

Case-Based Methodology as an Instructional Strategy for Understanding Diversity: Preservice Teachers' Perceptions

By Malcolm B. Butler, Seungyoun Lee, & Deborah J. Tippins

It is well-documented that preservice teachers have difficulty transferring their formal knowledge from teacher education courses to complex teaching practices (Black & Halliwell, 2000). Noting that teachers' knowledge is holistic, with much personal meaning that cannot be taught in a linear fashion, many scholars emphasize the importance of linking teachers' meaningful learning and application to practice within an educational context, rather than passive acquisition of educational knowledge (Elbaz, 1991; Harrington, 1995; Jones & Jones, 1998).

Added to the teacher preparation equation is that of preparing teachers who can function effectively in schools that are diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, ability, language, socioeconomics, family configurations, etc. Many times, the teachers who are being prepared to teach in these settings are limited in their understanding and appreciation of these diverse communities.

With the efforts of teacher educators to seek new directions for teacher preparation, case-based pedagogy is being advocated as a valuable method to prepare elementary teachers for the complex contexts of teaching and learning (Harrington

& Garrison, 1992; Neuhardt-Pritchett et al., 2004) and as "a promising way of converting research and other knowledge of teaching into practice" (p. 716). Shulman (1992) and Berliner (1986) assert that opportunities to analyze, discuss and reflect on multiple cases are needed for teachers to promote their decision making by understanding theories, practice, and complex situations in classrooms.

Case-based Pedagogy

Case-based pedagogy focuses on teachers' problem solving, decision making, reflective practices (Carter, 1988; Koballa & Tippins, 2001, Neuhardt-Pritchett et al., 2004), and their own personalized theory about teaching and learning (Neuhardt-Pritchett et al., 2004). Cases in teaching and learning show educational problems and dilemmas where teachers need to make decisions within specific situations.

Research has shown that case-based pedagogy enables teachers to improve their actions in teaching and learning from multiple perspectives, reflective thinking (Shulman & Colbert, 1989), active participation and motivation for learning (Shulman, 1992), and intellectual strategies. Through case-based pedagogy, preservice teachers can learn the essence of educational dilemmas, seek the most appropriate solution in a given and informed context, assess the results of problem solving, and reflect on meaning (Ross, 1989). In this sense, cases mediate teachers' higher order thinking by applying and modifying the theories and practice in education.

As we think about the issue of diversity and preservice teachers, several key practical questions come to mind: (a) How

are preservice teachers able to acquire deeper understandings about diversity that cannot be developed by taking written tests in teaching and learning? (b) What is an effective way to bridge gaps among preservice teachers' personal experiences, classroom lectures and textbooks, and problem-solving experiences in educational settings? (c) Are there ways for preservice teachers to practice their problem solving and decision making?

The main purpose of this study was to investigate preservice teachers' perceptions of case-based pedagogy as an instructional strategy for understanding diversity.

Methodology

Research Participants

This study employed purposeful sampling that is based on "the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Because all cases should meet the criteria for study, this study utilizes criterion-based sampling (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993).

Three female preservice teachers—"Kate," "Lisa," and "Shazia"—participated in this study. They were matriculating in an undergraduate teacher preparation program at a large university in the Southeast during the 2002-2003 school year. The university is predominately white and the majority of the elementary teachers are white and female, which is comparable to the nation's public school teaching workforce, which is over 78% white and 72% female (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

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The three were enrolled in a required undergraduate science methods course for prospective elementary teachers. This course of 24 students (all female) was taught by a science educator who is well versed in the use of cases for pedagogical purposes. The three preservice teachers were fourth-year students and had over ten weeks of experience in the form of student teaching/classroom practicum/volunteer work in schools or /substitute teaching.

During the elementary science methods course, the preservice teachers experienced case-based pedagogy—reading five instructor-selected cases featuring dilemmas that address issues of diversity, writing reflective responses to the cases, and discussing the cases. After the case-based experiences, the three preservice teachers had face-to-face in-depth interviews with the researchers, focusing on their perceptions about case-based pedagogy experiences in relation to multicultural education. The interview with each participant lasted between one and one and one half hours. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed.

Descriptions of the Five Cases in the Study

"Who Eats the Mango?"
by Janice Koch

(Koballa & Tippins, 2001)

In this open case, a student teacher develops a lesson to assist a classroom of third graders from a middle-class suburban community with the exploration of edible plant parts. The student teacher attempts to expose the students to fruits and vegetables from diverse cultures. Thinking the students will be excited about learning about these unusual plants, the student teacher is totally surprised by the students' negatives responses.

"The Day the Lobster Died"
by Joseph Riley

(Koballa & Tippins, 2001)

In this open case, an experienced fifth grade teacher attempts to expose his students to a part of his life experiences growing up in the Northeastern United States. He plans to have a lobster boil as a culminating activity for the class' unit on oceanography. When he tries to conduct the lobster boil in class, his plans go awry from the moment he indicates to the students what is about to happen to the lobster.

"Where Have All the Ipil-Ipil Trees Gone?" by Teresa Silva
(Barcenal et al., 2002)

In this open case, a fourth grade teacher in a rural Filipino community struggles with the disconnect between what she teaches her students and their home lives. The teacher focuses in class on the need to conserve trees, yet one of her students must help his dad cut down trees to make coal, which is the major source of income for their cash-strapped family.

"El Secreto de las Ninias"
by Cynthia, Jessica
and Angel Calabrese Barton
(Koballa & Tippins, 2001)

This story is written by two elementary-age girls who live in a homeless shelter. They share their secret with Barton about why they do not like science in school, even though their teacher tries to engage in fun, student-centered activities. The case focuses on how the two immigrant girls are marginalized with respect to participating in science.

"When Do You Perform Tuob?"
by Esperanza Parcon
(Barcenal et al., 2002)

As a teacher in a rural school in the Philippines, a third grade teacher experiences tension when faced with two competing referents- the traditional health beliefs practiced in her home and those of her students' and modern ideas of health care advocated in both her university classes and the national curriculum for elementary education. She designs an inquiry activity for her students that highlights the dangers of smoke, while knowing that her own child is at home being passed through a bellow of smoke every evening to drive away evil spirits. The practice of "tuob" is a part of the local community's cultural heritage.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with a focus on what the preservice teachers thought about case-based pedagogy as a tool for understanding diversity. Data were analyzed to identify themes and categories based on patterns of "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p.131).

Themes that emerged from the participants' interviews were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of both their individual and collective perspectives.

Findings from the data analysis were shared with the participants to confirm, clarify and expand the depth of our understanding and interpretation of their robust perspectives.

Findings

Constructing Knowledge with Sensitivity to Different Cultures

Cases as tools to develop awareness of and sensitivity to unfamiliar cultures. The three preservice teachers believed that case-based pedagogy helped them construct knowledge and understanding about different cultures; the cases shed light on new, different, and unfamiliar experiences. Kate suggested that the cases made it possible for her to recognize, be empathetic to situations of diversity, and make meaning for herself based on her prior experiences.

Similarly, Lisa felt that case-based pedagogy exposed her to many different cultural issues that she might not necessarily see during her university classroom or student teaching experiences. She explained that case-based pedagogy is essential for developing sensitivity to the cultures of the children in classes and for being an effective teacher.

It would definitely affect thinking through things, because the cases brought up issues that I hadn't thought of and sensitivities that the different cultures might have that I had not thought of because it was not a part of the culture that I was raised with.

Reflecting on the various cultural issues highlighted through the cases, Lisa came to value the importance of understanding the subcultures of each individual child.

Shazia mentioned that she had experienced many perspectives that she had not considered previously. She felt the value of cases rested, in part, with the opportunity to learn about diversity within real classroom contexts. She thought that cases would help her, a soon-to-be teacher, to handle diversity matters because they reflected actual classroom situations.

It was really a positive effect on me because I was able to read those cases and then think what I would do in that situation, and what if that comes up in my classroom. It made me realize things that I would never have thought about until it happened to me. Which in a lot of cases it could have been too late and now I realize that there are certain things at least from the cases that we read, hopefully I won't make those mistakes about.

Cases as tools for learning and constructing one's own personal truth about diversity. Kate expressed the value of learning about different cultures through cases. She felt the case discussions enabled her to go beyond superficial understandings at the "tip of the iceberg." Kate noted that she did not always agree with the decisions made by the teachers in the various cases. The process of experiencing conflicts about the problematic situations in cases is evidence of Kate's construction of beliefs about diversity in teaching and learning. Through this process, Kate learned how to think about individual cultures and situations.

Kate stated that she enjoys talking about other cultures, even going beyond the case dilemmas. Talking about other countries, Kate expressed the belief that her culture is not always the norm in the world.

We're not always the norm we think that we are. I thought that was good that we were able to expand it to other areas that sparks our curiosity about other places and how we really don't know that much.

Through the case-based experiences, Lisa saw that "things are very personal" and that "truth would be what a person personally believes to be true"; consequently, she believed that it is important to construct one's own personal truth by experimenting and reflecting on how to handle the situations that cases provide, rather than memorizing the knowledge formally presented in textbooks.

I think each person has one's own truth. I wouldn't say my personal beliefs are true. I think that's arrogant. I think my personal beliefs are my personal beliefs and I have reasons for them, but they're not.

In-depth Reflections on Diversity and Personal Beliefs

Cases as tools for instruction. Kate felt glad that there are actual cases that she can read of people in similar situations. She thought that it was valuable to have these cases in order to see how other teachers deal with various situations. She also found it useful to critique the cases in terms of her own beliefs.

Kate also found that the case experience required more time for in-depth reflections because it was not easy to develop meaningful learning by simply reading through the cases a single time without discussion.

I need to take the time to really think

about it in depth. For me, it was easy to be critical of those, but I would see myself probably in the same situation maybe doing similar things and not realizing it until afterwards looking at it.

Cases as tools for discussing and challenging existing theory or "truth." Kate loves being able to talk things out and play the devil's advocate because she loves making people think. Case-based pedagogy provided Kate and her peers with the chance to have genuine dialogues about situations related to teaching and learning.

I'm a very skeptical person. I love challenging everything. I like to say no. I don't wanna say that there's no truth at all, but then everything can be challenged and we don't know until we challenge something. I mean we can base everything in theory but nothing can be definite for sure until it's been tested and tested and tested.

Emphasizing the importance of not conforming existing theory or so-called, "truth," Kate extended her thinking to her views about evolution. She does not like to teach about evolution because she thinks it is a matter of personal beliefs. However, based on her reflection of the cases, she felt that if she teaches about evolution and encounters a child who disagrees with her teaching, she would answer in the following manner:

I would probably teach evolution and if it was brought up and the child said, 'no no,' that's not how it started, then I would say 'that's fine, you can have your belief but inside the classroom we're gonna talk about what our textbooks discussed. You can either agree with it or disagree with it but this is just something you need to be educated. You can then voice your opinion. You need to know the other side of your argument just as though I'm learning. I'm trying to broaden my awareness of culture. I think you also need to broaden your knowledge of scientific beliefs as well.

Cases as tools for reflective peer conversations and considerations. Shazia felt that cases helped her realize what the profession of teaching is all about. She indicated that cases provided opportunities to think and talk about the issues over and over again with peers and to learn about teaching and learning on diversity embedded in the experiences of real classroom teachers.

We talked about it in different classes but never in this way of learning how to look, of reading about other teachers' experiences. It was neat to read about teachers and know that we're gonna have similar situations as them.

As a future classroom teacher, it was helpful for Shazia to see how and what the teachers in the cases did with children from cultures different from their own.

I feel a good thing from reading those cases is, right now I can sit back and critique those teachers, but it gave me an upper hand because now I know what to think when I'm in my own classroom or how to approach things.

Shazia noted that cases are valuable because they provide opportunities for reflection rather than simply showing concrete solutions for problematic situations. For Shazia, cases are opportunities for in-depth reflections; chances to confirm or change beliefs about diversity, and tools for helping teachers consider their actions when faced with similar dilemmas.

I think they were trying to make us more aware of things that happen with multicultural issues and what we can do, and it's more of a reflective thing, they weren't telling us what to do. It was just read the case and then, what would you do, if you were in that same position, so it was a lot of reflection.

Cases as tools for learning about diversity by sympathizing with and criticizing classroom teachers. Although she disagreed with some of the teachers portrayed in some of the cases, Shazia was sympathetic with these teachers in the contexts of the situations described in the case. By referring to the point that it is easy to sit and critique classroom teachers, Shazia thought that she could not say for certain, "That is really wrong of the teacher to do that."

I was able to be an outsider and look at what teachers were experiencing and critique what they were doing. But given in that same situation, maybe also I would have said or done the same thing. I was not only able to learn from it but also I was able to sympathize with her and learn from it.

Cases as tools for imagining oneself in a real diverse world, rather than the sterile worlds of textbooks. For Shazia, experiencing case-based pedagogy is better than having a textbook. She noticed that cases include real-life classroom situations that address multicultural issues.

Just by knowing that those things happen and that they are real accounts of teachers' experiences. So just like they happened to them, they can happen to me, too. Just learning from them.

She compared her thoughts about textbook knowledge and case knowledge. First, she

thought that learning from textbooks is a harder way of remembering, even though textbooks show many key ideas about diversity issues. "Something you learn in textbooks is harder to remember. You'll remember key things but you don't remember the details." However, she stated that cases helped her read about diversity issues with interest and remember the specifics that may be helpful for her own teaching and learning in the near future.

Cases that I read stay in my mind, I remember them. It's like a story that I remember from, something I did with my friends. It's an anecdote or a vignette, it just stays with you and so when you experience something in your own classroom, you'll think of that, cause it's specific and real. I can look back on it and refresh my memory and never forget the cases that I read. Those are real examples for me.

Through the real-world case vignettes, Shazia saw the life of diverse cultures and was encouraged to learn more about multicultural education. Cases gave her hope and insights about children from other cultures. She told about a multicultural project for another class. For that project, she is using cases.

The case I am using is about a teacher and her experiences with different children. There are a lot of vignettes in it from where the children are actually talking about what they're feeling and how they're feeling isolated and what impact moving from another country has had on them. This little Chinese boy felt like no one was there for him and felt like exhausted from not knowing the language. It's really neat with the book that I'm reading, just reading about the child's point of view.

Shazia was confident that the cases vicariously put her in the real world of teaching and positioned her in an authentic context. "The cases really put you in that world and in that position. They make you think I'm not in that position, but I could be."

Sources of Learning through Case-Based Pedagogy

Reading, writing, and discussing as sources of reflection and meaning making. Kate explained that her learning about diversity during the case-based experiences stemmed from the processes of reflections, meaning making, and making connections through reading, writing, and discussing the cases. Kate emphasized how she tried to feel and experience what the people of the cases were going through and consider whether it is how she will deal with the situation. Kate

noted that putting herself in the position of the teacher in a case involved much more than simply reading or looking at the questions that follow the cases.

I think that when I read through cases I was really connecting by looking through and writing down, trying to put myself in that teacher's role or the student teacher's role in the cases.

Assessing that case-based pedagogy is a good tool for learning about multicultural education, Shazia also felt that reading cases, relating her own experiences to the cases, and writing reflections on cases provided her with the opportunities to think and experience what the teachers in the cases had been experiencing throughout their personal and school lives.

The learning just comes from all three of those things. Like we read the case and we discussed it and we wrote about what we remembered most and the follow up. It was a really good set up to really make you think and reflect on.

Reading as a source of providing templates for one's problem solving. Lisa felt that reading cases had a personal impact on her learning because she could better relate to the characters in each story. For Lisa, cases were templates for her problem-solving that can be used when she encounters similar problems in teaching and learning settings.

She saw how the teachers in the cases dealt with conflicts that relate to issues she struggles with personally. "When an issue like that comes up, I know that will come back in my mind and I'll go back to the case or look through it, on how I would like to handle that." Lisa believed that by reading cases, she could examine and witness her own thought processes for problem-solving.

My learning came from reading the cases. As a teacher, when I read the story, I would be thinking about OK what would I do next and what is this person going to do next, and so it made more of like a personal connection. When I read through it that would be my thought process. I question myself in a good way as to what I'm doing and what my thought process is and procedural processes are.

Writing as a source of reflection on one's own knowledge and beliefs about diversity. The three preservice teachers indicated that many of their thoughts and reflections during case discussions were based on their written responses to cases.

Lisa emphasized the importance of

being able to examine her own knowledge and personal beliefs about the issues in cases. "The writing is good because it makes you think about what you really want to say, what you're really personally believing and it prepares you for the group discussion." Pointing out the importance of the writing case responses, Shazia mentioned,

When you actually write it down, that's your time to reflect on it and I think reflection is a really good way of metacognitive learning. Like when you reflect on something you're just making it stronger for yourself.

Discussion as a source of collaboratively recognizing new and different issues. During the case discussions, Kate found herself in the role of facilitator. The case discussions provided an opportunity for helping peers expand initial thoughts about the dilemmas by sharing her thoughts and opinions with peers. Shazia felt discussing cases with peers helped her think collaboratively about certain diversity issues.

When I discuss something, it just helps me learn it better and stronger for me. By discussing it, I start out reading I'm thinking about it, and I reflect I'm putting my ideas out and I'm putting it all together. It was just a really good mix of three different types of strategies. Cause you just sit there and read it, and really not gain as much from it as if you write about it also. Then you gain even more I feel from discussing it.

Suggestions for Experiencing Case-Based Pedagogy Regarding Diversity

The need for more background information. The preservice teachers sometimes had difficulties seeing themselves in the complex multicultural situations due to their lack of knowledge about other cultures. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have explored multicultural and diversity issues with participants with limited cultural experiences (Merryfield, 2000; Morales, 2000, Taylor, 199).

The preservice teachers stated that it would be helpful if the cases included more detailed background information about the situations portrayed. Lisa indicated that case authors should consider the readers or audiences for the cases. However, Kate understood that reading and discussing cases was a good start to developing an understanding of various cultures and to building an attitude of open-mindedness, even though she may not have a thorough

knowledge of information relevant to a particular dilemma:

Make sure that when you're given the case, this is an issue for this culture or this situation. It's just a little slice of the whole piece. But if you're really interested in being open-minded about culture, you need to not just look at bits and pieces that you need to, but to look at a lot of different bits and pieces and really educate yourself.

The importance of readers not creating too many generalizations about cultures. Lisa pointed out that case readers should be cautious not to create too many generalizations about a culture through the limited pictures of a particular vignette. She thought that generalizations about a particular culture could undermine understanding. She positioned herself as an outsider to other cultures in the cases.

I think that perhaps because I am not a member of the case teacher's culture and have not had the same experiences as she has. I am also a student who is reading this case looking for cultural sensitivities. As an outsider to this culture I would want to be particularly careful not to offend or disrepute [sic] it.

"Put yourself in the person's shoes." Shazia indicated that it was important to put oneself in the person's shoes in cases. She noted that it was easy to critique the characters of cases as an outsider when reading and discussing; however, her university teacher stressed the importance of reflecting upon her own teaching in the same situation rather than simply criticizing.

I remember the first case, Dr. Bechar told all of us, go easy on the teachers, like put yourself in their shoes. I realized I really need to do that because I might make the same mistake too and someone else looking at me could say, oh, that teacher's stupid, why is she even teaching. Whereas, they don't really know what went on. They need to step into my shoes, into my world and see what I was thinking, and what I was doing, and that quote is what I tried to do with the cases.

Shazia expounded on this point, noting that when one is not putting her/himself in the person's shoes, it is really easy to critique. She now thinks more about "what I can do to fix it instead of just saying, oh, that teacher shouldn't do this or do that."

I really think the first case response I wrote was a lot the tone of it, was very harsh, putting a lot of stipulations on the teacher, whereas the rest of them I started thinking, what if I was in that situation, I could make that same mistake.

Desire for more cases focusing on different aspects of diversity. Shazia recommended that the next group of elementary preservice teachers have even more cases about diversity.

I think maybe even doing more than five. I know it would be more work for the next group but it was really a good experience to do those cases and to do the work. Yeah, it took time but it really made me think about what the different things are.

Shazia thought that considering various issues focusing on diversity will help preservice teachers construct deeper knowledge of multicultural issues. Because diversity means more than racial or ethnic issues, she maintained that cases should include a broad range of issues.

Everyone really does know about ethnicity and racial issues regarding multicultural education. A suggestion would be to try and include some different cases like the barangay community [Filipino neighborhood] and the homeless shelter cases that we read.

Furthermore, Shazia insisted that case-based pedagogy should be utilized in more teacher education classes. She believed that case-based pedagogy made her enjoy learning about diversity in schools by enabling her to consider the holistic aspects of teaching and learning rather than the fragmented knowledge typically presented in each class.

It's interesting to learn why we don't do those things, what the reason behind it is. Even I think, multifaceted of learning in any scenario not just tagging math, social studies, English. We can have so much other stuff involved that is different.... things to learn from and enjoy.

Discussion

Constructing Knowledge with Sensitivity to Different Cultures

Unlike traditional teaching methods based on textbooks and lectures, case-based experiences have preservice teachers actively engaged in creating meanings about their learning, devoting time and effort to read, analyze, solve problems, and evaluate solutions within the "contextualized, local, and particular nature of teaching and learning" (Moje, Remillard, & Wade, 1999, p. 89).

Interacting with case characters within specific sociocultural contexts, the three preservice teachers became more aware of and sensitive to new, different, and unfamiliar cultural contexts. Exposing themselves to diverse cultural issues, cases

afforded these preservice teachers the opportunity to reflect on actual classroom situations in relation to diversity from multiple perspectives.

In the course of carefully observing the case teachers' teaching practices, and comparing their own beliefs about diversity in teaching and learning with those of the case teachers, the preservice teachers emphasized that they are now more aware of and sensitive to the subcultures of each individual child. In her work, Nieto (1999) confirmed this new awareness by stating, "I had never been happy with what I call the list approach to multicultural education [list of characteristics that supposedly describe the people of any given culture] because such lists often cause more problems than they solve" (Nieto, 1999, p. 189).

Verification of the preservice teachers' positive responses to case-based pedagogy and diversity issues could be ascertained by observing their behavior during their student teaching experience the following semester, where they could be placed in educational settings composed of diverse student populations.

In-Depth Reflections on Diversity and Personal Beliefs

Cases provide opportunities for preservice teachers to investigate and reflect upon their own 'knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs' in teaching and learning (Lunderberg & Fawver, 1994). Experiencing case dilemmas and making efforts to resolve the issues regarding diversity during their analyses, the preservice teachers reported that they connected the case situations to their own experiences, thoughts, and beliefs about teaching and learning (Lundeberg, 1999).

In this sense, case-based pedagogy was considered an effective instructional method to facilitate preservice teachers' reflective thinking, providing them with opportunities to experiment with case dilemmas from various perspectives and to clarify and re-structure their beliefs about teaching and learning.

Developing and changing their beliefs, the preservice teachers believed that their culture is not always the norm in the world; it is mediated by relationships with the surrounding people. This implies that the preservice teachers' alteration of beliefs may later have a positive impact on their teaching practice (Lundeberg, 1999; Lundeberg & Fawver, 1994; Pajares, 1992). The preservice teachers pointed out that continuous peer conversations and

social interactions about diversity issues help them become more reflective about teaching and learning practice. Cases are “value-laden, if not explicitly, then certainly implicitly . . . dialogue allows us and our students to transcend the limitations of our own experience and values” (Harrington & Garrison, 1992, p. 717).

The preservice teachers noted that case-based pedagogy is “definitely” better than textbooks in terms of opportunities for in-depth reflection about diversity in teaching and learning situations. Experiencing cases, they could challenge or confirm their personal beliefs rather than simply conforming to existing theory or “truth.” They commented that they thought about other sides of arguments, adapt the ideas obtained from the university to actual working examples, and imagined themselves in real classrooms in the diverse context of cases.

For them, textbook knowledge was a “harder way of remembering even though so many key ideas about diversity” can be found in books. The preservice teachers think that cases providing authentic context are “better than looking at an encyclopedia.” Yet the preservice teachers pointed out that learning from case-based pedagogy required more time for in-depth reflection; they note that it is not easy to develop meaningful learning by simply reading the cases; in-class case discussions were deemed critical.

Sources of Learning through Case-Based Pedagogy

The preservice teachers indicated that case reading, responding to questions, and discussions are all interconnected. They felt that every process helped their reflection and meaning making. They suggested that case reading stimulated their thought processes by providing templates for reflecting and solving educational dilemmas.

The preservice teachers pointed out that case discussion, in particular, helped them expand initial thoughts about case dilemmas by helping them to recognize new and different issues and uncover more information relevant to the case dilemmas. Rather than being passive recipients of transmitted “right,” fixed and static answers in education, the preservice teachers put one another in the role of facilitators.

They considered case discussions to be a collaborative learning process and a form of peer mentoring where they learn by sharing their own ideas about teaching and learning. “Read alone, they offer the vi-

carious experience of walking in another’s shoes. But in group discussion, they are especially powerful, allowing differing points of view to be aired and examined” (Shulman & Mesa-Bains, 1993, p.v)

Suggestions for Experiencing Case-Based Pedagogy Regarding Diversity

Effective cases “describe in vivid detail the sociopolitical context in which students live. . . . Details such as these need to be included in culturally relevant cases so that the influence of other contexts can be taken into account in explaining students’ school experiences” (Nieto, 1999, p. 191). Similarly, the preservice teachers in the study reported the need for thorough knowledge of information relevant to a particular dilemma.

Feeling that it is easy to criticize case teachers as an outsider, the preservice teachers pointed out that case readers should reflect on the case teachers’ unique teaching situations. Feeling that overgeneralization may actually be harmful or offensive to cultures, the preservice teachers also indicated that case readers should not generalize too much about the various cultures represented in the cases.

In addition, the preservice teachers expressed the desire to experience even more cases about diversity. They felt that cases showed them holistic features of teaching and learning that can be difficult to grasp through more traditional forms of instruction. Accordingly, they indicated their desire to experience other aspects of diversity through case-based pedagogy.

Based on our findings, we surmise that the case-study experience for these three young soon-to-be teachers should be one upon which they can draw when they find themselves in a classroom of diverse students, who need them to teach in a culturally relevant manner. As teacher educators, our belief that case-based pedagogy can be an effective tool for increasing teachers’ knowledge and understanding of diversity issues in the classroom was confirmed.

Our findings are instructive for understanding how to integrate case-based pedagogy into teacher preparation programs. It is hoped that the findings of this study can be used to illuminate the benefits of using case-based pedagogy in teacher preparation programs, as teacher educators seek effective strategies for preparing teacher candidates to work in diverse educational settings.

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