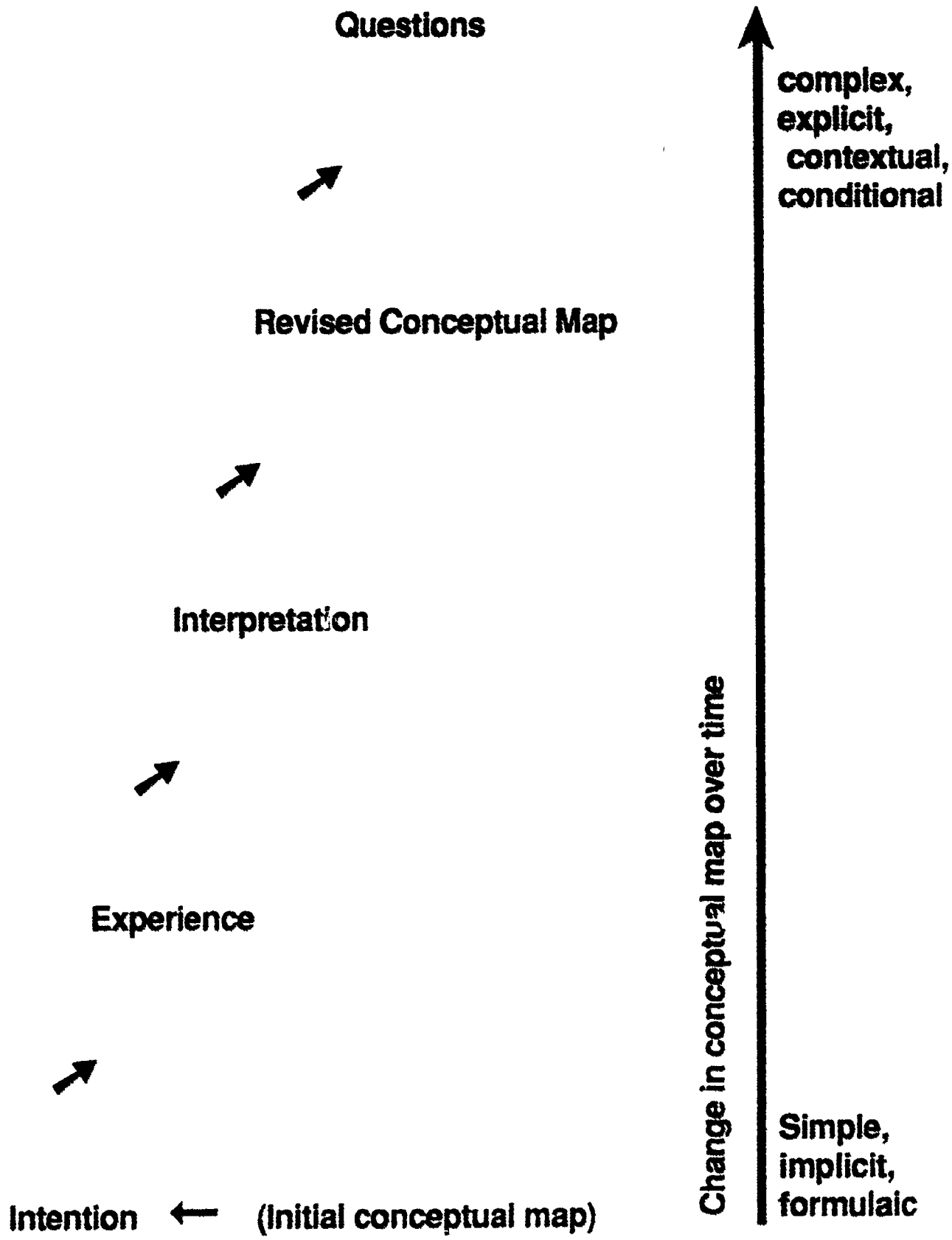


**Figure 2.**
**"The Easter Egg Hunt"**

Change in conceptual map over time

simple, implicit, formulaic → complex, explicit, contextual, condition

**Initial conceptual map→**

- An Easter egg hunt is a "positive community activity."
- (Sacrificing my needs brings respect.)
- (Teachers should participate in community activities.)
- (Village people are indulgent toward children.)

**Intention→**

- I will participate in the Easter egg hunt, and it will improve my relations with the village.

**Experience→**

- She stayed up all night hiding eggs.
- The villagers wouldn't help. They watched where she hid the eggs and took them before the children could find them.
- The teachers laughed at her.
- The villagers "yelled their disapproval" of her actions.

**Interpretation→**

- "The past 24 hours seemed like a perfect set-up."
- It was "disturbing" to her that the adults would literally steal these eggs from the youngsters, especially on Easter.

**Revised conceptual map→**

- There are different types of Easter egg hunts.
- Self-sacrifice doesn't always bring respect.
- People can set you up and enjoy it.
- Participation in community activities can "alienate people and lead to condemnation."

**Questions**

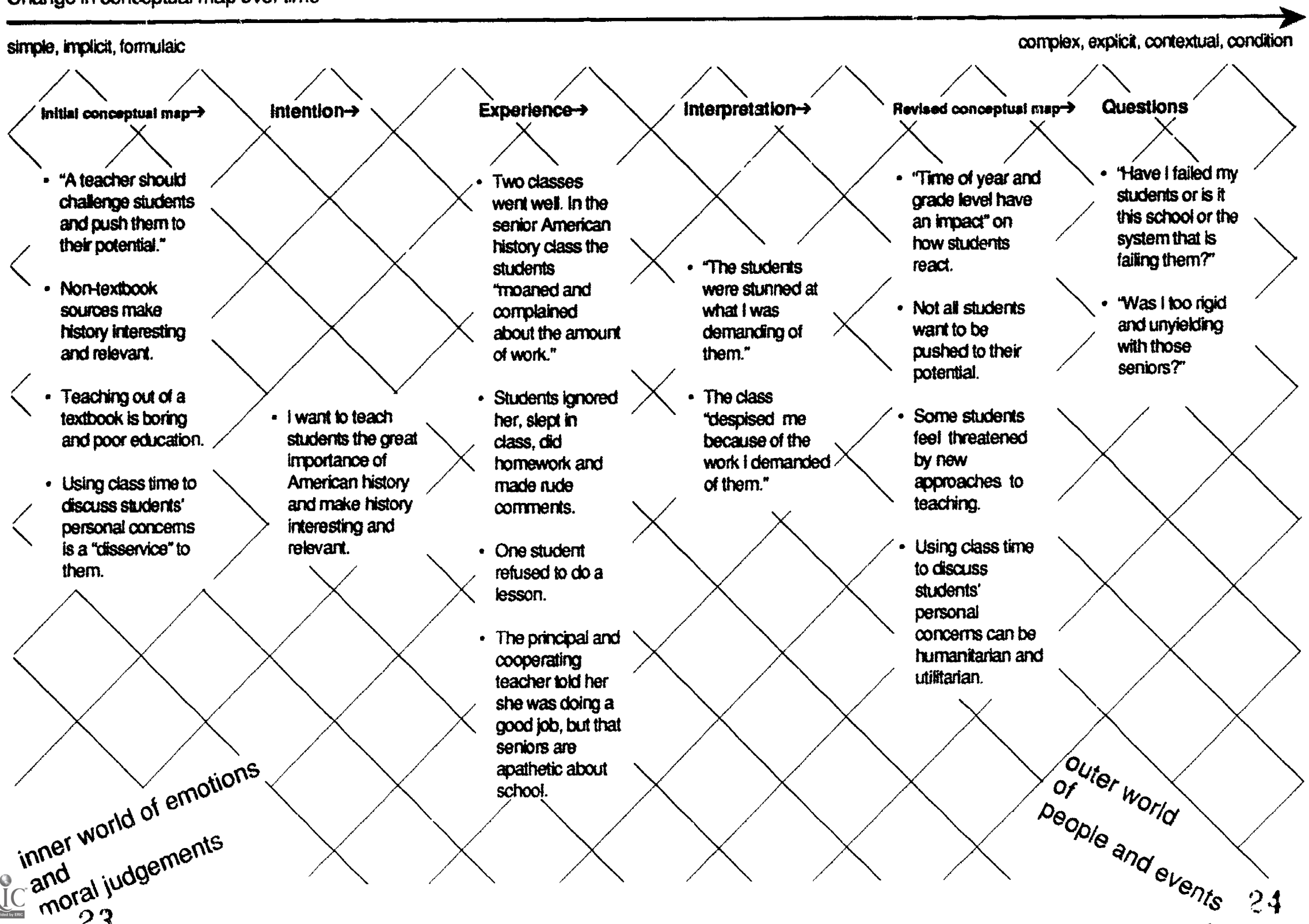
- I need to recognize when my good intentions are going to backfire. How can I prevent this situation?
- How could I have been more aware?

inner world of emotions and moral judgements

outer world of people and events

**Key**: ( ) indicates implicit idea.

**Figure 3.**
**"I Had a Mission."**



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TEACHERS FOR ALASKA (TFA)
University of Alaska Fairbanks

## WRITING A CASE STUDY OF YOUR STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE: WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

The purpose of this assignment is to help you think through and make sense of your own experience as a student teacher in a particular classroom, school and community setting. We want you to develop the habit of reflecting upon your own teaching experience and considering the philosophical, ethical, political, interpersonal and pedagogical problems and dilemmas embedded in it. We want you to develop the habit of thinking carefully and analytically about what you have learned from your experience and how these learnings will influence your future teaching.

The case study is the final requirement for both of your spring semester courses -- Education 619/682. In writing the case, you can draw upon the assignments you have completed for these two courses, for example, your student teaching journal or your description of the economy of the community in which you are doing your student teaching.

Come to the concluding seminar with a first draft of your case and a videotape of you in your student teaching setting. You may use the videotape you prepared for Education 619/682 or you may use another videotape if you prefer.

During the concluding seminar, you will be presenting your own student teaching case and videotape informally to other TFA students and soliciting their help in making sense of your student teaching experience. The final paper (approximately 15 pages) will be due two weeks after the concluding seminar.

### Directions for Writing the Case Study of Your Student Teaching Experience

1. A case is essentially a story. However, it is NOT simply a chronology of what happened to you first, second, and so forth. A story centers around a problem or conflict and shows how the "hero" dealt with this situation. You could center your case on instructional problems, political problems, ethical problems, and so on. Think about your experience and consider what you have learned from it. Your first and most difficult problem will be thinking about the

question, "What is my story about?" "What is the central problem or learning experience that organizes my story?"

To help you organize your case, you may find it helpful to look at the sample story grammar notesheet (below). This "story grammar" has been generated from cross-cultural research on stories and identifies a basic structure of stories across cultures.

2. You can write the story in the first person ("I") or the third person (giving your character a different name). DO DISGUISE THE NAMES AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDENTS, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY. THE PURPOSE OF DISGUISE IS SIMPLY TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY AT YOUR SCHOOL.

3. After writing the case, add an "epilogue" to the case in which you discuss what you learned from the student teaching experience about yourself and about the problems of teaching. At this point, what do you see as the "lessons" of your story? How might these "lessons" influence your future teaching and your future learning about teaching? Keep in mind that you may view your own student teaching, its lessons and influence differently as time passes.

This is a story grammar -- a basic story form -- that arises in stories across cultures. Many different researchers have come up with the same basic pattern, and we have adapted it here for your use.

## STORY GRAMMAR

1. **MAIN CHARACTER AND CHARACTER CLUES:** Who is the main character and what is the main character like? (Ordinarily you -- the student teacher -- will be the main character. Think about yourself the way you might think about a character in a story -- your personality, appearance, reactions.)

2. EVENTS AND REACTIONS: What are the important events in the story and how does the main character react to and feel about these events?

3. PROBLEMS: Name the problems or conflicts that the main character is facing. These may be problems in the outside setting or these may be internal problems, an internal conflict in the main character's mind, or some combination. Circle the main problem, the fundamental problem that you can use to organize your story.

4. ATTEMPTS: How do the characters try to solve the problem? These may be the efforts of the main character or other people's efforts.

5. RESOLUTION: How does the main problem get solved or managed? Sometimes a distinct resolution may occur and sometimes the problem or situation may be unresolved.

6. THEME: What is the underlying point of the story? What has the main character learned about himself or herself? What has been learned about teaching?