

Case Study 5

New Kid on the Block



Introduction

The case in this publication was written by a member of the College of Early Childhood Educators. The case describes a real experience in the professional practice of a registered early childhood educator. It profiles a professional dilemma, incorporates participants with multiple perspectives and explores ethical complexities.

This case study may be used by members as a source for reflection and dialogue about the practice of early childhood educators within the framework of the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*.

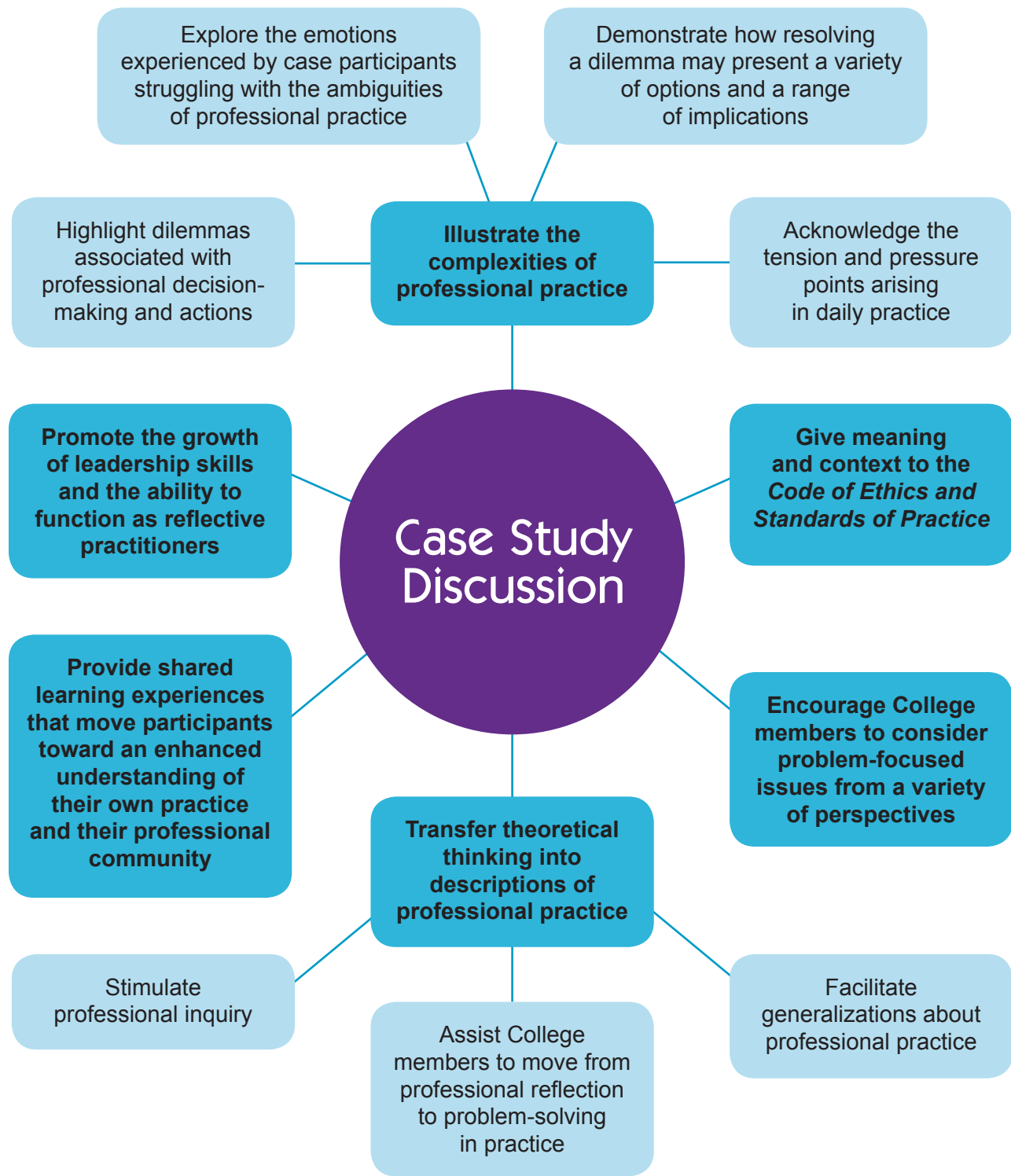
Case studies give meaning and context to the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*. They transfer theoretical thinking into the realities, complexities and ambiguities of professional practice. They highlight the dilemmas and emotional tension associated with professional decision-making and action. Analyzing a case encourages College members to examine problem-focused issues from a variety of perspectives and to explore the implications of a range of decision-making options or solutions.

Case studies stimulate professional inquiry and reflective practice. Discussing a case is a shared professional learning experience through which members gain an enhanced understanding of their practice and their broader professional community. College members, while engaging in case reflection and discussion, may also construct new understandings and develop additional strategies to enhance their practice.

Case-based professional learning encourages RECEs to step back from the specifics of daily practice and analyze, in a more global way, the broader issues arising across their profession. RECEs can reflect, question assumptions and gain new insights into not only their own practice, but also their profession.

Case studies assist RECEs to identify common themes inherent to the rewards and challenges of working in the early childhood education sector. In this way, individual RECEs recognize that what seemed to be personal or isolated incidents are often examples of the broader and fundamental dilemmas facing other early childhood educators throughout the profession.

Enhancing Professional Practice through Case Study Discussion



New Kid on the Block

Day one: I couldn't believe it! With my College of Early Childhood Educators membership in hand, I was starting my first job at my previous student placement site. That was a good thing! The staff members and I already knew each other. We got along so well during my placement and they had made frequent references about what a great job I had done. Naturally, I felt some stress about starting my first job as an ECE – but I wasn't really worried or anxious.

Arrow Early Learning Centre looked exactly as I remembered. The centre had crisp walls with children's artwork neatly displayed, the smell of freshly baked banana bread, laughing parents, engaged staff and children at play. Robin, the centre supervisor, greeted me warmly and guided me to the toddler room.

"Jenna, welcome aboard! It's great to have you join our toddler room." Carol, my room partner and also an RECE, beamed ear-to-ear as she greeted me with open arms. Her enthusiasm was infectious and I couldn't help but feel at ease.

"Hi Carol, it's so good to be back. I'm just grateful to have this opportunity. My placement here in the kindergarten room was great. I love working with all the age groups, and toddlers are no exception." I beamed right back, hoping I exuded just the right amount of ambitious enthusiasm.

Now, a month later while I'm sitting on the bus on my way to work, I can't help but feel as though something's not right. I can't quite put my finger on what exactly was wrong. The toddlers at the centre are all thriving and I've developed strong relationships with the families. Robin likes the work I'm doing and collaborating with Carol and Oliver, the third staff person in the toddler room, seem so effortless. We laugh a lot, share ideas and our program plans are moving along well, so why do I have this nagging feeling that something isn't working?

Over the next week, I start noticing what might be triggering my worrying. Certain comments made by some staff members are making me feel uncomfortable.

On the day a resource consultant was scheduled to visit the centre, one of my colleagues made a flippant remark. "Oh sure, here comes the help. Like they can actually be of any help! That kid has serious problems. Bringing in a supposed specialist once a month – what good will that do?"

Just before I left work last Friday, another RECE made a sarcastic remark. "You think Oliver is great to work with? That guy knows nothing about programming."

This week I was asked by one of my co-workers at the centre to talk to a parent who normally would have met with the RECE working the most often with their child, Adam. "Adam's family drives me nuts. You go talk to them. They've been such pills since the divorce. I can't handle crybaby parents."

Did I not notice those kinds of comments during my placement? What about during my first month on the job?

Now that I have been working here for three months, I'm officially past my probation period. That is very reassuring, but I don't feel happy. I'm finding it harder to get up for work, and the enthusiasm I felt on day one is long gone. What's wrong with me?

**The name of the early childhood educator who wrote the story is not provided. Names, locations, contexts and/or dilemmas presented in the case have been modified for the purposes of confidentiality.*

“Jenna, it’s time to get those toddlers rocking.” Oliver’s perky comment jolts me. Oliver and Carol still refer to me as “the new kid on the block” and it seems like I am regularly assigned to handle all of the “dirty dos”, even though my skills have progressed over the past three months. Not only am I able to get all of the diapers done in record time, but I am also incredibly adept at navigating the flurry of sweaters, coats, hats, mitts and boots with the toddlers in full song and dance while my co-educators set up the room for morning programming.

It is noon on Wednesday and we are experiencing snow and freezing rain again. That means another lunch for me in the staff room. As staff members from different rooms gather, I begin to feel uncomfortable and awkward. My face is starting to flush. I sink my nose deeper into my novel, bracing for another torrent of comments.

“Try working with Ben’s family. They have no comprehension of the English language whatsoever. He’s barely surviving in our preschool room. That kid has no chance in school if his parents don’t pull themselves together.”

“There is no way I would raise my child to be vegan. Did you see the food Cooper had to eat? If you really love your child, you’d think twice about what you feed him.”

I couldn’t help but interject. “You know, being vegan isn’t such a bad thing. Studies have shown, so long as you balance out food choices so all nutritional components are met ...”

Elena, one of the RECEs from the preschool room, cuts me off. “Oh Jenna, you’re still young and green. You’ll see.”

I’m incredulous! Young and green? Sure, I only received my ECE diploma this year, but I have plenty of experience under my belt. I’m a mother. I’ve lived an experienced life with my own three children. I’ve worked with children for more than 10 years before getting my diploma. I am not young, and I am definitely not green!

Days pass and my uneasiness continues to get worse. Maybe I’m just being too sensitive – especially after Adam’s dad yelled at me because I didn’t pack his nap time blanket and toy to go home. I didn’t even know he would be going on holidays.

When I shared with Carol my oversight the following day, she shrugged and responded, “Oh yeah, guess I forgot to tell you. Better you dealing with his crybaby parent than me.”

The following day, I walk into the centre and hear shouting. I see Ben’s parents from the preschool room. There’s no doubt that they’re upset, and his mom looks like she’s on the verge of tears. I decide to step in to offer my help. Would they like to go sit down and talk in a different room? Could I get them some water? Would they like to talk to Robin?

At the mention of Robin’s name, Ben’s father yells “No! No Robin!” and storms out the centre with his wife right behind him. I’m shocked and speechless.

I run upstairs to Robin’s office and knock on the door. She is standing by the filing cabinets appearing somewhat flushed but otherwise composed.

“Robin, I’m really sorry to interrupt you. I just wanted to let you know that I saw Ben’s mother and father ...”

Robin cuts me off again. “Don’t remind me.”

“You know?” I ask.

“Yes I know. They really are impossible. They only care about their culture, their values and their expectations. I told them to go home. I have more important things to do with my day than worry about them and their complaints.”

I stand in Robin's office stunned. She tells me to go back to work. I have a sinking feeling in my stomach. My throat is tight and my heart is racing.

For the rest of the day, I work in a foggy daze. Despite all the laughs and giggles shared with the toddlers, I can't help but think of everything that has happened over the past few months, and now this most recent incident with Robin.

Maybe I don't know the whole story. Since I'm an RECE in the toddler room and not the preschool room, perhaps I should not have become involved with Ben's parents or tried to help. At the same time, I can't help but feel as though Robin should have handled the situation differently.

Where are all the values that I had learned about collaborating with colleagues and families, and demonstrating respect for children, families and other professionals?

Is this what life as an RECE will be like for the rest of my career?

Case Study Reflections

1. What are the key facts of the case?
2. Analyze the case from the perspectives of the case writer, Ben's parents and the director. How do their perspectives differ?
3. What are the main issues in this case?
4. When the case writer sees that Ben's parents are upset, she offers her help. As an educator in the toddler room and not the preschool room, she questions whether or not it was her place to become involved with Ben's parents. To what extent do you think her actions can be justified?
5. In what ways do you think this case reflects the collective experiences of other members of the early childhood education profession?
6. How are the ethical and professional standards reflected (or not reflected) through this case?
7. By the end of the case study, the case writer appears to have a diminished sense of professional self-confidence and questions her future career. What advice would you give this REECE?

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