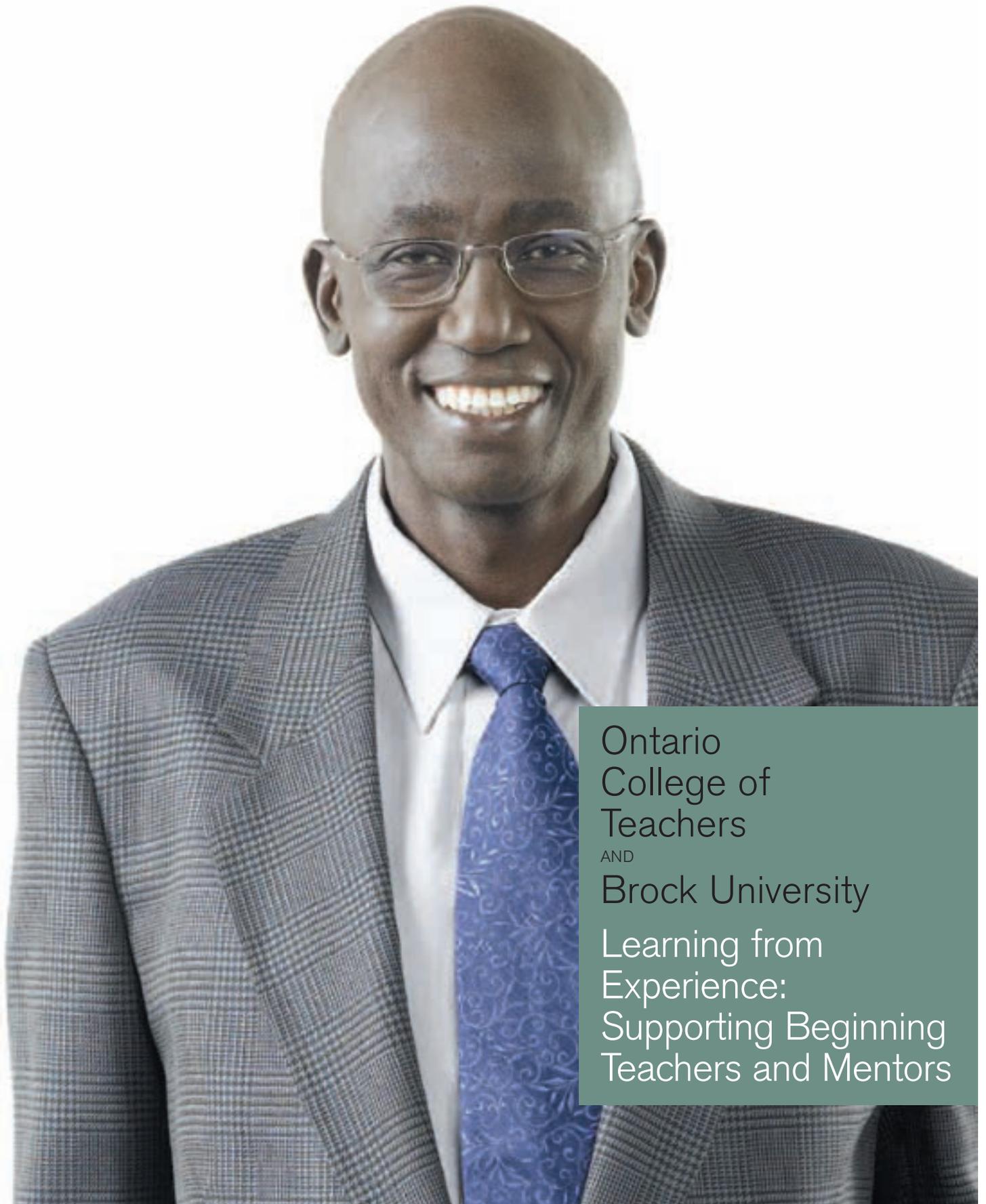


Booklet 2: Using the Case Method in Induction



Ontario
College of
Teachers

AND

Brock University

Learning from
Experience:
Supporting Beginning
Teachers and Mentors

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Ontario College of Teachers Brock University

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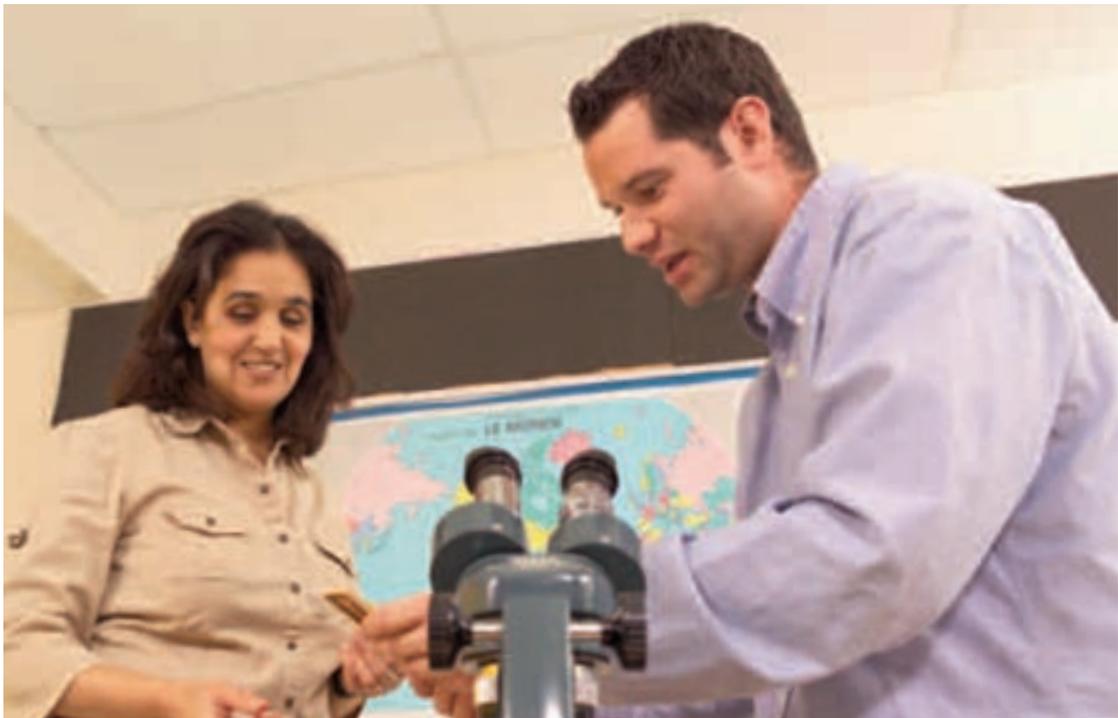
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Learning from Experience: Supporting Beginning Teachers and Mentors

Booklet 2: Using the Case Method in Induction



The Case Process: Learning through Case Studies

This booklet provides information on case studies: background, strategies, a case study with a clear induction dilemma, and responses to the case made by participants in an induction session. The booklet will assist you in your work with case studies through a structured protocol. The steps outlined invite participants to list the facts of the case, to identify issues and to select one particular issue to examine. In discussion, participants will generate insights and questions, proposing ways to remedy or address the complexities of the issue(s). Finally, the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* and the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* are used to contextualize the situation described in the case.

Why Case Methodology Is an Appropriate Strategy for Supporting Induction

Casework is holistic, constructivist and active. Interest in using case studies as a teaching strategy stems from an increasing appreciation of the value of narrative and practical considerations as opposed to abstraction and generalization (Bruner, 1986). Narrative thinking is compatible with how teachers organize their experiences and develop professional knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

Professionals develop knowledge through the dilemmas they encounter, what those dilemmas actually look like, what causes them to occur and which approaches might be productive in finding explanations or resolutions. By providing vicarious experience with a variety of cases, facilitators of the case method can expand and sharpen educators' understanding of the principles inherent in professional practice (Goldblatt & Smith, 2005; Allard et al, 2007).

Why Cases Promote Effective Learning

Research at the Ontario College of Teachers has revealed that teacher-written narratives that focus on dilemmas of practice are effective in raising and deepening awareness of the numerous issues that educators must negotiate on a daily basis. The use of case studies supports the understanding that “teachers know what teachers need to know” (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1999). When teachers relate to the experiences described in a narrative, they perceive that the situation is real.

Case institutes facilitated by the Ontario College of Teachers have enabled participants to:

- prepare for issues that might arise in practice
- frame and reframe dilemmas
- consider issues from multiple perspectives
- understand how theory looks in practice
- initiate dialogues with colleagues over issues identified in case studies
- reflect on practice
- connect with their own professional practice
- understand the case as a vehicle for the further elaboration of issues connected to it but not necessarily identified in it.

By using teacher-authored case studies and respecting the lived experience and knowledge of educators, participants in case institutes become facilitators of their own professional learning.

What Is a Case?

A case study is a carefully crafted narrative with a real-life dilemma.

Each case has:

- an authentic dilemma, conflict or tension
- a context integral to the dilemma (classroom, staff room, schoolyard, education community)
- the author's inner thoughts and attempts to problem solve, written as a first-person account
- ambiguity – particularly an ambiguous ending that invites discussion complexity – because teaching is complex
- a theoretical claim because a case is a case of something
- a situation that occurs frequently in education
- a narrative that involves the observations, perspectives and conversations of a variety of participants
- no one right answer to the dilemma(s) represented.

When used as curriculum and pedagogical tools, case studies will facilitate deeper awareness and understanding of the standards and their integration into daily practice.



The Case Method

A case study can be a catalyst for examining teacher practice. Participants in an induction session list facts, pinpoint issues and propose and assess solutions based on what they might do in similar situations. This is a starting point. Participants also analyze the group process by listening to one another, debating viewpoints, and asking themselves, “How does this affect me?” Once engaged, participants might speculate on how to use their newly acquired information and then contemplate short- and long-term implications for student learning.

The facilitator of a case discussion provides a framework for collegial discussion about professional practice. A facilitator listens, responds and records participants’ thoughts, insights and questions. A facilitator is also a participant, involved and interested in the discussion. A case discussion provides a vicarious experience, a give-and-take of ideas and a focused inquiry into practice to explore the consequences of actions. A case discussion may prepare group members to consider situations in their own practice. The facilitator may probe deeply into an area raised by the participants. The facilitator also provides a theoretical framework, such as the standards, to connect abstract principles of practice to the practical examples in the case studies.

Using the language of the standards in conjunction with the participants’ own experiences validates and empowers participants as teachers capable of directing their own practice. The shared endeavour of case analysis entwines discussion based on personal practice with the theoretical guiding principles of the standards, thus binding practice with theory. It establishes a context for the participants as problem solvers and action researchers, and promotes a culture of inquiry.

Effective facilitation of a case discussion enables participants to critically reflect on the rich, complex and multi-faceted nature of teaching. Through collaborative reflection and dialogue, participants share their diverse perspectives, theories and practices. Beliefs and assumptions are illuminated and accessible for review. In this supportive and collegial context, new perspectives and assumptions can take shape. During the case-discussion process participants can use a case-discussion chart (Appendix II) to record their thoughts.

Setting the Tone

Throughout a case-discussion process, the facilitator encourages and engages all group members. Sometimes body language will suggest that a person would like to respond but needs encouragement. An effective facilitator establishes a respectful, supportive environment in which each group member feels valued. Participants should feel comfortable speaking openly and sharing their concerns. Activities such as icebreakers and community builders generate laughter and break down solitude so that participants feel they belong.

Focused Reading

When a case study is introduced, participants are invited to read it with a pen, flagging the facts, pressure points and elements that bother or surprise them or motivate action in the narrative.

Identifying the Facts

The facilitator invites group members to list the facts of a case. This is important because participants should have a shared understanding of the story's events. By looking closely at evidence in the text, an opinion swap is avoided. As well, a group discussion of facts can promote a comfort level for those who are fearful of saying the wrong thing.

Identifying the Dilemmas

Once the context, characters and conflicts of a case have been established, the facilitator invites the participants to identify the issues. If participants are not forthcoming with responses, the facilitator might make this a small-group activity and invite one person to become a reporter who shares each small group's consensus with the larger group. Participants or the facilitator list issues, point out dilemmas and raise questions. The facilitator invites the entire group to decide which issue it would like to investigate. The facilitator allows the participants to decide where to begin. Facilitators do not direct or push their authority onto the group.

Considering Multiple Perspectives

It is important to delve deeply into the issue selected. Facilitators ask open questions. Facilitators try to keep biases to themselves as the questions should not lead but help participants unravel and unscramble puzzling elements of the case. Facilitators stimulate discussion of the conflicts or tensions in the case and encourage the group to consider dilemmas from multiple points of view, taking the perspective of different characters in the story. Each case should possess many layers of rich meaning.

Generating Alternative Solutions

It is important to focus on the dilemmas at the core of the narrative. The facilitator asks participants to evaluate the solutions presented in the case study and generate alternative solutions. The facilitator asks group members to consider short- and long-term consequences for proposed solutions. "What would happen if ...?" In this way the group investigates the short- and long-term consequences of a variety of solutions.

Identifying the Concept

The facilitator asks, “What is this a case of?” Again, there is no one right response. If participants were discussing The Sharing Circle (page 7), they might suggest that it is a case of miscommunication, insecurity, class management, teaching styles, social justice or lack of administration involvement.

Connecting Cases to the Standards

Using the charts in Appendices I, II and III, map back to the ethical standards and standards of practice or examine the case study in light of the standards, considering which standards are evident in or absent from the story. Initiating a discussion about the practice of Sal, the new teacher in The Sharing Circle, the facilitator asks where the standards are present in the case and where they might provide a vision for growth.

Group members may choose to use the appended charts to consider where Sal has demonstrated knowledge of the standards or where the standards might have helped to remedy the dilemmas revealed in the case.

Writing Commentaries

Participants may choose to write a brief commentary on any aspect of the case.

Connecting to Personal Practice

Participants might discuss their own experiences in light of the case study. They might consider crafting their own case studies in written form. Having tested principles of practice in the case discussion and having established the standards as their theoretical framework, participants might recall a dilemma of practice and come up with a new approach for an old problem. The process should promote informed decision making and renew participants’ confidence in themselves as professionals (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006).

Case: The Sharing Circle

The following case study, written by a beginning teacher, was used in the collaborative induction project. The case focuses on issues that many inductees encounter in their first years of teaching.

“My grandma got stabbed with a beer bottle. We took her to the hospital. She’s okay.”

It was my first day of teaching. I sat in a circle with 23 six-year-old children. We shared summer stories – just like every other Grade 1 class in every other school on the very first day of the new school year. We called this the sharing circle.

I quickly realized, however, that this was not going to be like every other Grade 1 class – or every other school. I sat in the circle speechless, listening as this student shared her dire experience as casually as if she were talking about a trip to the beach. I hoped my burning face didn’t reveal how shocked I felt. At that moment, in that circle, I felt helpless, inadequate and terrified as I realized that many of the children in my class came from disadvantaged families.

When I first entertained the notion of becoming a teacher, I harboured doubts because of my nature. I worried that – in today’s complex school environment and with so many difficulties facing young people – I might be overwhelmed emotionally. As well, I was entering teaching late in life, when I already had a young family. The fear of: “How am I going to balance my dedication to my family with my dedication to my students and my professional life?” was becoming a recurrent theme played over and over in my head.

By the end of the first week, I was seriously questioning my choice of career. I began to question my own professional skills and my ability to empathize with learners and to create a loving, secure environment. And my list of concerns was growing. Could I walk away at the end of the day without constantly worrying about my students, both in the school setting and in their home lives?

The sharing circle continued to bring forward many stories of family difficulties.

“I got taken away,” Paul shared through unbrushed teeth.

“We had food for lunches but now it’s all gone,” a very thin Julianna mentioned matter-of-factly.

Simon wrote in his journal, “I am tired today because my little brother woke me up during the night because he was sick. He can’t wake up my Mom.” He looked at me blankly, not expecting any answer.

And another student, buoyant Mariska, related how proud she was because she had set her own alarm, made lunch for herself and her brother, and got to the bus on time. I could feel the pride she exuded as she stood up in the circle and told her story with great authority. I pondered: “Why should a seven-year old be given such responsibility?”

The children's stories haunted my dreams. I agonized over the challenges they faced. And always there was the voice in my head: "How am I ever going to make their lives better?"

Now, I can look back on my year of teacher preparation and laugh at my naivety. I believed then that my greatest challenge would be navigating the Ontario curriculum for the first time. But the real challenge, the one no one talks to you about, is to figure out how to teach curriculum to students who have not eaten dinner the night before.

My personal and professional questions refused to disappear as I continually asked myself: "Do I have the strength to manage this first year? Am I just too sensitive to handle these challenges?"

In late October of my first year, the district school board's mentoring program was formally initiated. Due to geographical differences and our busy schedules, it was after Christmas before the first meeting with my appointed mentor, Joseph, actually took place. I did not feel comfortable asking him questions about issues that I should have had well in hand.

What I wanted to ask him was, "Where were you in August when I was desperately trying to set up my classroom for the first time? Where were you when I needed help preparing my first report cards? Where were you when I needed advice on juggling the many new roles and responsibilities expected of a beginning teacher?" But instead I smiled weakly, extended my hand and said, "Glad to meet you."

We chatted briefly and I alluded to the fact that the first year is one in which a teacher must find herself as a teacher and a member of a learning community. I was purposely vague, trying to check him out to see if he would be supportive or reprimand me for all of my shortcomings. I only briefly sketched out one or two scenarios, trying to minimize the multiple issues I faced daily.

My mentor, looking rather perplexed and scratching his head, obviously found it difficult to decide where to focus.

Please understand, I thought my mentor was wonderful. It was not his fault that he was in a school that sharply contrasted with mine. It was difficult for him to relate to the issues that I was facing. He had parental support and most of his students had two-parent families and even additional support systems when things went awry.

I listened to his suggestions but I could not set up a volunteer schedule when there were no volunteers. And many of my students had difficulties focusing and remaining on task. To me, comparing his situation to mine was comparing apples and oranges. I had the sinking feeling that there were too many students and not enough of me. I felt as though I were drowning in a sea of needs and emotions with no one to throw me a life preserver.

In fact, I truly believed that no one even knew that I needed a life preserver. I hesitated to ask for help because I did not want to give the impression that I was too weak or emotionally unprepared to handle my job. Occasionally, I felt I would burst if I didn't talk to someone and admit to my feelings – but when I did open up, even to my mentor, I was told, "Just try to toughen up."

In truth, there were many people in my school who were willing to assist me. Mary, the school nurse, stopped me in the hall with a welcoming grin and said, “How are you doing, Sal? My office is always open for a cup of tea.”

The vice-principal on his morning rounds would take a moment to offer a way into a conversation. “Have you had a chance to see Joey’s painting on the walls outside the office?” he asked.

“Uh-huh,” I responded, not making eye contact and moving off like a ghost. I felt that we were all so busy with daily demands that discussing the issues of the day would lessen time for really important school needs. And I didn’t want to burden anyone. So I closed my door, did my work, and spent the night tossing and turning, going over problems that seemed to have no answers, or at best ambiguous ones.

As the only Grade 1 teacher in the school, I felt that I had no one to collaborate with on lesson plans or managing curriculum. I wished I had someone to talk to and even thought of taking Mary up on her offer, but she was a nurse and not a teacher, and besides, she might think I was just weak.

As my first year came to an end, I felt as though I had made some progress in the technical aspects of teaching but I was still bothered by the advice I had been given to toughen up.

The test of my toughness arrived in the final month of the school year. Sari had started the year in a stable foster home. She was happy, well dressed and had progressed well academically. However, when she was returned to her birth family, her behaviour steadily worsened, she lost her focus and she began to struggle academically. In that final month, signs of possible abuse became evident. Recognizing my legal responsibility, I contacted the Children’s Aid Society (CAS), yet I felt that I was somehow betraying her.

I was distraught. I could barely discuss the situation with the CAS social worker. “Sal, try to be calm,” he said, handing me a tissue to wipe away the tears streaming down my face. He said, “You can do this. You are trying to save this child from a potentially harmful and destructive home.”

Somehow I made it through the interview process but I felt helpless and angry, reflecting as I had that very first day in the sharing circle that children in my class had to face such overwhelming issues in their lives.

Finally, I went to see my principal and revealed how I had been feeling all year. I cried as I told her that I hadn’t wanted to admit how sensitive I was and that I had not managed to toughen up. I felt like a runaway train, going faster and faster, anticipating the fiery crash at the end of the track. When I finished talking I was breathless and still in tears.

I raised my head as I searched her eyes for a response. I had admired her as a leader because she always appeared so strong and in control of every situation in our school’s tough community.

She smiled at me and remarked that sensitivity in this school was not viewed as a weakness but as a strength! She confided that she had hired me because she was aware of my sensitive nature and thought I would respond to the cultural and emotional needs of the children in her school. She believed my sensitivity would be an asset. I could barely breathe when I heard these words and felt myself grow taller and stronger in my chair. She told me that I did not need to toughen up but to find a way to ensure that I did not give so much of myself that I would burn out.

I left her office with a new sense of purpose. I knew that I could make some small difference in the lives of these children – and I was ready to try again.

Inquiring into the Case

The following framework may assist with further inquiry into The Sharing Circle.

Analysis: Analyze the issues from the viewpoints of the different people involved.

Evaluation: Examine critically the teacher's strategies for handling the issues.

Alternative Thinking and Action: Generate ways to think and act other than those presented in the narrative. Take into consideration the risks, benefits and long- and short-term consequences of each proposed action.

Standards: Formulate some generalizations about effective practice. Remember that the standards of practice and the ethical standards are guiding principles for teacher action.

What Is This a Case Of? Link this case to more general categories. Rich cases are by nature about many things.

Changing Opinions: Who or what has caused you to consider a new way of thinking? How strongly do you still feel about your previous assumptions? Our hope is that cases as curriculum and pedagogical tools will facilitate deeper awareness, understanding and integration of the standards into your daily practice.

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Appendix I

Example of Community Builder: Community Builder for Inductees

My first day of class surprised me because ...	My favourite teacher was because ...	I never expected teaching to be ...	An important issue in education today is ...	When I have time to myself, I ...
In 5 years, I will be ...	An important lesson I had to learn about teaching was ...	My teacher education prepared/ did not prepare me for ...	So far, the most helpful person at my school has been ... because ...	I think that I must ... in order to be successful at my school.
I still can't figure out ...	I'm bothered by students who ...	I'm frustrated by colleagues who ...	My best experience at this school has been ...	When I was a student, I thought teachers were ...
My support when I have a bad day comes from ...	I think I am growing in ...	My advice to other beginning teachers is ...	I plan on ...	My parents always told me ...

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2002)

Appendix II

Discussion Chart: Following the Case Process

List the Case Facts	Identify Issues	Consider Multiple Perspectives	Alternative Approaches	Connect to the Standards
		Teacher		
		Student		
		Parent		
		Principal		
		Staff		
		Other		

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2002)

Appendix III

Identifying the Standards

Ethical Standards

Care

The ethical standard of *Care* includes compassion, acceptance, interest and insight for developing students' potential. Members express their commitment to students' well-being and learning through positive influence, professional judgment and empathy in practice.

Respect

Intrinsic to the ethical standard of *Respect* are trust and fair-mindedness. Members honour human dignity, emotional wellness and cognitive development. In their professional practice, they model respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy and the environment.

Trust

The ethical standard of *Trust* embodies fairness, openness and honesty. Members' professional relationships with students, colleagues, parents, guardians and the public are based on trust.

Integrity

Honesty, reliability and moral action are embodied in the ethical standard of Integrity. Continual reflection assists members in exercising integrity in their professional commitments and responsibilities

Examples I noted in The Sharing Circle of Care, Respect, Trust and Integrity are:

Ethical standards that might offer support or guidance to the players in The Sharing Circle are:

Standards of Practice

Commitment to Students and Student Learning

Members are dedicated in their care and commitment to students. They treat students equitably and with respect and are sensitive to factors that influence individual student learning. Members facilitate the development of students as contributing citizens of Canadian society.

I found the following examples of Commitment to Students and Student Learning in The Sharing Circle:

Professional Knowledge

Members strive to be current in their professional knowledge and recognize its relationship to practice. They understand and reflect on student development, learning theory, pedagogy, curriculum, ethics, education research and related policies and legislation to inform professional judgment in practice.

I found the following examples of Professional Knowledge in The Sharing Circle:

Professional Practice

Members apply professional knowledge and experience to promote student learning. They use appropriate pedagogy, assessment and evaluation, resources and technology in planning for and responding to the needs of individual students and learning communities. Members refine their professional practice through ongoing inquiry, dialogue and reflection.

I found the following examples of Professional Practice in The Sharing Circle:

Leadership in Learning Communities

Members promote and participate in the creation of collaborative, safe and supportive learning communities. They recognize their shared responsibilities and their leadership roles in order to facilitate student success. Members maintain and uphold the principles of the ethical standards in these learning communities.

I found the following examples of Leadership in Learning Communities in The Sharing Circle:

Ongoing Professional Learning

Members recognize that a commitment to ongoing professional learning is integral to effective practice and to student learning. Professional practice and self-directed learning are informed by experience, research, collaboration and knowledge.

I found the following examples of Ongoing Professional Learning in The Sharing Circle:

Standards of practice that might offer support or guidance to the individuals in The Sharing Circle are:

Standards of practice that might have helped remedy the dilemmas in the Sharing Circle are:

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