



# Learning from Cases

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## SITE HANDOUT

*This handout is designed to provide a brief overview of the contents of the site, including an abstract of the accompanying paper, several key images from the site, and the course syllabus.*

### Abstract

#### **“Learning from Cases: Toward Expert Thinking about Practice”**

How new teachers develop the ability to reason in ways that go beyond folk wisdom and common sense, grounding their decisions in theories of learning and development, is a particularly intriguing question for teacher educators. One of the claims of some teacher educators is that cases are a particularly powerful means for new teachers to engage with theory and practice (Shulman, 1986; 1996). This paper and our website explores what—and how—student-teachers may learn about theory and practice from writing cases, and examines some of the features of the pedagogy that may contribute to those results.

This work is based upon a teacher-education course, “Principles of Learning for Teaching,” that is offered in the winter quarter of the Stanford Teacher Education Program (STEP). In this course, writing a case was designed to promote the application of learning theory to practical experiences in the classroom and served as the central, culminating product of the class. Drawing upon data collected including students’ cases (from outline to final draft), students’ final self-assessment essays, interviews with instructors, and interviews with a small sample of students, we found that students’ thinking developed through the case-writing process from naïve toward expert in four distinct areas: explanations of practice and teaching events; understanding of students and student learning; explanations of teaching goals and objectives; and ability to reflect more broadly beyond the immediate here and now as well as beyond their classroom.

As an illustration of this movement towards expert thinking, we focus upon the case-writing of two students in the class, Mika and Sonya, demonstrating how these two students moved from a simple explanation of their case (locating problems solely with the students’ work and efforts; viewing a less successful lesson as a result of “lack of planning”) to a much more sophisticated, theoretically informed explanation of the events in their cases. We illustrate how these students drew upon key course concepts as a means of linking their experiences to a professional knowledge base, in turn, demonstrating a movement towards expert thinking about practice. We conclude with a discussion of some of the features of the course that may have supported this professional development.

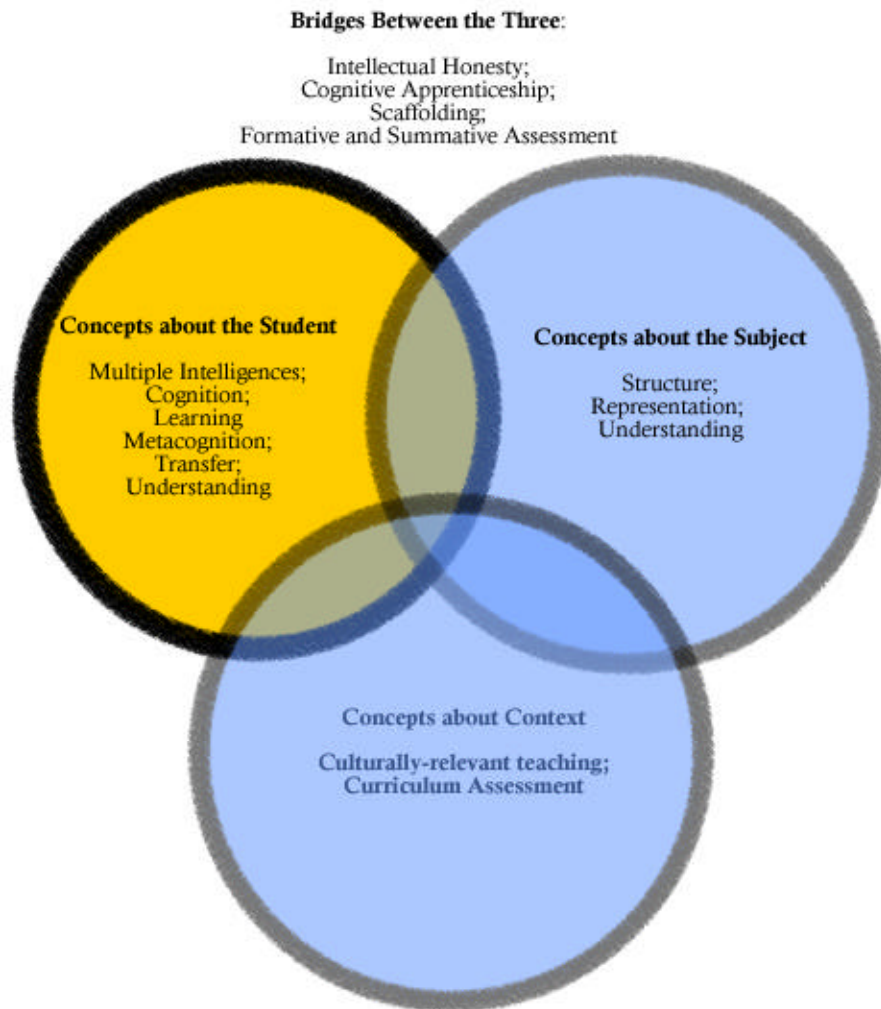
### Six Ways We Supported Case-Writing

As the course syllabus describes, work on cases is woven throughout the course. The diagram below illustrates the six ways we support students' case-writing. First, students' own personal teaching experiences serve as key foundation material for their cases, and because they are engaged in teaching throughout the case-writing they also have further opportunities to reflect upon their current and past practice. Second, throughout the course students are reading, evaluating, and discussing key concepts in learning theory, concepts which they are then asked to use in analyzing and interpreting their cases. We saw the embedding of case-writing within a context of reading theory as particularly critical to the development of powerful cases. Third, students have opportunities to read, discuss and interpret others' cases as well as work on the development of their own case. For instance, course readings include cases by educational scholars such as Deborah Ball as well as cases authored by teachers (some of whom are former STEP students) such as Mark Ellis, Michelle Phillips and Vicky White. Discussions and critiques of such cases are part of the curriculum. Fourth, students are also working on their own cases through an extensive revision process. As depicted above, early in the course, students select a case-worthy topic, submit a "case outline," and prepare several drafts of their case. Fifth, extensive feedback, using a publicly developed and shared rubric, is provided by section leaders for every version of the case, from outline to final piece. Finally, in order to obtain diverse perspectives, and engage in a community of case-writers, students also participate in two "case conferences" in which they present their cases, receive feedback and discuss alternative interpretations of the cases.



## Key Concepts in the Course

The PLT course focused upon the relationships among four fundamental aspects of the educational process: first, concepts about the subject matter of the curriculum, second, concepts about the diverse capabilities of students and the character of their learning, and third, concepts about the character of the context of the classroom. Fourth, we wanted to help students understand teaching as the creation of bridges between the knowledge embodied in the subject matter, the minds and motives of students, and the context of their particular classrooms and communities. We hoped that at the end of the course, students would leave with a deeper understanding of how to teach central concepts in their own subject matter, of the diverse learning of their students, of what and how they teach, and of the cultures and contexts in their classrooms. The diagram below illustrates that relationship, by showing some of those key concepts we explored with students:



## **ED 269: Principles of Learning for Teaching**

Stanford University  
Winter Quarter 2000

### Instructors:

Prof. Linda Darling-Hammond      Dr. Karen Hammerness      Dr. Kay Moffett

Prof. Lee Shulman      Misty Sato (Teaching Assistant)

### Course Description

This course addresses the relationships among three fundamental aspects of the educational process: the subject-matter of the curriculum, the diverse capabilities of students, and the teacher's responsibilities to design and implement instruction. We view the challenge of teaching as the creation of bridges between the knowledge embodied in the subject matter, on the one hand, and the minds and motives of students, on the other hand. In our various content areas, we will ask what counts as knowledge. How does its character vary across or within disciplines? What are the general processes of learning and thinking? How are these processes influenced by aspects of student language, culture, prior knowledge, and experience? How can teachers transform their subject matter knowledge into representations that help students draw on their own resources to construct and transform knowledge of their own?

These are tough questions, of a sort rarely answered once and for all, no matter how many years one has been teaching. They are tough because they occupy that contested territory between theory and practice, where both perspectives are needed but neither can suffice. They are tough because, at a theoretical level, they demand the contributions of many disciplines, such as psychology, linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy. They are tough because at a practical level no two situations are quite comparable, and the helpful maxim for one setting becomes balderdash for another. Learning to teach thus demands that we weave delicate webs of the general and the particular, finding ways to enrich our personal experiences through studying the experiences of others, seeking theoretical insights that give meaning to what we do, or raise skeptical questions about what we think we know.

In this course we will engage these challenges through employing a variety of materials and activities. Most classes will be divided into two sessions: a large group lecture, demonstration, or discussion in which ideas will be expounded, demonstrated, discussed and elaborated; and a discussion section (with about 12 STEP teachers in each) in which these ideas will be further examined through reading and discussing cases of teaching. We view the variety of "case methods" as a vehicle for connecting useful theory with accounts of practice and its problems. You will do many things with cases this quarter. You will read, analyze, and discuss cases of teaching written by teachers and researchers who have written analytic accounts of their practice for their own benefits and as a contribution to others. You will also read and discuss cases written by some of your predecessors in STEP, who have left these accounts as a

legacy to you, even as they used their case writing as a form of disciplined reflection to learn from their own experiences. You will write cases of your own teaching, and will use those cases as an occasion for examining aspects of your work. You will comment on and critique each other's cases. You too will leave a legacy of cases.

Texts:

The course readings include a book by Jerome Bruner [The Process of Education, Harvard University Press (1960, 1977)], on-line readings from the National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council, as well as a volume of collected readings combining a *casebook* and a *sourcebook*. The casebook sections include a variety of cases of teaching from elementary and secondary classrooms across content areas and diverse contexts of culture and community. The sourcebook includes theoretical, research, and policy papers on teaching, learning, language, culture, and curriculum.

Assignments: (detailed instructions for each assignment will be distributed in class)

1) ***CASE REPORT OF INSTRUCTION***

A case is a first person interpretive narrative account of a sequence of events of teaching and learning taken from your own experiences during these first few months of teaching and examined through the lens of research on learning and teaching. We will provide a number of models and an explicit organizational structure (though not the five-paragraph essay). The case you write for this course will be a case of subject-matter oriented teaching, a curriculum case. You will also be expected to solicit *at least two commentaries* to accompany your final draft. One commentary must come from a fellow STEP teacher (which means that you are expected to write one commentary on the case of a colleague). Other commentaries can come from experienced teachers, community members, administrators, and even students. Cases generally run five to ten pages plus appendices. Commentaries rarely exceed a page or two. Your case and its associated commentaries will become entries in your STEP portfolio. Examples of STEP-written cases and commentaries are in the STEP curriculum library.

2) ***COMMENTARY ON A CASE***

As noted above, your commentary on a colleague's case will be part of your responsibility as a peer reviewer. In your commentary you will provide an additional perspective on the case from your own vantage point as a teacher and a researcher.

### 3) **REFLECTIVE ESSAY**

After writing your case and receiving feedback from faculty, STEP colleagues, and others who write commentaries, you will write a brief reflective essay on your case, commentaries, and course readings. This essay will allow you take a metacognitive stance toward your teaching practice and offer the opportunity for you to ask what you have learned from your case and the discussions around it. We will provide the guidelines for the essay in class.

#### TIMELINE

Jan. 19	Initial outline of case due to section leader
Jan. 31	Case conference #1 on first draft of case
Feb. 23	Penultimate draft of case due to section leader
March 13	Case conference #2 on final draft of case
March 16	Final case, two commentaries, and reflective essay due by 6:00PM

### **POLICY ON GRADING AND COURSE COMPLETION**

The course is graded on a letter-grade basis. A's will be given for outstanding performance on all assignments and active participation in discussion sections. A grade of C represents marginal quality on all assignments. When assignments do not meet the standard to which they aspire, students will be offered the opportunity to revise within a time limit. Clear criteria will be specified for each assignment and STEP teachers will be invited to apply those criteria to their own performance whenever appropriate.

**INCOMPLETE GRADES WILL NOT BE GIVEN!** It has been our sad experience during many years of teaching this course that an incomplete grade given out of kindness in March becomes an open wound as graduation looms near in June. Keep up with the assignments. There will be no exceptions other than those associated with family tragedies or serious illness.

#### PART I. INTRODUCTION

**January 5 (W) Introduction**

**January 10 (M) Learning from Cases [Lee Shulman]**

Shulman, L.S. (1996) Just in case: Reflections on learning from experience. In J.A. Colbert, P. Desberg & K. Trimble (Eds.) The Case for Education: Contemporary Approaches for Using Case Methods. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

White, V. (1988). One struggle after another. In J. Shulman & J.

Colbert (Eds.) Intern Teacher Casebook. San Francisco: Far West Lab.

Ellis, M. W. (1992). Demystifying Pi: A case of trying to enhance student understanding. Case prepared for ED269,

Foundations of Learning for Teaching, STEP program.

*Recommended:* Shakespeare, W. Romeo and Juliet, Prologue, Act

I. Sc.i, Act II, sc.ii.

#### PART II. LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

**January 17 (M) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: No Class**

**January 19 (W) Structure, Readiness, and the Challenge of “Intellectual Honesty”**

- Bruner, J.S. (1960). The Process of Education. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Ch.1-3.
- Ball, D.L. (1993). With an eye on the mathematical horizon: Dilemmas of teaching elementary school mathematics. Elementary School Journal. 93 (4). 373-97.
- Ball, D. (1990). Teacher's journal for January 19, 23, and 25. East Lansing, MI: M.A.T.H. project.
- Jetter, A. (1993) We shall overcome, this time with algebra. New York Times Magazine, February 21, 1993.

*Due: Outline draft of case*

**January 24 (M)**

**Views of Understanding: Knowledge, Representation and Performance**

- Norman, D. (1980) What goes on in the mind of the learner? In W.J. McKeachie (Ed.), New Directions for Teaching and Learning: Learning, Cognition, and College Teaching. No. 2. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. pp. 37-49.
- Perkins, D. (1998). What is understanding? In M.S. Wiske's (Ed.), Teaching for Understanding: Linking research with practice. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. pp. 39-57.
- Shulman, L.S. and Ringstaff, C. (1986). Current research in the psychology of teaching and learning. In A. Bork & H. Weinstock (Eds.), Designing computer-based learning materials, pp. 1-31.
- Wineburg, S. and Wilson, S. (1988). Models of wisdom in the teaching of history. Phi Delta Kappan 70(1). 50-58.

Feedback on case from section leader

**January 31 (M)**

**Cognitive Processing**

- Bransford, J., A.L. Brown and R.C. Cocking, (Eds.) (1999). How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School. Washington: National Academy Press, Ch. 4 How Children Learn (excerpt pp. 83-101 starting with "Strategies for Learning and Metacognition") [<http://books.nap.edu/html/howpeople1/ch4.html>] and Ch. 5 Mind & Brain, pp. 102-115. [<http://books.nap.edu/html/howpeople1/ch5.html>]
- Armstrong, T. (1994). Multiple intelligences in the classroom. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. pp. 1-14 and 146-155.
- Bloom, B. et al (1956). Condensed Version of the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. In Bloom, B. *et al* (Eds.) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The classification of educational goals, Handbook 1, Cognitive domain. New York: David McKay. pp. 201-207.

*Case conference #1 on first draft of case*

*Potluck at the Shulman's house 6:00pm*

**February 7 (M)**

**Metacognition and Learning**

- Bransford, J., A.L. Brown and R.C. Cocking, (Eds.) (1999). How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School. Washington: National Academy Press, Ch. 3 Learning and Transfer, pp. 39-66.

[ <http://books.nap.edu/html/howpeople1/ch3.html>]

Resnick, L. (1987). Education and learning to think. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Heller, J. I. and Gordon, A. (1992). Lifelong learning. Educator, 6(1). Graduate School of Education, University of California at Berkeley. pp. 4-19.

**February 14 (M) What One Has to “Do” to Learn**

Collins, A., Brown, J.S., & Holum, A. (1991). Cognitive apprenticeship: Making thinking visible. American Educator, pp.6-11, 38-46.

Lee, Carol (1995). A culturally based cognitive apprenticeship: Teaching African-American high school students’ skills of literary interpretation. Reading Research Quarterly, 30(4), pp. 608-630.

Bransford, J., A.L. Brown and R.C. Cocking, (Eds.) (1999). How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School. Washington: National Academy Press, Ch. 7 Effective Teaching: Examples in History, Mathematics, and Science, pp. 143-177.

[ <http://books.nap.edu/html/howpeople1/ch7.html>]

**February 21(M) Presidents’ Day: No Class**

**PART III. CONTEXTS, CULTURES AND LEARNING**

**February 23 (W) Context, Culture and Learning**

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). The Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Ch. 5 Tree of Knowledge, pp. 78-101 and Ch. 6 Culturally Relevant Teaching, pp. 102-126.

Juarez, D. A. (1999). A question of fairness: Using writing and literature to expand ethnic identity and understand marginality. In S. Freidman, E.R. Simons, J. S. Kalnin, & A. Casareno (Eds.), Inside City Schools. New York: Teachers College Press. pp. 111-125.

Skolnick, J. (1995). Diane: Gender, culture, and a crisis of classroom control. In J.S. Kleinfeld and S. Yerian (Eds.), Gender tales: Tensions in the schools. New York: St. Martin’s Press. pp. 111-116.

*Due: penultimate draft of case of instruction*

**February 28 (M) Assessment for Learning and Teaching**

Black, P.J. and Wiliam, D. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. Phi Delta Kappan. 80(2). 39-46.

Darling-Hammond, L., Ancess, J. & Falk, B. (1995). Authentic Assessment in Action. New York: Teachers College Press. Ch.2 Graduation by portfolio



at Central Park East Secondary School, pp. 21-75 and Ch. 6 The Bronx New School (excerpt starting with “Akeem’s Story”), p. 217-223.

*Feedback from section leader by March 1*

#### **PART IV. BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

##### **March 6 (M) Policy Contexts and Learning**

Atkin, J.M. (1994). Developing word-class educational standards: Some conceptual and political dilemmas. In N. Cobb (Ed.) The future of education: Perspectives on National Standards in America. New York: College Entrance Examination Board. pp. 61-84.

Zancanella, D. (1992). The influence of state-mandated testing on teachers of literature. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis 14(3). 283-295.

Ellwood, S.C. (1997). The power of possibilities. In A.L. Goodwin (Ed.), Assessment for equity and inclusion: Embracing all our children (Transforming Teaching Series). New York: Routledge. pp. 77-99.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). The right to learn. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Ch. 7 Creating standards without standardization (excerpt), pp. 210-245.

##### **March 13 (M) Case Conference #2: Presentations and discussions of full case studies**

##### **March 16 (TH)**

*Due: Final case study, two commentaries, and reflective essay on case and commentaries*