

Voices of Student Teachers

Cases from the Field



Muriel K. Rand • Sharon Shelton-Colangelo

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Preface

New teachers consistently rate student teaching as the single most important experience in their college education programs. Student teachers occupy a unique position: although they are not yet real teachers, they also are no longer fully students; indeed, they shoulder a full array of responsibilities in the classroom. Caught in the middle of demands from their own students, their cooperating teachers, their college supervisors, and their education professors, these beginning practitioners often struggle to reconcile a host of particular issues and dilemmas. Student teachers may find themselves trying to bridge the gap between the educational theory presented in college courses and the complex realities of today's classrooms. To make sense of this busy, complicated, exhausting, but important period in their professional lives, student teachers need venues to reflect, reconsider, and rethink the events they experience.

Case-Based Pedagogy

Teaching cases have established themselves as an important pedagogical tool in meeting this need. We are especially drawn to teaching cases because they support our constructivist view of learning in higher education. Cases offer the opportunity for students to construct their own understanding, work at their own level, have choice in the curriculum, and, most of all, be active participants in their own learning. Cases are an ideal bridge between theory and practice.

Voices of Student Teachers: Cases from the Field is a book of cases based on real-life field experiences that reveal the unique problems and issues that student teachers face. These cases, which were written by student teachers themselves about actual dilemmas they confronted during their internships, are an ideal mechanism to enable beginning teachers to learn how to analyze and reflect on their own practice.

In addition, these cases provide a repertoire of experiences from which students can draw to meet new challenges and explore possibilities in their own teaching. The cases duplicate the process of professional growth described by Donald Schön, who explains, "A professional practitioner is a specialist who encounters certain types of situations again and again. . . . As a practitioner experiences many variations of a small number of types of cases, he is able to 'practice' his practice. He develops a repertoire of expectations, images, and techniques. He learns what to look for and how to respond to what he finds" (Schön, 1987, p. 60).

Peer Collaboration in Case Analysis

By analyzing cases in the college classroom, students will be able to think differently about the problems they encounter during their student teaching and beyond. These cases give prospective teachers an opportunity to think about the many possible ways in which a problem can be addressed. Ideally student teachers will also develop a habit of reflection: regularly thinking about what could be improved or what else would have worked in any given situation. When student teachers work with their peers to analyze and discuss cases, they are better able to function within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and to collaboratively construct meaning. In working with peers on cases, student teachers can be more resourceful, more thoughtful, and generally more competent than they could be on their own. The group discussions and reflections scaffold the students' growth and move them forward in their professional development.

Organization of the Book

The general framework we used in organizing this book parallels the way in which we use cases in our teaching:

- *Introducing students to cases.* In Part I we show students how to read and analyze cases and what can be learned from teaching cases. This section also demonstrates how to work together as a group, use active listening, and brainstorm ideas. We encourage students to think about the process of decision making in their teaching and to put themselves in the place of the case authors.
- *Presenting teaching cases.* Here we give students practice in analyzing cases that cover a wide range of issues. The cases in Parts II through VII are grouped together according to the major focus of the case, such as classroom management. There is no particular order to the cases, however, and we encourage you to choose individual cases that fit your needs and use them in the order that makes sense for your teaching. To help you select appropriate cases, we begin each one with a short abstract that gives pertinent details about the case.
- *Writing your own teaching case.* After analyzing various cases in our classes, our students write their own cases as a formalized way of reflecting on their teaching. Part VIII presents guidelines for prospective teachers to follow in writing their own cases and explains the value of using writing as a form of reflection.

How These Cases Were Developed

The cases in this collection are authentic narratives written by student teachers studying at an urban university in New Jersey. The great majority of these students are from

working-class families in which they are the first generation to attend college. For many of the students, taking four months to work full time in a school was a great financial hardship since they were putting themselves through college. About half the authors are nontraditional students: mothers returning to college, older men changing careers, people in their late 20s who spent time in business and now would like to teach, and so on. Many of them are African-American or Hispanic, and about half speak English as a second language or are bilingual. Most of the authors were raised in an urban environment and attended urban public schools or urban Catholic schools.

The cases they have written reflect the realities of the classrooms. The style of the narratives provides both observable actions that happen in the classroom and the thoughts, reactions, and background information of the student teachers as the story unfolds. The students who wrote these cases were not simply reporting events but interpreting them through their own eyes and constructing their own meaning of the events. We believe that the cases are open enough for readers to be able to put themselves into the student teachers' places. No resolutions are provided; each case ends with a problem, challenge, or dilemma facing the student teacher. Most narratives are relatively short, with enough details to encourage discussion but without extensive reflection from the writer. This allows learners who are reading the cases to mentally re-create the situation and rethink the possible actions through their own reflection.

The cases lend themselves to many topics and are best used in conjunction with other readings, experiences, and related activities. Since by their nature these cases focus on problems, it is important to provide readers with a balanced perspective on teaching. This book will be useful in seminar courses taken in conjunction with student teaching or in courses with earlier practicum experiences. These cases would also stimulate discussion and raise issues for introductory educational foundations courses and illustrate principles covered in educational psychology, philosophy, and other courses.

Because many of the issues and relevant concerns in these cases cut across grade levels, most of the cases can be used with early childhood, elementary, middle school, and secondary education students. There are a balanced number of cases representing all these levels in the book. (See Table A.) The inclusion of all grade levels also comes from our belief that teachers can gain a great deal by knowing more about teaching issues across developmental levels.

We hope that this book provides fertile ground for preparing new teachers and that our readers continue their lifelong professional growth through reflection, questioning, and sharing their own stories.

For Further Reading

Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

TABLE A

Chart of cases by grade level. **ECE:** Early childhood, grades pre-K–2; **EI:** Elementary, grades 3–5; **Mid:** Middle school, grades 6–8; **HS:** High school, grades 9–12

Title	ECE	EI	Mid	HS
Part II: Classroom Management (9)	4	2	2	1
1. I Tried to Be Their Friend	X			
2. A Special Bunch		X		
3. You're Not the Teacher!	X			
4. Burning the Candle at Both Ends				X
5. Class out of Control		X		
6. My Creative Nightmare	X			
7. Do Rules Work?			X	
8. The Schedule Will Not Permit It			X	
9. Attention, Please!	X			
Part III: Teaching Methods (9)	1	2	3	3
10. A Dilemma over Dittos		X		
11. Cooperative Learning: Trials and Tribulations				X
12. Rush, Rush, Rush: How Can I Find the Time?			X	
13. To Lecture or Not to Lecture				X
14. Creative Writing That Doesn't Conform			X	
15. Homework Hassles		X		
16. The Games Are Over	X			
17. On The Wrong Track?				X
18. Teaching or Test Preparation?			X	
Part IV: Students in Crisis (9)	3	2	2	2
19. Worried About Tommy	X			
20. My Students, My Children		X		
21. The Fight				X
22. Am I Going to Die?		X		
23. Rebecca's Ways	X			
24. Struggling with Learning Disabilities				X
25. What Can I Do about James?			X	
26. Stop Passing the Buck	X			
27. I Want It Now!			X	

Part V: Identity Issues (9)	1	4	1	3
28. What Did I Do to You?		X		
29. White Faces Don't Want to Be My Friend		X		
30. Two Dads		X		
31. Who Will My Girls Be?	X			
32. Profanity in the Classroom				X
33. Them and Us				X
34. What to Do about Gender Equity		X		
35. Flashback Pain			X	
36. Rethinking Race: I'm Not Biased!				X
Part VI: Relationships with Students (9)	2	4	1	2
37. Low Expectations		X		
38. Stereotyping in the Teachers' Room		X		
39. Should We Celebrate Holidays?			X	
40. Too Much Love?	X			
41. Don't Give up on Elvin	X			
42. These Kids'll Steal Anything				X
43. On My Nerves		X		
44. Are You Gay?				X
45. Do Not Touch		X		
Part VII: Relationships with Professionals (9)	2	1	3	3
46. The Conflict			X	
47. A Matter of Exhaustion				X
48. Innovative Teacher or A Big Goof-up?			X	
49. How Am I Doing?		X		
50. A Difference of Opinion	X			
51. Who's in Control?			X	
52. Student Teacher or Just Helper?	X			
53. A Tough Decision				X
54. No Time to Be Both Teacher and Student				X
Grand Totals (54)	13	15	12	14

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Thanks also to the many, many students whose cases could not be included because of space limitations. Like most teachers, we have learned more than our students as we continue together on the journey toward improving our teaching.

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Miss Martin is in the second month of student teaching in second grade. She struggles with finding the right balance between being the children's friend and yelling at them so that she can gain control. How can she care about the students but not control them? How can she instill responsibility when they won't stop playing long enough to listen to her?

Case 2: A Special Bunch 10

Jill Harmon tries hard to establish a student-centered approach with plenty of opportunities for student interactions in her fifth-grade class. She struggles to deal with misbehaviors such as note passing during her lessons. She questions how she can be a supportive teacher and still correct misbehaviors.

Case 3: You're Not the Teacher! 12

Rosemary Green tries to get the children to see her as the "real teacher" while struggling to find a way to handle a difficult child. She wonders how effective she is at teaching kindergarten and what she should try next.

Case 4: Burning the Candle at Both Ends 14

Juan De Primo, an older student teacher, finds that using active learning strategies in his high school English class is demanding too much of his time. He questions how student-centered instruction should be.

Case 5: Class out of Control 17

Ms. Leon experiences one of the worst days of her life when her cooperating teacher is absent: she cannot get control of the third-grade class and needs the assistance of the substitute teacher and the vice-principal. She wonders what she did wrong, what she could do differently next time, and whether she is cut out to be a teacher.

Case 6: My Creative Nightmare 19

Bianna is excited to try out a lesson that would foster creativity among her first-grade students while they are learning language skills. The lesson creates a great deal of noise and confusion that she didn't expect, and she is left without a backup plan.

Case 7: Do Rules Work? 21

Carol Seaver, a student teacher in art, realizes that her junior high school students are used to many different classroom management styles and tries to develop her own techniques. She wonders why rules figure so prominently in all the classrooms but seem so ineffective.

Case 8: The Schedule Will Not Permit It 23

David is student teaching in a sixth-grade remedial reading class in a school in the midst of a labor action. Because the class is having trouble staying on task, David suggests changing the sixth-grade schedule to accommodate two half-hours instead of one continuous hour, but he is met with opposition.

Case 9: Attention, Please! 25

Miss Holmes tries a fun, interactive lesson with her first-grade class but can't seem to get the students' attention. She struggles to understand her classroom management choices and decide what will help her be more effective.

For Further Reading 27

Part III: Teaching Methods 29

Case 10: A Dilemma over Dittos 30

Dawn Myers, who is student teaching in fourth grade, is trying to work collaboratively with her cooperating teacher, who uses ditto packets as her primary teaching technique. Her college supervisor wants to see lessons with more active learning experiences, which Dawn agrees would be more effective. How can she meet the expectations of her cooperating teacher while trying to introduce different teaching methods?

Case 11: Cooperative Learning: Trials and Tribulations 33

John Williams, a student teacher in a large urban high school, tries to implement a cooperative learning lesson that had been a big success in his college methods course. As he drowns in a sea of students' questions and hesitations, his confidence begins to crack.

Case 12: Rush, Rush, Rush: How Can I Find the Time? 35

Darleen Jackson wants to be creative in designing lessons for her eighth-grade class but finds that there is not enough time to carry out her ideas. There is too much to be covered in the set curriculum at her school. How can she find the time to be creative and still cover this curriculum?

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Ralph Spittler is discouraged by his cooperating teacher from using group activities or assigning homework in his high school history class because the students are low achievers.

Case 14: Creative Writing That Doesn't Conform 39

Miss Abbott's philosophy about how to teach writing differs from that of her sixth-grade cooperating teacher. This leads to conflicts during lessons and means that mixed messages are sent to the students.

Case 15: Homework Hassles 41

Mr. Bachman is surprised during fourth-grade parent-teacher conferences that so many parents describe homework as a problem and a nightly battle. He wonders whether homework is worth the negative energy and how homework can be more positive and productive.

Case 16: The Games Are Over 43

Ms. DeMarco feels that she has begun to find an effective way to teach her first graders math problems by focusing on her students' interests. She also experiments with ways to help the students in her class who are struggling to learn. She is disheartened when her cooperating teacher tries to dissuade her from these methods and tells her to just stick to the book.

Case 17: On the Wrong Track? 45

Marcy Benjamin notices that Daniel, a bright student who acts out in class, may be bored. Because of his disruptive behavior and failure to do his work, the cooperating teacher wants to move him to the lowest track, something Marcy does not agree with. To complicate matters, the student teacher suspects that Daniel flirts with her.

Case 18: Teaching or Test Preparation? 47

Melanie Brooks is struggling with the contrast between the exciting, creative teaching methods taught in her college courses and the skill-and-drill curriculum used in her urban seventh-grade class to prepare the students for upcoming state standardized tests.

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Case 19: Worried about Tommy 52

Diana Bartlett first notices a suspicious bruise on Tommy's face, then discovers other disturbing evidence of child abuse. She has been planning to have the second-grade class role-play resolutions to family conflicts as part of their social studies unit. She questions whether to let Tommy participate or to cancel the activity.

Case 20: My Students, My Children 55

Francesca Molino is having a difficult time student teaching in a third grade in an inner-city school in which most of the children are very poor. She is upset about the living conditions that the children are faced with. She begins to buy them needed food and supplies and questions where she should draw the line between being a mother and being a teacher.

Case 21: The Fight 57

Leslie Jenkins begins her student teaching in an urban high school that has the reputation of being the toughest in the district. During her fifth week of teaching, her cooperating teacher steps out of the room. A few minutes later a fight erupts between two boys in her class.

Case 22: Am I Going to Die? 59

Margaret Dawson ponders how to deal with her fifth-grade students, who are teasing a child with cancer who has lost her hair.

Case 23: Rebecca's Ways 62

Dolores Gonzales feels that Rebecca, a three-year-old child in her preschool class, has medical problems that need to be addressed. She wonders what the best ways are to approach the child's mother for more information and what can be done to help Rebecca in the classroom.

Case 24: Struggling with Learning Disabilities 64

Jim Parker, assured by his cooperating teacher that his own learning disabilities would create no problem, is overwhelmed by his need to help two learning disabled students in the eighth-grade class where he is student teaching.

Case 25: What Can I Do about James? 66

Melinda Mora wants to make the most of her student teaching assignment in a seventh-grade classroom but believes that one student who is new to the district, James, is making it difficult for her to develop her skills as a teacher. While her cooperating teacher agrees that James needs to be evaluated, Melinda still must cope with his disruptive activities until the best placement for him can be determined.

Case 26: Stop Passing the Buck 69

Charlene Russell is frustrated by the lack of help that is being offered to Brenda, a girl in her first-grade classroom who has already been retained twice. She feels like everyone in school is passing the buck.

Case 27: I Want It Now! 71

Nancy Shah is horrified when an angry seventh grader uses self-mutilation to get what he wants: to be able to go to the nurse's office for a medical form during class.

For Further Reading 74

Part V: Identity Issues 77

Case 28: What Did I Do to You? 78

Justine Cheng reprimands a third-grade child who then claims racial discrimination. She learns about Jerome's problematic past in the school and his tough home life. It seems, though, that none of her management strategies have worked, and she is left wondering what she can possibly do to reach Jerome.

Case 29: White Faces Don't Want to Be My Friend 80

Laryn Coulter, a student teacher in elementary health education, has difficulty managing one of her first-grade classes, primarily because Jasmine constantly puts her to the test. After trying out many classroom management strategies, she finally develops an effective approach and gets Jasmine to open up in discussions—only to have her bring up racial issues that make Laryn unsure of what to do.

Case 30: Two Dads 83

Kathleen McCall wonders how to restore the self-esteem of a third grader who is being teased because he has told the class that he has two dads. How can she enable the other students to be more understanding?

Case 31: Who Will My Girls Be? 85

Elizabeth Anton questions what happens to girls' identities when they are mixed into a predominantly male kindergarten class. She struggles as a student teacher to reflect on the ways in which girls and boys are being stereotyped and short-changed.

Case 32: Profanity in the Classroom 87

Curtis Parker, an African-American student teacher, wants to serve as a role model to his inner-city high school students but is frustrated by their use of profane language, which he believes will hold them back from future advancement.

Case 33: Them and Us 89

Ann Ricardo is dismayed to learn that there is a racial issue behind the isolation of a group of newcomers from other students in her suburban high school class.

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Louise Patel, a student teacher committed to gender equity, becomes disturbed that only females have been chosen to participate in a fifth-grade cooking class.

Case 35: Flashback Pain 95

Pamela Butler's cooperating teacher suggests that she explain to her sixth-grade class that she has a cleft palate. This brings back the pain Pamela felt years before at being denied the opportunity to teach.

Case 36: Rethinking Race: I'm Not Biased! 97

Malcolm Lewis is frustrated because his cooperating teacher asks him only to teach special lessons relating to ethnicity in his tenth-grade history class and he wants to teach all topics. He feels that she is biased against him and has low expectations for the African-American students in the class.

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Alicia Cuervas questions her school's policy of ability grouping fourth graders. She sees big differences in the expectations for each group and wonders how she can challenge the lower ability group in her position as student teacher.

Case 38: Stereotyping in the Teachers' Room 106

Sonya Burke hears other teachers in the faculty lounge using stereotypes to label students, and she is afraid that their remarks will prejudice her relations with her fifth-grade students.

Case 39: Should We Celebrate Holidays? 109

Megan Loughlin is looking forward to the fall holidays, preparing many theme-related activities and celebrations for her seventh-grade English class, when she discovers that some of the children in her class do not celebrate Halloween. Just when she thinks she has come up with a solution to this dilemma, she realizes it is more complicated than she thought.

Case 40: Too Much Love? 112

Charles is an eight-year-old who has captured the heart of his student teacher, Debra Nichols. She wonders whether she loves him and the other students too much.

Case 41: Don't Give Up on Elvin 114

Cassie Corbin, a student teacher in an inner-city prekindergarten class, feels that her cooperating teacher has given up on Elvin, who has many problems in school. She gets no support from his father either, but she desperately wants to save Elvin from becoming just one more inner-city child who doesn't make it.