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ABSTRACT

This analysis of a pilot study in inservice teacher education seminars provides insight into the potential of case-based methods in multicultural education and exposes some of the difficulties that accompany this approach, for both discussion leader and participants. Rather than passively listening to generalized knowledge on multiculturalism through lectures, teachers have an opportunity to explore key issues in the context of real classrooms. They can make explicit their beliefs about teaching and learners; they can test out their assumptions about practice; they can confront their personal biases through a shared, socially constructed, and deeper understanding of issues related to race, class, gender, and culture; and they can transform what they learn into effective instructional practices. The intensity of participants' contributions during the discussions, while at times difficult for both the participant and the facilitator, indicates how important this vehicle is for discussing these sensitive topics. The paper is organized into five sections: (1) Case Methods in Multicultural Education: Background; (2) Confronting Bias, Innocence, and Racism: A Case in Point; (3) Findings: Impact on Participants; (4) The Challenges of Case-Based Teaching; and (5) Implications. (Contains 23 references.) (LL)

# Tender Feelings, Hidden Thoughts: Confronting Bias, Innocence, and Racism Through Case Discussions

by

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**Abstract**

This analysis of a pilot study provides insight into the potential of case-based methods in multicultural education. Rather than passively listening to generalized knowledge on multiculturalism through lectures, teachers have an opportunity to explore key issues in the context of real classrooms. They can make explicit their beliefs about teaching and learners; they can test out their assumptions about practice; they can confront their personal biases through a shared, socially constructed and deeper understanding of issues related to race, class, gender, and culture; and they can transform what they learn into effective instructional practices. The intensity of participants' contributions during the discussions, while at times difficult for both the participants and the facilitator, indicates how important this vehicle is for discussing these sensitive topics.

**Tender Feelings, Hidden Thoughts:**
**Confronting Bias, Innocence, and Racism Through Case Discussions**[1]

While there is much controversy over how to best prepare teachers for a culturally diverse society, there appears to be strong agreement that improving teacher education and professional development programs is necessary (Gomez & Tabachnick, 1991). Conventional approaches to multicultural education, typically in the form of separate courses that offer lectures and readings on different ethnic groups, are inadequate (for detailed reviews of the literature of these programs, see Grant and Secada, 1990; and Villegas, 1991). Most student teachers and teachers—predominantly white, middle-class females whose life experiences are different from their increasingly diverse students—neither change their understandings and beliefs about teaching minority children nor adapt what they learned to their instructional practices (McDiarmid, 1990; McDiarmid & Price, 1990).

Using evidence from cognitive research (e.g., Resnick, 1983), McDiarmid and Price (1990) argue that most of these programs fail to provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on both what they believe and what they are learning. According to these teacher educators, teachers need to make explicit their beliefs and assumptions about teaching, learning, and learners as they *take in* the new information; they must be given opportunities to discuss how to transform what they learned into tactics they can use in their classrooms; and they must confront their personal beliefs on issues of race, class, gender, and bias, even as they learn to teach (Nelson-Barber & Meier, 1990; Gomez & Tabachnick, 1991). In short, teachers are not likely to reconsider their deeply held beliefs and assumptions—many of which are held unconsciously—unless these are deliberately surfaced, examined—and in many cases—challenged.

[1] I would like to thank Susan Sather for her help analyzing data and Suzanne Wilson and Lee Shulman for their contributions to previous drafts.

But how do you engage individuals in such reflection? In most social and academic settings, it is awkward to discuss issues of race, class, and bias, particularly in groups that are themselves diverse. Instructors and students often shy away from making their views on these issues public for fear of unwittingly offending someone or saying something considered racist, insensitive, or prejudiced. And with few exceptions (e.g., Kleinfeld, 1990; Paley, 1979), materials designed to support such deliberations are not available.

I propose that case-based teaching is a uniquely powerful vehicle for dealing with these delicate issues.[2] Case discussions—rich with contextualized detail and verisimilitude about the challenges of teaching diverse students—can provide a context for teachers to confront their own assumptions and feelings about teaching diverse students. By collaboratively exploring and debating critical moments in the cases, teachers both develop the analytic skills to frame problems from different perspectives and expand their repertoire of effective instructional practices (Kleinfeld, 1992). They can also test their generalized knowledge about different cultural groups.

In this paper, I present an example of what case-based teaching looks like in this context. Next, I discuss a small pilot study that used a case-based approach to multicultural education in order to address two questions: In what ways might case-based instruction about cultural diversity provide special opportunities for cross-cultural learning? What are some of the difficulties that accompany this approach, for both the discussion leader and the participants? I conclude with a discussion of potential implications of this work for teacher education and professional development. But first, a word about the background of this project.

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[2] See L. Shulman, 1992; Sykes & Bird, 1992, and Wassermann, 1992 for discussions of purposes, rationale and uses of case methods in teacher education.

## Case Methods in Multicultural Education: Background

The Case Methods in Multicultural Education project, developed at Far West Laboratory, was conceived two years ago as a supplement to existing multicultural education programs. Using the prototype of the mentor and intern casebooks (J. Shulman & Colbert, 1987; 1988), which consists of teacher-written cases with commentaries by other teachers and scholars, we collaborated with the San Francisco Unified School District to produce a casebook on the challenges of teaching diverse students.

**The casebook.** During the first year of the project, my school-based collaborator, Amalia Mesa-Bains,[3] and I worked with a group of ethnically diverse teacher-authors and commentators to develop the cases. The result of this effort was a draft of the volume, *Diversity in the Classroom: A Casebook for Teachers and Teacher Educators* (Shulman & Mesa-Bains, in press). More than just narratives, the cases in this book were meant to be "teaching cases," stories of classroom life that represent recurring challenges for teachers in diverse settings. Layers of commentaries follow each case, written by educators who represent different points of view—teachers, administrators, staff developers, and scholars.

The cases deal with several themes. Some describe the problems of a teacher from one ethnic group providing instruction to children from different ethnic groups or children whose knowledge of English is limited or nonexistent. Others deal with the challenges of working with parents and communities from different cultural groups. Most often, however, the cases focus on a teacher's difficulties with individuals or groups of children. Issues of racism, bias, class, culture, gender, and inexperience with other ethnic groups permeate the accounts.

The casebook is designed to be used in teacher education and professional development settings. Our goal was that they would serve as stimuli for the type of case discussions I

[3] At the time of the case development, Mesa-Bains worked in the district's Office of Integration as a specialist in multicultural education. Since then, she has joined Far West Laboratory as a Senior Research Scientist.

described earlier. In the casebook, we wanted to both model and provoke conversations and we used commentaries as one tool for doing so. Written by individuals from multiple perspectives, they are intended to raise significant questions about each story, and, hopefully, invite readers to do the same.[4]

**The field test.** In the second year of our project, we piloted the cases using discussion methods in a 10-week seminar with a group of 15 new teachers in San Francisco—10 European-Americans, 3 African-Americans, and 2 Chinese-Americans. We had several purposes. One was to gather data to inform the development of an instructor's guide to the casebook (Mesa-Bains & Shulman, in press). Another was to study the impact of the seminar on participants' attitudes toward diversity, their ability to frame problems from multiple perspectives, and any reported changes in teaching practices. We were also interested in the extent to which the case discussions engaged participants in confronting their own biases and contributed to collegial learning.

Our analysis of the project draws from several kinds of data: documentation of successive drafts of the 15 cases and interactions with case writers; documentation of similar drafts of the 33 commentaries and interactions with their authors; protocols of nine case discussions; questionnaires and writings of teachers before and after each discussion; and interviews conducted during the seminar. In addition, we used several of the cases with other groups of teachers to test both our style of discussion leadership and the range of participant reactions.

These data are limited because of an increase in absenteeism after the district pink-slipped all new teachers midway into the seminar. Many participants reported a need to attend district hearings in lieu of the seminar to save their jobs. By the last two sessions, only eight of the original 15 teachers attended. We cannot account for all those who quit, but many reported

[4] See Shulman, 1991, for an analysis of the collaborative process we used to develop cases.

that the combination of fighting for their job at hearings and general low morale contributed to their absence.

### Confronting Bias, Innocence and Racism: A Case in Point

In my experience, some of the most difficult case discussions to facilitate are those that deal with a case author's naivete and misperceptions about issues of race, class, culture, and gender. These cases explore a special kind of misperception, such as when a teacher--usually a white, middle-class woman who had little experience in diverse settings--recounts a problem encountered in practice and concludes that, through the experience, she has learned something important about her own racism and has overcome her biases. The authors of the commentaries that follow, however, often assert that the author is still biased or has substituted one set of misconceptions for another.

Discussions about these cases are difficult to facilitate because they evoke strong emotions. Sometimes, minority discussants are offended by the teacher's perceptions and have little patience with her struggles. Middle-class whites may identify with the teacher's experiences and feel hurt if she is labeled a racist. Tender feelings and hidden thoughts often arise during these sessions, and facilitators must be prepared to handle them sensitively. A case in point is "Fighting for Life in Third Period" (Shulman & Mesa-Bains, in press), perhaps our most emotionally provocative account.

**"Fighting for Life in Third Period."** This case vividly portrays the struggles of an inexperienced, idealistic, white, middle-class teacher who taught in an experimental, ethnically diverse high school. After staying home for several years to raise children, she looked forward to returning to teaching and working with "other kinds of people" in an experimental high school. But nothing in her orientation prepared her for third period. Students made fun of her idealistic speech about increased opportunities for minorities in the new high school. In the midst of the

jokes, Veronica, described by the case author as "stout, black, stuffed in a flame red dress," sauntered in slowly and asked in a "loud, husky voice, 'Who are you. some kind of preacher lady?'" Meanwhile, three large black boys began dancing around the room rapping, "Yea Sister." At the end of the class, Veronica gave the author a note that said, "I can see right now you never going to make it as a teacher. This class is going to walk right over you."

> During the "nightmarish" days that followed, the author confronted her own bias: I felt that I had run into the worst of everything I had heard about in the ghetto: crude, foul language, rudeness, low achievement, blatant sexuality, continual talk of violence, guns, drugs—the works. These students would have been a fearsome group in any color, but their blackness seemed at first to be a barrier. I was not sure what **really** to expect from them. Were they truly capable of decent behavior? Did they need some other kind of schooling?

The rest of the narrative recounts the teacher's struggle to gain control of the class: She confronts her own black stereotypes; she asks for help from school counselors and administrators; she tries a variety of discipline techniques before finding one that is constructive; she learns that each of the four students has a stake in passing her course; and that Veronica is a single mother. At the conclusion of the case, the teacher reflects on how much she learned during the past year. She believes she has conquered her bias because she has lost all sense of color. "I find that in the malls, on the streets, I hardly notice that people are 'different,' because in fact they actually don't look different to me." In the end, she concludes that poverty, not race, is the real issue:

> Many of our African-American and Hispanic students come from good homes, where there is fine support. These students are doing very well. It is poverty that is the real enemy . . . the 'poverty mentality'—the apathy, laziness, hopelessness that will surely doom them to perpetual poverty if they can't see beyond it.

Four commentators interpret the case—a black scholar, a white veteran teacher, and two intern teachers, one black and the other Latina. From their different perspectives, they all commend the teacher on her perseverance and her attempts to confront her biases. But they also notice some misperceptions or misunderstandings in the case.

I have used this case on several occasions–with three groups of new teachers, including those in our pilot; with two groups of staff developers and administrators; and with five groups of teacher educators. In general, when I open the discussion with the question, "What is this case about?", I have received dramatically different responses depending on the ethnic composition of the group. Often, predominantly white teachers say that it is a case of teacher versus student control, and do not consider other alternatives until I ask, "Can you think of any reason why the students might have responded like they did?" After analyzing the text, they can begin to reframe the problem from the student's perspective and examine the problem with new understandings.

My experience during these discussions also suggests that most middle-class, white teachers with limited experience in diverse settings admire the teacher's "growth" in combating her racism. Were it not for either minority participation or my intervention and challenge to their assumptions, particularly on the issue of color-blindness, they are not apt to consider other alternatives. Often, I hold the commentaries until after the group has had an opportunity to analyze the case first. When I hand out the commentaries and ask if they have learned anything new, they are frequently surprised by both the new information and unanticipated perspectives. The analysis then takes on new dimensions, both personally and professionally. Examining what "racist" means can be tense but ultimately constructive if skillfully facilitated. For some new teachers, these discussions may be the first opportunity to confront the view that what they had considered "racially sensitive" was not uniformly accepted as correct. As one teacher said with tears in her eyes, "I come from a suburban background and have never encountered these feelings before. I'm afraid to teach because I may say something wrong and hurt someone's feelings."

Others, particularly teachers of color, may become impatient with the naivete of innocent whites. For example, one black young woman, Laurinda, who had been quiet during the

beginning of the discussion, countered passionately:

> I feel that racism and white supremacy is the issue, and that is what shapes everyone's belief and permeates all areas of life whether you realize it or not, and we're bombarded with it every minute in the media. Who's beautiful? White, blonde and blue-eyed. It [racism] is the real enemy, and it is an issue I deal with all the time . . . This woman [in the case] went into the situation as 'the great white hope' to save the darkies. What is the American dream?

Another teacher, a black man, said, "I don't give this teacher any points. She's still color blind and does not want to deal with race."

Such moments during a discussion can be tense, especially for the facilitator. Yet these episodes can enable group members to better understand one another and, perhaps, themselves. They can also be powerful occasions for learning by the facilitators as well.

**Findings: Impact on Participants**

What did we learn during our pilot seminar with new teachers? Analysis of data from interviews, questionnaires, and transcripts of case discussions from the seminar suggest that this case-based seminar can influence teachers' awareness and sensitivity to cultural diversity. Several teachers reported that they had a greater understanding of their students and of their own cultural biases and limitations. Some teachers also described new ways of communicating with students and their parents and of novel approaches to planning instruction. Finally, all of the teachers who were interviewed and/or filled out a final questionnaire valued this approach to multicultural education and recommended that the district bring the model to other teachers.

The data, reported through representative comments of a sample of teachers from questionnaires, interviews, and transcripts of case discussions, are grouped in three sections: (1) Changes in Attitudes; (2) Changes in Behavior; and (3) Responses to the Case-based Model of Professional Development.

**Changes in Attitudes**

Most teachers showed increased sensitivity and awareness of issues of cultural diversity and of personal limitations and bias. This was no small feat. From the very first case discussion on "Home Visits," it was clear how naively and narrowly many of the participants viewed their students' perspectives and home situations. The case begins with an impending disaster for an outdoor performance sponsored by community volunteers, because the third grade students who had been rehearsing for weeks had not arrived and the performance was due to begin in an hour. When we initially began to discuss this case and asked, "Why didn't the kids show up?," many teachers saw this situation as simply one more signal that "these parents" are not interested in their children's education. As they saw it, the performance should have been a highlight in their students' lives. It was not until we began discussing the situation from the students' and parents' perspectives that these teachers began to consider other possibilities.

**Awareness of Diverse Perspectives.** Most of the teachers reported an increase in their awareness of diverse perspectives. Pauline's[5] comment below is representative of middle-class white teachers who had little experience in inner-city settings before their current assignment:

> The discussions helped me gain some perspectives about the different ethnic groups, though I have also learned a lot just from teaching. I learned that these kids weren't just trying to be troublesome and difficult for me. They were just acting the way they usually did, and I had to learn that. (interview, 6/17/91)

But those with limited experience were not the only ones who increased their awareness. For example, Anna, another white teacher who raises her family in a culturally diverse neighborhood, was affected:

> I need to be aware of the ways my ESL students might perceive me, and perhaps modify some of my exuberance that might cause them embarrassment and discomfort in my classroom. (interview, 5/24/91)

[5] To maintain privacy, all of the participants' names have been changed to pseudonyms.

And William, a black teacher in his mid-forties who came to this seminar with a variety of experience in diverse settings, said, "I will be more open to consider the environment from which the student comes to me" (questionnaire, 5/28/91).

Some teachers found that they paid more attention to the difficulties of certain groups. Eloise, a young black woman, pointed to greater sensitivity to the concerns of her inter-racial third graders:

> We've talked about some of the kinds of culture clash that occur with children who have a dominant home culture that is substantially different from the American mainstream culture. Some of those things I find happening with my interracial kids. The mainstream culture at my school is black and biased in that direction. Some of the kids look as black as the other kids, but in truth their home lives are different, and it's very confusing to the children where they're supposed to fit in. (interview, 6/5/91)

David, a white teacher in his mid-forties who had previously taught in Harlem, spoke about his need to learn more about his African-American and Latino students:

> It's hard to say what influenced me in this direction—my students or the project—but I've become aware of the need to learn more about African-American and Latino youth cultures. (questionnaire, 5/28/91)

**Awareness of the Importance of Outreach to Parents.** Other teachers reported that the seminar forced them to reevaluate the importance of going beyond the classroom and reaching out to parents. For example, when asked what they might do differently next year as a result of participating in this project, Pauline and Anna appeared more open to pursuing parents by phone:

> The big thing that I learned is that I have to spend more time on the phone talking with parents. I felt frustrated this year with parents who I thought didn't support me, but I learned from the discussions, the cases, [and another teacher] that I should be more patient and stick with it . . . and that it's important to have more contact with families and the community. (interview, Pauline, 6/17/91)

> I'd make an extra effort to communicate with parents. The cases were an extra reminder that it was worth the effort . . . . "Home Visits" reminded me of the importance of happy calls at the outset of the year. "An

> Unanswered Dilemma" warns of the importance of explaining curriculum and techniques to parents while retaining a firm sense of teacher authority. (Anna, final questionnaire, 5/28/91)

**Awareness of Limitations and Bias.** Regardless of their ethnicity, many teachers reported that they became more aware of their limitations and biases as a result of this seminar. Some teachers like Eloise were surprised to discover their biases. Before the seminar, Eloise thought she was quite open, but as she noted at the end of the year:

> It's made me more sensitive to looking at biases that I know I have and biases that I don't recognize because they are part of the cultural norm. And, we don't see our society as biased, but it is. (interview, 6/5/91)

Anna was also surprised at her limitations. As she reflected on the impact of the seminar, she said:

> I think it made me aware of the limitations in my own thinking, especially from the written case studies that we read. I recognize myself through the foibles of many of the first year teachers [in our seminar] and in the Delpit articles. Especially, I realize the importance of cultural cues in teaching and the need to give very precise, definite statements of my expectations and behaviors, rather than just suggestive, cultural cue-type statements. (interview, 5/24/91)

Patrick, a white teacher who quit after the 7th session (see below), was particularly affected by the seminar. Though he had previously taught at a predominantly African-American school, he acknowledged his limitations during the third case discussion while we were analyzing our most emotionally provocative case, "Fighting for Life in Third Period":

> I need this project. I don't know how to work with these [black] kids . . . I'm learning a lot by reading this [case] and thinking about how I've reacted [in similar situations] and how my kids react . . . . [At the end of the discussion, he directed a question to the black participants:] "How do you teach these kids?" (case discussion, 2/12/91)

We discover why Patrick was particularly vulnerable at this time two months later, because he refers to this case discussion during our interview. He described similar problems with particular black students in his own classroom:

> You know how meaningful that case was for me. It seemed like the teacher was backing down at the beginning, and she had to learn that she needed to be strong. I was in a similar situation at the time, and realized [after the case discussion] that I had to be more firm with those kids. At the beginning of the year, my kids told me things like I was prejudiced, and I used to back down, like that teacher in the case. I used to feel like, well, if I'm really strong with them they're going to think that I'm prejudiced. (interview, 4/23/91)

As he analyzed his situation, he pointed to his previous, more positive experience at a predominantly black school, where parents knew that he tried to treat all students the same regardless of color. But this "attitude" caused him to reevaluate, so he checked his perceptions with parents at conferences:

> "Am I prejudiced because I'm being strong with your child? Should I treat your child any differently than I would treat any child that's misbehaving because your child is black?" They said "No! You should be treating my child just like you would treat any child and you should be as strong with them as you would with any kid." (interview, 5/23/91)

After the same discussion, Matthew, another inexperienced white teacher, referred to the importance of our discourse about racism and stereotyping:

> I appreciated the honesty of the discussion about this teacher's racism and stereotyping . . . I realize that I must alter/explore my own teaching styles instead of forcing the students to capitulate to me and my way of presenting things. (post discussion questionnaire, 2/12/91)

The seminar had a particularly profound effect on Robert, a Chinese-American, first-year high school math teacher who was having a rough time with his classes. Robert was raised in Chinatown and never thought about being "different" until he went to UC Berkeley, where he was constantly challenged about his racial identity. While contrasting his math instruction to Chinese students and Latinos in terms of effectiveness and comfort, he noted that there may be some cultural stereotyping involved in his perceptions of the latter. The seminar made him "more aware of his cultural biases . . . and issues that he had never before considered cultural." Perhaps more important, however, was the challenge to his conception of teaching. Before the seminar, he felt that "if teachers want to get involved with the personal lives of their students,

that's fine. But teaching is our main responsibility." Now Robert is not so sure; maybe teachers should take social issues into account:

> There is a role that teachers have which is something like a social worker. I realized that I don't do so much of that in my classes, and I'm not sure how much I want to do because it's hard for me to talk to strangers. But it's an issue that I'll be addressing next year. We didn't get into these issues until the second semester, so it was kind of late to put some of these lessons into my classes. I had already developed some routines, and the kids had already developed a rhythm of how I teach. (interview, 6/10/91)

When asked what he may do differently next year, he responded:

> I think I'll spend more time and effort on communicating with individual students . . . I think it [the seminar] made me easier to talk to. Perhaps these meetings have also modified my expectations of some students. It helped me to remember that not all students do poorly because of lack of effort. (questionnaire, 5/28/91)

In summary, Robert epitomizes the change that many teachers experienced as they went through the seminar. When they are encouraged to examine problems from various perspectives, collaborative analysis of the cases and commentaries enabled these teachers to think about their teaching and their students differently through increased awareness and sensitivity to multiculturalism.

**Changes in Behavior**

Not only did many teachers demonstrate their increased sensitivity to diversity, the data suggest that some teachers altered their behavior as a result of their participation in the seminar. They report a change in their interactional practices with students and parents. They listen more to students' concerns, spend more time communicating with individual students and parents, and interact differently during instruction. A few teachers also report that the seminar influenced the way they planned certain lessons.

**Change in Communication Patterns.** When asked how this project affected their communication patterns, several teachers described specific modifications. Some teachers noted

changes in their interaction patterns with students, while others described differences talking with parents.

*Changes with students.* For example, Robert reported not only a change in the way he communicates with students but also alluded to why these discussions may have made him a more sensitive teacher:

> [What I have gained from this project is improved communication skills.] Whenever I talk to a student about matters other than school, I always remember some of the ground rules we've used at the meetings. For example, I'd never demand an answer, or I'd always wait for the person to answer fully.

While Robert's depiction is a change in communicating to students on "matters other than school," Anna reports a shift during instructional episodes. As a result of reading an article by Lisa Delpit (1988) distributed during the seminar, and participating in the case discussions, Anna reported a change in the way she gives directions and interacts with her students:

> My third period class has a number of at-risk black males. From Eloise I learned to give very precise, very specific directions, and it made phenomenal differences in the behavior of the students . . . . I have changed my classroom management to avoid indirect statements like, "It would be nice if it were quiet in here" and replaced them with direct instructions like, "Stop talking. You need to be quiet in order to concentrate on your work now." . . . As a result of a more quiet, orderly class, management has improved, and, I believe, their learning has increased. (interview, 5/24/91)

*Changes with parents.* Several teachers reported changes in communication patterns with parents, whose norms of communication were different from those of the teacher. Eloise, for example, maintained that a teacher should "be herself" in all situations (case discussion, 5/14/91). However, our interview at the end of the seminar suggests that she changed her mind and had begun to use cultural cues when interacting with parents.

> More than anything, the case discussions have made me more sensitive to talking with parents, not trying to put my personality out as much as trying to keep our talks kind of professional and yet open. Basically I've come to the conclusion that I should follow the parent's lead, especially when I'm dealing with a parent and child at the same time. My job is not to be

> a parental force for the child but rather another adult that the parent can use for support and information. (interview, 6/5/91)

**Altering Instructional Strategies.** Anna and Eloise were the only teachers who described specific changes in their instructional strategies as a result of this project. Anna attributed her students' increased math test scores to three factors: (1) providing short-term goals rather than the "long-term, nebulous, middle-class goals" that she original used, which were similar to the teacher in "Fighting for Life in Third Period;" (2) providing direct rather than indirect directions during instruction (described above); and (3) providing very specific instructions and record-keeping systems for how to obtain the goals, an idea she developed during one of our case discussions.

Eloise described several reading and social studies lessons that she linked to the seminar. In one particular reading lesson, she traced the development of a pre-reading activity to one of our case discussions.

> We had a case discussion about a child from a Spanish-speaking background who was living and going to school in the United States. She was still having difficulty speaking English in class even though she could read and write. I have a child in this same situation right now and I think before I had this program I might have just taught it without thinking about the effect the story might have on this student. (interview, 6/5/91)

Another discussion prompted her to seek outside resources when she was uncertain of her approach and teaching methods with immigrant children. With the help of resource specialists, Eloise was able to provide more appropriate instruction and materials to these children, and linked her students' productivity, initial academic success, and comfort in the classroom to these efforts.

In summary, while we were pleased to see the kinds of changes that many teachers attributed to the case discussions, we were disappointed that only two described altering specific instructional strategies. Analysis of the case discussions suggests that perhaps we spent too much time examining the issues in the case and not enough on exploring alternate teaching methods.

In the future, we will both allocate more time to this part of the discussion and provide small-group opportunities for teachers to examine their own related curricular concerns.

**Responses to the Case Approach**

Interviews and questionnaires conducted during the field test suggest enthusiastic support for the goals of the case-based model of professional development. Participants appear to value these aspects: their reduced isolation; the importance of having a support group where they could learn from one another; the opportunity for continuous learning through collegial analysis and reflection; and their enhanced sense of professionalism. The comments below are typical of the teachers' responses:

> This program involves, quite often, self discovery. While personally challenging, such discoveries, I feel, are worth the effort.
>
> More than ever before I see teaching as ongoing problem solving. You have to continue to work on your instructional strategies to fit the kids you have. And you have to keep what works and get rid of what doesn't.
>
> I was motivated to examine teaching strategies, cultural perceptions, and educational policies that affect our lives and careers as teachers. The project allowed me to problem-solve in crucial educational situations, free from concern of damaging students' well-being.

Our reactions to the above enthusiastic remarks from the participants in this report are tempered by our concern for two of the participants who quit the seminar, an issue I discuss in the following section. It appears that these two individuals found it difficult to deal with the emotions they felt during some of the case discussions. Their departure reveals how deeply the case discussions can provoke personal reactions. As facilitators, we must be cognizant of the ramifications of such honest deliberations and be prepared for the possibility of personal discomfort. These episodes underscore the need for skilled facilitation and sensitivity.

## The Challenges of Case-Based Teaching

Conducting case discussions that lead to attitudinal and behavioral change is a complex activity.[6] Skillful facilitating requires deep understanding of the issues embedded in the cases and numerous experiences experimenting with and reflecting on a variety of approaches with discussion techniques. In general, the more experience a teacher has using a particular case, the easier it is to facilitate the discussion because he or she will be able to anticipate the variety of responses each case evokes.

I came to this project as an experienced teacher educator and thought I knew something about leading case discussions. During the past several years, I had used cases from the mentor and intern casebooks in a variety of settings and had received generally high marks. But because of my limited background and experience in multicultural settings, I was not prepared for some of the challenges of facilitating these particular cases. What were some of the lessons that we learned?

### Provide a Safe Environment

Of particular importance were the lessons about creating a safe environment for such discussions. In my previous experience with the mentor and intern cases, this had never been a problem. I had never encountered hostility or rude behavior between participants. But working with these cases was a different story. For example, on a few occasions participants intentionally or unintentionally trivialized colleagues' remarks as naive or uninformed.

A representative incident occurred during the first session of the pilot seminar, when the teachers were considering why a group of black children from a particular housing development did not show up at a class performance of their play. In the midst of this debate, Matthew, a young white male teacher innocently suggested that certain topics of conversation—such as the

[6] For an analysis of effective discussion techniques, see Christensen & Hansen, 1987; and Christensen, Garvin, & Sweet, 1991; Silverman, Welty & Lyon, 1991; Mesa-Bains & Shulman, in press.

lack of field trip forms–were "irrelevant" and "off track," and went on to substantiate his position with data in the case. At one point, Wayne, an older black teacher who had raised the issue of field trip forms, retorted, "I don't think we're off track at all. . .It's just your opinion." And Matthew responded angrily, 'OK, that's what I said. . .This is me speaking. It is my opinion. Excuse me!"

This was a tense moment for me as facilitator; I knew that something had occurred between Wayne and Matthew that I had neither anticipated nor prepared for. In response, I said that each person's opinion should be respected and valued. But by this time the damage was done and Matthew remained silent during the rest of the discussion. After the session was over he told me that he was angry at Wayne's "put down" and insinuation that he was naive, and he hoped that these kinds of occurrences would not happen again.

What we learned from this incident and others like it was the importance of continued attention to the elements of a safe environment throughout the seminar. In the future, we will involve participants in establishing clear ground rules for discussions, emphasizing the values of mutual respect and divergent points of view.

**Monitor Participants' Emotions**

We also learned that it is crucial to attend to individual feelings as they come up during each case discussion. Facilitators must be prepared for participants to unveil strong emotions. They must respond to verbal and nonverbal cues and have some ready strategies for dealing with tense moments. Though most of our participants reported that they valued the case discussions, two participants in our field test apparently quit because they felt too vulnerable. Laurinda, a black teacher, dropped the project after spontaneously revealing to her naive white colleagues the extent to which she felt the impact of racism and white supremacy (see previous section in "Changes in Attitudes"). As she told Mesa-Bains on the phone after the discussion, she was uncomfortable exposing her feelings to a group of strangers and tired of telling white folks how it

feels to be black. This incident highlights the potential dilemma for minority participants who are frequently cast in the role of expert witness and feel polarized and marginalized as a result.

Patrick had other problems. As a white male who frequently identified with the teacher in the cases, he felt his perspective was not valued in our diverse group and felt growing discomfort in the discussions. He quit after the eighth session when he inferred that another participant was hostile to his remarks. As it happened, the precipitating incident occurred prior to the formal discussion and out of our hearing range. As we reflected on Patrick's departure, we realized that we must attend to interactions before and after the formal discussions to ensure that all members feel safe in the group.

**Balance Personal and Participants' Agendas**

Both the facilitators found the discussions challenging to plan and to lead. We realized quickly, however, that it is one thing to promote an active and dynamic discussion, which inevitably happened, but it is another to establish whether participants learned something (Sykes & Bird, 1992). We wanted to focus on certain key issues in the cases, but had to balance our agenda with the concerns, questions, and experiences of the participants. We wanted to create an ethos of inquiry during the discussions, but realized that some participants identified so strongly with the teacher in the case that they were reluctant to "bash the teacher."

One of our biggest challenges involved learning how to use the diversity of our group to teach about diversity. For many white teachers, especially those with limited backgrounds and experiences in multicultural settings, these sessions provided an unusual opportunity to explore issues of race and culture from multiple perspectives and to get instructional insights from teachers of color. Yet, while some minority teachers enjoyed the role of informant, others did not. And some were simply tired of talking about racism and want to "get on with the business of learning how to teach." We are still looking for solutions to these dilemmas.

**Limitations of Case-Based Teaching**

Can case discussions ever be harmful? I think the answer is yes. Let me give an example: While Mesa-Bains and I were conducting our own field test, often spending hours debriefing one another after each discussion, we were also engaged in helping some local teacher educators use selected cases with their own first-year teachers. One teacher educator wrote a paper about the various misconceptions that her predominantly white teachers exhibited during one of the case discussions. When asked if she had ever challenged their misconceptions, she said, "No!" She had been so surprised by their naivete that she didn't know how to challenge them, though next time she will be more prepared.

After deliberating with my colleagues, I have concluded that this kind of case discussion can cause more harm than good. Without being challenged to confront their misconceptions, these teachers were able to leave the discussion reaffirming their biases and stereotypes. It's as if the discussion process legitimized their preconceptions and they may never seek an opportunity to challenge them. Confronting persons in constructive ways is difficult, especially when dealing with issues of race and class. Yet if our goal is to stimulate learning, discussion leaders must be prepared to assume these uncomfortable roles.

## Implications

Although this study was small in scope, it provides insight into the potential of case-based methods in multicultural education. Rather than passively listening to generalized knowledge on multiculturalism through lectures, teachers have an opportunity to explore key issues in the context of real classrooms. During the case discussions, they can make explicit their beliefs about teaching and learners; they can test out their assumptions about practice; they can confront their personal biases through a shared, socially constructed and deeper understanding of issues related to race, gender, and culture; and they can transform what they learn into instructional practices

that are tailored to their students. The intensity of participants' contributions during the discussions, while at times difficult, also indicates how important this vehicle is for discussing these sensitive topics.

Yet cases, even with commentaries, do not teach themselves. Discussion leaders must not only be sensitive to the issues represented in the cases, but also acutely aware of their own biases and intercultural blindness. They must understand the problems portrayed from multiple perspectives. And they must be able to anticipate in detail the variety of responses each case evokes, both emotionally and intellectually.

During the past two years I have undergone my own cultural education through co-editing and teaching these cases with a collaborator whose life experiences and cultural background differed dramatically from my own. While analyzing these cases together and soliciting commentaries, I gained knowledge about other ethnic groups and a lens into my own ignorance and blindness. My sensitivity and awareness continue to grow as I gain experience facilitating and debriefing case discussions. This experience suggests that the need for multicultural learning is not limited to teachers; it is a goal worth pursuing for today's teacher educators and staff developers as well. Studying and teaching with cases may prove a powerful vehicle for the needed continuing multicultural education of all educators.

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