



Case Study 4

No Qualified Staff

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.

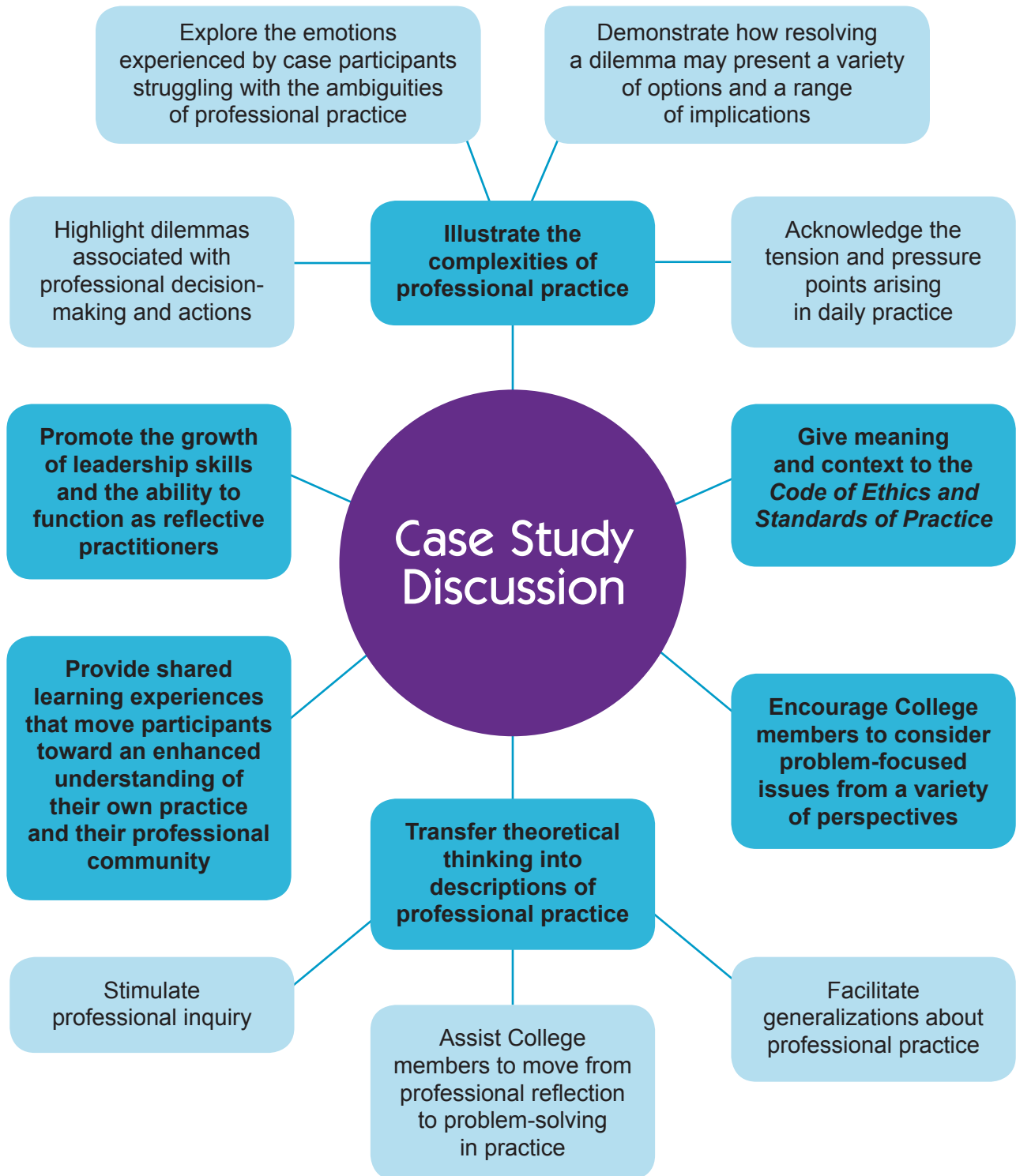
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Enhancing Professional Practice through Case Study Discussion



No Qualified Staff

“Hey Lindsay*, did you see the memo?” Alexis whispered to me. Her face was flushed from excitement. Sure enough, there was a memo tacked to the bulletin board like the missing posters people hung up on telephone poles. The bottom was fluttering in the breeze from the fan. We rarely had reason to look on the staff board because Laura, our supervisor, communicated with all of us on a personal level. She never let us “just read about it” via inter-office memos. She believed that knowledgeable and informed staff members were happy staff. We appreciated that about her.

The memo was short and to the point. “We are sad to announce the resignation of Laura Donavon from Peeps Child Care. We wish her the best in her future endeavours. Please help us welcome Polly Peters as the new supervisor.”

We had heard that Laura was leaving. It was worrisome, however, waiting to find out who would be our new supervisor. Now we knew.

I could feel the dread in my stomach, like a rock sitting deep in my gut, weighing me down. I had heard rumours that Polly was best friends with the owner of the centre. This, plus stories I’ve heard from her previous staff, made me nervous. I was told that Polly often disregarded the rules and chose favourites among the staff. I have always been one to follow the rules and took pride in working hard to act professionally. It was going to be an adjustment. A wave of nausea started to slowly rise to my throat. I realized that, despite what I had heard, I needed to give Polly an opportunity and not meet her with predetermined judgements. I was determined to give her a chance.

Polly started at the centre at the beginning of summer. We are a medium-sized child care centre nestled in a school with toddler, preschool, and school-age programs. I worked in the

preschool room along with Tanya, a registered early childhood educator (RECE) and Nancy, who is an assistant. We also had four other staff who worked with the toddler and school-age groups.

On this particular morning, Tanya had called in sick. Unable to find an RECE, we called in another assistant. It was a beautiful afternoon and I looked forward to ending my shift at 3 p.m. Polly had gone on a trip with the school-age program so the centre was quiet without the hustle and bustle of the older children moving around. I sat completing my program plans for the next day. Alexis, the RECE who worked with the toddlers, came into my room.

“Hey Alexis, what’s up?” I asked.

“Oh, I just wanted to tell you that we only have four toddlers today, so I called Polly and she said I could go home early. I was thinking I would leave at 1:30 p.m. during my lunch hour.”

I turned and looked directly at Alexis. “You’re leaving today at 1:30?” I asked just to be sure that I had heard her correctly. “But I am supposed to be leaving at 3 p.m. and since the qualified school-age person is not here, you will be the only qualified staff on the premises.” I knew that it was a requirement in the child care centre’s policy that a qualified staff member was on the premises at all times. I didn’t understand why Polly would let Alexis leave. Perhaps Polly didn’t remember that my shift ended at three that day.

“Oh, I don’t know. Anyways, I am going to get my stuff. I have to go and get my kids. I’m so busy. You wouldn’t understand. You don’t have kids,” huffed Alexis as she rushed out of the room. I looked at the spot where she had been standing and tried to think of what to do next. Maybe Polly intended to come back to cover.

I contemplated calling Polly at that moment but, because I had been previously reprimanded by her when I asked a similar question, I decided to wait until closer to the time I was to go home and hope the school-age children and staff would return by then.

**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.*

As 3 p.m. drew closer, the nausea I felt in my stomach increased. I did not feel comfortable in calling Polly to authorize my overtime as I waited for the other group to come back. I was very unsure of what her reaction was going to be this time. Was she going to be supportive or would she get angry with me for calling her?

Finally at 2:45 p.m., I decided to call her. I slowly dialed her number, meanwhile hoping the other group would get back so that I wouldn't need to talk to Polly.

I really missed the days when my old supervisor, Laura, would inform us of the things happening in the centre and did not leave us guessing. I listened to the phone ring then a click. "Hello," Polly answered. She had a voice that was distinct and easy to identify.

"Hi Polly, it's me Lindsay."

"Yeah." She replied.

"Polly, I just need to ask you if you want me to stay a little later today because there will be no RECE at the centre if I leave. Alexis has left for the day and the school-age group is not back yet," I managed to say. I didn't know what her reaction was going to be. Some days she was very helpful and some days everything seemed to annoy her.

"So who will be in the centre?" She asked.

"Just Nancy, Sandy and the supply staff person. None of them are qualified ECE staff so I don't think I can leave".

"No it's okay, you can go."

I paused a moment to collect my thoughts. I wasn't sure what to say. Ever since I could remember, I have been taught that there must be an RECE on the premises at all times. I was confused that my supervisor, who should know the policies, was telling me otherwise. "Are you sure?" I asked slowly.

There was a pause. Perhaps she sensed my hesitancy. "Go ahead and leave unless you are willing to stay," she finally snapped.

"Of course I am willing. I don't really mind. Besides, I don't want to leave the centre with no qualified staff." I hoped that she didn't feel like I was trying to insult her.

"Whatever, just stay then. It doesn't really matter. It will be only for a few minutes. The school-age group should be back soon".

"No, it's okay. I'll stay."

"Whatever. Okay, I have to go. I'm driving."

I sighed as I heard the click that signified she had hung up. I went over the conversation in my head wondering if I had heard it right. Had my supervisor just suggested that I could leave the centre without a qualified staff? I understood it was only for a few minutes, but I was not comfortable with not following the policies of the centre. As I waited for the school-age group to return to the centre, I tried to figure out whether I could have misunderstood the conversation. I didn't think I had.

The school-age group returned at 4 p.m. that afternoon tired from the trip. It was an hour after I was scheduled to leave. I passed on the message to Mark that he would be the only qualified staff in the building.

As I headed home, I knew that I needed to do something about what happened today, but was unsure what to do. Had I followed the directions of Polly I would've left the centre without qualified staff for an hour. If I brought up my concerns with the owner, my job might be in jeopardy. Polly was good friends with her.

My professional side told me that it was important someone knew what had happened this afternoon. My personal side reminded me that I needed to keep my job. What was I going to do?

Case Study Reflections

1. What are the key facts in this case?

2. What are the issues that have an impact on the way this case unfolds?

3. What ethical and professional practice standards are integral to this case?

4. What are the dilemmas experienced by the case writer?

5. What role do you think Alexis played in the way this case evolved? To what extent do you think her actions were justified?

6. How might the tensions evident in this workplace have an impact on the employees, children and parent community?

7. What do you think the case writer will do? What might be the implications arising from this course of action?

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