Illuminating and facilitating professional knowledge through case work

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In the spring of 2002 the Ontario College of Teachers began a research project in order to foster awareness of the Standards of Practice for the 187,000 teachers in the province. Case work, in which 18 teachers representative of the College’s membership wrote narratives describing their professional dilemmas, was the methodology chosen. Through reflection and collaborative group work these practitioners co-created a set of cases, mapping them back to the standards in order to ascertain how the standards had been embedded or absent from their daily practice. To validate the effectiveness of this method, we used the cases in pre-service, in-service, principal and supervisory personnel venues. We also recorded the impact of the ‘case institute’ in a focus group session with the original writers. Augmented by commentaries from internationally known teacher educators, this text will be sent to all provincial school boards as part of a resource kit to educate teachers about the standards of practice.

Au printemps 2002, l’Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l’Ontario amorçait un projet de recherche ayant pour but de sensibiliser les 187 000 enseignants de la province aux normes d’exercice de leur profession. L’étude de cas rédigés par 18 enseignants membres de l’Ordre est la méthode qui allait servir à présenter divers dilemmes professionnels. Ainsi, ces praticiens ont réfléchi et travaillé ensemble pour présenter des cas et les rattacher aux normes afin de déterminer la présence ou l’absence des normes dans leurs pratiques quotidiennes. Pour valider l’efficacité de cette méthode, nous avons mis les cas à l’épreuve lors d’activités organisées pour les étudiants des facultés d’éducation, des enseignants en perfectionnement professionnel, des directeurs d’école et des agents de supervision. Nous avons également réuni les 18 rédacteurs pour discuter de l’impact des ateliers de rédaction de cas. Le texte, auquel s’ajoutent les commentaires d’éducateurs de renommée internationale, fera partie de la trousse de ressources qui sera envoyée à tous les conseils scolaires de la province pour initier les enseignants aux normes d’exercice de la profession.


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En la primavera del 2002, el Colegio de Profesores de Ontario inició un proyecto de investigación para crear conciencia entre los 187,000 maestros en la provincia sobre los estándares de práctica profesional. La metodología elegida fue el 'Estudio de antecedentes' en la que un grupo representativo de la membresía del Colegio, conformado por 18 maestros, redactó historias contando sus dilemas profesionales. Tras mucha reflexión y trabajo mancomunado de equipo, estos profesores crearon colectivamente un conjunto de casos, trazando un mapa vinculándolos a los estándares y así poder determinar de qué manera estos estándares habían estado arraigados en su práctica profesional cotidiana o si los habían dejado de lado. Para validar la eficacia de este método, aplicamos los casos en varios contextos docentes: estudiantes de la facultad de educación, capacitación profesional para docentes, directores de plantel y superintendentes de las juntas directivas escolares. También tomamos nota del impacto del 'Taller para la redacción de casos' en una sesión de enfoque grupal con los propios autores. Este texto, que ha sido complementado con comentarios de capacitadores de maestros conocidos internacionalmente, será enviado a todas las Juntas Directivas de las escuelas provinciales como parte del kit de recursos para educar a los profesores sobre los estándares de práctica profesional.

Introduction

In 1996 the Ontario College of Teachers was established as the self-regulatory body for the teaching profession in Ontario. As a relatively new institution, the College's mandates that apply to teacher education are clear and specific:

- accredit pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes and provide for the ongoing education of members;
- establish and enforce professional and ethical standards.

One of the first tasks of the new college was to establish Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 1999) and Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 2000). Although the Standards of Practice were created through consultations, focus groups, an examination of standards of comparable international associations and by listening to thousands of teachers, the majority of the College's members were not aware of the standards. Copies of the standards of practice were enclosed in the College's magazine, Professionally Speaking/Pour Parler Profession and sent out to members. The College anticipated that their members would read the magazine cover to cover and embrace the standards as inspirational words written by the collective. Indeed, the College felt certain that the standards would become a mainstay in the homes and classrooms of professional educators across the province. After all, the standards were hardly rocket science, but they did celebrate the work teachers engaged in on a daily basis.

More than 4 years later, educators across the province still possess limited
awareness of the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*, the *Ethical standards* and the *Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2000): the three seminal documents that were created by teachers for teachers. The Standards of Practice and Education Committee at the College determined that as many educators as possible should become conversant with the standards and recognize that these three documents together address the question: What does it mean to be a teacher in Ontario?

The job of the programme officers in the Standards of Practice and Education Unit was to develop a plan in order to ensure that teachers would become aware of the standards and, if they were aware, deepen their understanding. It would be important to make direct connections to personal teaching practice and to be able to demonstrate the relevance of these documents. Perhaps if teachers comprehended that the standards were a conceptual framework against which educators could direct their ongoing development as professionals, perhaps if the standards could function as a platform or a rallying point for stimulating discussion or if teachers recognized how very valuable the standards were professionally, then the standards would be read, used and acknowledged as essential to understanding the values, disposition, commitment and behaviours of those professionals described in the document. The Standards of Practice and Education Committee accepted the challenge and decided to focus their work on the education of the members of the College.

How teachers would begin to make meaning of these documents is the subject of this paper.

**Purpose**

Although consultations with teachers across the province in revising additional qualification courses for teacher education had indicated that knowledge of the standards was sparse, the College embarked on a research project, ‘Gauging Awareness’, to confirm what we all ready thought we knew. Establishing a meaningful place for the standards of practice in the practices of educators was the College’s goal. We, the College staff in the Standards of Practice and Education Unit, were aware that pre-service professors and instructors of additional qualification courses were teaching their candidates about the role of the standards in education, however, the College also knew that many teachers in the field, those not taking additional qualification courses or those who had graduated from faculties of education prior to the College coming into existence might possess limited or no awareness of the standards.

We anticipated the difficulty of introducing the standards to our teachers and asking them to change, revise or reflect again on their practice by embracing another new document. Among other classroom requirements, the Ministry of Education had recently released revised curriculum documents to be implemented in the classroom across the province. Before selecting strategies to implement the standards, the level of awareness and to what degree standards were being used by teachers had to be ascertained.
Broudy, Smith and Burnett (1964) argue that apart from replicating and applying knowledge principles in new situations, professional practice also requires active judgments that relies on interpretation and metaphorical association, on ways of seeing and imaginatively understanding what is required in practical changing situations. (Van Manen, 2003, p. 15)

The College was cognizant that a vehicle was required to provide in-service teacher education and facilitate professional development for teachers about standards province wide.

**Theoretical framework**

Narrative combines personal and professional knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Conle & Sakamoto, 2001). It makes meaning of lives lived (Heilbrun, 1988), particularly in teacher knowledge. Bruner's work on situated and paradigmatic knowledge points out these two ways knowledge is processed and retained. Bruner (1987) differentiates between paradigmatic and situated knowledge and how the latter is attached to specific concrete details that lodge in the mind and allow for the recollection of significant moments from a person's life. It is as if those reminiscences are hot wired: considering all of the days of a person's life, why is it that birthdays, celebrations, losses and funerals can be recalled in vivid detail? By extension, significant moments in teaching can be recalled. We were aware that specific knowledge is recollected in concrete details: student reactions, their faces, the times and places of an educational event. This knowledge is easily retrievable because it is associated with emotion.

Phenomenologists understand and analyze the essence of an experience by acknowledging that wisdom and knowledge are founded in the experiences of people. Having teachers make meaning of the standards necessitates a way to make the generalized words come alive and resonate back to the classroom. Teachers' stories as examples of lived experience validate the essence of the standards because those narratives make theory observable in the work of the practitioners they describe. A belief that teachers know what teachers need to know and can be their own experts (Carter & Doyle, 1987; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990) underpins the direction of the Standards of Practice and Education Unit's research. It is the lived experience and the wisdom gleaned in real situations that are studied for the clues that are elucidated. Yet any inquiry is theory laden. Therefore, setting out a backdrop of theory in the standards of practice in which to understand the concrete and specific examples that arise from living is required in bringing together theory and practice, even when theory is implicit in action.

Case work is a well-established and accepted methodology in schools of pharmacy, social work, architecture, economics and law. Cases introduce particular dilemmas that raise questions of judgement and ultimately draw on the guiding principles or standards of each discipline under scrutiny. To reflect, to enter into a dialogical discussion with self and others and to form a collaborative community (Kleinfeld, 1992; Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001) are essential components facilitated by case discussion. Shulman's work on cases provides an opportunity
for examining practice and comprehending the theory that underpins it. Either writing or discussing cases (Shulman et al., 2002) offers opportunities for reflection and meaning making. Although a case will always have at least two participants (the reader and the case author), the most effective means of reflection occurs when cases are discussed in a group setting (Loughran, 2002):

The question became how to make teachers aware of their practice knowledge, the conceptions, beliefs and personal theories embedded in their everyday teaching and how to develop in teachers both a feeling of responsibility for the goals and effects of their teaching and the skills required to work towards these goals. This also meant a shift away from general theory about good teaching towards more appreciation of the teacher. (Russell & Korthagen, 1995, p. 188)

Methodology

Gauging Awareness sessions

In the autumn of November 2001 the College offered invitations to 12 school boards to participate in sessions to investigate educators’ levels of awareness of the standards of practice. Directors were invited to submit the names of 10–12 teachers with a range of responsibilities and experiences, from first year teachers to those nearing retirement. The College staff would meet those educators for 2–3 hours and inquire about their knowledge regarding the standards.

When we planned our investigation into the standards we had no idea that the teachers themselves would, in fact, steer our implementation process. We randomly selected nine school boards in order to verify our perception that the standards played a minimal role in the lives of teachers in Ontario. We began our sessions by asking teachers to share a positive moment in their teaching careers. This strategy was followed by enquiring if, where and when they had become aware of the standards: ‘What comes to mind (what feelings are evoked) when you read the standards ...?’ In groups, the participants were invited to look at the five domains of the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession along with the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession and the Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession. The participants’ responses were not surprising as the following thoughts were provided.

- This document articulates what teachers already know.
- Good information for the public.
- Professional growth primarily happens in the classroom.
- When educators share a common goal, this helps define ‘common/shared’ profession.
- If every teacher is unique, how can it be monitored as a ‘standard’ if there is so much variety in practice.

(Greater Essex, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Boards, November 2001)
Analysis of Gauging Awareness sessions

The original stories from our Gauging Awareness sessions were, in fact, mini-cases. Teachers employed language and concepts that were recognizable to all members who teach. Immediately these vignettes bound the group together as inclusive because of the common knowledge they all possessed and shared, as well as the interest and responsibility of teachers to insert themselves into the verisimilitude with which they were personally acquainted. Even though each story recounted was specific to the teller, the listeners had experienced similar scenarios: their realities coalesced. If Lee Shulman (1986) had asked ‘What is this a case of?’, the answers would have replicated the five domains of the standards. With a focus on both theory and practice, generalized and specific, the collective and the individual, the case became a method that not only combined but made meaning to conjoin the standards with the daily world and work of the teacher.

The Gauging Awareness sessions highlighted that it is what teachers do in their professional lives that forms the basis of the standards. The telling of positive moments in these sessions provided snapshots of the standards as holistic principles and images that integrate commitment to students, professional knowledge, teaching practice, leadership and ongoing learning. The connections between practice (stories) and theory (standards) were done seamlessly, yet the practitioners were unaware that recounting their experiences in stories revealed the complicated integrated nature of teaching: providing examples of best practice. From these sessions the College concluded:

• teachers intuitively approved and supported the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession, the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession and the Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession created by the College;
• teachers possessed shared knowledge due to similar experiences;
• teachers could become inquirers into their colleagues’ practice;
• narratives provide a useful methodology for forming collaborative and supportive communities;
• narratives facilitated the methodology for discussing both individual and collective practice;
• narrative functions as an excellent professional development;
• knowledge of the standards was limited at best.

We had engaged and piqued the interest of our groups by establishing positive environments, by using open-ended questions and by valuing the experiences in the stories of our practitioners. Teachers who described their positive moments were unaware that their descriptions were underpinned by the standards. Had they been asked to connect a specific memory with the standards of practice in the booklet before them, they would have seen how their work illuminated the standards. Their stories were, in fact, a link between the concrete world of teaching and the abstract world of theory.

We learned that in order to carry out the College’s mandates, the Standards of Practice and Education Unit would have to devise a method to inform and educate
Ontario’s practitioners. However, the initial Gauging Awareness sessions provided direction to enable the profession to construct new knowledge and a method ‘to provide for the ongoing education of the profession’.

A Case Institute

Three key strategies comprised the methodology of the first case institute: learning the tenets of the case genre; discussing those elements in the context of a case; writing and discussing the case elements in the personal context of each participant in the Case Institute. On 27 and 28 May 2002, 18 educators reflecting different educational environments as well as their roles as pre-service teacher candidates, retired educators, principals, vice principals, supervisory officers, beginning teachers, teacher educators and experienced classroom teachers gathered at the College of Teachers. They were taught the case genre by using a case written by a Standards of Practice and Education programme officer: the dilemma focused on a new teacher’s attempts to impress her evaluator whose job it was to grant her a permanent teaching credential. The ingenue’s classroom management skills for a rowdy group of Grade 9 Tech boys did not appeal to the superintendent sent to decide the teacher’s professional fate.

The participants passionately engaged in analysis and discussion following a structure set out by Judith Shulman (1992). Because the underlying purpose was to foster or to deepen awareness of standards, the case was mapped back to a matrix of the College’s standards.

Asled to resurrect a personal dilemma of practice, participants produced a ‘case seed’, which was also mapped back to the matrix of the standards in order to substantiate its validity as a case that reflected the standards. The case was discussed (Jenlinck & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001) by teachers as a way to make meaning of the standards. Colleagues became peer editors and offered comments or questions that provoked insights into the developing cases. As discussions deepened, questions asked of each case writer caused more details to accrue: “listening to the stories of others usually creates more ‘data’ on one’s own experiences” (Conle & Sakamoto, 2001, p. 17). Feedback was also provided by staff at the College.

After participants had rewritten their cases, College staff edited the cases. Always aware of the need to maintain the authentic voices of the writers, the staff attempted to make minimal changes and retain idioms and idiosyncratic elements of each educator’s writing style.

Through reflection, each writer was able to examine her/his practice and begin to shape a case that reflected the reality of an educational dilemma. Eisner writes of the need for connoisseurship and becoming a critic of practice. By looking closely and observing nuance and details, participants examine metaphor, language, innuendo, hypothesis and connotation in order to make meaning (Eisner, 1991). This habit of thinking about relationships among people and of those people with their educational contexts gives rise to a ‘norm of reflection’ as a way to think about events and dilemmas. John Dewey also suggested that there was a need to develop qualities of sincerity, wholeheartedness and responsibility, along with a habit of thinking in a
Reflective way (Dewey, 1964, pp. 224–228). Routinized reflective behaviour causes one 'to think like a teacher (Richert, 1990; Harrington & Garrison, 1992). Similar to Schwab's polyfocal consensus (Schwab, 1971), questions asked by oneself or in group discussion in order to solicit multiple points of view can then be compared and contrasted so that thoughtful evaluation results. We observed that exposure to varying and diverse perspectives benefited critical thinking in educational situations.

In order to ascertain the validity of the cases written, College staff used the cases written in the Case Institute with a variety of educator groups: in-service, pre-service, principal and superintendent qualification course sites.

**Analysis of the Case Institute**

Indeed, due to the safe and supportive nature of the collaborative community that was forming, cases were further enhanced and developed in greater detail (Bakhtin, 1981) in discourse among case writers through a dialogic process. Using a common language embedded in the words of the standards and relating a personal story of tensions in practice seemed to ease participants into an environment that was non-judgemental and reassuring. Details depicted in the cases functioned as areas of speculation about the strategies used or which might be used to remedy dilemmas. Participants tried out practical strategies, making judgements and considering consequences of proposed decisions in the context of the changing world. Participants scaffolded and constructed new knowledge on prior situations. Teachers drew vigorously on their own behaviour in the classroom (Doyle, 1979). However, teachers' experiences varied, particularly because as individuals they had each conceived of incidents in their own unique ways and had responded accordingly.

Exposure to a variety of responses to classroom conflicts stimulated participants to frame and reframe the case dilemmas and look at them from a variety of perspectives. They understood that their dilemmas were open to personal interpretation (Stake, 2002). It was suggested that this multiplicity of strategies aided participants in their own reflective thinking. Inserting themselves into the case situations, for example, the anxiety experienced by new teachers' pursuit of certification, provoked a need to see through diverse lenses and thoughtfully consider action. The participants used divergent thinking and prepared for future events that might arise in their own classrooms or educational settings. Robert E. Stake (2002) has said 'Teachers are not of one mind. They conceptualize education in different ways' (p. 304). Yet, our observations revealed that most seek greater competence in teaching students in the classroom, which yields personal satisfaction. Teacher learning and satisfaction are directly related with student learning and satisfaction (Ontario College of Teachers, 1999, p. 13).

Case discussion was shown to alter views. Reflecting on dilemmas exposed personal theories, values and ethics. Deliberating on the complexity of a teaching tension often challenged teachers' deeply seated contentions. Competing interpretations of the same situation resulted in participants looking critically at themselves. They had to decide if their responses to issues were based on self-interest, collective
responsibility or what was best for the student in the story. Recognizing that there were many options, many choices, the participants often referred to the standards for guidance and direction. Participants began to understand that a teacher must be a negotiator of conflicting views, a decision-maker as well as an ethical practitioner.

Case Institute participants reported in feedback forms that the success of the session and the possibility of changing their assumptions occurred because of 'a very open facilitator, [her] ability to summarize, affirm, respect perspectives without judgment ... [her] natural manner, positive tone'. Whether in case institutes or in a casual collection of teachers, 'study groups provide a forum in which teachers can be inquirers and ask questions that matter to them, over a period of time, and in a collaborative and supportive environment' (Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998, pp. 113–114).

In a second group instructors of additional qualification courses who analyzed a sample case that examined the conflicts that arise when pedagogies differ between team teachers immediately identified with the dilemmas of one particular teacher, speculating on her motifs. However, after careful rereading of the details and gathering evidence, as well as noting the diverse points of view presented by their peers in discussion, the group challenged their own initial perspectives, revisited their original perceptions and arrived at a second and deepest understanding.

This ability, this openness to accept new ideas and question self, most often letting go of traditional, popular and readily accepted notions of teaching, is an anticipated outcome of the case methodology, since diverse perspectives are an intrinsic property of cases. Teachers guided by the memory of their own history, their schooling and their former teachers are reluctant to change assumptions. The possibility of considering and even accepting new ideas moves the participant towards transformation in terms of thinking. Certainly, teachers are pragmatic: '[w]hat they hope to gain through professional development are specific, concrete, and practical ideas that directly relate to the day-to-day operation of their classroom' (Fullan & Miles, 1992). Arriving at new meaning through reflective questioning works towards developing the habits of mind that informs decision-making in difficult but real situations that impact on their students' learning and achievement.

The process of reflection involves convincing teachers to question what they know and believe to be true and prepare them to reframe as 'problematic' that which they see as given (Richert, 1991). Based on our observations, teachers in our group samples did just that, provoked by case dilemmas and engaged with colleagues to co-construct new professional knowledge, based on a close reading of the standards of practice and the ethical standards. They learned that in situations presented in a case 'it depends' (Hutchinson, 1999) on a teacher's context: on recontextualizing case events into different milieus. Hutchison speaks of this flexibility in thinking and a comprehension that 'any critical theorizing of experience' (Hennessy, 1993) may cause a participant to imagine the event in a setting other than that described.

We observed critical thinking as participants extrapolated beyond the particular case. Also, when participants moved from cognitive analysis of the case prompted by our case-specific questions to metacognitive exploration, a kind of reflective conversation with themselves about a similar incident in their own practice, they reconcep-
tualized the case dilemma in terms of their own experiences. They had identified a 'case' that could occur in their own environs of relevant cultures of students and teachers. 'Through the notion of effective reflective practice, it is possible to consider teacher knowledge through particular concrete examples' (Loughran, 2002, p. 39). The case's dilemma always represented at least one, if not two or three interconnected realms described in the College's standards of practice. Teachers considered teaching and changes to teaching in terms of their own concepts, relationships, personal experience and possible applications, contemplating if and how a revised or new protocol would make sense in their own schools.

The case provokes reflection. Schon (1987) differentiates between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, the later occurring not during but after an incident. Cases in teaching 'are probably the form in which teacher meanings are stored, conveyed and brought to bear' (Doyle, 1990, p. 356). Loughran (2002) speaks of 'wisdom-in-practice' (p. 37). This wisdom becomes a resource offered by colleagues as lived experience. Instead of being told by an authority what works, teachers in the Case Institute shared their insights, open to the whys and why nots of peer interrogation and conversation: teachers became their own authorities! In a postmodern sense, teachers became both the subject and the object of their study. Van Manen (2003) suggests that practical knowledge exists in the existential teaching situation of the classroom, a kind of 'felt sense of the classroom' and not primarily in the intellect of the head (p. 16). The 'whole embodied being' (p. 15) of the teacher is a repository for prior interactions between students and self in the contexts of curriculum, student relations, etc. When teaching, a teacher must balance and respond to both psychological and social needs of students. To discuss these theories of practice in a group provided a window into teacher thinking.

As perpetual learners, the educators in the Case Institute felt that the College had acknowledged and valued their own lived experiences because teachers' work was being positioned as a curriculum for inquiry. Teachers felt empowered as they became the source to direct their own self-study as professional development. Through reflection and discussion, the views of colleagues who had encountered similar situations were examined.

By proposing solutions to real situations, educators, at leisure, put strategies under a microscope and received the input and conjecture of those who had tried, failed or succeeded in educational contexts. One case participant, Frank, a principal, when speculating on his own actions [described in his case seed] said

I wish I could expand the case and truly honour the voices of the others in this case. I want to broaden my/the perspectives of the 'other'. I believe that you get a detailed description of my/the teacher's challenges, fears, confusion and insecurities [in my case] (May 28, 2002).

In this way, Frank could diagnose and closely pinpoint where his interest and areas for further inquiry resided.

Aware that it is important to record not just the details of an incident for the case, but personal revelations that result because of revisiting a specific dilemma, we asked
participants to use their journals to note their insights. Gabrielle, a principal, commented on her process,

I also kept reading and rereading the *Standards of practice* to make certain that my story would generate a discussion which would result in a greater understanding of the *Standards of practice*.

And as a constant way to refocus her attention on the standards, she added,

Again I also struggled with the ending [of the case]. I was particularly attracted to the notion of tying the story neatly and presenting my surefit (sic) solution to the dilemma. Again I had to remind myself of the purpose of the Case Study (sic) – to illustrate the Standards, to provoke analysis & dialogue by others to promote discussion.

The filtering of past events and the crafting of them into a narrative caused the writer to go deeply into analysis of an issue, highlighting or removing elements that obfuscate the reason for writing the dilemma in the first place. Again, revisiting a dilemma and offering it as a way for another to probe practice required new thinking about an old matter,

Furthermore, encouraging the episode to be reconsidered, developed, and articulated through writing an anecdote enhances meaning-making from the action in the practice setting and can unsettle the taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching that ... have developed (are developing) and increase the likelihood that new ways of seeing may emerge. (Loughran, 2002, p. 37)

Besides wishing one could return to a scenario wiser and better informed or wanting to illuminate the standards, participants proposed alternative solutions to case dilemmas and empathized by imagining themselves in other writer’s shoes. James, a retiring superintendent, contributed this thought,

I think it helps to record a professional memory that we need in our profession. And I think there needs to be more of this done where I am learning through the eyes of others. When actual events from practice are written down, as I read their experiences and what experiences they have recorded, so then I can learn from those experiences and get the perspective of others who have gone before me. I think we’re creating a professional memory here.

Teachers’ knowledge is often stored in narratives and it is lamentable that when teachers retire they do not leave a record, their story of their experiences lived out in classrooms.

Since the reason for these workshops involved raising awareness of the standards, we listened carefully to comments that revealed that participants were thinking about the standards from their own specific perspective. Mark, a principal, considered how the standards aid in leadership development. She reflected on the complexity of the leadership role that is underpinned by

... the need for wisdom, patience and goodwill that are required to be an effective leader. The heart of good teaching is professionalism, and that is what the standards promote, support and validate. The standards give teaching and teachers the respect that they deserve.
Shelley, a pre-service candidate wrote

... this experience has given me a breadth of knowledge surrounding the standards of practice in my profession and it has filled me with a spirited desire to somehow make a difference.

The words of these practitioners, sparked by using case methodology, present a panoply of paths: collective and singular, ones concerned with leadership, professionalism, self-improvement and critical reflection.

All writers had made themselves vulnerable by sharing not successes, but dilemmas and conflicts. They had captured their tensions, traumas and conflicts so that others might learn from them: offering a vicarious experience. The process was not an easy one, participants in the Case Institute used the words ‘stressful ... vulnerable ... difficult ... burden’ to describe the actual writing of their narratives, yet they also articulated that the sessions were ‘inspiring ... supportive ... amazing ... healing’. Tara said

I found it very helpful to share experiences with fellow teachers and to get their perspectives on cases and issues that are important to me.

Further, she added,

The format of the 2 days was excellent. The first day had provided the necessary preparatory activities to facilitate the writing process. Feedback sessions were most illuminating and inspiring.

These comments signify that participants responded to professional development that was stimulated by accruing new knowledge about the standards of practice. Participants related that they were re-energized and excited to be involved in these sessions. Because there is ambiguity in a case, it invites disparate views and stimulates conversation so that participants can engage in constructing knowledge about teaching problems. Thomas, another participant who was beginning to understand the connection between the standards and his own personal professional knowledge, stated

[I] found this to be a wonderful learning experience—it is interesting to find myself on a road that shared and expresses 'my teaching in such a safe environment'. I didn’t expect this to be healing as well.

The importance of a safe and supportive environment was a constantly reiterated theme. Sofia, a special education teacher, described

how difficult it was to write about such a stressful experience [in a case seed]. ... I’ve learned that the sense of trust and community is strengthened when you see a situation through another person’s perspective. The case study writing experience gave me the opportunity to reflect and dialogue with others so I may see all perspectives of this situation.

Sofia reaffirmed the importance of a community that provided a safety net for participants and became integral in the facilitation and freedom of expressing conversations of meaning.
When interviewed and asked directly about the benefit of linking cases to standards through the case method participants said

- This really forced me to focus on the College standards and to think about how I will use them with my staff in September.
- I became very familiar with the standards and realized that they are all at play.
- It was great to review the standards, again in depth.
- Some of the standards are very evident, however, you can relate every case to every element in the standard.
- The power of the case genre is reflecting on past experience, of seeing how we exemplify the standards.

Besides the recognition that the standards represent what a teacher does on a daily basis is the awareness that the standards are a vision of growth and a way to improve practice. Thinking about his own personal development, Mark, a media teacher, stated,

'[this session encouraged me to] ... reclaim my core beliefs and values as a teacher. ... I want to be an advocate for my students. ... I am heartened by finding my professional voice, sharing what I know and what I don’t know.'

In a professional vein he added,

And lately I am writing my experience as a teacher, a teacher leader, to share with others.

The narrative facilitates and provokes both personal and professional insights. 'Cases help us to focus on the specific and at the same time give us a method to link our work to broader issues' (Richert, 1991, p. 135).

**Educational significance of the study and findings**

There are many layers of analysis and significance to this study of the Case Institute: personal, professional and collective. Through crafting their dilemmas into stories, the group members set their conflicts outside of themselves and were able to critically analyze their own actions and behaviour in times of difficulty in their practices: planning, evaluating and preparing. The telling of professional stories resubstantiated the direction of the Standards of Practice and Education Unit: 'that teachers know what teachers need to know' (Carter & Doyle, 1987; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). The educative value of cases as topics of instruction and teachers as agents and recipients of their own knowledge was pivotal in the formation of a collaborative community of inquiry. Listening and fully accepting that teachers are 'scholars of their practice' (Richert, 1991, p. 141) provided the lens through which the standards were conceived and a reminder that teachers can function as their own venues for professional development. It is not surprising then that the College as an institution, rather than imposing how the standards might be implemented and professionals made aware, turned once again to teachers themselves for direction (Figure 1).
Just as practice informs theory, so theory must be evident in practice as the constant movement from the specific (the teachers themselves) to the general (the standards) and back to the specific experience of teachers informs not only the content making but the ways to implement the standards. ‘The case becomes the gathering point around which teachers come together to think about teaching and learning’ (Richert, 1991, p. 136). Teachers who talk about their practice create knowledge and become risk takers, revealing their foibles and frustrations and playing at correcting or improving practice, their own and others. We were encouraged to hear participants indicate that we should compile the cases into a curricular text for their colleagues so that more of their peers might also learn about the standards through cases.

In a professional environment where teachers are their own mentors and experts, a safe harbour is established by the voices of the collective. The isolated practitioner receives support and understanding from colleagues who comprehend the loneliness and isolation that may occur, particularly at the beginning of one’s career. The comprehension that there are numerous interpretations to any situation and not one patterned right answer to resolve dilemmas honours and respects the individuality of College members. Standards are rendered meaningful and useful when practitioners understand the principles’ generalizations in practical, everyday situations with which they themselves are familiar. From the outset of the College’s seminal documents teachers had been consulted: the lived experience of the professional as pivotal to realizing the College’s mandate, and now teachers had informed implementation!

Besides the focus on the teacher as an essential source of knowledge and pivotal to our work, an awareness of the importance of story or narrative that is a repository of teacher knowledge and a catalyst to the creation of a learning community was evident. The role of story in teacher education and the need to have materials that were truly relevant to teachers’ practice was moving us to create a text that was responsive to what educators said they wanted. We began to organize participant stories into a text, add questions, pertinent bibliographies and even commentaries. The need of peers for involvement in meaningful professional development was clearly indicated and substantiated the importance of collegial support in the collective, particularly in forming a culture of inquiry where educational needs are similar (Fullan, 2001). Described above as support, a sounding board, a means for transformation of thought and deepening meaning, the standards provided a platform for teachers to collaborate as professionals intent on improving practice. We were constantly validating the case stories by visiting teacher and principal groups,
observing the efficacy of the case methodology. This qualitative approach that encouraged teachers to be their own guides and honoured their ‘insiders’ knowledge proved, time after time, to be well received. Not only were participants excited and stimulated by cases, they modeled case strategies and were eager to educate their colleagues in the benefits of this pedagogy.

Strongly aware that they were supported by the Ontario College of Teachers, participants selected narratives from their practice in which their colleagues could see possibilities for learning and growth: as teachers, they used their own conflicts as teaching material. Educators recreated situations where parents contested their insights, where educators tried to meet the needs of students who were exceptional; where communities and governments were at odds over school closings ...: each story a glimpse into the complex world that offered no pat answers because the variables themselves are complex and ever changing. Teachers’ decisions to commit to this difficult task of revealing their past teaching traumas underlined their trust in the College and their case participants.

When topics and activities in professional development activities are connected in logical ways to teacher experience, they will be more readily embraced, particularly when the knowledge presented is based on real experience by respected colleagues. Since the College’s project of deepening awareness of the standards had initiated our project of professional learning (of the standards), we ascertained that our practitioners would depart the institute with new knowledge. When professional development is designed to provoke change (Guskey, 2002b), it is reassuring for practitioners to discover that much of what they already do is supported and represented in the standards. Change is, therefore, more easily accepted when one feels she/he has begun the process; ‘teachers do not easily alter or discard the practices they have developed in the demanding environment of their own classrooms’ (Bolster, 1983).

Inherent in James’s ‘professional memory’ (see above) was the belief that teachers would be contributing lessons to the professional development of the collective: lessons, examples, cases that would be contained in a College case book for a provincial resource kit to help educate teachers across the province about the standards. Although the vehicle of the cases had been used in pre-service, it was summarily embraced by Ontario’s in-service teachers as a way to extend their dialogue based on the standards. Cases would engage colleagues because the contexts and voices were authentic ones that showcased the standards of practice.

The impact of the Case Institute on praxis

When the group was brought back together again in November 2002 the significance and validity of using cases was recorded in a focus group analysis. The report suggested that ‘Cases provide a meaningful context for reflecting on how the standards can guide improved practice’ (Squire, 2003). Seven themes emerged.

• The value of working collaboratively.
• The value of looking at cases.
• The value of identifying standards through dilemmas in cases.
• Professional renewal that is consistent with the case-focused work on standards.
• The acquisition of new knowledge and skills that results from case work.
• The possibility of changing assumptions by constructing new knowledge through case work.
• The benefits of reflection prompted by case work.

Participants had been asked to record their observations according to Guskey's (2002a) five levels of evaluation and to use their journals to document how they were able to integrate their new insights professionally and personally. The Case Institute participants spoke of the successful impact on classroom practice, how their beliefs and values about teaching had been validated. Research suggests that improving teachers’ knowledge and teaching are both essential in raising student performance (Ferguson, 1991; Sparks & Hirsh, 1999). Participants indicated that their renewal and enthusiasm had improved classroom tone. Many of our group had worked in the classroom, listening and attending more to student voices, encouraging students to write more. They reported the so-called ‘felt’ tacit messages that impact on learning were more obvious. Some practitioners said that they had worked collaboratively with other staff members, using cases to diagnose areas of renewal for school plans and providing mentoring activities. Again, this attitude improved school tone and encouraged staff to participate in activities that were relevant to practice and could foster professional growth. All indicated a new realization about teaching, a few even reporting that they had rekindled their initial reasons for entering the teacher profession originally.

Most reported that they felt less isolated, having established networks and new sources of support with colleagues. By using cases, many reported they had prepared for unforeseen situations because they had talked about and co-created strategies and discussed consequences of actions. All felt more confident, fortified by the theories of their peers. One participant initiated a series of leadership workshops and wrote her own case. One consultant had used the case technique in literacy workshops. And still another had developed a professional portfolio as an outcome of the Case Institute.

Every participant emphasized that his/her educational practice had been enhanced by increased knowledge, thinking and reflecting on the standards. In all, we noted actual outcomes beyond personal practice in the classroom that either involved the standards directly, were based on the standards (as in workshops, school plans, etc.) or were loosely linked to ideas or methods of using cases as a strategy (as in discussions with colleagues or using case scenarios with students, colleagues, etc.).

Mark, the media teacher, went to his school board and proposed an in-depth mentorship/standards of practice case writing project with a focus on mentoring. He described his plan,
three years of teaching practice, mentors, mentor leaders, as well as vice-principals and principals.

Replicating our process, he continued,

We would begin with a 2 day seminar that introduces the concept of case writing and gets the participants started on drafting their stories. Later there would be a one day follow-up session to discuss and begin revisions of first drafts.

In his six goals, he pointed out the need for

familiarizing the committee with case methodology [in order] to cultivate a learning community by promoting discussion and active inquiry

and

to broaden awareness of the *Standards of practice* as a catalyst for ongoing professional learning and renewal.

Later he wrote,

We hope these stories will invite educators to critically reflect on their own practice and will motivate them to communicate the values of the *Standards of practice* as a basis for school improvement in their learning communities.

In fact, Mark had used our model, based on the case model, for the purposes of a mentoring project. He was modelling our workshops and assuming a leadership role at an administrative level.

The College comprehended that the standards must be a living document. Wisely, the College had used the words and the voices of their members in the standards. What was needed was a way to connect the writers and the readers. Our methodology of case work extended a venue for teachers to acquaint themselves with or deepen awareness of the standards of practice. The case as catalyst caused teachers to relate the standards to their work in their own classrooms across the province, thus illuminating and facilitating their own professional learning. Not as some quaint artifact that bears no relationship to the reality of teachers' work, the standards, through the application of cases, would grow, develop and reflect what it means to be a teacher in Ontario.

For us as teachers, facilitators, College staff and the originators of the study, we felt the responsibility of following the direction set out by the participants: to ensure that curricular tools that are written by teachers for teachers be made available to the field. We worked towards the creation of a textbook and anticipate the publication by Sage Publications of a case book in April 2005 entitled *Cases for teacher development: preparing for the classroom*. A growing realization and trend that understands the importance of rich, qualitative discussion that is meaningful to teachers because practice is the subject is a direction we fully endorse.

**Conclusion**

We concluded that cases were effective, reliable and valid catalysts in teacher education. Repetitive themes along with the replication of statements in participant
observations confirmed the reliability of cases as a useful methodology. Certainly, our research substantiated the importance of cases in terms of teaching teachers about standards, developing and reinforcing identity. Through a focus on qualitative research and acknowledging the informative role of teacher emotions and values in their stories, we had presented a methodology that worked, one that was shown to be accountable and could be duplicated when teachers gathered to talk about educating their students.

Elliot Eisner (2004), in his long and prestigious career as a teacher of educators, has reiterated the importance of how we should educate our children. In *Educational leadership* he again stressed that schools should educate for judgement, critical thinking, meaningful literacy, collaboration and public service. He commented on what should matter in education and reasserted that ‘accountability is wider than measurement and more sensitive to nuances that count’. He continued that to be accountable is to require an approach that is

a radically different view of where we [now] look to find out how well students are learning. After all, the major lessons of schooling manifest themselves outside the context of schools. The primary aim of education is not to enable students to do well in school, but to help them do well in the lives they lead outside of school.

We have always agreed with Eisner. His vision, we believe, is one of quality education, a way to live one’s life, always learning and contributing to society. Our research on cases is consistent with this notion. It is a methodology entrenched with the same aims that he sets out for students. In teaching teachers with cases we model a strategy that is meaningful and purposive, one that speaks to ‘the potential that humans possess for shaping not only the world, but themselves’ (Eisner, 2004, p. 10).

**Notes on contributors**

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