



# Case Study 2

## Accepting the Consequences

# Introduction

The case in this publication was written by a registered member of the College of Early Childhood Educators. The case describes a real experience in the professional practice of an early childhood educator (ECE). 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 registered early childhood educators (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.

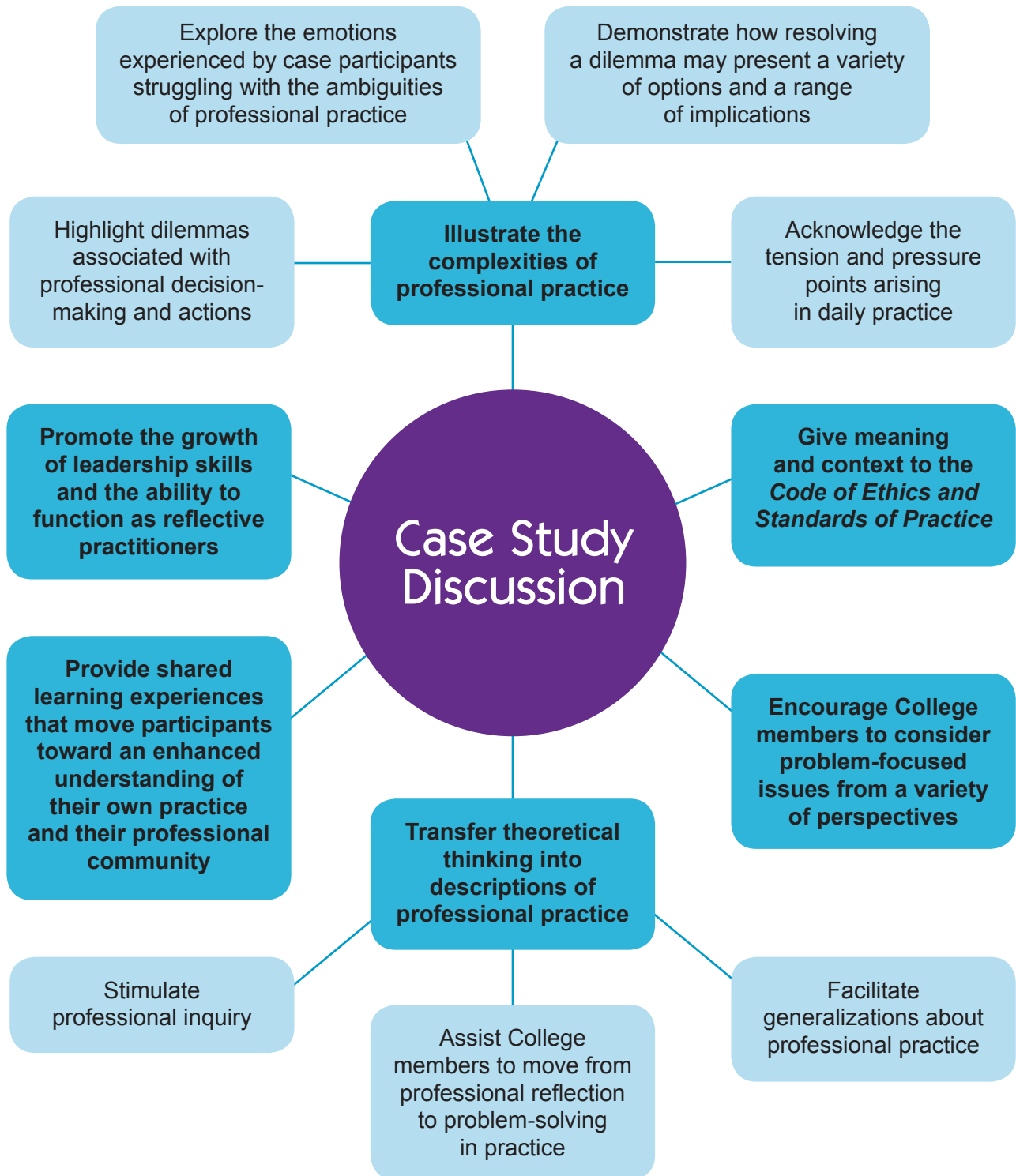
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# Enhancing Professional Practice through Case Study Discussion



# Accepting the Consequences

Now what? I read the message sitting on my desk again. I had just returned to the child care centre from an early morning meeting for area supervisors. What had happened and why would the Children's Aid Society (CAS) call me?

Our child care centre offers a caring and nurturing environment for infants and toddlers. We encourage family involvement in our program. Most of the children look forward to beginning their day with us. Crisis situations in our centre are few and far between. Why was CAS calling me?

Juliana\*, an RECE from our centre, briskly approached my desk. "I need to tell you right now what happened in the infant room this morning. It's really important," she said.

Juliana began to recount the morning's events. "Mrs. Redford, Randy's mother, witnessed Valerie behaving in what she believed was an inappropriate way and she got really angry. In the infant room, Simone was climbing on a shelf loaded with toys and it was about to topple over onto the floor. According to Mrs. Redford, Valerie grabbed Simone roughly and very abruptly seated her on a mat. Mrs. Redford told me that Valerie had pounced on Simone and terrified her."

Juliana emphasized that Mrs. Redford, who was at the centre delivering cupcakes for her son's birthday, was outraged. She had yelled at Valerie, "What are you doing? You can't do that to a baby, I'm going to call the police."

Juliana said she saw Valerie step back and roll her eyes and heard her ask Mrs. Redford, "Would you have preferred that Simone had fallen?"

Mrs. Redford stood her ground and yelled again. "You can't do that to a baby!"

Apparently, more words flew back and forth between the two women as children gathered at their feet. Other staff members seemed transfixed by the escalating voices in the usually quiet room. Finally Valerie, now in tears, hustled out of the infant room.

Later that morning, Marie, an RECE, approached me and informed me that she had called CAS because Mrs. Redford had come to her with the accusation against Valerie and again threatened to call the police.

I had known Mrs. Redford for some time. She always seemed to be a very caring parent who often spoke positively about our program. I had never seen her upset or flustered about anything happening in our centre.

At this point, I decided it was time for me to respond to the call from CAS. I wasn't pleased with the situation. I would have preferred to have interviewed Valerie myself. I also would have liked to have personally spoken to anyone who might have witnessed the scene with Valerie and Simone.

My first choice would have been to work within the centre and coolly and calmly try to understand what had happened rather than involving CAS. I was aware of the ramifications: reports that would have to be filed; investigations begun; parents alarmed; gossip initiated and routines disrupted.

**I liked to think of the centre as a safe place where children prospered and where trusted staff members were supported by a community that truly believed their children's interests were at the heart of our care.**

My thoughts returned to Valerie. Had she saved Simone from seriously hurting herself? Had Valerie, in a panic, lost her control? Worse yet, was Valerie's rough response a deliberate act? I wasn't sure what to think.

Finally, I dialed the CAS number and spoke with a case worker who informed me two calls had already been placed reporting Valerie. I was interested to discover that besides Marie, there had been another complaint made anonymously and not by Mrs. Redford. This information made me pause and wonder if Valerie had, indeed, been out of line.

*\*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.*

The CAS case worker directed me to complete an internal investigation. I began with Valerie. “I will be conducting an investigation into this morning’s incident with Simone. Please see me at 4 p.m. in my office and you should arrange for your union representative to be present.” Valerie must have surmised that the events would follow this protocol. She met my eyes and nodded.

At 3 p.m., Valerie handed me her written account of the morning’s events. She offered no additional verbal comments and behaved professionally. Her notes indicated that she had phoned and invited her union representative to our meeting.

The following day, I interviewed the witnesses and gathered written statements in response to two questions. What did you actually see and hear happen between Valerie and Simone in the infant room? Why do you think Simone became so upset?

The witnesses’ factual descriptions of what they saw and heard were fairly consistent. The explanations of why Simone was so upset, however, varied.

**I remembered two other occasions involving complaints against Valerie. Was a pattern emerging? Should my gut feeling add anything to my assessment of this present accusation?**

I liked Valerie and had hired her right out of school because she was so enthusiastic about working with infants. She had graduated at the top of her class and her professors all felt she had a promising career ahead of her. Yet, over the last five years, there had been a few issues and each time, like today, I was surprised.

The first incident I recalled was a complaint from a parent involving a three-year-old child. Mrs. Franklin had been hesitant in her words, accusing Valerie of telling her son, “The dragon will get you if you don’t listen to me.”

Valerie vehemently denied saying this when I confronted her. She had blushed deeply and avoided my eyes. She even laughed in a high-pitched way that made me nervous. I accepted her denial somewhat uneasily.

The second complaint about Valerie was made

by Mr. Franconi, a member of the community. He related that he had witnessed Valerie roughly holding a child by the chin on the playground. When questioned, Valerie confirmed, “I was talking to Michael and he wouldn’t listen. I touched his chin to make him look at me.” She denied being harsh.

After the second complaint from Mr. Franconi, I had reviewed the centre’s behaviour management guidelines with Valerie. Also, because I wanted to remind staff about the behavior management guidelines, I issued a formal written warning to Valerie and posted an up-to-date version of the behavior management guidelines on the staff bulletin board.

The following week, the investigation meeting was held. In attendance were Valerie, her union representative, myself and another management staff member. There was a high level of tension in the room. During my questioning, I could sense Valerie was clearly uncomfortable.

I asked a series of questions. “How did you remove the child from the toy shelf? How did you put her down? When the parent spoke to you what was your response? Why did you leave the room? Were you aware that when you left the room, staffing ratios were not being met and children were unsupervised?”

Valerie made no response, looked glum and occasionally cast a glance at me and her union representative.

After the meeting, Valerie received written notice from the child care centre management indicating that she had been issued a one-day suspension from work. Valerie filed a grievance with her union. The union requested that the one-day suspension be removed.

Another meeting is scheduled two weeks from today. I will ask the centre lawyer to be present. I still feel that staff members who cross boundaries or commit any wrong doing should take responsibility for their actions, accept the consequences and learn from their mistakes.

I shook my head and asked myself out loud, “Wouldn’t Valerie be better off just admitting what she had done and accepting the consequences?”

# Case Study Reflections

1. What are the key facts in this case?
2. What dilemmas exist for the case writer and for Valerie?
3. What ethical and professional practice standards could support the decision-making and actions undertaken by the case writer, Valerie, Juliana and Maria?
4. To what extent and in what ways do you think this case reflects the collective experiences of other members of the early childhood education profession?

5. The case writer indicates that Valerie was issued a one-day suspension from work following the investigation meeting. What do you think the implications arising from this decision might be for the case writer, Valerie, Juliana, Maria, the child care centre management, the union, CAS and the parent community?

6. To what extent do you think that the case writer's closing question provides a satisfying ending to the case?

7. What advice would you give Valerie and the case writer?

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