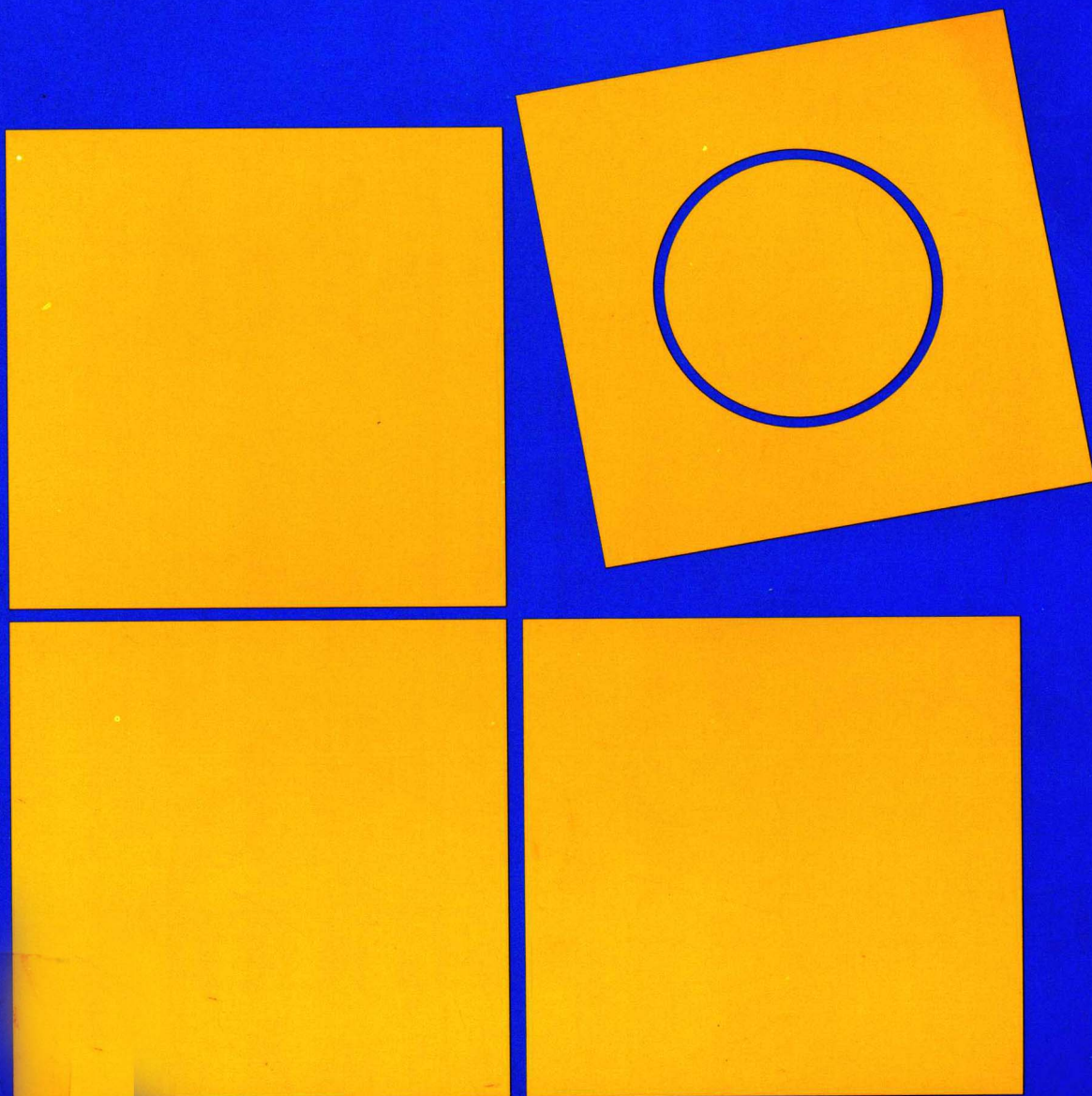


CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT CASES FOR TEACHER PROBLEM SOLVING

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To the Student

For most of you this collection will be a new experience in education. It is a series of case studies centered on the experiences of elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States. Based on the concept of case study developed in schools of business, these cases present stories told by practicing teachers about their experiences. The stories introduce problems teachers have encountered and require that students preparing to be teachers use their analytic and critical thinking skills, their knowledge of educational theory and research, and their common sense and collective wisdom to identify and analyze problems and to evaluate possible solutions.

At first, case method may seem a strange way of learning. For one thing, cases present stories about real teachers in real schools and ask that *you* go to the theory and try to apply it to understand the stories and the problems they present. Part of the reason for using cases is to help you understand educational theory more completely by thinking about how it applies in actual situations. Case method requires that you interact with the theory; it requires that you decide how to use theory to analyze classroom situations in order to solve problems.

Deciding for yourself—that is really the heart of case-method pedagogy. It is based on the understanding that the most important learning, the most meaningful learning, the most long-lasting learning comes from the work the learner does on his or her own—active learning.

Problem-solving cases require that the learner be active in both the preparation for class and the participation in class. Your preparation for a case class will not be limited by the normal “I’ve got fifty pages to read tonight.” Instead, it will be determined by how much work *you* want to put into the analysis, by the limitations you put on yourself. Usually the cases can be read in a relatively short time, since few are more than ten pages long. But for cases to have any lasting educational value, you must expend much more effort than simply reading them. Because these cases are problem-centered, there will be a more or less obvious “presenting problem.” But there will be, as well, some more subtle problems, problems the teacher telling the case story may not have recognized. It will be up to you, in your preparation for class, to identify the problems, apply relevant theory, and develop solutions. There will never be one right solution; often there will be many possible solutions. For sure, there will be better or worse solutions, but better or worse will depend on the analysis you used to understand the problem. That analytic process is the heart of case method. This experience can be both frustrating and exhilarating, as it was for the student who describes her introduction to case method in the following excerpt:

I entered the battle of the case method unarmed. The routines and tools that had allowed me to survive years of schooling no longer helped me; my old study habits were

useless—counterproductive, in fact. For example, I had always been a diligent student, priding myself on completing the assignments I was given. If I was expected to read pages 220–256 of a book, I read them. As a student in a case class, though, my assignments were open-ended: prepare the case and develop recommendations. I was supposed to decide how to approach the material, but it was hard to know how much to do, hard to know where to stop. Was I supposed to consider two alternatives or six? Was I supposed to consult outside sources (textbooks, classnotes, the library)? I had always been an outliner, finding that outlining helped me see the structure of the material. But cases by their very nature could not be outlined. They were not books, logically organized by the author to facilitate my understanding. Just because a particular aspect of the case situation occupied the first three pages of the case booklet did not mean it was more important than an aspect mentioned in one small paragraph on page 17. Just because certain data was not provided did not mean it was not necessary.

Like a “real” [teacher] in a “real” [teaching] situation, it was now my job to impose a meaningful framework on the unruliness of case facts. I had to search for the key nuggets of data, distinguishing central facts from peripheral ones. I had to sort out the conflicting explanations and alternatives presented to me, and arrive at a reasonable recommendation for action.

I understand the importance of these skills in the real world. But that understanding didn’t make the skills any easier to develop. . . . Every time I needed to make an assumption, . . . I hesitated and thought, How would I defend my assumption? How could I know what was reasonable? I rarely could walk into class secure in the knowledge that I had “cracked” the case. The uncertainty was frightening. [Robin Hacke, *The Case Method: A Student Perspective*, unpublished working paper, Harvard Business School, 1986, quoted in C. Roland Christensen, “Teaching with Cases at the Harvard Business School,” in C. Roland Christensen and Abby Hansen, *Teaching and the Case Method*, Harvard Business School (Boston, 1987), pp. 29–30.]

Cases require active learning in the classroom, as well. Do not expect your instructor to prepare a neat lecture that summarizes the main points of the case, points out the relevant theory, provides a list of sources, and details the correct solution. Instead, the class will be a discussion. You will be asked questions designed to get you and your classmates to compare and build your individual analyses into a collective one. You will be challenged to defend your analysis and your solutions, to listen to and challenge others, and to take away from this collective process a deeper understanding of the case situation than you, your classmates, or your instructor could ever have done alone.

All of this is designed not only to make you an active participant in your own education but to prepare you for the *real* world of the elementary and secondary school teacher. That real world is one of constant action, of making decisions day in and day out. Seldom is there time to consult theory; seldom is one situation exactly like another. Real teachers, therefore, need to be prepared to analyze situations for themselves and to build and evaluate action plans on their own. They need to know how to go to colleagues and friends for help—again, not in seeking the single right answer but in seeking help in problem analysis. They need to learn to take responsibility for the problems encountered in teaching and, by taking responsibility, to develop

a proactive attitude toward those problems. In short, they need to develop critical thinking skills for their profession. We believe that case method education provides a basis for developing these skills and for continuing to use them during one's professional teaching career.

► HOW DO I PREPARE A CASE?

For the teacher education student encountering cases for the first time, the following are some concrete, step-by-step suggestions for case preparation:

1. *Understand the assignment in context.* Your instructor will probably assign one case at a time and include in the assignment some study questions or issues to think about while you are preparing it. As well, each case will most likely be accompanied or preceded by traditional textbook assignments. These may alert you to theoretical concepts related to the case. So before you begin to read the case, be sure that you understand the overall framework within which the case is being used and the points your instructor may want to emphasize.
2. *Read the case for an overview.* Try reading the case first rather quickly, to get a general idea of what it is about: what happened, who the main characters are, what the problems are, and how the issues in the case relate to the overall assignment.
3. *Analyze the case.* Go back and read the case again, this time much more carefully. Begin to try to make sense of the study questions assigned by your instructor. Make notes of main characters and their relationships with each other. Try to understand the problems, both obvious and hidden. Try to understand the point of view of the case; that is, determine who is providing the information. Identify what impact this perspective may have on the information in the case. Make a list of questions you have about the material, and identify any other information you would like to have. At the end of this stage you should have a list of problems and an understanding of the causes of these problems.
4. *Seek outside information.* At this point you might want to turn to outside sources for help in understanding the problems you have identified and to develop solutions. Go to the textbook, especially the chapter assigned to accompany the case. Anything that helps you understand the case better at this point is fair game to use.
5. *Develop solutions.* Ultimately, cases call for solutions to problems, not to determine the one right answer but to focus analysis and to prepare you for a real world of teacher action and decision making. Relate your solutions to your analysis of the problems. Since there are no perfect decisions, be sure you understand both the weaknesses and the strengths of your solutions. Every good solution has a downside; it may not negate the solution, but you should at least always understand the negatives as well as the positives of what you are proposing. Prepare to argue for your ideas in class. Come

armed with the relevant theory that supports your position. Be ready to take risks. The case class is a teaching laboratory. The case is the lab experiment, and you are the social scientist seeking to test your ideas.

► HOW DO I PARTICIPATE IN CLASS
DISCUSSION?

Thoughtful participation in case discussion has two components: you should state your own informed ideas and analysis, and you should listen actively to the contributions of your classmates. The case class is a learning community; collectively you and your classmates are proceeding toward a more complete understanding of the case situation and possible solutions. No one person can do it all. Your instructor will guide the class toward this collective understanding, but your active participation and active listening are necessary to further this process. You must listen actively in order to understand where the discussion is going and where the group is in the process of the case analysis so that your contributions are relevant to the discussion of the moment.

After the discussion is over, go back over your analysis of the case and think about how the discussion changed or added to it. Try to summarize in a few thoughts the main points of the whole case exercise, from original assignment to summary statement at the end of class. Be sure you understand how and where the case related to theory. Think about the questions you still have relating to the case or the general assignment and about the ways you might begin to answer them.

Case method is an exciting new venture in teacher education. Our experiences using case method teaching have demonstrated that new teachers go into their own classrooms more ready to deal with the myriad of problems they must face if as students they have prepared seriously for case discussions by taking the time to analyze the cases and to develop solutions based on the educational theory and have taken part in case discussions with both thoughtful contributions and active listening.

► THE SETTING FOR THE CASES

The cases that follow are the true stories of practicing teachers. Each tries to capture an event or experience that was particularly significant or memorable in the teacher's life. As you read the cases and then analyze them, you will need some information about the settings in which they occur. Knowing the socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial makeup of the communities and having information about class size and availability of ancillary services will help you make decisions about the cases. On the other hand, since the cases are true stories, for privacy reasons we have disguised the names of all individuals, both teachers and students, and of all actual places.

Most of the cases in this collection are set in a school district we have named "Littleton," a suburb of a large northeastern city with a population of 75,000. It is large enough to be classified by the state as a small city district, and made up of neighborhoods with a wide range of incomes. While many homes in the area are valued at more than \$350,000, the city is also plagued with the problems faced by most urban centers: poverty, decaying public housing, crime, and a recent increase in the homeless population.

Once primarily a bedroom community of its core-city metropolitan area, Littleton has in the last twenty years become a business and local government center. Many residents still commute to the city, but others work in local corporate and government offices. Several companies have moved into the Littleton area, taking advantage of the more affordable space and small-town amenities. In addition, over the past ten years Littleton has become a major shopping hub, and this has created new jobs in the retail and service industries.

There is wide ethnic representation in the district, and that diversity is reflected in the school population: approximately 50 percent of the students are white, 30 percent are black, nearly 20 percent are Hispanic, and about 2 percent are Asian.

The district serves approximately 8000 children in six K-6 elementary schools, one middle school (serving grades 7 and 8), and one high school. The average class size is twenty-two students. There are 500 teachers, 60 school administrators, and more than 300 ancillary (nonteaching) staff. Teachers average fifteen years of experience. Salaries in Littleton are well above the national average, starting at more than \$31,000 and reaching \$80,000.

The Littleton school budget is more than \$75 million. The district spends well above the state average per student per year. As a result of its operating budget, the district is able to offer some unique features. Class sizes are smaller than average. Teacher aides are available in the buildings to work with teachers and small groups of children. There are a variety of services for English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students and for high school students who function best in a smaller, less structured environment. Students classified as eligible for special education services either are served in self-contained special education classes or receive support in a resource room for no more than two periods a day. Prereferral services are available for students whom teachers identify as having problems in the classroom. These students are seen by a Child Study Team (CST) made up of a school psychologist, a learning consultant, and a social worker. Three CSTs serve the six elementary schools (each team is responsible for two schools), and there is a team at the middle school and one at the high school. Students determined by the CST to need further intervention are seen by the Committee on Special Education (CSE) which determines if the students are eligible for special education services.

Gifted students are served in a pullout program of enrichment activities

for two half-days a week. Teachers of the gifted students also work with teachers in regular classrooms, offering enrichment options for all students.

The high school tracks the students into four levels: honors, above average, average, and remedial. Students typically enter one of the tracks in ninth grade and usually remain at the same level throughout their four years of high school.

There is a great deal of cooperation between the school system and the education-oriented local government. Joint programs such as after-school play groups and summer day camps have been successfully established and now operate in the community.

The district also maintains close ties with the local universities. Teachers in all the schools accept student teachers each semester; some of the Littleton teachers and administrators teach as adjunct professors at the local colleges; and professors are involved in the gifted program and action research efforts, and they bring classes to the schools for field experiences.

Two other cases are set in neighboring districts which contrast sharply with Littleton. Raddison is a homogeneous, upper socioeconomic community with a district budget that reflects a per-pupil expenditure of \$17,000 (second highest in the state) and the two elementary schools and the junior-senior high school have the equipment, physical plants, and staffing to prove it. Parental support in Raddison is very strong; for instance, more than 80 percent of the parents attend Open School Night each year. The high school groups its students beginning in seventh grade, and movement between the skills, average, and AP honors tracks is minimal. Parental pressure is the most likely reason for a student to be moved across tracks. More than 95 percent of the high school graduates attend post-secondary programs, most at four-year institutions.

Alton represents the other extreme—a school district where more than 70 percent of the students are eligible for the free or reduced lunch program. The racial and ethnic make-up of the community, which is approximately 50 percent white and 50 percent black and Hispanic, is not reflected in the schools; fewer than 25 percent of the students are white. When a school desegregation order required the district to bus children across town to achieve racial balance, many white parents chose instead to put their children in private, often parochial, schools. The town of Alton does not have a strong tax base, passing a school budget every year is difficult, and the schools are underfunded. The per-pupil expenditure is less than \$10,000, and teacher salaries in the district are close to the bottom of the pay scale for the area, with starting salaries just above \$23,000 and maximum salaries at \$60,000.

The cases that do not take place in Littleton, Raddison or Alton are clearly identified, and background information for each setting is provided within the case itself.

CASE STUDY

Therese Carmen

A first-grade teacher in her second year of teaching is presented with a new districtwide science curriculum that she finds unteachable.

Therese Carmen looked out over her class of seventeen first-graders and smiled as she watched them prepare for the science lesson.

"Maybe I love first-graders so much," she thought, "because they are so defenseless, so needy." Therese walked up one aisle and down the next, helping one child make a place for his math book in his desk and another fit her crayons back into their box. The children, while fidgety and noisy, were responsive to Therese's attention, and their immature behavior and dependence did not bother her.

Once all the desks were clear, Therese began her introduction to the lesson. She perched at the edge of her desk and held up several circles of different colors and sizes. "What are these?" she asked.

Some children responded. "Balls, dots. . . ."

"Yes, these look like balls and dots. What *shape* are they?" Therese emphasized the word *shape* and pointed to a bulletin board that showed circles, squares, and triangles.

"Circles." Most of the children called out the answer.

"Good. These are circles. Are all the circles the same?"

The children were quiet. Some were no longer watching Therese. William called out, "Some are different."

"How are they different, William?"

"Some are red."

"Yes, some are red. Let's put the red ones here." Therese put the red circles on the flannel board and looked out at her students. Three or four had opened their desks and were looking inside. Other students were bouncing in their seats or talking to the children next to them. Fewer than half of the students were watching Therese.

"It's this damn science curriculum," Therese thought as she observed her students. The curriculum seemed poorly matched to the needs of her students and to their maturity levels. It was written by a new science coordinator, Carol Miller, who had been appointed two years earlier. The elementary level of the new science curriculum evolved from her work with a committee of elementary school teachers. It took them a year and two summers to produce the curriculum that Therese was now trying, unsuccessfully, to use. She wondered which of the teachers on the committee had decided that first-graders would be ready, in October, to begin a two-week unit on classification. Regardless, she plunged ahead.

"OK, everybody. Eyes front. Look at Miss Carmen. Rosa, Anthony, Jacob." As she called the names of several students, all the children turned toward her.

"William told us that some circles are different because they are red. Kelly, how are some other circles different?"

Kelly shook her head but didn't answer.

"Tiffany, do you know?"

"Some are round."

"Yes, all circles are round. How are they *different*?"

When none of the students responded, Therese answered her own question. "Some of the circles are yellow," she said as she placed the yellow circles underneath the red ones on the flannel board.

"What color do I have left?"

"Blue," several students responded.

"Good," Therese said enthusiastically as she put the blue circles on the flannel board. "We have circles that are different *colors*. What colors are they, class?"

A few children answered, but most were no longer looking at the teacher or the flannel board. Again, Therese thought about what a poor idea it was to teach classification in this way to first-grade children. It occurred to her that tomorrow might be better because the lesson involved animals, and she knew that the children would be more interested in animals than in circles.

But she had to get through today's lesson before she could introduce tomorrow's, so she again sought the children's attention to continue the discussion.

* * *

Two weeks after the classification unit, Therese went to see Marie Sharp, the third-grade teacher whose classroom was next to Therese's. Marie had been teaching for more than twenty years, and she was a wonderful resource for her new colleague. In the year and two months that she had been teaching, Therese had come to see Marie as her mentor: Marie was able to help when Therese wasn't sure what to do with a problem in her classroom, and Marie's years in the district had "sharpened her eye," so she was also Therese's source of advice about political issues. Since Therese considered her problems with the science curriculum as both academic and political, she was again turning to Marie for counsel.

Marie smiled as Therese walked into her classroom. "Hi, how was your weekend?"

Therese returned the greeting and went on: "Actually, my weekend was lousy, since you asked. I spent hours working on my lesson plans for the next science unit. I thought I'd get some help at the grade-level meeting on Friday, but I seem to be the only first-grade teacher having a problem with the curriculum. You should have heard the other teachers when Carol

LITTLETON SCHOOL DISTRICT
K-2 Science Program

TEACHERS' GUIDE
Lesson Plan Ideas

Level: K-2 Science Curriculum

Topic: Science Skill—Classification

Week: 6

Lesson 1

Objective: To enable students to see that objects can be grouped and regrouped according to certain characteristics.

Method: In this lesson the teacher will model the skill of classification. Using one or more shapes familiar to the students, demonstrate how to sort the shape(s) by different characteristics. These characteristics may be color, size, texture, etc.

Once the initial classification is understood, demonstrate that the shapes can be reclassified by another characteristic.

Lesson 2

Objective: To provide guided practice in grouping and regrouping objects according to certain characteristics.

Method: Using animal crackers (or something similar), have the students sort the animals by different characteristics, such as the number of legs, the length of tail, the humps on body, etc.

Once the initial classification is understood, help the students to see that they can reclassify the shapes by a different characteristic.

Lesson 3

Objective: To give students independent practice in grouping and regrouping a variety of objects according to certain characteristics.

Method: Using materials available in the classroom (erasers, pencils, chalk, books, etc.), have the students sort the objects by different characteristics. These characteristics may be shape, size, color, usage, etc.

Then have the students reclassify by another characteristic. Be sure that the students understand the characteristic that is common to each sorting.

asked how teaching the new curriculum was going. I couldn't believe it. I can't be the only teacher having trouble with the lessons, but no one said anything except how well the classes were going. I was the only one to bring up problems."

"What did you say?"

"I explained that I felt some of the lessons were impractical for young students. Remember the lesson on classification I told you about? The

manual called for the students to use animal crackers as part of the lesson. The kids ate the cookies as soon as I handed them out. I told that story."

"And what was the response?"

"That's just it. No one agreed with me. I said that I thought some of the units were unrealistic. I also talked about how elaborate some of the lessons were and how much time I'm spending making the 'props' I need for the lessons. First-grade classrooms aren't equipped for science. And not one other teacher said anything. I really felt like a fool."

Marie looked sympathetic, so Therese went on. "What's going on, Marie? Why the silence?"

"Don't forget, Therese, Carol's got a lot invested in the new science curriculum. She's still pretty new as science coordinator, and the science curriculum is her first big project. The teachers are probably changing the lessons. I'd guess that they've figured out how to work around the curriculum, and they're just not talking about it."

Marie's last comment actually gave Therese some relief. "Then I really don't have to use this curriculum," she thought to herself. "I can pretty much do what I want."

Therese hadn't told Marie that she was going to be observed the following week and that the principal had specifically told Therese that she wanted to see a science lesson. But now that she and Marie had talked, she knew what to do for the principal's visit. She was feeling better already.

CASE STUDY

Marie Dupont

A college student observes a high school French class and learns how a good teacher handles all the events of a typical class.

Debby Barton ran down the central hallway at Littleton High School, wanting to absorb the scenes of adolescence around her but rushing because she was late for her field placement observation. Debby was a sophomore at Metropolitan University, majoring in English with an education minor. Her assignment this semester was to observe and assist for twenty hours at the high school as part of an educational psychology course. She was savoring, even as she ran, the “feel” of a high school again; the two years since she had been a senior seemed an eternity.

Debby was irritated with herself for being late; she found room 233 less than thirty seconds after the bell rang and opened the knob without stopping to catch her breath. Marie Dupont already had her class of twenty-two freshmen settled and was saying something to the students in French. She turned toward the opening door, smiled, and said, “Bonjour.”

Debby wished immediately that she had thought about this assignment enough beforehand to conjure up some of her own high school French so that she could have replied. In fact, she had forgotten that this was a French class, if she had ever been told. Her adviser at the university had simply given her Ms. Dupont’s phone number and told her that she would see a pro in action. He told her that Marie Dupont graduated from Metropolitan’s education program two years before, having pursued another career for several years before entering teaching, and that the faculty thought very highly of her when she was at the university.

“Good morning,” Debby murmured, and then she felt sillier than she had from being late; this was the eighth period, and it was one o’clock in the afternoon.

“This is . . . I’m sorry, I’ve forgotten your last name,” Marie said. “Perhaps you could introduce yourself to the class.”

“Sure.” Debby gathered her thoughts and smiled at the terribly young-looking faces staring at her expectantly and a bit irreverently. “My name is Debby Barton. I am a student at Metropolitan University, and I am studying to be a teacher. Ms. Dupont has been kind enough to let me watch your class today. . . .”

“Because you guys are such a great class!” interrupted Marie. The students burst into raucous applause, during which Marie smiled at Debby and indicated an empty desk at the back of the room.

The chairs were arranged uniquely. While the room itself was standard

high school issue—beige cement-block walls; metal-framed crank windows at the rear; green chalkboard at the front, with the teacher's desk in front of the board; bulletin board on the right—the usual arrangement of tablet desks in rows was replaced with what looked like an upside-down *v*. The point of the *v* started at the teacher's desk, and the legs of the *v* angled backward toward the two rear corners of the room. The desks on either side of the *v* were angled inward slightly, so that the students faced each other across the *v*, although their general orientation was to the front.

Debby's first reaction was that the room looked messy, and in fact the desks were askew by this time of the day. But she also felt a pleasant air of informality in the classroom, and she noticed that the students were addressing each other as well as Marie when they spoke.

Debby made her way down the outside of the *v* to an empty desk in the back. As she took a seat, Marie resumed her conversation with the class. Debby caught "Giants" and "Browns" between Marie's fast and fluent French and intuited that this was a conversation about the pro-football playoff games televised over the weekend. The class was trying valiantly, with mixed success, to understand and answer Marie's questions.

"Maintenant. Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait ce weekend? Ellen?" Marie changed the subject with this question, and Debby tried to translate along with Ellen. During the pause as Ellen thought, Debby heard "weekend" and "I went skiing" from the opposite side of the *v*. Two girls on that side of the room began a quiet conversation in earnest, and a general hum, which Debby now realized had been present all along, escalated until it was distracting.

"Sshh . . ." Marie put her hands out at her sides in a gesture for quiet and sidestepped two paces toward the noisiest perpetrators. After a moment it seemed apparent that Ellen wasn't going to answer, and Marie turned to one of the girls who had been talking. "Denise, qu'est-ce que vous avez fait ce weekend?"

Denise immediately assumed that self-conscious look of a novice speaker of a foreign language. "Je . . . I went skiing."

"En français: J'ai fait du ski. Où est-ce que tu es allée?" Marie caught the look of confusion on Denise's face and relented: "Where did you go?"

"Stratton." Denise was obviously relieved that she needn't translate a proper name. Marie was not ready to move on, however. "Est-ce qu'il y avait beaucoup de neige?" Marie was smiling and nodding with an expectant look of encouragement, but Denise returned the gaze with an expression of befuddlement. She was rescued, however, by an audible "snow" from one of the seats behind her. "Ahh, oui." Again, Denise was relieved, this time at getting away with a one-word answer.

"Oui, il y avait beaucoup de neige." Marie phrased the answer in a complete sentence as she returned to Ellen. "Maintenant, Ellen, qu'est-ce que vous avez fait ce weekend?" This time, of course, Ellen was ready and seemed pleased to be able to respond fairly fluently.