

Case Method and Intercultural Education in the Digital Age –

DRAFT

Marsha A. Gartland
Robert F. McNergney
Scott R. Imig
Marla L. Muntner

University of Virginia

I. Our Challenge

In the post 9/11 era it seems almost gratuitous to suggest that we need to become more conscious of the world around us. But certainly this truism, like few others, bears repeating again and again, particularly to an audience of educators. To be socially and intellectually disconnected from one another is to be ignorant of the problems and possibilities of life around us -- a consequence no self-respecting teacher can abide. By studying in particular the educational lives of teachers and children in other nations and cultures, we have opportunities to see the future, for schools are where the future is being shaped.

No less important, if we are isolated from others around the globe, we will never be able to know ourselves fully. It is one thing to live and learn among those who share our history and values and quite another to compare our own collective identity to the identity of a culture that is distant to our own, both literally and figuratively. If social psychologists are right, and our various conceptions of self depend heavily on what we believe others think about us, we cannot truly know ourselves until we interact with and listen to people who are quite different from us.

Case-method teaching and learning on the Web can help us learn about others and also learn about ourselves. Here, an introduction to the ways online cases and case-methods work will be followed by an example focusing on teaching teachers using a case. Lastly, the potential for using international online exchanges in teaching and teacher education is explored.

II. Cases and Opportunities

A college sophomore comes to her foundations of education class prepared to discuss the previous night's reading on educating a multicultural student population. Instead, she and her classmates watch as their professor enters a URL (www.casenex.com) on the classroom computer and the CaseNEX website appears. The professor navigates the site and the multimedia case "Project Cape Town" begins to play.

As she watches, the young woman notes inconsistencies between her textbook's best-practice theories and the teaching methods employed in the Model C schools in Cape Town, South Africa – where recently integrated students and teachers begin to experience their similarities and differences. The teachers, she believes, should be doing more to guide the students through this process.

When the video ends, the young woman is quick to share her observations with her classmates. To her surprise, many disagree with her, and a lively discussion ensues. The professor guides the conversation by having class members identify the major issues in the case. The professor also encourages the class to consider explicitly the values of people depicted in the video. Students share knowledge they possess that might be relevant to the issues. Finally, the professor challenges the class to devise actions or

opportunities to mitigate the identified issues and identify possible consequences for those actions.

In the days that follow, the young woman and her classmates will log onto the Internet to perform many operations, including: viewing Project Cape Town again; reading expert perspectives on the case; participating in discussions on the Project Cape Town discussion site; sharing their opinions with their professor via private electronic journals; consulting a virtual reference library and scouring the Internet for related readings; and, through videoconferencing or chat, discussing the case with another culturally diverse group of educators geographically distant from themselves. Throughout this process, the participants in this class will become familiar with the technological tools they use, as well as with the issues in the case.

Case methods are typically used in professions in which complex interactions require professionals to exercise judgment rather than to apply rules and principles in prescriptive ways. The use of cases in the training of professionals in this country began at Harvard Law School in 1870 and now has a well-documented history in law, medicine, and business. Case studies have just recently begun to take root in teacher education.

Real-life scenarios lie at the heart of case studies. In education, these problem-centered stories can focus on issues of teaching and learning in classroom situations, education policy conflicts, and challenges related to colleagues, parents, or administrators. Often, expert analyses from different perspectives accompany cases and suggest that there are no right answers; instead different perspectives are presented for exploration to help educators practice making decisions about teaching and learning. Case studies encourage a vibrant connection between theory and practice – one that is

often missing in lecture and textbook learning. Because cases are based in practical reality, they offer credibility and relevance to contemporary education issues and problem solving skills (Shulman, 1992).

The stories represented in cases are as varied as the teaching methods used to enhance them. Instructional techniques range from use of quasi-Socratic discussions led by skilled instructors to student-oriented reading, reflection, and reaction (Shulman, 1992). Through case studies, educators learn not only about theory and practice, but also about morals and ethics, thereby becoming more capable and multiculturally aware problem solvers. Like professionals in law, business, and medicine, educators typically engage in advanced research, writing, and presentation skills when analyzing cases. As participants confront different values, they develop an inquiry-oriented teaching approach and a strong foundation on which to build consistent teaching behavior.

The resulting recognition of different values and actions are what make cases rich and successful teaching tools (McNergney, Ducharme, & Ducharme, 1999). A case's many layers allow for this and encourage participants to experience real-world teaching and learning situations as they are – not necessarily as they should be. As participants gather different ways to view the case issues, they work reflectively on their own dialogue and analyses, treating these as a form of second-order text (Shulman, 1992). In Piagetian terms, the balance between discomfort and safety then allows participants to engage in critical reflection and confront, rather than avoid, established beliefs, biases, and stereotypes (Houser & Chevalier, 1996). As a result, educators will be more

adequately prepared for the challenges facing today's schools. Combining these methods with multimedia technologies creates even more powerful and immediate results.

CaseNEX (originally “CaseNET”) was founded at the University of Virginia with this combination in mind. CaseNEX case studies and teacher education programs support increased professional knowledge, heightened problem solving skills, and the purposeful use of technology. Instructors encourage educators to study teaching and learning using situations that are familiar and distant – both physically and philosophically. The more than sixty cases in the CaseNEX library concern educational life in elementary, middle, and high schools across the United States. But participants also find cases about education in Australia, Cuba, India, South Africa, the Netherlands, and France. Parenthetically, these distant cases represent an important addition to standard teacher education curricula – stretching the knowledge base of teacher candidates and encouraging a global perspective.

This set of case-based curricula delivered online uses multimedia technologies to allow geographically disparate teachers to come together to consider educational problems. The first Web-enabled case, "Project Cape Town," was delivered via the Internet in 1995. The CaseNEX model is not distance learning in the traditional sense; the approach is more accurately described as "distributed education" supported by the World Wide Web. Students attend weekly class sessions at their site, and an on-site instructor, who has completed a training session sponsored by CaseNEX, guides student work. With the diversity of participants and the introduction of multimedia web technologies, the practice of "making the strange familiar" (McNergney, 1994) has taken case-based instruction to a new level of intercultural and interactive teaching and learning.

Working from scenarios or slices of real classroom life, pre-service and in-service CaseNEX participants learn to apply a case-study method. The method consists of five steps for making judgments in teaching and learning situations: (1) identifying issues, problems, dilemmas, and opportunities, (2) recognizing multiple perspectives, (3) calling up available knowledge, (4) proposing actions, and (5) forecasting consequences of such actions (McNergney, Herbert, & Ford, 1994; McNergney & Medley, 1984). These processes should help summon participants' intellectual responsibility, encouraging them to be cognizant of the issues and knowledge that guide their thinking and actions rather than uncritically accepting others' ideas. In exploring other perspectives and considering the possible consequences of proposed actions, participants will also increase their understanding of the complex moral decision making and the complicated realities inherent in teaching. In doing so, they will become better equipped to face similar issues in their professional lives.

Studies have demonstrated that teachers who participate in CaseNEX are better at identifying problems, designing educational interventions to address them, and evaluating the effects of their teaching (Bronack, 1998; Imig, in press; Kilbane, 2000). A recent study of online and face-to-face offerings of CaseNEX courses undertaken also suggests that live and virtual treatments were equally as effective for promoting the moral development of teachers who entered the treatment with relatively low moral reasoning skills (Gartland, in press). Continuing examination of the CaseNEX curricula and research on teacher development will determine how participants extract meaning from their experience.

III. Using Cases in an Online Community

The vast majority of educational problems cannot be solved procedurally by applying a formula; similarly, case methodology invites solutions that must be found by an interactive consideration of means and ends. While methods of teaching cases vary, reflection and analysis are consistent components. “Dilemma discussion” is the technique most often recommended for facilitating the development of moral reasoning and reflection (Rest, 1993). Dilemma discussion, better known as “case discussions” or “case-method learning,” provides a vehicle to investigate the multi-focal dilemmas of education, to link theory and practice, and to explore morals and ethics while enhancing problem-solving skills.

Unlike strictly video-based or text-based cases, multimedia cases provide the benefits of technology along with the complexity of case content. The Internet enables the delivery of multiple technologies that, when combined, can create and enhance the verisimilitude of cases and the interaction possible in teacher education. Cases available on the World Wide Web utilize various forms of hypermedia that allow participants the flexibility to choose their own pathways through case materials (Merseeth & Lacey, 1993). Working online also enables synchronous and asynchronous conversations that contribute to the construction of knowledge by bringing various perspectives to bear on case analyses and discussions.

Network-based learning environments that provide opportunities to discuss educational issues with one another are fairly new. In the more advanced models for online course deliveries using the World Wide Web, participants have access to a variety of global library resources, online publications and journal articles, audio and video files,

and desktop videoconferencing. In such environments, learners take more responsibility for their own learning processes as they collect, record, and analyze data; and reflect on previous understandings within an environment that gives the opportunity for students to interact together to build a community of learners (Jonassen et al, 1995). CaseNEX is the first Web-based environment to offer cases and interactions in such a manner.

IV. A Case in Point

“Project Cape Town,” and international case from the CaseNEX library, illustrates some of the ways multimedia cases enhance intercultural connections and the ways these connections can deepen understanding of issues closer to home.

Project Cape Town, according to Kent (1997) was created using raw video footage from two Model C schools in Cape Town, South Africa. These schools were among the first to pioneer racial integration in South Africa. By happenstance, the Cape Town video footage was taken during the same week that South Africa ratified the constitution which eventually led to the election of Nelson Mandela. Because this event marked the historical transformation of a country’s government and culture, South African politics and culture became very popular topics in the Western press. The Project Cape Town case compliments this interest well.

The first case segment focuses on a music class. The teacher of the class is white, and all the students in the class are black. The teacher encourages the students to sing songs from their tribal culture, yet the spontaneity and loose structure of the tribal songs seems at odds with her European notions of performance. This tension can be inferred by observing the interaction between the teacher and the students on the video tape. The

meeting of the two previously segregated cultures in a music class offers a rich event for exploration.

The second segment shows a videotaped interview of an Afrikaans and English teacher at one of the schools. The teacher discusses two interesting dimensions related to the recent integration of the school: language differences and discipline problems. The language issues involve the tendency of some black students to speak loudly in public places. The teacher says this was a cultural artifact rooted in the belief that if one spoke loudly in public, others would know the speaker was not gossiping. She continues by describing the white students' reactions to this behavior. The discipline dilemma concerns the frequent tardiness of many of the black students who, unlike their white counterparts, use unreliable public transportation to travel an hour or more to school. The teacher raises the questions of whether it is correct to punish such tardiness and whether no punishment would be perceived as fair by the white students. This interview clearly describes some of the daily issues that arise from integration.

The third segment draws from a speech given by a senior black student to her peers at a high school. She describes her own thoughts regarding the fact that even though black and white students share the same physical space, they still remain segregated socially. Her reflections are compelling. The inclusion of a student's perspective enriches the case and case discussion tremendously.

The fourth segment comes from a lesson on perceptions taught by an English teacher. The teacher uses a demonstration with hats to illustrate how people's perceptions can be changed easily by relatively minor factors. The lesson is engaging and addresses issues of how people get along with one another. Because this video

footage contains actual teaching, viewers can focus directly on classroom events. These four selections (two classroom scenes, a teacher's perspective, and a student's perspective) reflect a diversity of issues and perspectives.

Dr. Rudy Ford, formerly of Hampton University's School of Education, uses web-assisted cases and related technologies to help teachers address the challenges of teaching in culturally diverse environments. Ford probes teachers' thinking about cases to help them synthesize their knowledge of and beliefs about classroom learning. According to Ford, using cases at the pre-service level, "forces students to think and reflect on their feet, which is what they'll have to do out there in schools."

Ford and his colleagues introduce the comparative and global education chapter in his foundations class with Project Cape Town. Problems that occur in schools halfway around the world sound familiar to his students. The idea is for educators to learn more about their own country's educational system by thinking critically about what happens in schools outside U.S. borders.

The basis for this learning can be found in the work of practical theorists such as George Herbert Meade (1934), Lev Vygotsky (1978), and John Dewey (1938). Meade stressed the importance of role-taking as a catalyst for growth and maintained that active participation in "real-world" activities offered conditions appropriate for development. Vygotsky stressed the role of discourse and social interaction in development, presenting learners with a variety of perspectives and problems to solve. The key to Vygotsky's theory is his postulation of the zone of proximal development, described as a person's range of potential for learning and development. Dewey elaborated on the important interplay between action and reflection, highlighting the importance of integrating theory

and practice. All developmental theorists agree that learning begins with a knowledge disturbance. This perturbation has been major focus of inquiry, prompting numerous studies seeking to identify elements and conditions necessary for such growth (Firth and Pajak, 1998). Online, multimedia case studies provide opportunities for the interaction, reflection, and perturbation that are the foundation of effective education.

CaseNEX instructors work with students using online journals and discussions to enhance these opportunities for learning by prompting further reflection and a deepening sensitivity to intercultural issues. Similarly, participants' growth in intercultural awareness and communications skills are encouraged through interactions with one another within this Web-enabled community.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is a useful tool for guiding participants' growth in addressing intercultural differences (Bennett, 1986; 1993). Using concepts from cognitive psychology and constructivism, this model breaks responses to cultural difference into six stages. The first three stages are considered ethnocentric in that when operating within them, a person's own culture is considered central to reality. The second three stages are considered ethnorelative in that they represent a view of one's own culture within the context of others (Bennett & Hammer, 1998). Ideally, as a person gains exposure to and understanding of other cultures, their reactions progress along this continuum of responses and they eventually gain the ability to accept, respect, adapt to, and integrate cultural differences.

Instructors using case studies can encourage movement along this continuum by responding to participant journals and discussion responses. The following examples from "Project Cape Town" asynchronous discussion group on the Web illustrate this

approach. The discussion revolves around the first case scene in which the white music teacher is at odds with the spontaneity and looseness of her students' tribal singing:

“I have found that it is hard to be good at two things at the same time. There is a limited resource of time, and the teacher would not be able to provide an in-depth study on both musical styles. As long as the students are enjoying music, I think whatever she does is ok.”

This discussion response falls within Bennett's ethnocentric-minimalization stage in that it diminishes cultural differences and considers them inconsequential. The challenge at this stage is to “continue learning about one's own culture and to avoid projecting that culture onto the experience of others” (Hammer & Bennett, 1998). An appropriate instructor response might be:

“Aside from differences in musical styles, how else might the teacher's culture differ from that of her student's? In what ways might the two be alike? Similarly, reflect on a time you have interacted with someone outside of your own culture. In what ways do your two cultures differ? In what ways are they similar?”

The next discussion response falls within Bennett's ethnorelative-acceptance stage in that it acknowledges and accepts cultural differences. The challenge at this stage is to view the “world through the lens of a different world view while maintaining your own commitments to values” (Hammer & Bennett, 1998):

“In this music class we find a group of black students and a white teacher. This event only recognizes the black students in the class, which makes me wonder if there are only these black students in this particular class. It makes this class sound almost as if it is segregated. If this is the case, then the school does not seem to be addressing its goal of being an integrated school. However, I feel this teacher has the right ideas. Even though she is partial to European traditions of performance, she encourages the students to express the musical concepts embedded in their own culture, and to do so in their own ways. Her actions promote the culture of these students. She helps bring some meaning to the material the students are learning.”

An appropriate instructor response would encourage the participant to emphasize the importance of both cultures and make connections to her teaching strategies:

“How might you envision responding appropriately to the students’ singing while also honoring your musical heritage? Think of an analogous situation in your own teaching experience. How might you respond to the unique cultural needs of your student/s while honoring your cultural norms?”

As participants and instructors collaborate in exploring cases, their understanding of both global and local issues, opportunities, and perspectives grows.

IV. The Future is Now

Cases are no substitute for real life. Teachers need rich, challenging experiences with real children in real situations to foster continued professional development. Yet, these first-hand experiences are expensive and difficult to provide consistently. The objectivity provided by case studies allows aspiring and experienced teachers opportunities to stand back, analyze, reflect, evaluate, and collaborate in finding effective solutions to complex education challenges. Cases on the web open pedagogical possibilities for teachers and teacher educators everywhere to work in ethnically diverse and internationally varied contexts. Both case content and collaborative cross-culture study groups encourage educators to broaden their professional horizons in safe yet challenging ways--ways that real life does not often afford.

References

- Bennett, M. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(2), 179-195.
- Bronack, S. C. (1998). Analyzing multimedia cases: Teacher development in a Web based environment. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Collier Books, 1938.
- Hammer, M. R., & Bennett, M. J. (1998). *The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) manual*. Portland, OR: Intercultural Communication Institute.
- Houser, N., & Chevalier, M. (1996). Multicultural self-development in the preservice classroom: Equity education in the dominant culture. Delaware, MD.
- Imig (2003). CaseNEX evaluation data. Unpublished manuscript, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.
- Kent, T. W. (1997). Project Cape Town: A description of the use of a multimedia Web case. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. University of Virginia, Charlottesville.
- Kilbane, C. R. (2000). Preservice teachers' use of multimedia cases. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.
- McNergney, R.F., & Medley, D.M. (1984). Teacher evaluation. In J.M. Cooper (Ed.) *Developing Skills for Instructional Supervision*. New York: Longman Inc., 147-178.
- McNergney, R. (1994). Videocases: A way to foster global perspective on multicultural education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(4).
- McNergney, R. F., Herbert, J. M., & Ford, R. E. (1994). Co-operation and competition in case-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(5), 339-345.
- McNergney, R. F., Ducharme, E. F., & Ducharme, M. K. (Eds.). (1999). *Educating for democracy: Case method teaching and learning*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
- Merseth, K. K., & Lacey, C. A. (1993). Weaving stronger fabric: The pedagogical promise of hypermedia and case methods in teacher education. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 9(3), 283-299.
- Rest, J. R. (1993). Research on moral judgment in college students. In Andrew Garrod (Ed.), *Approaches to moral development: New research and emerging themes* (pp. 201-211). New York: Teachers College Press.

Shulman, L. S. (1992). Toward a pedagogy of cases. In J. H. Shulman (Ed.), *Case methods in teacher education* (pp. 254). New York: Teachers College Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.