

ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE
BOOK AND CASE STUDIES

BEFORE READING—REFLECTING ON JENNIFER'S STORY

Jennifer was small, delicate looking, and quiet. She had long brown hair and big brown eyes, and she giggled and was overcome with shyness when I spoke to her. She was somewhat immature compared to the other children, but she seemed to like school and adjusted well to the first-grade classroom. I clearly remember Jennifer from my first year as a teacher. Jennifer was learning to read and write in her first big educational adventure and didn't warrant my special notice until the school year was well underway. At that point, Jennifer's mother made an appointment with me to relate some happy news. It seemed that Jennifer had lost her father when she was a baby, and now her mother was preparing to remarry. The date was set, the wedding was planned, and Jennifer was to be a flower girl. Jennifer giggled and twisted excitedly on her mother's arm as the details of the wedding were described. Jennifer was also excited about her new daddy, who had already made plans to adopt her. All of this seemed the happiest of family circumstances, so I was surprised when Jennifer's work began to suffer. Jennifer stopped doing her assignments, and the work she did attempt was sloppy and incomplete. Curious, I began to watch her at her desk. Jennifer acted if she were in a daze—rather than working on her math, reading, or writing a story, she daydreamed, doodled, and wiggled restlessly in her seat. More surprising than that, quiet Jennifer began to relate the most startling stories about her home life. When I asked Jennifer why she hadn't returned her reading assignment, she told me that her little brother was

sick and might die so she couldn't do her work. Becoming suspicious, I decided to check out the story. At the end of the school day, I walked Jennifer to the corner where her new daddy picked her up. I asked Jennifer's dad about the sick little brother, and he turned in surprised to Jennifer—of course, Jennifer didn't have a brother, much less a sick one! Jennifer giggled and ducked her head. At some level, she seemed to know that she had played a great joke on me.

TEACHER STORIES

This incident had a happy ending, as soon Jennifer was back to her old self, participating in class and completing her work. I remember the incident because it taught me something very important about the fragility of learning. This was one of my first experiences in dealing with a student problem and being uncertain about how to handle it. Looking back, I now realize I was engaged in reflection in order to solve a classroom problem. At the time, I didn't know the word *reflection* or how reflection could be used to solve classroom problems. Years later, I understand the need for reflection—the process of “thinking like a teacher”—that as a new teacher I was struggling to teach myself. Intuitively, I knew that I shouldn't put additional pressure on Jennifer or punish her for her lack of effort. Somehow, I knew she was busy dealing with a difficult home situation, and I wanted to allow her time for that. All the while, as a first-year teacher, I was anxious about not assisting a child who had stopped learning, particularly when I didn't have any idea how long Jennifer's hiatus from learning would last. Happily, it was only for a few months, so I felt I made the right decision to give Jennifer space and to contact her parents about the unexpected change in her behavior.

I'm grateful to Jennifer because she taught me an important lesson about learning and how even in the happiest of circumstances a stressful event in a child's life can interrupt the learning process. It also caused me to wonder how children with horrendous home lives (several in that same classroom) ever learned anything at all. Jennifer, and all my students during those first few difficult years, taught me many important lessons about children, learning, and how to be sensitive to students with special needs. While these early experiences in the classroom taught me how to be an effective, practicing teacher they also provided me insight into how teachers reflect and how they solve classroom problems.

All teachers have stories like mine about Jennifer, and they enjoy telling these stories and relating their special meaning. From the earliest times, life stories have been important in understanding ourselves and relating the importance of what we do (MacIntyre, 1984). Some teacher educators believe that everyday classroom stories are important tools that teachers can use to learn about their teaching and the students they teach (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991; Preskill & Jacobvitz, 2001). One way of using the impulse of storytelling is to formalize this natural process by analyzing and writing student case studies. Vivian Paley, a kindergarten teacher, wrote a series of books, including *White Teacher* (1979) and *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter* (1990), that relates her story as a teacher and how she learned about being a teacher from her students.

This book uses teacher stories and the case study process as a tool to help beginning teachers explore the classroom, students, and learning in ways that are more natural and engaging than traditional educational textbooks. It uses classroom stories as the focus to explore common classroom issues such as discipline, student motivation, and the special needs of students. The next section describes this special type of teacher decision making and how individuals become thoughtful teachers.

REFLECTION AND HOW TO BECOME A THOUGHTFUL TEACHER

The purpose of this book is to provide beginning teachers practice in the skills needed to make good classroom decisions. Jackson (1986) tells us that classrooms are extremely complex and busy places. Teachers make dozens of daily classroom decisions. How does a teacher learn how to make these decisions? What can a teacher do to ensure that he or she is making decisions that will benefit students?

Case studies can be used as a tool to learn about the process of classroom problem solving. A case study typically describes a specific student or classroom problem—with the aim of solving the problem. This book provides both examples of case studies to analyze and a structure that the reader can use to develop his or her own classroom case studies. Practice in structured problem solving and reflection are important so that beginning teachers can develop into skilled professionals as recommended by national groups such as

Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). Teacher standards developed by INTASC detail the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs teachers need to be effective in the classroom. These standards are extensive and require much thought and practice to allow beginning teachers to integrate them into daily classroom behaviors (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1995). Practice with the case study method can help new teachers begin to synthesize this knowledge into professional teaching behaviors. In addition, the PRAXIS Test and the *Principles of Learning and Teaching* (PLT) use classroom case histories as one determinate of a beginning teacher's pedagogical knowledge (ETS, 2001). Currently, states including Kentucky, South Carolina, and Kansas require the PLT as part of their certification requirements. New teachers need practice using this type of assessment format before they take an important test that will determine their qualifications for becoming a teacher.

Stake (2000) defined the case study method as the selection of a specific, unique, bounded system to be investigated. The case can be studied for a variety of reasons; in this book, cases serve as vehicles to investigate educational problems and issues. Stake describes how the narrative of the case provides an opportunity for vicarious experience, where readers expand their memories of happenings leading to increased awareness and understanding leading to the construction of new knowledge.

The use of case studies in teacher education is based on the research of educators such as Lee Shulman (1986). He advocated the use of case studies in education in the same manner that case studies are used to teach the practice of law. Law educators use case studies not to teach specific instances of the law but to argue for a broad application of how a law works. The particular case stands as a general example of how the law works, and it illustrates and serves as a model for new applications of that law. Shulman (1986) suggested that case studies could be used in the same way for teachers. He described how case studies representing typical classroom situations may serve as teaching tools to illustrate how teachers apply educational theory to make classroom decisions. He suggested that as prospective teachers practice the use of case studies and application of theory, they should develop a template or framework for how to think through tough classroom problems.

This framework will not provide the correct solution to every problem for new teachers—that is impossible—but it can help new teachers utilize experience more effectively by providing a way to better organize experiences in

order to solve problems. Case studies provide new teachers with the processes of classroom problem solving that experienced teachers eventually learn through trial-and-error problem solving. Traditionally, new teachers have been left in isolation to figure out these problem-solving processes. The case study method gives new teachers the benefit of classroom experience but hopefully shortens trial-and-error learning. The case study is a way to provide a “leg up” in teacher development so prospective teachers become more effective more quickly in the classroom.

Most prospective teachers would readily agree that experience in an actual classroom is the best way to practice and demonstrate teaching skills. But while field experiences might be preferred by the prospective teacher, they also present a number of difficulties and limitations. For example, locations for sheltered field experiences may not be available to the extent that the prospective teacher might need. Also, it can be difficult to predict and control what happens in the field. For example, certain situations may never arise in the field to allow the new teacher to experience important instructional situations or specific student behavior. Or the instructional methods used in the field may not be the same as those advocated by the course instructor.

In addition, case studies offer a safety factor, where the decisions of an inexperienced prospective teacher will not harm an actual child. They offer opportunities for collaboration and deliberation with peers where prospective teachers are able to work together to share and solve a specific problem. Case studies allow the course instructor to tailor course experiences to specific classroom situations and course objectives. Overall, case studies allow deliberation, reflection, discussion, and collaboration that are not always possible in a real setting, where classroom decisions are often instantaneous and impossible to capture for examination. Case studies, although not as vivid and compelling as a real classroom, offer an alternative to field experiences that include a degree of control, shared experience, and emotional safety impossible to duplicate in a real classroom setting. They offer a vicarious experience as an instructional alternative that can augment, although not replace, experience in real classrooms.

WHAT TO EXPECT

This book provides prospective teachers a variety of issues to discuss and skills to practice in order to begin their journey to become reflective problem

solvers. Chapter 2 presents the reader with his or her first experience in using case studies to solve classroom and student problems. It provides a number of case studies to prompt the reader to explore the case study method. These first case studies are based on topics that research has shown are of universal concern for new and prospective teachers (Veenman, 1984). Chapters 3, 4, and 5 describe the professional foundations for skillful classroom problem solving. Chapter 3 addresses the topic of reflection, where reflection is described as a special way of thinking fundamental to the process of making good classroom decisions. Chapter 4 describes the process for developing an educational philosophy. This chapter explains that an educational philosophy provides the answers to *why* a teacher makes a particular instructional decision to select a textbook, to arrange the classroom in a certain fashion, or to administer a particular classroom management system. Educational philosophy includes the underlying values, beliefs, and dispositions that influence classroom decisions. Activities at the end of the chapter allow the reader to explore his or her own values, beliefs, and dispositions so that an educational philosophy can be developed as the basis for reflective classroom problem solving.

In Chapter 5, case studies of students with special needs are presented for analysis. According to Veenman (1984), providing instruction for students with differences—students with disabilities (physical, emotional, cognitive); difficulties in learning; or cultural, ethnic, and language differences—is a particular concern for new teachers. The cases present the common exceptionalities that a new teacher is likely to encounter—the conditions of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, underachievement, behavior disorder, and reluctant readers. The case studies of Chapter 6 portray the common but challenging educational issues of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These case studies describe ordinary problems concerning what to teach, how to teach, and how to determine if students have learned. Although these are ordinary problems that all teachers face, they may be exceedingly difficult for new teachers to handle. Particularly, issues of evaluation in an era of “high stakes assessment” can be challenging for new teachers. Oftentimes, outside forces—such as state and national mandates, pressures to cover content, and overly prescriptive curriculum—can make teachers feel that they are not allowed to teach in the manner that is best for their students. This can be a source of frustration and unhappiness for excellent teachers, but there are ways to ameliorate this by negotiating outside demands with teacher philosophy and reflective problem solving. In Chapter 7, the context of the classroom is explored as an important

consideration for making good classroom decisions. In the contextual view, the classroom is seen as a group of unique learners guided by a unique teacher who is ready to provide the best possible instruction to meet student needs. In Chapter 8, the reader will write his or her own case study using structured activities that allow case study development in a step-by-step manner. The reader is guided to explore a self-identified problem according to the problem-solving processes and knowledge gained from previous chapters.

Reflective questions and activities are provided in each chapter to help the reader personalize the information presented on each topic. They will also allow the reader to apply and integrate new knowledge in order to make it accessible for problem solving during case study development and analysis, and later in the classroom during field experiences and student teaching. The chapter exercises provide practice in the skills used to make reflective decisions and, hopefully, to help the prospective teacher avoid some of the pitfalls common to the novice stage of teacher development. Finally, Internet resources are listed at the end of each chapter to supplement the information explored in each chapter. Often a case study will only touch upon a complex topic that is of critical interest to teachers. Many topics deserve far more space than what is presented in this book. The Internet resources and printed references will provide sources where the reader can learn more about a topic of special import and interest.

END-OF-THE-CHAPTER REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY—WRITING A TEACHER STORY

The activity at the end of this chapter will start the reader on a journey of reflection in becoming a professional teacher and a reflective problem solver. Writing your own story of teaching will help you understand your beliefs and values about teaching and reveal your motivation for becoming a teacher. This is just the beginning for you, because, as teachers such as Vivian Paley (1990) and Parker Palmer (1998) describe, the journey to becoming a teacher can also be a journey to discover your truest self as a human being.

What is your teacher story? Do you have a story about an experience you can describe in which you were in a classroom situation or classroomlike situation? This might be a summer camp, Sunday school, an experience coaching sports, or even baby-sitting. Or, if you can't think of a teacher story, write

a student story. Everyone remembers a special story about a time when they were a student. Write about an incident or occasion—happy or sad—that made an impression on you. Write a one- or two-page version of this story to share with others in the class. This introductory writing activity will prepare you for the writing you will do later in the book. If you are stuck, use the following prompts to guide the development of your story.

1. Describe what happened during the incident.
2. Why do you think you remember the incident?
3. Describe how you felt about it at the time. Did you share the incident with anyone?
4. Discuss how it affected you later in life. What did it teach you about school, teaching, or learning?

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INTERNET RESOURCES

Council of Chief State Officers

www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_New_Teacher_Assessment_and_Support_Consortium/

Council of Chief State Officers developed the INTASC teacher standards. The home page describes what the Council is and what it does for national educational community. It is described as a nationwide nonprofit organization that sets policy and supports research for elementary and secondary education.

INTASC Teacher Standards

www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/corestrd.pdf

A Web site of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Teacher Standards. This set of teacher standards is used in many states to determine the quality of a teacher's classroom performance. The INTASC teacher standards were developed by the Council of Chief State Officers.

PRAXIS Tests (ETS)

www.ets.org/praxis/prxtest.html#prxiplt

This Web site provides a listing of the PRAXIS tests, including the PLT (Principles of Learning and Teaching) and the subject matter tests. Information is provided about the topics found on each test from the *Test at a Glance* manuals (which are free and downloadable in PDF format).

www.ets.org/praxis/prxstate.html

This page provides a list of PRAXIS test requirements according to state certification requirements. Most states now require some type of testing before teachers are certified for the classroom. Most states use the ETS exams to meet their testing requirements.

Teacher Stories

www.lessonplanspage.com/index.html

www.useyourheadteach.gov.uk/teachers_stories/index.html

www.teacheruniverse.com/community/teacherstories/moments.html

These Web sites provide stories about teachers that will inspire or inform you about the profession of teaching and what teaching means to individuals.

