

USING CASES AS A STRATEGY WITH MIDDLE GRADES PRESERVICE  
TEACHERS TO FOSTER THEIR DECISION MAKING

by

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(Under the Direction of Elizabeth Pate)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine what influenced the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers and how middle grades preservice teachers used cases as a strategy to foster decision making. Participants were seven middle grades preservice teachers from a small, private, Christian college in the southeast. Each participant was a case study. Data sources included interviews, class discussions, and artifacts. Within-case analysis and cross case analysis were used in the study. Findings indicate that participants had common and differing themes for what influenced their decision making and for how they used cases as a strategy to foster decision making. All participants were influenced in their decision making by their field experiences, personal experiences, and other people. Some participants were also influenced by other sources, needs and characteristics of students, and examining possible outcomes of decisions. Using cases as a strategy to foster decision making gave all participants the opportunity to reflect, helped them identify solutions to the dilemmas presented in the cases, and helped them examine consequences of the decisions they might make. Some participants used cases as a strategy to put them in the role of the teacher and to help them think about multiple perspectives.

INDEX WORDS: Cases, Preservice Teachers, Strategy, Decision Making, Middle School, Field Experiences, Qualitative Research, Teacher Preparation

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband and daughter, Tom and Ashley Hollinshead, whose encouragement and support sustained me through the long hours of writing, and who never complained about my lack of participation in household responsibilities. This dissertation is also dedicated to my parents, George and Frances Cleveland, who instilled in me a love for learning and encouraged me to set high standards for myself.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers make thousands of decisions each day. Some of these decisions are made before instruction, others are made during instruction, and still others are made after instruction. The decisions teachers make are often influenced by personal experience and knowledge of students. Because decision making is an important skill, it is important to foster it. As a teacher for almost three decades, I have made thousands of decisions related to teaching.

I taught middle school for twenty years in various settings: rural, suburban, large schools, small schools, schools that were not very diverse, and schools that were very diverse. Due to personal reasons, I applied and was accepted to teach middle grades preservice teachers at a small, private Christian college. At this time, the question that became foremost in my mind was how can I best use my experiences to help these middle school preservice teachers become more effective classroom teachers? As future middle school educators, these preservice teachers will make many instructional, management, and procedural decisions each day. They need to be prepared to make decisions that are in the best interest of both their students and themselves.

First, I had to take a close look at my background, then at myself as an educator, and finally at these preservice teachers who looked to me for guidance as they prepared for a teaching career. I grew up in a community near this college. As a matter of fact, I attended the college as an undergraduate student when it was a junior college. Therefore,

I can identify very closely with most of my students and understand their small town thoughts. Many of the students come from the surrounding community or from a community very similar to this one. The college is located in a very rural area. Most of the students come from middle-class, Christian families. The communities in which they have been raised are not very diverse, and these students are very naive concerning people from different ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as those with different sexual orientations.

I seek to prepare these preservice teachers to face the many challenges and opportunities that they will confront in the public schools, which are becoming more diverse each day. Diversity provides positive opportunities for students to learn to interact in society. Because I was not adequately prepared to teach diverse learners, I seek to provide experiences which will adequately prepare these future middle school teachers to teach in a diverse society. Preparing these future educators to become effective problem solvers and decision makers in the middle school classroom is an important part of my role as an instructor. However, many times our preservice teachers are not prepared to deal with some of the diversity issues because of their mono-cultural backgrounds.

Developing the problem solving and decision making skills of these preservice teachers will assist them in approaching new experiences in the classroom from different perspectives. The classroom presents new opportunities each day. In our area of the south, teachers experience students from different cultures, students who speak other languages, students with exceptionalities, students from many religious and socioeconomic backgrounds, and students whose family values and sexual orientations

are different from their own. In addition, many classroom students come from homes where drugs and alcohol present many problems. Hopefully, the preservice teachers will appreciate the many opportunities they have as classroom teachers during their field experiences to help students understand themselves and others who are different. They will use the knowledge gained as preservice teachers to understand how students can learn from each other and how they, as teachers, can learn from their students to create a classroom climate of respect and acceptance of those who are different. My desire is to become a more effective instructor, and in turn prepare these future educators to become more effective middle school teachers by enhancing their decision making skills.

#### Rationale

As teachers make decisions in the classroom, they constantly evaluate circumstances, find problems, look at alternative courses of action, and respond to the situations that arise. These decisions may be made before instruction (planning), others may be made during instruction (management/implementation), and still others may be made after instruction (reflection). Many of these decisions are carefully thought out to meet curricular and instructional goals, while others are made spontaneously as teachers and students interact (Ryan & Cooper, 2000). Regardless of when the decision is made, what the students learn as a result of these decisions is most important.

Fostering decision making skills in preservice teachers is a vital part of teacher preparation programs because making informed decisions is an important teaching skill. Effective teachers are those who continuously strive to resolve classroom problems by generating hypotheses, testing empirically, and then adjusting to the situation (Nottis, Feuerstein, Murray, & Adams, 2000). Effective teachers structure their classrooms to

run smoothly and efficiently, which provides them with more time to devote to curricular decisions that will improve student learning. These curricular decisions involve what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, and how learning will be assessed.

It is important for teacher educators to understand the knowledge base from which preservice teachers draw their responses to challenging situations in the classroom.

Teachers draw from several areas of knowledge when making decisions, according to Doebler, Roberson, and Ponder (1998). Connelly and Elbaz (1980) identify five types of knowledge used by teachers: contextual/situational, theoretical, social, self, and experiential. According to Kagan (1992), novice teachers acquire knowledge of students and use this new knowledge to look at themselves as teachers. Regardless of the labels for knowledge, teachers use several areas of knowledge as they confront the myriad of decisions they make each day in the classroom arena. Teachers are constantly making decisions as their environment changes. They rely on their prior knowledge and knowledge base as they make these many decisions in their classrooms (Borger & Tillema, 1993). Therefore, teaching is a complex process that involves making decisions before, during, and after instruction. The decisions made by teachers influence instruction and impact learning outcomes (Klimczak & Balli, 1995).

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore what happened when *cases*, which are narratives that describe a dilemma set in a particular context for the purpose of discussion, analysis, and reflection, were used as a strategy with middle grades preservice teachers to foster their decision making. Because teachers are constantly confronted with challenging situations, developing the decision-making skills of preservice teachers is

important. Dottin and Weiner (2001) state that thinking is the way we make sense of the world in which we live. Therefore, preservice teachers should receive assistance in helping to make sense of the world of teaching and learning and thereby improving their own world.

The beliefs preservice teachers have about the art of teaching form the basis for what they do in the classroom and the rationale for why they do it. They act as they do in the classroom because of their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. Therefore, these beliefs and experiences are important considerations when helping preservice teachers develop their thinking practices. These attitudes and beliefs affect what the preservice teachers learn and how they learn, and will constantly grow and change. Experiences and reflection on actions may lead to changes in beliefs and attitudes (Richardson, 1996).

#### Research Questions

Eggen and Kauchak (1998) state that effective learning occurs when students are actively involved in the learning process rather than being passive recipients of knowledge delivered by the teacher. Involvement in active learning increases learning and retention of content. It also improves thinking skills. It is important to teach students not only what they should know, but also how to acquire knowledge. There are a variety of ways (e.g., discussion, field experiences) to foster the decision making skills of preservice teachers. The use of *cases* as a strategy with preservice teachers may engage them in the learning process as they explore their own ideas and understandings as well as the ideas and understandings of others.



The research questions which guided this study were

1. What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?
2. How do middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making?

By exploring the answers to these questions, I hoped to gain insight into how teacher preparation programs could foster the decision making skills of middle grades preservice teachers through the use of *cases* as a strategy.

### Theoretical Perspective

The purpose of this study was to explore how middle grades preservice teachers used *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making. All teachers possess theories about knowledge and learning that affect the way they teach and the way their students experience learning. Theories influence the way the role of a teacher is conceptualized, how teachers interact with their students, how they develop and present curriculum, and how they organize their classroom for instruction (Oldfather, West, White, & Wilmarth, 1999). Undoubtedly, my theory concerning knowledge and learning played a major role in the way this study was designed and conducted. Therefore, it is important that I discuss the theoretical lens that framed this study.

### *Constructivism and Social Constructivism*

Constructivism is not a way of teaching, but a theory of knowledge and learning. It has become an important movement in education in the last few decades. Constructivism is based on the works of such theorists as Jean Piaget (1969) and Lev Vygotsky (1978) as

well as others (Fosnot, 1996). Each of these theorists, as well as others, has contributed to the theory of learning known as constructivism.

The term constructivism has been used in different ways, and many educational leaders have different views about exactly what constitutes constructivism. Brooks and Brooks (1993) postulate that constructivism is a theory about knowledge and learning, not a theory of teaching. They identify five principles of pedagogy that is constructivist:

1. Problems that are relevant to learners are proposed.
2. Learning is centered around large concepts.
3. The points of view of students are sought and valued.
4. The curriculum is adapted to address the suppositions of students.
5. Student learning is assessed in the context of teaching.

Social constructivism is one of the many forms of constructivism espoused, and was inspired mainly by the works of Vygotsky (Cobb, 1996). Oldfather, et al. (1999) define social constructivism as “a particular view of knowledge, a view of how we come to know” (p. 8) where learning is constructed through interactions with others within specific socio-cultural contexts. Students construct their own meanings based on their prior knowledge and experiences as they interact with others in various social situations, including the classroom.

It is social constructivism that will frame this study. According to Green and Gredler (2002), social constructivism is knowledge that is shared socially. It is co-constructed within a community of learners. Knowledge and understanding are constructed and reconstructed through social interaction. Constructivism blends the what with the how and addresses how students learn (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

A social constructivist approach allows the opportunity for social interaction and self-expression in the classroom. It gives the teacher a theoretical basis for making decisions about pedagogy and curriculum (Oldfather et al., 1999). The aim is to provide learning experiences which are authentic in classrooms which are collaborative, not competitive (Foote, Vermette, & Battaglia, 2001).

Although many instructional strategies may be used in a social constructivist classroom, there are no instructional techniques that are considered solely social constructivist in nature (Fosnot, 1996). However, constructivist teachers are challenged to create classroom environments that are innovative, environments where students and teachers are encouraged to think and explore (Gould, 1996).

Gideonse (1999) states that *case* instruction is “quintessentially constructivist” (p. 3) because it actively involves the participants in the learning process. The students involved do not passively receive knowledge, but they test their own understandings and perceptions. The participants can then take new information and reshape it or transform it (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Lundeberg and Scheurman (1997) state that interacting in *case* discussion is a form of social construction of knowledge that strengthens the previous understandings as well as the knowledge currently being learned. Students are provided with authentic classroom situations in which they can identify problems and discuss possible solutions. The use of *cases* as a strategy offers preservice teachers the opportunity to become aware of how the assumptions they have are based upon what they and others know (Harrington, 1999).

In a social constructivist classroom, the teacher plays a different role from that of a teacher in a traditional classroom. The teacher in the social constructivist classroom is a

facilitator or guide. The teacher's main task is to help students make meaning of their understandings and questions (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). The teacher is also a co-learner who has less control over the lesson than a teacher in a traditional classroom setting (Foote, et al., 2001). Teachers have more control over what is taught, but less control over what students learn. Therefore, teachers who use a social constructivist approach learn along with their students, and must be open to ideas and perceptions that are different from their own.

Stage, Muller, Kinzie, and Simmons (1998) report that approaches to learning that promote social constructivism provide an ideal learning environment for some students. The students have more meaningful learning experiences, and in some instances, learn more than students in traditional classrooms. Using *cases* as a strategy with preservice teachers may guide these preservice teachers in transferring learning in the college classroom to learning in the middle school classroom and to decision making in the real world of middle school teachers.

Our values and belief systems are socially constructed. Through the use of language and social interactions, our knowledge can be challenged and new knowledge can be constructed. When we interact with others and listen to their ideas and perspectives, our own understandings and beliefs may undergo a change (Stage et al., 1998). Reconstruction of knowledge is the end result of problem solving. Fosnot (1996) postulates that preservice teachers need to be involved in learning experiences that may challenge their traditional beliefs.

All learners come to new situations with knowledge, skills, expectations, memories, and misconceptions with which they try to make sense of their experiences

(Clark, 1998). According to Marlowe and Page (1998), our prior experiences, knowledge, and learning affect how we view new experiences and learning. In turn, our interpretations affect how we construct knowledge and define this new learning. Constructivism stresses the importance of examining prior knowledge and prior experiences. This theory of constructivism seeks to change cognitive structures that exist by allowing students to explore and discover new alternatives (Doebler, et al. 1998; Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). According to Shepard (1995), if preservice teachers are encouraged to examine their own beliefs and then are presented with the belief systems of others, then a generalized constructivist schema would be more likely to emerge. The Middle Grades Program at the college in this study offers students a chance to examine their own belief systems and the beliefs of others early in their preparation as a teacher. The prospective teachers are sent into a public school classroom to observe during both their freshmen and sophomore years. The field experiences become more intensive during their junior and senior years, providing them with a chance to observe and interact in a variety of school settings in order to explore the diversity of the school population and various teaching styles.

According to constructivism, the knowledge about teaching that is constructed by preservice teachers builds on their school-related prior knowledge. Most preservice teachers have many experiences in schools and classrooms before they enter a teacher preparation program. These preservice teachers have been a part of school culture in elementary school, middle school, and high school. They have participated in and observed many aspects of the school culture, including the behavior of their teachers (Powell, 2000). These experiences and observations influence the decisions these

preservice teachers make in the classroom. Exposing preservice teachers to activities that allow them to examine their own perceptions while at the same time examining the perspectives of others can influence their decision making skills in the classroom. Using *cases* as a strategy allows these preservice teachers to examine classroom situations from different perspectives, including their own.

Howe and Nichols (2001) state that teachers must learn to make all kinds of decisions in the classroom and live with the results after they are made. This is part of becoming a teacher. Preservice teachers can learn from reading and thinking about the situations of other teachers and discussing the thoughts and actions of these teachers. This, in turn, may help them develop their own decision making skills, thus impacting the learning of their students.

The perception of teaching that preservice teachers acquire may be impacted by the theories and practices to which they are exposed, according to Brooks and Brooks (1999). Hudson-Ross and Graham (2000) state that teacher educators “need to engage in reflective practice, make public our teaching tensions and decisions, and explicitly engage our students and colleagues in the social construction of knowledge” (p. 5). They believe it is important for teacher educators to make their beliefs and theories explicit by modeling their stance and theories in their teaching. This, in turn, helps preservice teachers develop their own theories. Using *cases* as a strategy may help preservice teachers further develop their own theories about teaching and learning.

Hausfather (2001) believes that teacher educators must inform preservice teachers about the importance of prior experiences and misconceptions while at the same time dealing with the prior experiences and misconceptions held by these same preservice

teachers. Providing opportunities for preservice teachers to learn in cooperative or discourse groups will help them analyze their experiences and serve as a guide to their teaching as they make decisions in the classroom. Yost et al. (2000) state that teacher educators need to provide preservice teachers with experiences that may produce cognitive change. The use of *cases* in teacher education programs provides an opportunity for the preservice teachers to examine how their prior knowledge and experiences affect their decision making. It also provides them the opportunity to effectively examine the perspectives and beliefs of others, thus bringing about reconstruction of their own knowledge.

#### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, these specific terms are defined.

**Strategy** - a goal directed procedure that is purposefully, or intentionally, evoked whether prior to, during, or after the performance of a task to aid in the regulation, execution, or evaluation of that task (Pate, June 1999)

**Preservice Teacher** - those undergraduate students enrolled in a teacher education program who have not as yet been certified to teach

**Case** – a narrative that describes an educational dilemma set in a particular context for the purpose of discussion, analysis, and reflection. *Cases* used as a strategy is used intentionally with students to foster their decision making skills.

- *Cases* used as a strategy will be italicized to distinguish it from case study methodology.

**Decision Making** - Making well thought-out choices from among several alternatives based on judgments consistent with one's values and on the relevant, sound information available (Moore, K.D, 1998, p.8 )

**Case Study** – an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bound unit (Merriam, 1998, p. 193)

**Constructivism** - Constructivism is not a theory on teaching but a theory about knowledge and learning. There are five principles of a constructivist pedagogy:

1. posing problems of emerging relevance to learners,
2. structuring learning around “big ideas” or primary concepts,
3. seeking and valuing students’ points of view,
4. adapting curriculum to address students’ suppositions,
5. and assessing student learning in the context of teaching (Brooks, J.G., & Brooks, M.G., 1993).

**Social Constructivism** – a particular view of knowledge, a view of how we come to know, where learning is constructed through interactions with others within specific socio-cultural contexts. (Oldfather, et al., 1999, p. 8)

#### Outline of the Dissertation

This chapter discussed the purpose of the study, the rationale for the study, and my theoretical perspective. In addition, the research questions which guided the study were listed and definitions of terms were provided. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature relevant to this study. First, I reviewed literature pertaining to preservice teachers’ decision making. Next, strategy instruction was reviewed. Finally, the literature concerning the use of *cases* in teacher preparation programs was reviewed. Chapter 3 is a



description of the methodology used in the study. The chapter presents a detailed account of how the data was collected and analyzed for the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings and interpretations for each of the seven cases analyzed. Chapter 5 is the cross case analysis of the seven cases. Chapter 6 presents conclusions drawn from the study, suggestions for using *cases* as a strategy in preservice settings, and implications for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. The following chapter is a review of the literature pertinent to this study. First, I examined the literature relevant to decision making in preservice teacher education. Next, I briefly discussed strategy instruction as a tool for teacher educators. Finally, I examined the use of *cases* as a strategy in teacher preparation programs.

#### Preservice Teacher Decision Making

Teachers of the future must possess much knowledge and many skills to meet the challenges they will face in the classroom. These skills include intellectual, moral, and critical thinking abilities. According to Wasserman (1994), the best that teachers can hope for is to possess the knowledge and tools necessary to face the dilemmas presented in the real classrooms of today, using the knowledge they have gained and the sensitivity they have acquired as educators to make informed decisions to aid their students in the learning process. Therefore, it is important for teacher preparation programs to find ways to promote critical thinking in preservice teachers (Yost, et al., 2000) so as to prepare them to face the many challenges of teaching in a diverse society.

Teaching is a sophisticated process of decision making according to Sparks-Langer, Pasch, Starko, Moody, and Gardner (2000). Teachers may solve problems in many different ways, calling on a combination of understandings and experiences. As

decision makers, teachers make planning decisions by choosing what content to teach, writing objectives, selecting activities for learners, and evaluating instruction. They implement decisions as they design and plan lessons, assess student learning, modify instruction for individual needs, and enhance the thinking skills of students. In addition, classroom management decisions are made by applying their beliefs and knowledge about students' individual differences to create a positive learning environment.

Teachers make thousands of decisions during their careers as educators of children. Many of these decisions are instantaneous, while many require much thought. Many decisions are made before the school day begins, while many others are made during the course of the school day. Regardless of when the decisions are made, the results will affect the lives of the students for many years to come (Kellough & Kellough, 2003).

Moore (1998) defines decision making as making well-thought-out choices from several alternatives. According to Greenwood and Parkay (1989), the decision making process involves looking at a situation and deciding how to deal with it, gathering data to further examine the situation, interpreting the data, arriving at a decision, examining the decision to determine its feasibility, and carrying out and evaluating the decision. Everyone is confronted with decisions that need to be made, and many times this decision making brings about change.

Ryan and Cooper (2000) identify three types of instructional decisions made by teachers: planning decisions, implementing decisions, and evaluating decisions. Planning decisions are made prior to instruction and involve what will be taught, the strategies that will be used to teach the content, the materials and resources necessary for

completion of the instruction, and how students will be assessed. Implementing decisions are made during the actual delivery of the lesson as the teacher modifies instruction to meet the needs of individual students and assesses their learning. Finally, evaluating decisions are made after instruction is completed. During this phase, the teacher analyzes the decisions made during the planning and implementing phases, examining what parts of the lesson went well, what did not go well, and changes that might be made in future instruction.

Many factors may influence the decisions teachers make each day in the classroom environment. These factors may include the personal philosophy the teacher has concerning teaching and learning, and the emotions, health, personality, and style of the teacher. In addition, Shulman (1986) postulates that five factors influence teacher decisions: student needs and characteristics, subject matter, learning theories and techniques, context surrounding teaching and learning, and teacher characteristics and beliefs.

First, the needs, the backgrounds, and the learning styles of the students require consideration as the teacher attempts to relate learning to the prior experiences of the students. Second, the subject matter may play an important role in influencing the decisions of teachers. Different subjects may require the use of different strategies to aid in the learning process. Third, a teacher's theoretical knowledge may influence the decision making process of the teacher. The teachers draw from the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge they have acquired as they make decisions in the classroom. Fourth, the context of the classroom itself may play a role in decision making as teachers seek to provide for the individual needs of their students. Finally, characteristics and

beliefs held by the teacher influence how the teacher interacts with students and the decisions made each day (Sparks-Langer, et al., 2000). An awareness of these factors that influence their decision making may assist teachers in their growth as decision makers, assisting them in realizing that decision making is a continuous and gradual process that continues throughout a teacher's career.

Making informed decisions is an important teaching skill because teachers are constantly confronted with challenging situations. Therefore, providing opportunities for preservice teachers to use the theories and principles of teaching and learning they have acquired in their teacher education program to foster their decision making skills should be a vital part of teacher preparation programs. However, many teacher preparation programs have all but ignored the development of professional decision making as a teaching/learning tool, according to Greenwood and Parkay (1989). It takes just as much practice to be systematic in decision making and to be aware of one's thinking during the decision making process as it does to acquire pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and organizational knowledge. Extensive practice in decision making in a variety of situations is important when preparing teachers to teach in the diverse classrooms of today.

The decisions made each day in the classroom by teachers are usually based on their own particular belief systems (Greenwood & Parkay, 1989). The beliefs of preservice teachers play an important role in their decision-making process (Martinez, 1998; Moore, 1998; Richardson, 1996; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000; Yost et al., 2000). Beliefs may have two functions in learning to teach. The first function relates to the constructivist view of learning that preservice teachers bring beliefs to the teacher

education program that influence what and how they learn. The second function deals with beliefs as a form of change. Preservice teachers bring with them strong beliefs about teaching that have been acquired during their many years in the classroom as a student. These experiences influence the way they approach their teacher preparation program and what they learn from it (Richardson, 1996). Teacher education programs should assist preservice teachers in examining their own belief systems, integrating the theories and principles they have learned as preservice teachers.

Preservice teachers have personal beliefs about classrooms and pupils and also images of themselves as teachers. These images and beliefs are associated with experiences in the classroom, relationships they have had with teachers and other authority figures, and how they recall their past experiences as a student in the classroom. However, many times these preconceptions are resistant to change because they are based on the beliefs and experiences of the preservice teacher that have been present for a long time (Borger & Tillema, 1993). Kagan (1992) states that a novice teacher's growing knowledge of pupils must be used to challenge, mitigate, and reconstruct these prior beliefs and images.

Harrington (1995) implies that preservice teachers must learn to deal with a variety of dilemmas they will face during their careers as teachers. Because teaching is such a complex process, preservice teachers cannot understand these dilemmas only through the presentation of methods and techniques. Teacher preparation programs that contain a strong clinical component can assist preservice teachers in acquiring problem solving strategies for the classroom. Herman (1998) believes that decision making skills will be fostered more effectively if preservice teachers encounter teaching realities very

early in their teacher preparation program. Preservice teachers need to learn how to translate the emerging knowledge base of methods and techniques they are acquiring into practice in the reality of the classroom.

Teacher educators provide preservice teachers with more than just support. They discuss issues that relate directly or indirectly to the classroom, based on problems that are school wide, and provide opportunities for practice in decision making (Westerman, 1991; Yost, et al, 2000). According to Yost, et al., problem solving is a process where individuals attempt to “make sense of a challenging situation, identify areas of practice needing scrutiny, define goals for improvement, and disperse action to accomplish them” (p. 40). Reconstruction of knowledge is the end result of problem solving.

Yost, et al. (2000) state that a primary mission of teacher preparation programs should be to produce teachers who engage in critical reflection. Teacher preparation programs need to engage preservice teachers in critical reflection in all aspects of their programs and practices, according to Martinez (1998). She suggests including small group discussions and debates concerning the intellectual, emotional, political, and ethical dilemmas that make up the field of education.

According to Thompson (1995), critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving do not exist independently of each other. Problem solving calls for reflection, which in turn calls for us to think creatively and critically. When critical thinking skills are well developed, they require creative thinking. Creative thinking then makes use of critical thinking to solve problems. Decisions are problems that need to be resolved. Borger and Tillema (1993) say that thinking is “reorganizing or linking various elements of a problem situation” (p. 186). Because their environment is ever changing, teachers

must be flexible in their decision making. They must transfer knowledge into action in the classroom.

Harrington (1995) studied the use of cases with preservice teachers to determine what insight could be gained concerning their reasoning. She found that *cases* could be used to gain insight into the development of their professional decision making.

Harrington (1999) believes that encouraging the development of reasoned argumentation will better prepare teachers to deal with the challenges they face in today's classroom and will help them respond to these challenges in more effective and responsible ways.

*Cases* used as a strategy provide preservice teachers with an opportunity to practice their decision making. As they make decisions concerning the dilemma or dilemmas presented in the *case*, they are provided with the opportunity to use the theories and principles of teaching and learning they have acquired. In addition, they have the opportunity to examine how their own beliefs and the beliefs of others influence the decisions they make in the classroom. Finally, *cases* used as a strategy give the preservice teachers the opportunity to enhance their critical thinking skills by making decisions involving situations they will encounter as teachers.

### Strategy Instruction

Powell (2000) states that how preservice teachers are educated for classroom practice is both a controversial and divergent issue among teacher educators. Many instructional strategies are used in various teacher preparation programs to prepare these future teachers for the real world of teaching. According to Rhoder (2002), it is important that strategies be presented in an authentic and nonthreatening environment where it can be understood how useful the strategy can be when something new is being



presented. Merseth (1999) postulates that teacher preparation programs must offer ways of assisting preservice teachers in influencing student learning. This is very challenging for preservice teachers because of the diversity of the school population, and because the knowledge base concerning teacher education is changing.

A strategy is “a goal directed procedure that is purposefully or intentionally evoked, whether prior to, during, or after the performance of a task to aid in the regulation, execution, or evaluation of that task” (Pate, 1999). Pressley, Woloshyn, and Associates (1995) describe three types of strategies: those the teacher uses to present material, those students acquire and use on their own, and those teachers use to improve their own teaching. They state that strategies are rarely used in isolation, and that a good strategy user possesses knowledge of many strategies and uses these strategies to process the information given to them.

According to Pressley, et al. (1995), it is sometimes a difficult task for educators to understand and/or implement strategy instruction. It is important for educators to understand when and where to use certain strategies and the benefits reaped from implementing these strategies. In addition, educators must understand the effort required to implement the strategies in the classroom. Risko, Roskos, and Vukelich (2002) state that little is known concerning the strategies preservice teachers use to make sense of new information they are acquiring in their teacher preparation program. However, the more practice they have in using a strategy, the easier it becomes for them to implement it in real classroom situations. Using particular strategies may require change in teacher preparation programs including the instructional methods used to present information and the curriculum in these programs. Strategy instruction is a long-term process which

may require changes in the way teachers are prepared, instructional methods, and the current curriculum of teacher preparation programs (Pressley et al., 1995).

McEwin & Dickinson (2001) state that it is important for middle school preservice teachers to begin their careers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to meet the challenges of the ever-changing work of teaching young adolescents. Therefore, teacher education programs should focus on refining and extending the knowledge, disposition, and skills these preservice teachers need to perform in the middle school classroom. Many changes in what middle school preservice teachers are taught and how they are taught are needed according to the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989). It is critical that the knowledge and skills these middle grades preservice teachers will need to teach young adolescents be increased before they enter the classroom (Jackson & Davis, 2000) in order to ensure their success as middle grades educators. Teachers are continuously learning as they make decisions relevant to the curricular needs of their students.

Because education courses which include instructional strategies that assist preservice teachers in developing their decision making skills are needed (Greenwood & Parkay, 1989), teacher preparation programs need to examine their curriculum and implement appropriate strategies that foster critical thinking. One way to accomplish this is by giving preservice teachers the opportunity to make decisions using the theories and principles they have learned about the development of young adolescents and their curricular needs. Preservice teachers need to be provided with opportunities to connect theory and practice in order for them to become effective decision makers in the classroom. *Cases* used as a strategy with preservice teachers meet these demands. High

quality teacher education programs are essential for improving the success of middle grades education and middle school teachers.

### *Cases* Used as a Strategy

There is a gap between knowing and knowing how. This gap is bridged through the understandings, skills, and attitudes preservice teachers perceive from their knowledge base to the application of that knowledge in the classroom (Wasserman, 1994). *Cases* can be used to assist preservice teachers in bridging the gap between theory and actual practice in the classroom, thus enhancing their ability to make informed decisions in the classroom. The use of the *case* as a strategy provides an approach where learning is connected with real-life experiences. Students become actively involved as they participate in authentic problem solving and decision making *cases*. A *case*, as defined by Shulman (1998), is a form of communication in which intention and chance are placed in the context of a lived and reflected experience.

According to Wright (1996), the analysis of the dilemma presented in the *case* and the subplots which are interwoven into it make it a valuable educational tool. As *cases* are read and discussed, solutions are considered and justified by applying educational theory to the actual classroom situation. Koballa and Tippins (2000) note that *cases* are “a particular form of narrative that can be used to explicate and clarify the professional knowledge of teachers” (p. 3).

When used as a strategy, *cases* enhance a preservice teacher’s understanding of educational practices and strategies while at the same time introducing them to the complex role of teaching in a diverse society. The preservice teachers have a chance to test their own understandings and perceptions about teaching and learning problems

while at the same time eliminating their misunderstandings as they work and share ideas with others in class. *Cases* present classroom situations, whether real or imagined. There may be many meanings or theoretical perspectives presented in each *case* (Koballa & Tippins, 2000) which may increase the preservice teachers' understanding of the complex world of teaching middle school students.

*Cases* have long been used in the fields of medicine, business, and law to explore particular problems and situations related to those fields. Using *cases* in teacher education programs is not a new concept. *Cases* were used in teacher education programs in New Jersey and Massachusetts in 1920. However, the use of *cases* in teacher education programs did not gain momentum until the reform movement of the 1980s. The use of the *case* began to appear in teacher education literature in the late 1980s, and books of *cases* began to appear in the early 1990s. Since the mid 1990s, a greater awareness of the need to understand how and why *cases* are used by teacher educators and the effect of using *cases* in teacher education programs has developed (Merseeth, 1999).

There are two types of *cases*: open-ended *cases* and closed *cases*. Open-ended *cases* give a scenario where no resolution is offered at the end. The dilemma is left unresolved, thus leaving it open to discussion without a preconceived solution to the problem. A closed *case* offers a solution to the dilemma presented by the author. This may be given by the author or by others who have been asked by the author to comment on possible solutions to the dilemma presented (Gideonse, 1999; Greenwood & Parkay, 1989).

Greenwood and Parkay (1989) provide three contexts for using *cases*: the context for instruction, the context for critical reflection, and the context for research. The context for instruction builds on the prior knowledge of the preservice teachers and allows them to view many perspectives as they look at the issues presented in the *case*. Reflection, on the other hand, is an important aspect of professional growth, which helps preservice teachers and teacher educators analyze situations, evaluate alternatives, and make decisions. Through the research process, teacher educators are able to study their own thought processes and pedagogical beliefs.

There are no set guidelines for teaching with *cases*. However, careful planning is essential when teacher educators contemplate the use of *cases* as a tool with preservice teachers. First, the course content and setting are examined, looking at what is being taught, where it is being taught, and how *cases* will benefit the preservice teachers most. Second, the preservice teachers themselves are considered -- their knowledge, experience, needs, and beliefs. Third, sources for *cases* are studied. Examining many *case* books as well as *cases* that are written by preservice or inservice teachers will give the instructor a better understanding of the types of *cases* available to be used with preservice teachers. Fourth, the *cases* to be used with the preservice teachers are selected carefully to ensure that they enhance the curriculum and are aligned with the teacher educator's goals. Fifth, how the *case* will be used with the preservice teachers and the assignments that will be given are considered. Finally, how the preservice teachers will be assessed is also taken into consideration (Powell, in press; Sudzina, 1999).

*Cases* can be used in many ways and there is no particular format. How *cases* are used is related to the purpose for using them (Powell, in press). However, most

discussions of *cases* include an initial reading of the *case* by the preservice teacher to identify the issues or dilemmas involved in the *case*. Some teacher educators require their preservice teachers to outline the issues presented in the *case* along with possible solutions or alternatives for dealing with the dilemmas and bring this with them to the class discussion. A group discussion of the *case* then ensues where preservice teachers are allowed to present their own perspectives concerning the issues presented in the *case*. Wright (1996) believes that class discussion is critical in the implementation of the *case*. During the discussion, preservice teachers air their thoughts and views and listen to the views of others, finally coming to an understanding of what they consider to be a solution to the dilemma presented. Wasserman (1994) states that the facilitator should use questioning and response strategies that require the preservice teachers to think critically about the ideas that are presented in the *case*. After the class discussion of the *case*, a written analysis of the *case* by each preservice teacher may be presented to the facilitator.

The instructor who uses *cases* as a strategy plays a major role during the group discussion of the *case*. Sudzina (1999) states that educators who are most successful with using *cases* as a strategy are flexible, reflective facilitators. They co-construct knowledge along with their preservice teachers. The instructor or facilitator is a learner and must be open to the views and perspectives of others which may differ from their own. They are not there to pass judgment on the solutions offered, but to help the preservice teachers examine each decision for the possible positive and negative consequences of each decision that is made.

Shulman (1998) states that teaching and learning with *cases* is no easy task. Because *cases* involve active learning, the preservice teachers are more outspoken and

assertive. The discussion of the *case* may go in unexpected directions. The authority of the teacher is reduced, thus making the job of teaching more complex and less predictable. The teacher educator is more of a facilitator who learns along with the preservice teachers. In addition, there is no one correct answer to the dilemmas presented in *cases*. Many preservice teachers want to know the correct way of solving the dilemma, and therefore find it difficult to accept the idea that the answer or solution is not always clear. The meaning the preservice teachers make concerning the case is their own, and the best answer may not always be presented (Wasserman, 1994).

The use of *cases* assists preservice teachers in bringing out, exploring, and changing beliefs as well as expanding knowledge according to Miller and Kantrov (1998). Many dilemmas cannot be transmitted to preservice teachers through the presentation of specific methods or techniques. Teacher educators must go beyond the presentations of declarative and procedural knowledge and examine the conditional knowledge of teaching and learning. The use of *cases* is one way of developing this conditional knowledge (Harrington, 1991), allowing preservice teachers to understand that there is no one solution to the many dilemmas encountered by classroom teachers today. Through the use of *cases*, preservice teachers are given the opportunity to analyze and reflect on different issues in a particular setting, and apply what they know and learn to their own particular situation.

Strategies to enhance decision making skills are necessary to produce effective, reflective teachers. Reflection plays a major role in teacher preparation programs. Shulman (1998) postulates that assistance in organizing the process of reflection should be a component of teacher education programs, assisting preservice teachers in thinking

and reflecting on their own teaching. Risko et al. (2002) state that reflection can generate a connection between theory and practice, thereby giving preservice teachers a deeper understanding of their own beliefs while at the same time they adopt new beliefs. This, in turn, may assist them in learning how to use reflective thinking when making their own instructional decisions. Therefore, reflection about the *cases* presented is an important aspect of *case* instruction.

Using *cases* allows preservice teachers to examine teaching, eliminating their misconceptions and misunderstandings about the teaching and learning process (Libby, 1999). According to Powell (2000), at times preservice teachers have problems transferring the theoretical principles of teaching to the complexities of the classroom. Through the use of *cases*, preservice teachers share their thoughts, feelings, insights, opinions, and reactions concerning the *case*. They examine their own strengths and limitations concerning their assumptions about classroom teaching as they participate in group discussion of the *case*. Powell investigated how preservice teachers' situative knowledge influences their decisions when using *cases*. He found that the situative knowledge of preservice teachers is constructed over a period of many years, and it clearly influences the direction of their discussion when using *cases*. Their thinking about situations presented in the *cases* is constrained by their previous educational experiences. Wright (1996) believes that using *cases* is most effective when the preservice teachers have been involved in the classroom themselves.

According to Dottin and Weiner (2001), the use of *cases* with preservice teachers requires the use of critical and creative strategies as they seek to analyze real school dilemmas. This new knowledge will enhance their thinking and problem solving skills



because the learner must take responsibility for their learning. *Cases* also encourage decision making in preservice teachers, postulates Gideonse (1999), as well as assist them in thinking more critically and reflectively (Libby, 1999). Doeblner, et al. (1998) examined the decision making ability of preservice students as they progressed through their teacher preparation program through the use of *case* analyses. They found that analyzing *cases* is a promising strategy for use in teacher education programs. They discovered that analyzing the *case* responses of preservice teachers is one way to show how these prospective teachers mature in their responses as they progress through the teacher education program. Using *cases* as a strategy with preservice teachers encourages multiple perspectives about issues, emphasizes critical thinking, and explores various answers and approaches as they look at different viewpoints and hear the ideas of other preservice teachers and professionals (Miller & Kantrov, 1998).

Harrington (1991) postulates that the use of *cases* allows preservice teachers to consider the many factors involved, reflect on different approaches in given situations, assess the consequences of the actions taken, and examine their own perceptions and misconceptions. Libby (1999) found that preservice teachers spent more time looking at the different perspectives of individuals in the *case* and that they were able to identify complex problems better and explain and support their recommendations with theoretical and personal knowledge when *cases* were used. In addition, they identified more facts, issues, and solutions as the semester progressed when *cases* were used in teacher education courses.

Yost, et al. (2000) state that preservice teachers need intellectual and professional experiences that will enable them to reflect on critical levels. The use of the *case* assists

preservice teachers in examining their ideas in a nonthreatening environment (Fisch, 1997). According to Barnett (1998), the preservice teachers view the *cases* from different perspectives and perhaps challenge their own beliefs and practices. Preservice teachers examine their own strengths, limitations, and views of classroom teaching, which are culturally based and culturally biased (Powell, in press). Merseth (1999) states that *cases* can help preservice teachers develop their analysis and problem solving skills, assist them in gaining a repertoire of pedagogical techniques, provide practice in reflection, and assist them in providing experiences in a positive learning community. According to Redman (1999), *cases* address real problems whereby preservice teachers apply pedagogical knowledge to resolve the problems and share and evaluate responses with other preservice teachers.

There is no one correct way to use the *case* in teacher preparations programs. Lundeberg and Scheurman (1997) conducted a study in which they used a case with 48 undergraduate students in an Educational Psychology course. The students were asked to analyze a case before a unit on learning and then again after a unit on learning. They found that using the same *case* more than once produces more in depth thinking. They concluded that students become more open-minded to different perspectives when *cases* are used in teacher preparation programs and that using *cases* assists preservice teachers in relating concepts to classroom situations. Gursky (1990) points out that teachers obtain useful ideas about teaching subject matter from reading *cases*. “*Cases* offer a needed taste of reality seldom served up in textbooks” (p. 23).

There is limited research about *cases*. Ertmer, Newby, and MacDougall (1996) examined how students who had high levels of self-regulation and students who had low

levels of self-regulation responded to and approached learning from *cases*. They found that the value students place on their learning from *cases* is influenced by self-regulation and how they approach analyzing the problems presented in the *case*. Students with high self-regulation value the learning from *cases* and consider it relevant to their needs. Students with low self-regulation fluctuate in their perceptions concerning the value of *cases*. In addition, they fluctuate in their confidence in learning from *cases*, focusing more on learning educational facts and being correct.

According to Koballa and Tippins (2000), learning takes place best when it is connected with experience. *Cases* are an active learning strategy (Brewer, 1997) that allow preservice teachers to examine real classroom situations. According to Shulman (1998), the preservice teachers become active agents in their own understanding. Preservice teachers are able to reflect on their own experiences and reactions to the dilemmas presented in the *case*. By considering the positive and negative consequences of the choices they make, they can better understand themselves and their beliefs (Barnett, 1998). Through the use of *cases*, preservice teachers are able to view themselves more authentically as future teachers and have the opportunity to express themselves more creatively (Powell, in press).

It is impossible to teach preservice teachers all they need to know to be effective (Harrington, 1999) in the middle school classroom including how to make effective decisions concerning curriculum. According to Harrington, preservice teachers need to be provided with ways to think about what they value, how they ground their arguments, and what evidence they use to support these arguments, which will help them to make more thoughtful decisions in the classroom. The use of *cases* helps preservice teachers

develop as learners who make more effective and responsible decisions in the complex classrooms of today. The *case* allows preservice teachers to test their own ideas in a nonthreatening environment, present ideas and solutions to problems, and share their personal resources, perspectives, and ideas with other preservice teachers. In addition, they evaluate their own beliefs, perceptions, and misconceptions (Harrington, 1991) and they are introduced to various other perspectives.

According to Lundeberg (1999), there is limited research about the development of formal or practical knowledge through the use of the *case*. In addition, research concerning what teacher educators learn about their own teaching through the use of *cases* in their education courses as well as how the results from that research influences their teaching is lacking (Moje, Remillard, Southerland, & Wade, 1999). Developing the decision making skills of preservice teachers is an important aspect of teacher education programs and should be examined carefully as the curriculum for the teacher education program is formulated. The use of the *case* as a strategy to foster these decision making skills in preservice teachers is worthy of study. In addition, using the *case* as a strategy in preservice teacher education can better inform teacher educators about their own teaching skills and abilities. However, there are challenges for teacher educators who seek to use *cases* as a strategy with their preservice teachers. Teacher educators must learn how to use *cases* effectively with their preservice teachers and how to facilitate the discussion of the *case* so that everyone involved in the discussion benefits from it (Powell, in press).

Teachers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century face many challenges as they seek to make decisions for an ever-increasing diverse student body. These new teachers must possess many

skills and much knowledge to meet these future challenges. Intellectual, moral, and critical thinking abilities must be developed in our future teachers if they are to meet the challenges they will face in the diverse classrooms of today. The teaching strategies, methods of evaluation, and decisions teachers make concerning students in the classroom are entangled with the needs, values, beliefs, and institutional pressures of the teacher (Wasserman, 1994). Therefore, it is important for teacher education programs to find strategies and techniques to assist preservice teachers in developing intellectual and professional experiences that enable them to reflect on critical issues (Yost, et al, 2000).

Teaching is a complex process that encompasses many areas of decision making. Thousands of decisions are made by teachers each day, before, during, and after instruction. Preservice teachers bring with them to their teacher preparation programs certain beliefs, attitudes, and biases that have been molded by their own experiences with schooling and their observations of teachers during their schooling experiences. These beliefs and attitudes are difficult to change. These beliefs, in turn, affect their decision making in the classroom concerning what content is to be taught, how that content is to be taught, and how the students will be assessed. More practice in real school settings and using real classroom dilemmas, such as those presented in *cases*, help to foster the decision making skills of preservice teachers by allowing them to participate in active learning situations rather than passively receiving knowledge delivered by the teacher.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a review of the literature that was relevant to this study. A review of preservice teacher decision making and the importance of developing it in teacher preparation programs were discussed. The review of the decision making of

preservice teachers was followed by a review of the use of strategies in preservice teacher education. The chapter concluded with a review of the use of *cases* with preservice teachers.

Chapter 3 examines the methodology which was used to conduct this study. Information concerning research design, site selection and context, data collection, and data analysis procedures is discussed. The chapter concludes with a description of the role of the researcher and her subjectivities and biases.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making. A case study research design was used for this study. Each of the seven participants in this study was considered a case. In addition, the participants as a group were considered a case. The result is a descriptive case study of the use of *cases* as a strategy with middle school preservice teachers to foster their decision making skills. Individual interviews, class discussions, and artifacts were used to document the experiences of middle school preservice teachers as *cases* were used as a strategy to foster their decision making. For the purpose of this study, a preservice teacher was defined as an undergraduate student enrolled in a teacher education program who had not been certified to teach.

This chapter begins with a description of the research design of the study. It continues with a description of how the participants were selected and the context in which the study was conducted. How data was collected and analyzed is then described. The chapter concludes with a description of my role as a researcher and my subjectivities and biases.

#### Research Design

##### *Qualitative Research Rationale*

Creswell (1994) states that qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human procedure, based on building a complex, holistic picture,

formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (pp. 1-2). Because of my research interest in the use of *cases* as a strategy, this study was designed to include the five characteristics of qualitative research as put forth by Merriam (1998): the major concern is understanding the phenomenon in which the researcher is interested from the perspectives of the participants, not from the perspective of the researcher, the primary instrument for collecting data and analyzing that data is the researcher, fieldwork is usually involved in the research, an inductive research strategy is usually employed, and the final product of the study is very rich in description. In this study, data from interviews, class discussions, and artifacts were collected and analyzed. An inductive research strategy was utilized, with a thick, rich description of how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making skills being the end product of the study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). According to Creswell, those individuals involved in the research construct reality. Therefore, several realities exist in the research situation: the realities of the researcher, the realities of the research participants, and the realities of the readers of the study.

### *Case Study Analysis*

Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993) state that the qualitative method has three major characteristics: describing, understanding, and explaining. The case study fits in with all three of these characteristics. I was interested in the process of how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making and not the outcomes of the process of using *cases*. I was interested in discovering how middle



grades preservice teachers perceive the use of *cases* as a strategy in their teacher preparation program rather than confirmation that it is a good strategy to use. Therefore, I used the case study as my research design. There are many definitions for case study, but Merriam (1998) defines a qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bound unit” (p. 193). She states that a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are clearly evident” (p. 13).

According to Merriam (1998), a qualitative case study is defined by its special features. First, a qualitative case study is particularistic. It focuses on a particular event, phenomenon, program, or situation. This study focused on how seven middle school preservice teachers used *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making skills. Therefore, it was particularistic. Second, a qualitative case study is descriptive in nature. A rich description of the phenomenon under study is the end product of the research. A rich, detailed description of how these seven middle school preservice teachers used *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making is the end product of this study. Therefore, it is descriptive. Finally, a qualitative case study is heuristic, which means that the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study is enhanced. The description of how these seven middle school preservice teachers used *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making skills may enhance the understanding of those who read about it.

Merriam postulates that the major consideration when analyzing data is to convey an understanding of the case. The description of each case attempts to convey how the

decision making of each middle school preservice teacher was fostered when *cases* were used as a strategy. According to Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993), “the theoretical and methodological foundations of the explanation resulting from the case study may thus be clearly understood through the depth of description of the object of study” (p. 48), which was the decision making skills of the seven middle school preservice teachers.

The case study was particularly suitable for this study because I was interested in the process of understanding how middle grades preservice teachers used *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making. The uniqueness of the case study as a research design lies in the questions asked and the relationship of the questions to the end product. The research questions were: 1. What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers? 2. How do middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making?

This design was chosen because I was interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation of how middle school preservice teachers used *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. The study was bounded by time and activity. The study was conducted during the fall semester of 2002 with seven middle school preservice teachers, each of whom was enrolled in a particular course (Curriculum: Essentials of Middle School Instruction) at a small, Christian college.

### *Cross-Case Analysis*

Because data were collected and analyzed from more than one participant, this was a multiple case study. When a multiple case study is used, there are two stages of analysis. The first stage is within-case analysis. Each case is analyzed for themes and categories. Once each case has been analyzed, the second stage, cross case analysis,

begins. The themes and categories are analyzed across all the cases (Merriam, 1998). Each of the seven participants in this study was considered a case. In addition, the participants as a group were considered a case. The result is a descriptive case study of the use of *cases* as a strategy with middle school preservice teachers to foster their decision making skills.

According to Merriam (1998), the more cases that are included in a study, the more variation one will see across cases, and in turn, the more compelling the interpretation is likely to be. The inclusion of multiple cases enhances the external validity of the findings, which “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 207). Therefore, each of the seven preservice teachers enrolled in the class were asked to participate in the study in order to examine the variation in the cases and to enhance the external validity of the findings.

### Context and Participants

#### *Context*

The college in this study lies nestled in the rolling hills of a small town in the south. It is a small, private, four-year, church-related, co-educational institution that was founded in 1919. Current enrollment at the college is 713 students. These students come from many states in the United States and several foreign countries. Approximately 45% of the students live on campus and 55% commute from the surrounding communities. The mission of the institution is to provide educational opportunities for both residential and commuting students to prepare them to enter the work force, graduate studies, Christian ministries, or other pursuits of life.

The Teacher Education Program at the college was established in 1994 with Bachelor of Science degrees in Early Childhood Education and Middle Grades Education. The program has grown tremendously in the last several years. Last year, the college added five more education degree programs that include Secondary Math Education, Secondary English Education, Secondary Business Education, Secondary Social Science Education, and Music Education. About 170 of the 713 students at the college have indicated education as a major. Therefore, the School of Education plays an important role in the life of the institution.

The School of Education at the college seeks to integrate faith, living, learning, and teaching to prepare knowing, sharing, and caring teachers to meet the challenges of our diverse society. In addition, each program area seeks to provide high quality field experiences in diverse settings throughout the professional experience of its preservice teachers. The School of Education is accredited by the state in which the college resides. Many of the preservice teachers who graduate from the college are employed in the surrounding communities. However, some seek employment in other areas of the south, in other states in the country, and in other countries.

The Middle Grades Program has two full-time faculty members, with approximately 50 students declaring Middle Grades Education as their major. Therefore, both of these instructors teach many courses and get to know their students very well. The number of students in each class is relatively small, ranging from approximately 5 to 20 students in each class. My role is that of department chair in the School of Education. In addition, I teach the two introductory education courses the preservice teachers take during their freshman and sophomore years and several methods courses that the middle

grades preservice teachers take during their junior and senior years. It is conceivable that a middle grades preservice teacher could take four or five courses with me as the instructor. The relationship between the preservice teachers and me becomes that of a family - we become well acquainted with each other.

The preservice teachers at the college begin their field experiences during their freshman year with an introductory education course designed to allow them to observe 10 hours in a public school setting. This allows the students the opportunity to decide if teaching is the profession they wish to enter. The students again go out into the field for 10 hours during their sophomore year when they take a course designed to discuss the historical and philosophical aspects of education in the United States. After the second introductory course, students are then admitted to the School of Education if all requirements for admittance have been met and they still desire to be an educator. During the fall semester of their junior year, the middle grades preservice teachers are placed in a public school setting for 30 hours, 15 hours in grade 4 and 15 hours in grade 5. During this time, they are asked to observe and reflect on what they observe and what they do themselves, as well as teach four lessons. Teaching four lessons gives the preservice teachers experience in planning lessons and then implementing them, thus making some of the same decisions concerning curriculum and instruction that inservice teachers have to make.

### *Participant Selection*

The participants for this study were volunteers from the members of a class I taught entitled Curriculum: Essentials of Middle School Instruction. This course is described in the college catalog (2001-2002) as follows:

A study of the organization, curriculum and instructional patterns in the middle grades, with emphasis on the growth and development of early adolescence. Emphasis is on varying patterns of curriculum organization and activities, school organization patterns, teachers' roles, instructional delivery systems, daily programs, courses of study, records, and evaluation of students. The ability to write instructional objectives and lesson plans is developed (p. 105).

The participants were middle grades preservice teachers who were just entering the Teacher Education Program at the college during fall semester, 2002. They had previously completed two introductory education courses, both of which required them to observe in a public school classroom setting for 10 hours. Therefore, the participants had some recent interaction with teachers and students in a classroom setting. In addition, the participants were required to register for the practicum which accompanies this course. The practicum requirements state that the preservice teacher must spend 30 hours in a public school classroom during the semester, 15 hours in a fourth grade setting and 15 hours in a fifth grade setting. The preservice teachers may complete the entire 30 hours in the same school, or they may be placed in a different school for 15 of those hours. The Director of Field Experience, who considers each preservice teacher's schedule and the schedules given to her by each school, determines this placement. The schools are chosen from the four school districts which surround the college.

Participation in the study was voluntary. I asked each of the seven members of the Curriculum class to participate in the study. Each agreed to participate. Before data collection began, a consent form approved by the University of Georgia Institutional

Review Board (see Appendix A) was discussed with each participant. The consent form explained the study, what participants would be required to do, and benefits participants might receive from participating in the study. In addition, confidentiality was assured. Pseudonyms are used in this study when discussing each participant to ensure confidentiality.

The 7 participants were traditional college students in that each had entered college immediately upon graduating from high school. They ranged in age from 20-22 years of age. Four of the participants lived in the county where the college is located or in a neighboring county, and were considered commuters. One participant was from a county in Georgia farther away, and two participants were from other states. Five of the participants were female, while two were male. Detailed descriptions of the participants are included in Chapter 4.

#### Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted at the college during fall semester 2001 and spring semester 2002. At this time, I selected several *cases* to use with students in my classes, and a response guide for students to use when analyzing the *cases* was developed. The results of this pilot study have guided the current research study. As a result of the pilot study, I gained experience in the use of *cases* as a strategy and experience as a facilitator of the class discussions which followed the reading of each *case*.

At the end of the semester, I asked the students in each class what strategies or instruction or what activities used in the courses were most beneficial to them individually. Several students referred to class discussions as being beneficial. These discussions included the discussions of *cases*. One student stated that “talking about

*cases* alongside what we talked about in class work” was most helpful. Another student stated that the *case* studies were helpful because “I loved the class discussion, because different people have different views, and one person might have had an idea that I had not thought about.” Eight of the ten students who filled out the course evaluation sheets at the end of the semester mentioned the use of *cases* as being beneficial in the class.

The *cases* chosen for this study were based on the responses of the students to the *cases* used in the pilot study. Some of the *cases* chosen for this study were used in the pilot study. However, others were not. The response guide was changed to a *case* analysis guide in the hopes of getting the students to think more reflectively about the *case* as they read it and analyzed it. In addition, another component was added to the study. Each participant was asked to write a closed *case* about a challenging experience they encountered in their field placements. Once again, they were asked to think critically and reflectively about the decisions they made in their field experiences and how their own experiences and beliefs affected their decision making as teachers.

### Data Sources and Collection

Three types of data were collected for this study: individual interview data, class discussion data, and artifacts. Data collection began in November, 2002 and ended in January, 2003 (see Figure 1 for data collection process).

#### *Individual Interviews*

##### *Pre-Case Interviews*

Each individual participant was interviewed before the *case* was used as a strategy. An interview guide (see Appendix B) was used to assist in asking each



<b>Participant</b>	<b>Pre-Case Interview</b>	<b>Case Analyses</b>	<b>Class Discussions</b>	<b>Post-Case Interview</b>	<b>Student Generated Case</b>
<b>Michael</b>	Conducted	1 2 3 4 5	1 3 4 5	Conducted	Generated
<b>Sheila</b>	Conducted	1 2 3 4 5	2 3 4 5	Conducted	Generated
<b>Amber</b>	Conducted	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	Conducted	Generated
<b>Keith</b>	Conducted	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	Conducted	Generated
<b>Erin</b>	Conducted	1 2 3 4 5	1 4 5	Conducted	Generated
<b>Susan</b>	Conducted	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	Conducted	Generated
<b>Leanne</b>	Conducted	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 5	Conducted	Generated

*Figure 1. Data Collection Process*

participant questions that would assist in obtaining information concerning the research questions. The interview conducted before the use of *cases* included questions concerning how the participant felt about his or her field experiences, the kinds of decisions regarding curriculum and instruction the participant anticipated making as a teacher, the process the participant used to make a decision, and if advice concerning a decision was ever sought from anyone. In addition, each participant was asked to relate a decision made during the field experiences and the strategies that were used in making this decision. Finally, the participants were asked to define a *case* and whether or not they had ever been exposed to the use of *cases* and in what context.

The pre-case interviews took place in my office or in an empty classroom to ensure that disruptions would be minimal. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes each, depending on the preservice teacher's comments. The pre-case interviews were audio taped and transcribed as soon as possible after being conducted. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. During the time the pre-case interviews were conducted, the participants had been involved in their field experiences for approximately eight weeks. During the transcription of the pre-case interviews, I began to list particular themes that became apparent as I was transcribing interviews for each participant.

#### *Post-Case Interviews*

After *cases* as a strategy were used, participants were interviewed again. An interview guide (see Appendix C) was used to assist in asking each participant questions that would assist in obtaining information concerning the research questions. The participants were asked questions concerning how they approached the experiences they encountered in their field placements, the kinds of decisions they anticipated making as a

teacher, and the information they used to make a decision. In addition, the participants were asked to describe a decision they had to make during their field experiences and the strategies they used to make this decision. Finally, the participants were asked what the use of *cases* had done to foster their decision making.

The interviews took place in my office or in an empty classroom to ensure that disruptions would be minimal. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the participant's comments. The participants had completed their field experience at the time of these interviews. These post-case interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. During the transcription of the post-*case* interviews, I began to list particular themes that became apparent as I was transcribing interviews for each participant.

### *Class Discussions*

After all participants had been interviewed concerning their field experiences, their decision making process, and what they knew about *cases*, I introduced the use of *cases* to the class. A discussion of the *case* as a strategy ensued and a detailed description of what was expected from the participants as they read each *case* was given. Five *cases* were read and discussed (see Figure 2). During this time, the participants were still involved in their field experiences. The *cases* were chosen from several *case* books I reviewed. An attempt was made to utilize *cases* that covered a variety of the grade levels considered middle school grades (4-8). Two of the *cases* were situated in a sixth grade classroom, one in a seventh grade classroom, one in an eighth grade classroom, and one did not provide the grade context. *Cases* situated in different subject areas (mathematics, science, social studies, language arts, and reading) were also utilized.

Case Book	Case	Subject Area	Grade Level	Topic
Siskind, T. G. (2000). <i>Cases for middle school educators</i> . Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.	#1 “Day In and Day Out”	Science Language Arts Reading	Not given	Cooperative learning
Greenwood, G. E. & Parkay, F. W. (1989). <i>Case studies for teacher decision making</i> . NY: Random House.	#2 “A Class Divided”	Reading Language Arts	6	Meeting students’ individual needs
Greenwood, G. E. & Parkay, F. W. (1989). <i>Case studies for teacher decision making</i> . NY: Random House.	#3 “Fractions and Interactions”	Math	7	Teacher/ Student interactions
Siskind, T. G. (2000). <i>Cases for middle school educators</i> . Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.	#4 “The Test”	Not given	8	Standardized testing
Siskind, T. G. (2000). <i>Cases for middle school educators</i> . Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.	#5 “Patrice”	Social Studies	6	Belligerent student

Figure 2. Case books utilized, cases utilized, subject area, grade level, and topic of cases

In addition, *cases* that examined topics discussed with the participants in the course during the semester were chosen. The topics included cooperative learning, meeting the needs of individual students, teacher/student interaction, testing, and problem students (see Figure 2). The participants were encouraged to respond freely during the discussions. Because the use of *cases* as a strategy was utilized at the end of the semester, it was hoped that the participants would know each other well by this time and feel freer to respond during the discussion of each *case*.

After the participants read each *case* (outside of class), the *case* was discussed as part of the class. During that time, I served as a facilitator for the discussion. I had a discussion guide (see Appendix D) to assist me in guiding the discussions. However, some questions evolved from the comments of the participants. The discussions began with an overview of the context of the *case*. Next, the dilemma or situation that was presented in the *case* was discussed. After the dilemma had been identified, the decisions made by the teacher and how these decisions affected others (students, parents, other teachers) were discussed. Then the participants were asked to discuss what decision or decisions they would have made in the situation presented and why they would have made the decision or decisions. Finally, the class discussed the consequences of each decision made. During the use of *cases* as a strategy, the discussion of each *case* by the participants was audio taped. The classroom discussions were transcribed verbatim. As the classroom discussions were transcribed, I noted various themes that became apparent during the discussions.

### *Artifacts*

Artifacts included analyses of each *case* discussed and a participant-generated *case*.

#### *Individual Case Analyses*

A *case* analysis guide (see Appendix E) was given to each participant prior to their reading of each *case* to guide them as they examined each *case*. First, the guide asked the participants to identify the problem or situation presented in the *case* from the teacher's perspective and from their own perspective. Second, the participants were asked to give evidence to support their statements and to relate knowledge that was relevant to the *case*. Third, the participants were asked to provide possible solutions to the dilemma and the consequences of each solution provided. Finally, the participants were asked to state how they arrived at their solution and what helped them make this decision. In addition, the participants were asked to reflect and analyze each *case* on paper using this guide. After the class discussion of each *case*, the participants were given the opportunity to revise their analysis of each *case*. These analyses were then due the next class period. The analyses were graded according to a rubric and returned to the students. These papers were photo copied and examined for themes.

#### *Participant-Generated Case*

After the five *cases* had been examined and discussed, participants were asked to write their own closed *case* about a particularly challenging dilemma or incident they encountered during their field experiences (see appendix F). The participants had completed their field experiences by the time the *case* was written. The participants presented their *cases* to each other at the end of the semester. These papers were

collected and graded according to a rubric (see Appendix F) and returned to the participants. They were photo copied and examined for themes.

### Data Analysis

This study, which examined how middle school preservice teachers used *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making, is a descriptive case study, which includes data collected through individual interviews, class discussions, and archival data. The constant comparative method (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the data. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe the constant comparative method as combining inductive category coding while simultaneously comparing all social incidents that are observed and coded. Within-case analysis and cross case analysis were used in analyzing the data. First, the data from each individual participant were analyzed and themes were recorded. Then the data from all seven participants were analyzed for common themes and for differing themes.

According to Grove (1988), the purpose of the constant comparative method is to “generate explicit categories which can help to provide an understanding of the data” (p. 277), and it is a particularly valuable research tool for the analysis of qualitative data. Events are recorded and classified across categories. As data is collected and analyzed, the categories are constantly revisited and refined (Flick, 1998; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The data from each participant was analyzed and coded, and these codes were compared over and over again with classifications and coding already made. The data was continuously compared, sorted, and refined during the entire process. Then the process was repeated using the data from all seven participants, comparing common and differing themes.

### *Within-Case Analysis*

I began data analysis with a few ideas concerning what influenced the decision making of teachers because of my own experience as a preservice teacher and then as an inservice teacher. I realized that many times we turn to others, in particular other teachers, for advice on matters concerning teachers. I also remembered that many times I had consulted my notes from courses I had taken to assist me in making these decisions. I also realized that I often called on experiences from my past when making a decision. These became my initial categories. Examples included other teachers, course content, and past experiences. In addition, I looked at the themes I had initially written during the transcribing of the interviews and class discussions.

I had two research questions, so I examined the data to determine which data would answer each research question (see Figure 3). Next, I began to read through all the data I had collected from one participant. As I read, I listed phrases under each research question that I felt supported this question, trying to place them in my initial categories, which were other teachers, course content, and past experiences, and trying to generate other categories as I read. It was apparent after a short time that this would not work. It became apparent that I would need to examine each question independently. Therefore, I started again by making copies of the data for each participant, the number of copies depending on how many questions could be answered with that data. For example, I determined that data from the interviews, the case analyses, the class discussions, and the student-generated cases would answer my first research question. Therefore, I made two copies of each participant's pre- and post-*case* interview



<b>Question</b>	<b>Data Supporting</b>
What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?	Pre- <i>Case</i> Interview Post- <i>Case</i> Interview Class Discussions of <i>Cases</i> <i>Case</i> Analyses Student-generated <i>Case</i>
How do middle grades preservice teachers use <i>cases</i> as a strategy to foster their decision making?	Pre- <i>Case</i> Interview Post- <i>Case</i> Interview Class Discussions of <i>Cases</i> <i>Case</i> Analyses Student-generated <i>Case</i>

*Figure 3.* Research questions and data supporting research questions

transcription, their *case* analyses, the class discussions, and the student-generated *cases*. This allowed me to examine each question independently.

After determining the data needed to answer each question, I began with the first research question. I read through the data highlighting phrases that seemed to be connected to the question. I used two different colored highlighters for each of the two different questions to eliminate confusion. Then I went back and read the data again, noting words that captured the statements highlighted. These became tentative themes. After completing this process, I made a data analysis sheet for each individual (see Figure 4) which included the research question, the themes, an explanation of each theme, evidence to support each theme, and where I found that evidence.

This process was completed for each of the seven participants for each of the research questions. As new themes emerged during this process, I went back and added themes to the data analysis sheets already completed. This process of adding and refining themes was a recursive process throughout the data analysis. It was continued until all cases had been analyzed.

### *Cross Case Analysis*

In doing the cross case analysis, I looked back at each of the individual cases to determine all the themes that had emerged in these cases. Next, I compiled a chart of these themes, noting underneath which themes had emerged from which participant. These were then examined for common themes across all the cases and for differing themes across all the cases (see Figure 5).

## Data Analysis Sheet

**Participant** - Michael

**Question #2** – How do middle grades preservice teachers use cases to foster their decision making?

**Theme** - opportunity to reflect

**Explanation of theme** – The preservice teacher thinks about the teaching/learning process.

**Evidence** - I think it's caused me to think more.(Post)

They have got a situation and find out you know if you'd do things the same or different and if so, how different (post)

CD 1 - I have a problem right there with you know they assigned them or they sent them all to a counselor and they punished them as a group and in my opinion, in a way all they get is more animosity toward Steve. Where ---yes, there might have been a problem, but she's going about it the wrong way. Some---like for instance, if she took the head of the group. You know if you cut the head off the snake, the snake dies. So if you take the head of the group, and individually speak with him over on the side after class one day ---and say look, I don't appreciate what's going on in here ----in the room. Don't send up to the office to the counselor, but in the room, so that by confronting somebody in the place where it's happening has a stronger effect on some body than sending

CD 3 - I agree with Kevin. I don't think you can enforce some rules and let others slide. If you have a rule, you gotta go with it, you know, explain to the students that, have the procedures set up to where they sharpen their pencils before the class and stick by it. You know then you don't have the problem of students getting up and then you don't have kids looking in the room and oh, we're not started yet. We'll go back down here. If you have procedures set up that they have to have done before class, then a lot of your problems are eliminated.

CD 3 - If you have need someone to tell you have good interaction, that you're doing things right, then you're probably not doing them right. If you can't look at it and say Ok this is what it's supposed to be then it might be a little messed up

CD 3 - And they're doing fractions. If there's a dollar for everybody who can't do fractions everybody who has trouble with fractions, if anything you need to spend twice as much time on that because I you mean you work with those for the rest of the time you do math or anything and there are so many people that struggle with fractions big time.

CD 5 - It might be, but then again you know, you put so much work into this student you neglecting the 30 other students in your classroom and how many others you have. I mean, what about that other student over there, the quiet students who never says

anything but you know something's wrong with him ---get their work done. You're so worried about this one student ----don't do the work -----might could help, it would be a lot easier to help that's sitting right there in front of you. And you've got to you've also got to look at are you neglecting other people in your classroom ----and if you are, then maybe you've got to cut that student lose. I mean you've got to cut your losses. Even if you go to war, I mean, you know, people die but it for the betterment of the cause so it's also done because you help more than you hurt. I mean, that's pretty much what it comes down to. I mean, yeah, you might lose a student here and lose a student there but if you

CA 1 – I feel that having each of the students singled out like this and sent to the counselor was a mistake because it gave more attention to the problem than what was needed.

CA 4 – In my opinion the teacher didn't do much wrong at all in the aspect of how she handled all of the problems that occurred once all of the other students finished their test.

CA 5 – She wanted attention from the teachers but went about it the wrong way and the teachers should have noticed this and done something about it.

**Data Sources** – Post Case Interview; class discussions 1, 3, 5; case analyses 1, 4, 5

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*Figure 4. Sample data analysis sheet for question #2*

**Question #1****What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?****Common/Differing Themes**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Michael</b>	<b>Keith</b>	<b>Susan</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Sheila</b>	<b>Erin</b>	<b>Leanne</b>
<b>Field Experiences</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Personal Experiences</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Other people</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Outside sources</b>		<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>	
<b>Knowledge base</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Examine possible outcomes</b>			<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
<b>Needs and characteristics of students</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>

**Question #2****How do middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making?****Common/Differing Themes**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Michael</b>	<b>Keith</b>	<b>Susan</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Sheila</b>	<b>Erin</b>	<b>Leanne</b>
<b>Gave me an opportunity to reflect</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Helped me identify solutions</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Put me in the role of a teacher</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>
<b>Helped me examine consequences of decisions</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Helped me think about multiple perspectives</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	

*Figure 5.* Common and differing themes for all seven participants for the research questions

This was done for each research question. For example, I looked at all the themes for the first research question, which was what influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers. I looked at the themes that had emerged from this question which were field experiences, personal experiences, other people, outside sources, knowledge base, examine possible outcomes, and needs and characteristics of students. I listed the themes that the participants had in common. Then I summarized each of these themes for what influenced the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers. After this determination, I looked for themes that were different and listed them. Next, I summarized each of the differing themes. This procedure continued for the second question.

#### Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher during this study was multi-faceted. There were many roles that I was called upon to portray during the course of this study. As an instructor, I performed the duties assigned to me by the college. I'm not certain that my participants viewed me as a researcher at this time because the study was conducted during the course of my instruction in the classroom. At times, such as during the class discussions, I was a participant observer as well as a facilitator of discussion as each *case* was discussed by the participants. I attempted to put the participants at ease during the course of the individual interviews and during the class discussions. The pre-case interviews assisted me in gaining valuable information about my participants before the class discussions began. Regardless of the roles I played during the study, as a researcher my own subjectivities and biases played a major role as the study was conducted.

### Subjectivity and Biases

In qualitative research, “subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding” (Stake, 1995, p. 45). Stake postulates that qualitative research calls for those who will be most responsible for the interpretations of the study to be in the field making observations and analyzing and synthesizing, while at the same time realizing their own consciousness. Therefore, it is important for me to recognize my biases.

I grew up in a white, middle class Christian family, which was reflective of the community demographics. I attended a small Christian junior college in this community, which shared the same demographics. My undergraduate studies and my subsequent teaching duties did not expose me to a very diverse group of students. Therefore, when I began teaching in a very diverse area, I felt unprepared to be an effective decision maker even though I had several years experience as a middle school teacher. I became more effective as a teacher of a diverse student population through my own studies and the process of trial and error in the classroom. For this reason, I strongly believe in actively involving my students in the learning process and introducing them to the many types of diversity that they may encounter as a future middle school teacher. This study was influenced by my 26 years as an educator, 20 years teaching middle school in a public school setting, and 6 years as an educator of future middle school teachers.

I believe that the construction of knowledge is a social process. The active involvement of students in the classroom is important to their learning process. They actively construct knowledge through their group discussions in the classroom. Here, in

my classroom, students are free to openly discuss their beliefs and experiences which inform the decisions they make in the field.

The instructional strategy I chose to explore is an active learning strategy. The students were actively involved in the learning process, examining their own understandings and misconceptions as well as the perspectives of others. I chose to use open *cases* for this study because I felt that the students would feel freer to express their own opinions and offer their own solutions to the dilemmas presented in the *cases* rather than taking the solution provided in closed *cases* as the “correct” answer to the problem. It was my hope that they would understand that there is no one correct answer or decision to the dilemmas presented in the *cases* they read.

#### Reflexivity

Internal validity raises the question as to whether researchers are measuring what they say they are measuring. Do the research findings “capture what is really there?” (Merriam, 1998, p. 201). Merriam provides six strategies for enhancing the internal validity of a qualitative study: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research, and the researcher’s biases. For this study, internal validity was established through the use of triangulation, which is “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (p. 204). Multiple sources of data, including individual interviews, class discussions, and artifacts, were used in the study. Member checks were also used. Each participant was asked to read the transcript of his or her pre-*case* interview and post-*case* interview and make corrections accordingly. In addition, my biases were specifically noted in the study.



Techniques for examining the reliability of qualitative research, or whether the results are consistent with the data that have been collected, include the investigator's position, triangulation, and audit trail. The audit trail describes in detail data collection methods, how the categories were obtained, and how decisions were made throughout the research (Merriam, 1998). Reliability for this study was established through the use of triangulation, multiple methods of collecting data. I also described in detail how data were collected, how the categories were obtained, and why and how decisions were made as the study progressed. In the previous section, I explained my assumptions behind the study and my position and biases concerning the participants; thus reliability was enhanced.

Strategies for enhancing the external validity of a qualitative study, which is "the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 1998, p. 207), include rich, thick description, typicality or modal category, and multisite designs. I have included adequate description so that other researchers will be able to determine if their activities match the activities of this study, hence transferring the findings. In addition, I have described how typical the situation, event, or program that is studied is compared with others so that comparisons can be made with their own situations. Finally, the examination of several cases, sites, or situations will allow the results of the study to be applied by other researchers to other situations (Merriam, 1998). External validity in this study was enhanced through the use of multiple cases and the rich, thick description of the findings, thus allowing other researchers to apply the results to other situations.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter described the research design of the study. A description of how the participants were selected and the context in which the study was conducted were presented. Next, how data were collected and analyzed was described. Finally, a description of my role as a researcher and my subjectivities and biases were given.

Chapter 4 examines the findings of the study. First, I present an overview of each participant's personal context. Then I answer each of the research questions as they relate to each participant. Finally, I give a brief summary of the findings for each participant.

## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDIES

Because decision making is a vital teaching skill, it is important to provide preservice teachers with an opportunity to practice their decision making. Teachers solve the multiple dilemmas they are confronted with in the classroom each day in many different ways. *Cases* used as a strategy provides preservice teachers with an opportunity to practice their decision making as they make decisions concerning the dilemma or dilemmas presented in the *case*. The preservice teachers are provided with the opportunity to use the theories and principles of teaching and learning they have acquired as well as examine how their own beliefs and the beliefs of others influence the decisions they make in the classroom. *Cases* used as a strategy gives the preservice teachers the opportunity to enhance their critical thinking skills by making decisions involving situations they will encounter as teachers. Five open *cases* were used in this study. The first *case* dealt with cooperative learning and working in groups. The second *case* involved meeting the needs of individual students. The third *case* was about interactions between the teacher and the students. The fourth *case* detailed a situation where a special needs student was taking a standardized test. The fifth *case* concerned the actions of a belligerent student.

The purpose of this study was to explore how middle grades preservice teachers used *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. In addition, I wanted to find out what influences the decision making of these middle grades preservice teachers. In this

chapter, I present findings for each of my seven participants. First, I present an overview of each of the participant's personal context. Personal knowledge and pre-*case* and post-*case* interview data were used to write the context for each participant. Then I answer each of the research questions as they relate to each participant. Finally, I give a brief summary of the findings for each participant. For each case, a pseudonym is used and student voice is represented in italics. Pseudonyms are also used in the participant-generated *cases* and for teacher and school names.

### Case One: Keith

#### *Personal Context*

Keith is a 20-year-old junior who commutes to the college from a neighboring county. During his freshman and sophomore years, he was uncertain about his major. He was interested in both education and Christian ministries. Last year, he made the decision to enter the School of Education. However, he is still somewhat uncertain of himself in the role of teacher. In his pre-*case* interview he stated, ... *at first I was like...I don't know if I can do this. It's so much. But now, as I've grown in it and I've learned a lot about it, I really think...it's what I... ought to do....*

Keith is a very conscientious young man and works diligently at his studies as indicated by his grade point average. He attends class regularly and turns in assignments in a timely manner. Nonetheless, he is very concerned about doing things correctly and improving his abilities in the classroom, as stated in his pre-*case* interview.

*...I like to make sure that what I'm doing is... in sync with what my cooperating teacher is doing, and when I write my lesson plan I like to get feedback from you so I'll know what I'm at and how I can improve my lesson plan.*

Although his grades are very good, Keith's uncertainty about himself in the role of teacher is apparent. He sets very high standards for himself.

*...just like today I visited a classroom and I taught a lesson and it just went great. That hasn't really happened to me. I've had some successes, but mostly I failed because either I've tried too hard or I don't try hard enough to ... get things across. But I really do feel like it's what I'm called to do, but I just have to get to the point to where I know exactly everything that's expected of me and everything that... will help the students...*

Conversely, Keith considers himself *...a pretty independent person, especially since I came to college....* and also *a really creative person....* He says in his post-case interview, *...I think out of the box, and sometimes I think my ideas are too... radical....* He also believes that it is important for teachers to show originality in their teaching. Keith states in his pre-case interview, *...I think part of being a teacher is being original in how you present stuff.*

Religion plays a major role in Keith's life. He feels that the Bible is a great teacher, and he uses it to guide him in his everyday decision making as stated in his pre-case interview. *... I know this may sound really churchy, but first of all ... I take into context what would God think of this... what ... does the Bible say about this....* Once again he reiterates, *...I'll go back to the Bible.... there's so much there. It teaches us how to live.... I use that information a great deal....*

Keith talks a lot about racial issues in class and in his pre-case interview. He has reiterated several times in class that he has different views about ethnicity than does his parents. *...You know I've been taught some things that weren't exactly right ... about*

*people of opposite races....* He believes that coming to college has changed his views about different cultures and different races.

*... as a high school student I did have some racial feelings....since I came to college I've... kind of gotten a better view of everybody...especially just in my education classes because that's one thing it stresses...multicultural... I learned a lot there.*

In his pre-case interview, Keith details an experience he had in the classroom with a young girl which left him wondering about whether he handled the situation in the correct manner.

*...I wasn't teaching but I was in a classroom and I was walking around helping some students ... I think they were writing a little book for 1<sup>st</sup> graders. This was a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class, and... one little black girl... raised her hand and I walked over there and ... kind of in a derogatory way, this is what she said....[these are] her exact words. She said, I don't want you cracker; I want my teacher.*

He was very concerned about how he should handle the situation because he did not want the other students to think he was racist. He discusses his thoughts at this time.

*Well, I thought...if I exploded, [if] I showed my temper to the class, the students might feel like I was racist. And I didn't want at all for anybody to feel that way because I'm not. I didn't ... want other kids to see me in anger either, so that's ... another reason I walked away....*

Keith was very concerned about this situation and reiterated that he would *...really like to know why she felt the way she did....* This is definitely an issue that concerns Keith, because this was also the experience he detailed in the *case* he wrote. He writes,

*Dismally shocked, Joe walks away to stop himself from venting his anger towards the little girl. Joe decides to walk away trying to figure out how to solve this problem....* He also states further in the *case* that he also ...*understands that it will be a while before Shakithia will understand how much he cares for her and the other students.*

Keith is a very assiduous young man with strong religious beliefs. He is concerned about how other people perceive him and is painstaking in his efforts to portray himself as tolerant of all people, regardless of race or culture. He is uncomfortable in the classroom at this time, but feels that with time he will become more comfortable as he gains experience with students in the middle school classroom.

#### *What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?*

Five themes emerged concerning what influenced Keith when he made decisions. These themes were based on his comments in his *pre-case* interview and his *post-case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses he wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* he wrote himself. The themes were: field experiences, personal experiences, other people, outside sources, and needs and characteristics of students.

#### *Field Experiences*

The experiences Keith had during his field placements had an influence on his decision making. He felt that by observing his cooperating teachers, he was able to gain an idea of the duties of a classroom teacher while at the same time learning things he would not want to do himself in his own classroom. In his *post-case* interview he says,

*...I found the field experiences really useful in the fact that I learned a lot of the things that a teacher needs to do, and also I learned a lot of things teachers don't need to do just by sitting back and... being able to observe....*

The field experiences were considered by Keith as a way to gain insight into the real world of teaching. He felt that by observing the students and teachers interacting with each other in the classroom, he gained valuable insight into the whole teaching/learning process as stated in his pre-case interview.

*...I think it's really given me insight into the classroom that I wouldn't have got otherwise....I can go sit in the back of the room and observe and I kind of see what's going on with students' mind [s], what's going on with the teacher's mind and how ...that works together....*

Keith felt that he learned a lot about instruction from his observations in the field. In addition, he learned much about the use of different instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of students.

*...I've learned a lot. Not so much about content, but how to teach the content. I'd guess that's the biggest thing I've learned. I've also learned that all kids aren't alike, that they're very different. You have to ... help them with their different learning styles and by incorporating different instructional... strategies and sometimes even just getting more down on their level....*

Not only has Keith learned about instruction from his field experiences, but he has learned some things about managing a classroom as well. *...And also I've learned a little bit about behavior management. How to... keep the classes quiet and how not to try [to] discipline classes more than [you have] ... to....*



Keith was also appreciative of the fact that he actually got to gain some experience in planning and implementing instruction. He felt that his hands-on experience was very beneficial to him in that it helped him gain a better understanding of the decisions he would have to make in the classroom. He stated in his post-case interview,

*I also got some hand [s]-on experiences when teaching the lessons.... I understand better what's expected out of a teacher and understand more about actually what it takes to teach. You know, it's one thing to come up with a lesson plan, but it's another thing to teach the lesson plan....*

He was also concerned at this time about how the students would perceive him. *I was concerned that I would not show the students who I really am, and how I really feel about things. I was afraid... they'd get a wrong idea of me....*

Keith used his field experiences as a way to observe and reflect on how teachers differed in their teaching styles and in their responses to their students. In his post-case interview, he talked about the differences in the two classes that he observed and the different styles the teachers used in their approach to teaching.

*... I ... got to see ... two different kinds of cultures in a way. ...over in [Murphy] County it's mostly white.... the instruction there was less direct. Over at [Miller] County, the population is about half white and half African American, and the teacher was more direct with the way she presented the material. I mean ... if she told the children to do something, she expected them to do it without any question.... But ... over in [Murphy] County, the teacher ... took some ... criticism*

*for some of the things she assigned the students to do, and she just kind of brushed it off and let it go on.*

Keith discussed a few decisions he made during his field experiences. One decision concerned a derogatory comment made to him by a little girl. He questioned the decision he made when he chose to walk away from the situation and let his cooperating teacher handle it. In his pre-case interview, he stated,

*...I don't think I handled it right but... basically I just fled the situation. I didn't handle it right. I didn't handle it wrong. I just walked away. But let the teacher... take the situation over. So I really didn't react to it other than that, but I didn't react too bad either....*

He also found himself having to make a decision concerning *...how long you should spend on an issue...* He was uncertain about the length of time he had spent on this one particular topic, and whether the students had learned what he had hoped they would learn or had fixed their minds on just this one particular subject. In his pre-case interview he states,

*...the students kept on and kept on asking questions. So, ... this is really the first time I had really got in a hot spot where the children really were ...fascinated by what I was taking about. So, I think I let it go a little bit too long. And it kind of ... took away from the class ... I had them write a paragraph about what we had talked about in class that day and they ended up writing ... about King Phillip's head being chopped off ....I don't know if it just fascinated them... or if that was the only thing they could remember because we got sidetracked so long....*

Keith also related how he felt limited in his decision making in his field experiences. He felt like he needed to follow what the cooperating teacher told him to do, whether he thought it was relevant or not. He stated in his post-case interview, *...when you're in field experience, you're in a touchy situation in a lot of ways because you don't want to step on the teacher's toes.* He detailed a situation where he used an activity his cooperating teacher wanted him to use even though he did not feel like it was relevant for his lesson.

*...I was going to try to come up with something better.... I didn't think it was really relevant, but the teacher kind of persuaded me to go ahead and do the assignment. I did the assignment and it really wasn't relevant. ... the students were done in two minutes... But I didn't feel like it was that good. I really didn't.*

*But I decided to go on with that...I think it actually took away from the lesson....*

According to Keith, he *...didn't feel free to...do what I wanted to do...* in this particular situation.

Keith's experiences in his field placements influenced his decision making. He observed different ways to manage a classroom and how to use different instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of a diverse classroom. He also gained first-hand experience in planning and implementing instruction, thereby making decisions that teachers make each day in the classroom. Some of his decisions that he made in his field experiences left him concerned about the perceptions the students and the cooperating teachers had of him. He was also concerned about whether the decisions he made while in the field were the correct ones.

### *Personal Experiences*

Keith recalled his own experiences as a student in the classroom during the discussion of the fourth *case* which concerned the test taking conditions for a particular student.

*I took the SAT twice and it was really quiet one time and then the second time I took it the ... instructor ... let everyone talk when they finished their section...I did worse on the second one than I did on the first one...*

He also stated in his analysis of the second *case* that *...my experience as a good reader also helped to influence my opinion in this given situation.* When asked in his post-*case* interview why he decided to use some of the strategies he used in his lessons, he said he had been exposed to them as a student himself, *...in other classes...throughout my school career...*

He also reiterated in his post-*case* interview how his decisions were sometimes based not only on his experiences in school, but his... *experience with youth in our youth group ... at my church...* In his written *case*, he said, *...Joe understands that it is best to walk away from hostile situations having learned this ... in working with students in his church's youth ministry....*

He recalls information that he has learned in his college classes in his analysis of the second *case*.... *I arrived at these decisions mostly from knowledge gained from my teaching courses....* The theories of teaching and learning that Keith has acquired also play important roles in his decision making. In his analysis of the first *case*, he gives his ideas about the situation presented in the *case*.

*...I think talking one-on-one with people is the way to help others understand what the common goal that I as a teacher would be striving to reach. I think it is more effective to talk to students as a teacher in the situation because they would respond better to me, someone they know well, than to a stranger like the counselor. I also think face-to-face confrontation is the right way to go with this parent because I could communicate to her how much I care and how much I desire for this problem to be alleviated....*

He also states one of his beliefs concerning teaching as he analyzes the fifth case.

*...I think the teacher needs to worry more about Patrice's life outside of the classroom before one could adequately teach her inside the classroom. Teachers must be willing to help students like these. To reach just one child like Patrice is worth a whole career of teaching....*

In his analysis of the first case, he related how he had arrived at the solution to the dilemma in the case. *...I arrived at my decision by thinking about the things that affect me the most as a person.*

Keith recalls his own personal experiences when he makes decisions. These experiences include those he has had as a student in the classroom as well as his experiences working with a youth group at his church. In addition, he recalls his own personal feelings about a situation. Keith uses his personal experiences to assist him in making decisions in given situations. Some of the knowledge has been acquired in his classes at the college, while other knowledge comes from his own theories of teaching and learning.

### *Other People*

Talking to other people also influences Keith when he makes decisions. In particular, Keith talks with other teachers. In his post-case interview, he recalled several teachers from whom he has sought advice when making decisions. *...when I was in [Susan Cleveland's] class over in [Miller] County at the middle school and ...over at the high school... She [the teacher at the high school] taught me and she's helped me on a lot of different things...* He also likes to get feedback from his cooperating teachers and his professors at the college regarding planning and instruction.

*...I like to make sure that what I'm doing is ... in sync with what my cooperating teacher is doing and when I write my lesson plan I like to get feedback from you so I'll know ... how I can improve my lesson plan...*

Keith has begun to seek advice from other preservice teachers as a result of a collaborative project the preservice teachers had to do in one their classes at the college. This was not something he had done before, and he saw it as a positive experience as related in his post-case interview.

*My attitude has changed ... a lot over ... the last few weeks ... through the unit plan and all those kinds of things because my partner came up with a lot of different ideas that ... I hadn't thought of. I think out of the box, and sometimes I think my ideas are too ... radical. I need somebody to kind of come along and ... be more structured ...*

Keith also seeks advice from people who are not in the field of education, in particular his parents. He shows his appreciation for them in his pre-case interview. [I]

*...also use my parents. ... I guess I'm lucky to have two parents who are real supportive of me, who really care about me.... I take into consideration what they have to say...*

Consequently, other people influence Keith's decision making. He talks with his parents and ... *I also listen to people like teachers and my peers too because you know they can't really teach you the big life lessons, but some of the small things...*

When making a decision, Keith seeks advice from other people. He looks to his family for advice, especially his parents. He also approaches other teachers for advice when making a decision, especially his former teachers because they have experience in teacher decision making. Finally, he talks to other preservice teachers when making a decision because they are encountering some of the same situations in which he finds himself.

#### *Outside Sources*

Keith also consults other sources such as books and the Internet when he makes a decision. One such book he consults is the Bible. He stated in his pre-case interview, ...*I guess I'll go back to the Bible.... there's so much there, it teaches us how to live ... I use that information a great deal...* In addition, he sometimes uses the Internet as a source of information to gain ideas about teaching as stated in his pre-case interview.

*...Sometimes I look at something on the web...It just tells you what to do with a certain QCC or whatever. It kind of gives you ideas... but I try not to copy the thing because I think part of being a teacher is being original in how you present stuff.*

Keith also discusses how he takes into consideration society's values as well as his own personal values when making a decision as stated in his post-case interview.

*...I don't look at society values, as much as I do ... my own personal values. But at the same time you have to take those [society's values] into account ... when dealing with students, because not everybody is like you. And you have to realize that.... you have to accept [it]. You might not like it, but you have to accept ... how they're different in order to teach them....*

Other sources are used by Keith to assist him in the decision making process.

These include books such as the Bible, information from the Internet, and his own personal values as well as the values of our society in general.

#### *Needs and Characteristics of Students*

Keith takes the knowledge he has about the students in the classroom and uses it during the decision making process. He talks about the individual needs of the students. In his post-case interview he stated, *...you have to take into account your students' needs...* He also talked about how decisions are made based on what the students already know. *...obviously I'd take into account what the teacher has covered in a certain time...*

Keith wants to make sure that what he is teaching is relevant to the students.... *I just want to make it relevant to them...if you make something relevant, I feel like people can learn better....* He also feels that it is important to take into consideration the interests of the students. In the discussion of the fifth case, he stated *...you have to kind of look at the student's interest and see...what... the student [is] interested in...*

What students find enjoyable is also important to Keith when making a decision concerning what to teach and how to teach it. In his post-case interview he stated, *That's just basically... what...[the] students find enjoyable.*



The needs and characteristics of the students influence Keith when he makes a decision. This may be knowledge about their individual needs, how much they already know about the subject matter, what interests they may have, or what the students like to do.

### *Summary*

Keith is influenced in his decision making by his experiences in the field, his own personal experiences, both as a student in the classroom and in other situations, and talking with other people such as his cooperating teachers, his former teachers, his professors at the college, and his peers. In addition, he sometimes uses outside sources such as the Internet and the Bible to assist him in the decision making process. Finally, he calls on his own knowledge and the needs and characteristics of the students when making decisions.

### *How do Middle Grades Preservice Teachers use Cases as a Strategy to Foster Their Decision Making?*

Five themes also emerged concerning how Keith uses *cases* to foster his decision making. These themes were based on his comments in his pre-*case* interview and his post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses he wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* he wrote himself. The themes were: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me identify solutions, put me in the role of the teacher, helped me examine consequences of decisions, and helped me think about multiple perspectives.

*Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect*

Cases used as a strategy offer Keith the opportunity to reflect on the situations in the cases and the teaching/learning process in general. In the discussion of the first case, he reflected on how the teacher responded to the situation when he stated,

*I think ... some of her students ... felt left out... they may have special needs, too... it seems like she's really concentrating on this whole Steve dilemma...I'm not sure that's the best thing she could do for her classroom... sometimes you can concentrate on something too much.*

In the discussion he also reflected on the reasons behind the student's behavior. *Does Steve really not understand or is he trying to get attention... sometimes students want attention whether negative [or] positive. They just want attention...*

In the class discussion of the fourth case, he tried to understand what the teacher was so concerned about. He said, *... I don't really understand fully what she's concerned about... It [doesn't] seem like she's concerned about the situation with the student [but more about whether] she overstepped her bounds somewhere.*

In the discussion of the fifth case, he again reflected on what might have made the student's attitude change so quickly. He stated,

*...it seems like there is a definite shift in her mood...I don't know if something happened in the classroom or something happened outside the classroom. It seemed like there was a shift in her overall mood and attitude toward school.*

Cases used as a strategy gave Keith the opportunity to reflect on the situations presented. He reflected on the actions of all who were involved in the cases, students,

teachers, parents, administrators, and others. He also reflected on the teaching/learning process in general.

### *Helped Me Identify Solutions*

*Cases* used as a strategy helped Keith identify various solutions to the dilemmas presented in each *case*. In his post-*case* interview, he stated that a *case* helped ...*prospective teachers ...come up with solutions to things...* In his analyses of the *cases*, he came up with many solutions to the dilemmas presented. His analysis of the first *case* offered several solutions to the situation presented. He said, ...*She needs to help Steve understand her directions more clearly. ...She... could have talked with the students on a one-on-one basis...she should talk with Steve's mother...* In his analysis of the second *case*, he stated that ...*I think one of the solutions to this dilemma is assigning the students reading groups.... Another solution... is the varying of instructional strategies...* Again in his analysis of the fifth *case*, he gave various solutions to the problem presented in the *case*. ...*I would try to get to know Patrice better...I would ...try meeting with her mother again...I would try to find something to motivate her to do better...*

Keith used *cases* as a strategy to help him identify various solutions to the problems in the five *cases*. In many of the *case* analyses, he identified several solutions to the problems presented.

### *Put Me in the Role of the Teacher*

Keith felt that the use of *cases* put him in the role of the teacher where he could think about the decisions he would have to make in the classroom. He stated in his post-*case* interview that many times as a preservice teacher he did not see all the problems that a teacher actually faced because the cooperating teacher was trying to make sure that his

experiences were positive. In addition, he felt that the students were not themselves when he was there because they were conscious of his presence in the classroom.

*...it [a case] lets you have a look at the classroom problems that maybe you don't see when you're in there because the teacher is trying to make everything perfect for [preservice teachers]...students [are]... shy and quiet...when another person's in the room.... sometimes that's not... true, but I've found that to be true in my experiences.*

Keith continued in his post-case interview to talk about how the use of cases challenged him to really think about what he would do in that particular situation.

*...it's taken me and put me in the position of the teachers who were facing different situations...it really challenged me to think about what...I [would] do in the situation...what would be the best solution...the quick solution...*

In the discussion of the third case, Keith talked about what he would do in that particular situation. *...I think once I had my procedures in place, I could give more positive feedback...* In the discussion of the fourth case, he said, *...I think you have to [do] what is right there. I feel I would have had to go to the state board and demand a retest for the student.*

In the analysis of the first case he stated, *...The only way for this classroom to accomplish the things it needs to is for this problem to be taken care of effectively and promptly.* In the analysis of the third case he stated, *...One way I would improve this classroom is to come up with some procedures...I would also... go to students to help them with work.* Keith stated in his analysis of the fifth case, *...If I were Patrice's teacher I would try to get to know Patrice better...*

Keith uses *cases* as a strategy to put himself in the role of the teacher. By doing so, he can think more clearly about these situations that he might encounter as a teacher

*Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions*

Keith used *cases* as a strategy to help him examine the consequences of the decisions made in the *cases* by him and his peers. In his analysis of the first *case*, he stated, *...The only consequence that I see...is ...that his mother may not respond well to me if I tell her to stop babying him.* In his analysis of the second *case*, he discussed several consequences for the solutions he has provided for the problem identified in the *case*.

*...The consequence of assigning reading groups would be that the students who can read well may grow weary with the slower readers ...the consequence of varying instructional strategies may be that both types of students may benefit ...A negative consequence ...may be that one group of students tunes out the reading portion while another group...[doesn't] apply themselves to the workbook pages...*

Once again in the analysis of the third *case*, he stated consequences for the decisions that he would make.

*...The consequence of making the decision of having procedures would be that students wouldn't instantly change.....The only real consequence of having character education is that it would take up class time but it would probably be better than twenty minutes of homework time....*

*Cases* were used as a strategy by Keith to help him examine the consequences of the decisions that were made in the *cases*. He examined both the positive and the negative consequences of these decisions.

### *Helped Me Think About Multiple Perspectives*

Keith also felt that the class discussions of the *cases* had given him a better understanding of the situation described because he was able to listen to his peers' understanding of the situation. He was able to listen to the perspectives of his peers and learn from them.

*...it [the discussion of the case] brought ideas up that I hadn't thought about... sometimes I wouldn't fully understand the case, and I would get a better understanding of it through the way everybody kind of [talked about it]. You asked us at the end to summarize what this case was about. I would get ... more out of that when I heard other people say it than I would when I read it...*

The discussion of the *cases* assisted Keith in gaining a better understanding of the situation presented. In addition, the class discussions gave him ideas for solving the dilemmas that he had not thought of before the discussion ensued.

### *Summary*

Keith thought that using *cases* as a strategy gave him an opportunity to reflect on the various dilemmas presented and helped him to identify solutions to those dilemmas. In addition, he felt that he was able to put himself into the role of the teacher and examine the consequences of the decisions presented. Finally, he thought that the classroom discussions of the *cases* helped him look at problems from perspectives that were different from his own, while helping him gain a better understanding of the *case*.

*Summary of Findings*

<b>Keith</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Question #1 What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?	Field Experiences Personal Experiences Other People Outside Sources Needs and Characteristics of Students
Question #2 How do middle grades preservice teachers use <i>cases</i> as a strategy to foster decision making?	Gave me an opportunity to reflect Helped me identify solutions Put me in the role of the teacher Helped me examine consequences of decisions Helped me think about multiple perspectives

*Figure 6.* Summary of findings for Case One: Keith

Many things influence Keith's decision making. His experiences he has in his field placements influence him. Other people, such as other teachers, his peers, and his family influence the decisions he makes concerning curriculum and instruction. He also seeks information from outside sources such as the Bible and the Internet when making decisions. His own experiences with youth as well as his personal experiences in the classroom influence his decision making, as does the knowledge he has acquired from courses taken at the college. Finally, the needs and characteristics of the students influence the decisions he makes.

Using *cases* as a strategy has assisted Keith in thinking more about the different situations he will encounter as a teacher of middle school students and given him an opportunity to reflect on the decisions he made. In addition, it has helped him to think about various solutions that might be used in different situations and to examine the

consequences of each of these solutions. Finally, it has helped him think about decisions from multiple perspectives.

## Case Two: Michael

### *Personal Context*

Michael is a 22-year-old senior who made the decision to become a teacher a year ago. Previously he had been a kinesiology major. In the pre-*case* interview, he related how he was not very concerned about his studies during that time.

*Before I turned into the Education Department, I was in kinesiology, and I really didn't care. [I would] just kind of get up in the morning and go to class and really wasn't learning anything. [I] ...didn't feel like that was where I was supposed to be.*

Michael's major focus at this time is to be a coach. However, he knows that to achieve this goal, he will need to become a certified teacher. Therefore, teaching is a way of achieving his goal of coaching. Since deciding to enter the School of Education, he feels that things have changed for him. *...And then I made a decision to come to the Education Department, and it kind of feels like this is where I'm supposed to be. Like this is where my niche is.* When commenting about his decision to become a teacher, he said, *I'm happy about it...*

Michael actively participates in all class discussions and likes to relate past school experiences of his own to emphasize points he wishes to make with his classmates.

Many times Michael does not show as much empathy for the students mentioned in the *cases* as do some of his classmates. This is characterized by some of his comments. In the class discussion of the last *case*, he said, *...you can't win them all...* and *...you've got*



*to draw the line somewhere. When he commented, ...we all need ditch diggers, too...*

another student commented that was an awful attitude. Michael was not at all concerned about what the other preservice teacher said. Michael wrote in his analysis of this *case* ....*the student is just sorry and doesn't want to do their work. I feel that it is laziness that is keeping Patrice from doing her work and not something at home...*

After having Michael as a student and looking at his grades from other classes, it is apparent that many times Michael still does just enough in his classes to get by. He does not excel in the classroom even though his Scholastic Aptitude Test scores indicate he is very capable of doing so. He has the lowest grade point average of the seven participants. From his comments, I think this has probably been a problem he has experienced in the past and may still be experiencing. In the discussion of the fourth *case*, he talks about his own experience in taking a standardized test:

*...when I was in sixth grade we were taking a standardized test and ...the teacher wanted me to ...write down all the work ... because she didn't like the fact that I did the work in my head ... I didn't finish half the math part and scored really low that year....*

Lack of motivation on the part of the student was a recurrent theme in Michael's *case* analyses. One sensed that he was relating to the students on a personal level, as if he had encountered some of the same problems. As a matter of fact, he mentioned lack of motivation on the part of the student as being the problem in three out of five of the *cases*. He based this on his own experiences as a student. In his analysis of the first *case* discussed by the class, he writes,

*...Usually if a student brings something to school to play with during the lesson, then the student isn't being motivated to work. So I would say that the lack of motivation is probably the root of the problem, and all the other problems are stemming from this. I was a student who suffered from some of the same problems that Steve suffers from, and I feel that the reasons for this is the fact that he isn't being pushed academically or psychologically....*

During the class discussion of this case, he reiterated, *...it's just obvious he's not being pushed academically or he wouldn't bring toys to school to play with. So the lack of motivation, I think that's a huge problem...* In Michael's analysis of the second case he said, *...I feel the problem is not in the students' activities but in their motivation in doing so....* Then in his analysis of the fifth case he concluded, *...The problem that is stated in this case is that a student has quit caring about school and therefore quit doing her work... All of this relates back to motivation.* This theme of motivation or lack of motivation was also mentioned by Michael in the class discussion of the first case when he said, *...the whole problem with Steve is he [doesn't]... have any motivation to get his work done....*

Michael is a very capable student who does not always work up to his potential. His desire to enter the teaching profession comes from his desire to coach. He actively participates in class discussions and has no problem with voicing his opinion, even if his classmates disagree with him. Motivation is of major concern to him as noted in several of his case analyses and during the class discussions of some of the cases.

### *What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?*

Three themes emerged concerning what influences the decisions Michael makes. These themes were based on his comments in his pre-*case* interview and his post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses he wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* he wrote himself. The themes were: field experiences, personal experiences, and other people.

#### *Field Experiences*

Each teacher is different, and Michael uses his encounters during his field experiences as a way to examine each of the teaching styles of his cooperating teachers and how they differ in the way they make decisions concerning their classrooms. This gives him the opportunity to think about his own decision making. In his pre-*case* interview he described his recent encounters in two classrooms.

*...my one in [Reedville], the teacher seems at times to be a little ordinary and not be as dynamic, but everybody has their own way.... the teacher in [Stephens], she moves around the room a lot...I feel like I'm learning a lot more there.*

Michael also described in his post-*case* interview how an incident that happened at one school would be treated by the teachers in a totally different manner at the other school where he was observing.

*...if that had happened over at [Brownwell], they'd overlook it, but at the other place they didn't because they thought it was a big deal. But at [Brownwell]... it's more, we need to concentrate more on just making sure we can teach the kids and quit worrying about what their little knick knack behaviors are. ... I was really impressed with the way some of the things went over there....*

The encounters he has in his field experiences influence his decision making.

Michael had some concerns about some of the decisions that he made in his field experiences. His concern in one incident was whether or not his decision was the right one to make. During the pre-case interview, he stated what he could have done differently in the situation.

*...I probably wouldn't have told him to quit whining about it. I probably would have asked him to come up there. I probably would have pulled him out of the room or pulled him to the side and briefly spoke to him.... that probably would have been better for me to do, but ... I didn't want to disrupt the flow of my lesson...*

He continued by stating that trying to decide whether or not you made the right decision is difficult. *...I don't know.... It's hard to decide whether or not that was the right thing...*

He described another incident in his post-case interview in which he had a concern about a lesson he was teaching because the students were not prepared as he felt they should have been. *My major concern was that a lot of them, even when they looked again, wouldn't look hard....* This was of particular concern to him because his supervising teacher from the college was observing at this time. He did not want to look unprepared. He stated, *...How bad is it going to look on me? Cause I was being observed at this time also....I ... didn't really want to mess that up, so ... it was just a hard situation altogether I thought.*

Michael felt limited in what he could do in the classroom during his field experiences because it was not his classroom. He was always cognizant of the fact that it was someone else's classroom and that he was just a visitor. In his pre-case interview, he related how he handled a particular problem in the classroom and how he felt he did all he could do under the circumstances.

*... before I made that decision, I made eye contact with the student. I spoke personally with the student... I asked him to get back on task a couple of times.*

*After that ... I [had] pretty much come to the end of the road as far as I could handle it.... But that was far as I could go I felt.*

Michael is influenced in his decision making by his field experiences. He observes how the teachers handle situations differently depending on the school where they teach and the students they teach. In addition, he feels his decision making is influenced by his field experiences because he is not the classroom teacher. Therefore, he feels limited in the decisions he can make while he is there.

### *Personal Experiences*

Personal experiences have a major influence on the decisions that Michael makes. In class discussions of the *cases*, in his own analyses of the *cases*, and in his interviews, he related numerous personal experiences related to the situation being discussed.

First, Michael related experiences he had as a student in the classroom and how these experiences were related to the *cases* being discussed. He identified with the student who was having problems in some of the *cases*. For example, in his analysis of the first *case* he stated,

*...I would say that the lack of motivation is probably the root of the problem and all of the other problems are stemming from this. I was a student who suffered from some of the same problems that Steve suffers from and I feel that the reasons for this is the fact that he isn't being pushed academically or psychologically....*

He continued with his dialog about his reasons for concluding that the problem with the student is also the fact that his peers pick on him.

*...The reason that I have come to this conclusion is the fact that I had a friend in High School that we were always messing with. One day the teacher got tired of it and confronted us with it before class. He asked me how I would like it if every time I did something somebody criticized me. If everyday I had to come to class*

*and all I got was picked on about stupid stuff. This is where I got my perspective for Steve's case....*

At one point during the discussion of the fourth *case*, another student asked him to imagine he was that student. He responded, *I've been that kid*. He then related his own experience with testing.

*...when I was in sixth grade we were taking a standardized test and ...the teacher wanted me to ... write down all the work... I didn't finish half the math part and scored really low that year...The teacher ...got something put on her record because of it...*

Again during his post-*case* interview, he related a situation that occurred during his field experiences and how he responded to that situation. He relates that situation to his own experiences. He makes a decision based on his own personal experiences as a student.

*...when I was in fourth and fifth grade, I was probably the most unorganized student in school....mine was the desk with the trash packed to the top, hanging out the side. My cubbyhole was the same way.... being in that situation, I kind of realized ...they've [the students] got it. They just need to find it.*

Michael also used his own actions during his experiences in school to justify his reasoning for the solutions he had to some of the problems presented in the *cases*. In the class discussion of the third *case* he related his own experiences in middle school with a teacher who did not seem to be “with-it.”

*I've been part of that on more than one occasion when I was in middle school because the teacher wasn't smart enough to realize...they're asking the same questions... Stop ...I can do it on the board for them. But if you have them all come up to your desk... you've got fifteen people standing in line, pulling hair, throwing paper, tapping someone on the shoulder, who knows what else.*

In his pre-*case* interview, Michael related his own observations about happenings during his school experiences as he observed other teachers and how they handled

different situations that occurred in the classroom. ...[the teacher] *tapping on their desk. I've seen that coming through school. You just let the student know... without disrupting the lesson, and progress on from there to whatever you need to do.*

Michael also uses the knowledge he has acquired in his college classes when making decisions. He mentioned several times that he has learned specific strategies in his courses at the college. ...*we've been learning about some of this in my ed[ucational] psy[schology] class...* He also recalled how he dealt with a situation during one of his lessons because of what he'd learned the week before in a class at the college.

*Actually... I think we went over some of them ...in my Curriculum class, but I know we're going over them now in my ed[ucational] psy[chology] class.*

*Actually, we'd just gone over those that week before I went and taught the lesson, so it was fresh in my mind....*

In his analysis of the third case, Michael wrote how he arrived at his solution to the dilemma presented in the case. ...*The reason I came to this solution is that we watched a video in EM 300 on classroom procedures and the benefits of them and this is pretty much a summary of what they said that procedures do.* During the class discussion of this case, once again he talked about what he learned in class. He related how he arrived at the decision he made. *Cause that little man on TV told me so. He said procedures, procedures, procedures.* The class had previously watched a video made by Harry Wong in which he expressed the need for teaching procedures in the classroom.

Michael recalls his own experiences as a student when looking for ways to deal with situations in the classroom. He also recalls what he has observed others doing in different situations before he makes a decision concerning what he should do in a situation. Michael calls on the knowledge he has acquired in his courses at the college when making a decision concerning curriculum and instruction. This knowledge comes from several courses he has taken.

### *Other People*

Michael also seeks advice from other people when making a decision, especially other teachers. His mother and father are both teachers, so sometimes he goes to them for advice as well as other friends who are teachers, other teachers he had coming through school, or his peers who are going to be teachers. Occasionally he seeks advice from his professors at the college as well. In his pre-case interview he stated,

*...my mom's a teacher so I talk with her. I talk with my dad. Both my neighbors are teachers..., a guy I grew up with, he's a teacher. I talk with him sometimes about ...what's the best way to go about this...*

During the pre-case interview, he related the reason why he seeks advice mostly from teachers. He feels that someone more experienced will give better advice about a situation.

*Because they're more experienced. They've done it before.... I'll take their experience instead of me learning the hard way. ...If you need something, ask somebody. If you asked somebody that's experienced enough...you'll probably get a better answer.*

Again in his post-case interview he stated, *...I think it's beneficial in all areas when making a decision to go to somebody and ask them ...* He feels that he will be able to get a better perspective of the situation if he asks the advice of others, because they may see things differently.

*...if I have a question about problems in the classroom, I'm going to ask...my mom, some of her friends ... some of my teachers around me, [and] some of my peers to get an overall perspective of what they think. Because if you ask other people, they're going to see it different than you will....*



Michael's decision making is influenced by other people, especially other teachers and other preservice teachers. However, he likes to seek advice from those who are more experienced concerning the decision he is trying to make. He likes to get different perspectives about the situation before making a decision.

### *Summary*

Michael's decision making is influenced by his field experiences and by his personal experiences as a student in the classroom. In addition, his decision making is influenced by his observation of others in the classroom. He uses the knowledge that he has acquired at the college when making a decision. He feels that several courses he has taken have helped him to acquire the knowledge he needs to handle certain situations that arise in the classroom. He is influenced in his decision making by other people as well. He looks to other teachers for advice most of the time when making a decision concerning the classroom. He feels that a person who is more experienced will provide him with a better solution to the situation presented.

### *How do Middle Grades Preservice Teachers use Cases as a Strategy to Foster Their Decision Making?*

Four themes emerged concerning what happens when *cases* are used as a strategy to foster Michael's decision making. These themes were based on his comments in his pre-*case* interview and his post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses he wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* he wrote himself. The themes were: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me identify solutions, helped me examine consequences of decisions, and helped me think about multiple perspectives.

### *Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect*

Michael felt that using *cases* as a strategy gave him the opportunity to reflect on his decision making. He stated in his post-*case* interview that using *cases* caused him *...to think more. ...They have got a situation and [you] find out ...if you'd do things the same or different...*

In his analysis of the first *case*, Michael reflects on what the teacher did in the situation. *... I feel that having each of the students singled out like this and sent to the counselor was a mistake because it gave more attention to the problem than what was needed.* During the class discussion of this *case*, he stated...*confronting somebody in the place where it's happening has a stronger effect on [them]...*

In his discussion of the third *case*, he reflected on the use of procedures in the classroom. *...I don't think you can enforce some rules and let others slide...if you have procedures set up...then a lot of your problems are eliminated....* In the class discussion of the fifth *case*, Michael discussed his thoughts about the one student who was giving the teacher trouble. *...you're worried about this one student...are you neglecting other people in your classroom...maybe you've got to cut that student loose...*

Using *cases* as a strategy gives Michael the opportunity to reflect about the situations presented and what his peers have to say about the situation. He can think about his own ideas and the ideas of others.

### *Helped Me to Identify Solutions*

In his post-*case* interview, Michael stated that the use of *cases* as a strategy *...made you come up with your own decision.* In the discussion of the first *case*, he discussed a solution to the dilemma presented. He stated that *...it wouldn't hurt him*

*moving to a lower level class... [when he] start[s] succeeding and doing alright... [then].move him back to a upper level class the next semester once he...has a taste of ...success...*

In his analysis of the second *case*, Michael proposed two possible solutions to the problem of how to deal with varied reading levels in the classroom. He stated,

*[one solution] ...would be to break the class ...into smaller groups and then to read aloud inside the smaller group. This way less people would actually be listening so the feel of embarrassment would not be as great....another solution ...would be to rotate the reading and workbook often...*

Finally, in his fifth *case* analysis he offered *...some kind of reward system...* as a solution to the problem of the belligerent student.

Michael offered various solutions to the problems presented in the *cases*. Many times he offered more than one solution to the dilemma.

#### *Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions*

Michael used *cases* as a strategy to examine the consequences of the decisions that were discussed by him and his peers. In the class discussion of the first *case*, Michael talked about the decision to use grouping as a solution to the problem.

*...It's just going to make things worse to stick him in the group with them. But if you stick him with a group... who...have sympathy for him... you might get a better response out of the other group members...*

In his analyses of the *cases*, he examined the consequences of the solutions he had for the dilemmas. In the analysis of the third *case*, he stated *...it would take time to set in place as the students have already shaped some patterns of their own that would be*

*hard to break....* In his analysis of the fourth *case* he stated that a consequence for the decision would be that the teacher would have to...*wait a little longer on test scores to return...* In his analysis of the fifth *case* he stated that the consequence of giving a student who misbehaved a reward is ...*that other students will begin to think that if they act up then they ...will get rewards....*

Using *cases* as a strategy gives Michael a chance to examine the consequences of each of the decisions made. This in turn helps him look at the possible effects of the decisions he makes.

#### *Helped Me to Think About Multiple Perspectives*

When discussing the use of *cases* with Michael during the post-*case* interview, he reiterated that *cases* were useful in that they assisted preservice teachers in looking at the perspectives of their peers concerning the situation given in the *case*. ...*it provided different points of view from different backgrounds....* He related how people come from different backgrounds and have different experiences, therefore they have different points of view about situations that arise.

*...we had six people in there and everybody in there comes from a different background. So they're going to look at things a little bit different.... It really ... gives you different views on it so when you step in that situation, you kind of have an idea where everybody else leans...*

Michael felt that listening to other points of view concerning the situations presented in the *cases* assisted him in gaining a better understanding of the situation and in some instances presented ideas that he had not thought about previously.

*...to actually seek another point of view... everybody has... a point of view and then... one student would have another look at it and ...say what they thought about it. Everybody's like... now I understand. And ...maybe that's something we didn't see...*

He felt that because of the discussion of *cases*, if he had to make a spontaneous decision about a situation portrayed in one of the *cases*, he could recall the discussions of these *cases* to help him with the decision. *...So if you don't have somebody you can go up to and talk to at the moment...you can actually ... have somebody else's point of view already in mind.*

Michael feels that using *cases* as a strategy has helped him think about multiple perspectives. He feels like this has helped him gain a better understanding of the situations presented in the *cases*.

### *Summary*

Michael believes that *cases* used as a strategy assist preservice teachers in reflecting on the situations they may face later as they teach. The use of *cases* as a strategy helped him identify various solutions to the dilemmas presented as well as examine the consequences of those decisions. Finally, the use of the *cases* as a strategy assisted him in examining different perspectives that he had not thought about previously.

*Summary of Findings*

<b>Michael</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Question #1 What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?	Field Experiences Personal Experiences Other People
Question #2 How do middle grades preservice teachers use <i>cases</i> as a strategy to foster decision making?	Gave me an opportunity to reflect Helped me identify solutions Helped me examine consequences of decisions Helped me think about multiple perspectives

*Figure 7.* Summary of findings for Case Two: Michael

Michael is influenced in his decision making by his experiences in the field. He examines various teaching and learning styles in the classrooms where he observes to assist him in determining how he wants to make certain decisions in the classroom. His own experiences in the classroom as a student influence his decision making. These experiences include what has happened to him as a student and decisions he has observed other teachers making. He also seeks advice from other people when making a decision, especially those who are more experienced in a situation. He feels that the more experience a person has, the better decision they will make. He seeks the advice of other teachers and other preservice teachers in particular. He also uses the knowledge he has acquired at the college when making decisions in the classroom.

Michael believes that using *cases* as a strategy has given him an opportunity to reflect about situations he will encounter as a teacher of middle school students. In addition, through the use of *cases* as a strategy, he has been able to identify various

solutions to the dilemmas presented and examine the consequences of these decisions. Finally, the use of *cases* as a strategy has given him the opportunity to examine various perspectives presented by his peers concerning the *cases* presented.

### Case Three: Erin

#### *Personal Context*

Erin is a 21-year-old junior from a state in the western part of the country. Math is her primary concentration in her program. She truly loves math and tries to relate most things to math. *...And I'm like, how does that relate to math? Cause I just want to do math....*

Erin thinks that her decision to be a teacher is a good one. She feels that this is what God has called her to do. However, she is not sure how she will use her degree. *...I think it's a good decision... I know it's what God wants me to do and I know it's what I'm supposed to do.... how... I'm planning on using it I don't exactly know...*

She believes that teaching middle school students is challenging and explains during her pre-case interview why she likes teaching this age group.

*I really like middle grades students. I like the challenge of teaching middle grades because I'm sporadic, I'm fun.... although I'd probably do ... well in elementary... I like the middle grades age. I think that too many people overlook them and.... no one really wants to deal with them.... but I think ... this is a very crucial time... when you need a good teacher.*

Erin relates in her post-case interview that she is somewhat nervous about teaching because she doesn't like to speak in front of people. *...I'm kind of nervous about*

*teaching. I like speaking to people individually, but I'm still working on actually ... working in groups.... I do better with kids than I do with ... adults.*

She considers teaching this age level as a challenge and relates why in her pre-case interview.

*...you're not only handling the youthfulness and the childlikeness of it, but you're dealing with them when they don't know who they are, when they don't know why they're acting the way they're acting. When they're dealing with all these extra emotions and feelings and the change that's going on chemically and physiologically. And they're changing mentally.... Also beginning to think abstractly. ... So it's a very transitional period of time.*

Erin is a very bright student as indicated by the scores on her Scholastic Aptitude Test and her grade point average. However, she did not perform up to her potential in her Curriculum class this semester. Her assignments were often late, and at times it appeared she had not thought carefully about the assignment. When the supervising teacher observed her teaching in the classroom, she had no plans written down. She knew what she wanted to do, but she had not thought through the entire lesson. This was apparent as the lesson progressed. She is very creative and has some very interesting ideas about activities to interest the students. In her lesson observed by her supervising teacher, she dressed up as Mrs. Abraham Lincoln and portrayed facts about this first lady. However, she had no objective in mind other than to disseminate the information.

Interaction with the students in the classroom is of major importance to Erin, as she mentions in her post-case interview.



*...I really liked my field experiences and being able to interact with the kids because they like people to interact with them and they like... being the center of attention, but they also like that you're paying attention to them.... that's what's important, paying attention to them. Like actually looking at them when they talk to you...*

During her post-case interview, she related how during her field experiences she had made the decision to get to know the students and be open with them.

*... just being open, I guess, was a big decision I made when I... walked into the classroom. Being open with the students. Being approachable. Instead of just saying I'm just here to interact with the teacher. Coming to students ...and being approachable to them.*

Erin is a very bright, creative young lady who has decided to go into the teaching profession because she feels like it is what God has called her to do. However, she does not know how she will use her degree in education as of yet. She sees teaching middle school age children as a challenge and is nervous about having her own classroom. She thinks that interacting with the students is a very important part of the teaching process.

#### *What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?*

Four themes emerged concerning what influenced Erin when she made decisions. These themes were based on her comments in her pre-case interview and her post-case interview, the five class discussions of each case, the analyses she wrote of each of the five cases discussed in class, and the case she wrote herself. The themes were: field experiences, personal experiences, other people, and outside sources.

### *Field Experiences*

Erin sees her field experiences as a time to observe what actually happens in the middle school classroom. She sees it as a time to observe how middle school teachers handle the various situations they encounter each day as they teach this age group, and how this will assist her in gaining ideas to use in the future when she has her own classroom. In her pre-case interview she stated, *I think that being out there you can see some of the situations the teachers have to handle and how they handle it, which gives you some ideas which will help you when you're ... a teacher....*

In addition, she sees it as a time to learn more about the teaching/learning process. She feels that these field experiences better prepare her for a career in teaching and allow her the opportunity to observe just what a teacher does each day, as stated in her post-case interview.

*...I see it as a chance to get out there and interact with the kids...to learn how to become more like a teacher, more like the teacher I'm supposed to be; to learn from the teacher as well...gaining information on what they do...*

Erin believes that her observations in her field experiences give her a chance to observe how teaching styles differ and how teachers react differently with different students. In her pre-case interview, she described the classes she is observing this semester and how they differ.

*...I'm observing in the fourth grade and fifth grade this semester.... I'm really liking ... teaching and observing and I have some really good teachers this year...[the] teacher at [Reedville] ...[is] really nice and she's very creative with the students and she does a lot of creative things. The teacher at*

[Farthington]...[is] *not as sporadic, not as creative, but she does... go in-depth with what she teaches....*

In her pre-case interview, Erin described one of the lessons she taught that involved group work. She was not sure how the students would react to the group activity. *I was a little bit concerned on how they were going to work in the group... She was also concerned because the activity did not take as long as she had thought it would, and was happy she had planned some extra activities.*

*...I thought their group work was going to take longer than it did.... I had planned for them to have a whole half an hour and they finished in like fifteen minutes.... I...was glad I had all those extra activities and those extra ideas.*

In reflecting on that lesson, she commented about what she could have done to lengthen the lesson.

*....I had so much extra time. I could have showed ...a five minute commercial at the beginning and that could have helped a little bit instead of having them brainstorm ideas for a commercial...but... I thought it went well.*

In her pre-case interview, Erin described several decisions that she made during her field experiences that she considered good decisions. She felt that *...getting to know the kids a lot...was a good decision she made.* She also felt that it was *...good to make friends with the teacher, or the teachers that you're connected with....* She also related a decision that she made when planning her first lesson that she considered a good decision.

*...I really like to be active, so I think my very first teaching at [Reedville] was really a good decision...I had them do group work and they ...made their own*

*commercials...they ...loved it....They loved being active. They loved creatively coming up with something in their minds. I think that was a good decision....*

Finally, Erin described in her post-case interview a decision she made about her interactions with the students. *...a big decision I made...when I walked into the classroom....[was] being open with the students. Being approachable...*

Erin is influenced in her decision making by her field experiences. She gains experience in teaching and implementing lessons as well as experience in interacting with students. By examining the decisions made by her cooperating teachers, she can make more informed decisions when she has a classroom of her own. She examines their interactions with the students as well as the strategies they use when teaching to decide which strategies would be most beneficial for her to utilize in her own classroom. Finally, Erin uses her experiences in the classroom to reflect on the decisions she makes while being involved in the teaching process. Examining her own decisions will help her make more informed decisions when she has a classroom of her own.

### *Personal Experiences*

Erin recalled experiences she had personally encountered as being an important strategy she used in making decisions during her field experiences. In her post-case interview she stated that *...the previous experiences, using what you've seen, what you have heard, what you have observed, what other people tell you...* influences the decisions she makes in the classroom.

In her pre-case interview she related how she decided to use group work during one of the lessons she taught because it was something she had herself taken part in previously. *...I've actually done group work in class before...[in] ... the beginning of high*

*school and middle school... I remembered using group work and I figured it would work...*

During the discussion of the first *case*, Erin related an experience her sister had as an influence on the solution she was proposing for the dilemma presented in the *case*.

*...my sister had a speech impediment growing up ... because she had tubes in her ears... she couldn't hear properly, so she heard things wrong .... she was in speech [therapy] all her life and she tried really ... hard and she was pushed ... really hard...by her senior year she was out of speech [therapy] completely and in all regular classes.... It can be done as long as the parents push you and as long as they motivate you properly.*

She also related her own experiences as a student in the classroom during the discussion of the activities in the classroom described in this *case*.

*I know that... growing up we had lots of fun teasing the teacher, and when the teacher's back was turned, that was the funnest time for kids.... they could do whatever they wanted... and kids get a kick out of trying to frustrate teachers....*

In addition, she sees herself in the same situation as the young lady portrayed in the fifth *case*, and wrote in her analysis of the *case* that this gives her insight into how to make a decision concerning what should be done in this situation. *...I have been in Patrice's shoes, just on the opposite extreme.... this gives me unique insight into how Patrice might have felt....*

Finally, in discussing what might be done to help the young lady in the fifth *case*, Erin recalled activities used during her own middle school experiences as a potential solution to the problem presented.

*...At my middle school we had peer groups... like counseling but with your peers and ... they'll pick a group of people and they'll put them together in a group and ... discuss issues and ...talk about things and ... get to know the people in the group... you get to open up to the group, but they're people that are your peers....You're able to share ...*

Erin uses the knowledge she has gained from her experiences in her college classes as well as her own ideas of what a classroom should be like and how students should react to teachers when making decisions. During the pre-case interview, she related a decision she had made concerning the use of group work in a lesson she was going to teach and why she made the decision to use groups. *...we were talking about it in class and ... I was reading in the book and there was [information] about group work.... I was thinking it would probably be a good idea to do groups.*

In the class discussion of the first case, Erin mentioned two strategies that were discussed in her curriculum class as possible alternatives for the teacher to use in this particular situation. *...I think that anything new like grouping and character education is always... hard on the students to adjust to at first...* Again in her analysis of the first case, she mentioned a strategy that was discussed in the Curriculum class, peer tutoring. *...She could also set up a tutoring group after school or have the students who understand the material to tutor the students who are having trouble....*

Erin also mentioned in some of the classroom discussions and in her analyses of several cases that classroom management is a problem in these particular situations. Classroom management and ways of managing the classroom had been discussed in the Curriculum class. In the class discussion of the first case, she said, *...I think that a focus*

*should also be on classroom management.... In her analysis of the third case, she reiterated, ...She [the teacher] desperately needs to develop a classroom management plan. Once this is complete, the children will behave more orderly, thus help[ing] the students to concentrate better and to understand what is being taught more clearly....*

Erin called on her own past experiences when making decisions. She recalled her own personal experiences in school having observed or participated in various activities. Additionally, she recalled the experiences of some of her family members. Finally, she used the knowledge she had acquired in her courses at the college when making decisions.

#### *Other People*

Erin often seeks advice from other people when making a decision. In her pre-case interview she stated, *...I like to go to other people [and] see how they've done it. I like to ... draw my ideas from other people; see how they've done it.... She likes to ...talk to people. See what they think. I like to draw from other people and ideas from other people... [especially] ...from other sources of people who've already done it before....* She related why she likes to talk with other people when making a decision.

*...I go to people who have already done it before. If I have an idea that I want to run by somebody, I'll find somebody that's done it before and I'll run the idea by them and see if they like it, if they think it will work.... if they can give me ideas on how to improve it...*

Erin sometimes approaches other preservice teachers to get their input on a decision she is making concerning curriculum and instruction because *...that's who I have access to here at the school...* In her pre-case interview, she related how she *...was talking to [Ann] about it and she said that it sounded like a good idea...*

She also consults other teachers when making a decision. In her post-case interview she stated, *...[if] it's not something I've dealt with before... I ask... other teachers...* In particular, she consults friends who are teachers. *...I ask friends. I have a friend that ...this is her first semester... actually teaching, and so I ...get ideas from her.*

During her analysis of the fifth case, she related what she thinks the teacher could do to help her with her decision. *...I think that she should talk to other teachers to get ideas... If Patrice has any friends at the school, the teacher could talk with the friend to find out what she is dealing with....*

Erin seeks the advice of other people when making a decision. If it is a decision concerning the classroom, she consults with other preservice teachers and other teachers, particularly friends who are teachers. She feels that this helps her make more informed decisions, especially if the person she talks with has experienced this particular problem before.

#### *Outside Sources*

Erin sometimes uses outside sources in assisting her in decision making. In her pre-case interview, she stated that sometimes she would *...go online [to] see if there's any information...* to help her make a decision. She related an incident where she went online to find information when making a decision about instruction. *...I went online to look at*



*some...ideas...and one of them was a persuasive commercial.... I thought that was a good idea so I expanded on it...*

The Internet was mentioned most often by Erin when discussing sources to use when making decisions. In her post-case interview she said,

*...If it's a decision that I don't have experience... [with] at all, I might look it up on the Internet or in books to see...has it happened before and how...did other people handle it to kind of get a rounded experience...*

Finally, in the class discussion of the fifth case, she stated *...You can go online and do a search on ADHD....*

Erin uses the information she gains from outside sources to make a more informed decision in the classroom. Most of the time this information comes from the Internet.

### *Summary*

Erin is influenced by her field experiences when making a decision. She also uses her personal experiences. She uses her own past experiences as well as the experiences of others when looking at possible alternatives to a situation. In addition, she looks to others for advice when making a decision. She calls on other teachers as well as other preservice teachers, especially if they are her friends. She especially likes to talk with others who are more experienced at making this particular kind of decision about which she is seeking advice. In addition, she uses the knowledge she has acquired in her college classes to help her with decision making. Finally, she looks at outside sources such as the Internet to help her find information and make a decision.

*How do Middle Grades Preservice Teachers use Cases  
as a Strategy to Foster Their Decision Making?*

Four themes emerged concerning what happens when *cases* are used as a strategy to foster Erin's decision making. These themes were based on her comments in her pre-*case* interview and her post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses she wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* she wrote herself. The four themes were: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me identify solutions, helped me examine consequences of decisions, and helped me think about multiple perspectives.

*Gave me an Opportunity to Reflect*

Using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making gave Erin an opportunity to reflect on the situation presented. In her analysis of the first *case*, Erin reflected on the situation of having so many different reading levels in one classroom. *...I think that it was not a good thing for them to put such a wide range of reading levels together in the same class...it causes conflict and strife...* However, she stated that the teacher *...is doing her best and trying hard....* In the class discussion of this *case*, she also talked about the student who is having major problems. *...I think that...it could be that he doesn't get it, but I think subconsciously ...we want attention and we...say things to get attention....*

In that same discussion, she talked about how teachers need to be careful not to show how frustrated they are. She stated, *... he could be trying to ... frustrate people, but if you portray somebody who's frustrated, if you let your emotions show to the kids, they're going to pick up on it...they're gonna try and enhance whatever your emotions are....*

Erin also reflected on how consistency was important in the classroom. She said, *...kids need consistency in their lives.... consistency helps kids feel more at ease, more safe.... Being safe is more likely to break down walls...*

During the class discussion of the fourth case, Erin reflected on several aspects of the case. She asked, *Does the fact that the school is overcrowded have anything to do with it?* Later she posed the question, *...Are you not allowed to read to him during this test or would it help him to take it faster?* As the discussion progressed, she reflected on a solution that one of her peers had offered when she stated *...I think there is a chain of command that you have to go through....* Still later she reflected on the actions of the teacher in the case when she stated, *...I think she was so ...nervous and paranoid about the testing... that she ....[didn't] want to do anything wrong...* In her analysis of this case she stated,

*...She is letting her fear of losing her job and going to jail add to the problem. The other teachers should not have been in the hall...the vice-principal should never have barged into her room...the counselor should have never moved the student to the office....*

Erin reflected on the situation of the teacher in her analysis of the fifth case when she wrote,

*...The teacher is in a situation that is really sensitive....she really does not have any say in what goes on at the child's home and has no right to prod [into] that family's personal life [but] she has an obligation as an educator and human being to find out what is causing Patrice's problem...to find out what she is dealing with....*

Using *cases* as a strategy enables Erin to reflect on the situations of the students and teachers presented in the *cases*. It gives her an opportunity to think about all the people involved in the situation presented.

#### *Helped Me Identify Solutions*

Using *cases* allowed Erin the opportunity to look at various alternatives proposed by others and to think of as many possible solutions to a problem as possible instead of looking at just one alternative. She stated, *...a lot of ideas were thrown out that I hadn't thought of before....* She said the use of *cases* assisted her in thinking *...well what else could I do? And think of alternatives and think of as many as I could....* Again she said, *...It [a case]... keeps you always thinking about what can I do, what should I do....* She further stated in her post-case interview, *...it helped us to find the solution...*

The class discussion and her written analysis of the first *case* produced several alternatives for the teacher. *...Character education...go online and do... research on ADHD, contact with other students ...more individual punishment ...watch him and protect him right in front of you... meeting with him individually...* were some of the solutions presented by Erin to the problem situation.

In her written analysis of the second *case*, Erin posed several solutions to the problem presented. She stated,

*...give encouragement to the students who are having difficulty with reading...implement the grouping suggestion.....set up a tutoring group after school or have the students who understand the material ...tutor the students who are having trouble...enlist the help of those parents of the teens having troubles...*

Erin's written analysis of the third *case* offered possible alternatives for the

teacher to use to improve her interactions with the students. Erin stated that the teacher *...desperately needs to develop a classroom management plan...to learn how to break the information down better...vary her teaching strategy.*

She posed several solutions for the teacher to use with the student who was in a testing situation during the class discussion and her written analysis of the fourth *case*. She stated,

*...put him in a corner...and let him...finish the test quietly...maybe reading to him would help him take the test faster...maybe finish it after school...have a place...where the students can go to take the test....maybe moving Dee to the Special Education room, the library, or the counseling office...appeal to the principal about the disruption in the test-taking process...*

Finally, in her analysis of the fifth *case* she offered these alternatives for the teacher to use with the belligerent student.

*...talk to other teachers to get ideas...talk to Patrice one-on-one...talk with [Patrice's] friend to find out what she is dealing with...show her love...help her to establish goals with her life, have her be a peer tutor, start a peer-counseling session with Patrice and a few other troubled students and a few "normal" students...have her fill out an interest inventory.*

Using *cases* as a strategy gave Erin the opportunity to identify alternatives to the dilemmas presented in each of the *cases*. She was able to provide many alternatives to each of the situations presented.

*Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions*

Erin used *cases* as a strategy to assist her in examining the consequences of the different decisions made in the *cases*, decisions proposed by her, her peers, and the decisions made by the characters in the *cases*. In her analysis of the first *case* and in the discussion of this *case* she stated how *...anything new...is hard on the students to adjust to at first...* She stated that many of the decisions made in the *case* would take *...time...* but that the teacher should *...keep working on it...keep persevering...keep doing new things with it....*

In her analysis of the second *case*, once again she stated that a consequence of some of the alternatives presented would be *...time on the part of the teacher and students...as well as work for parents*. She further stated, *...it would take commitment on the part of the teacher to stick with... [it] follow it through to the end....*

Erin's written analysis of the third *case* listed these consequences of the decisions she would make in the situation. *...Time, discipline, tenacity, perseverance, and studying will be the consequences of her trying to implement the possible solutions...* However, she also stated that *...the results of doing these things will far outweigh the negative [e]ffects....*

Finally, in her written analysis of the fifth *case*, Erin offered these consequences for the decisions made. *...Being more forceful could get the teacher written up...she could ...be reprimanded. Making a suggestion about where he is moved ...could get him moved or the teacher ignored. Appealing could get the teacher written up or suspended.* Erin concluded by writing, *...there is no easy answer here....*

*Cases* were used as a strategy by Erin to examine the consequences of the decisions made in the *cases* by the people involved in the *cases*, herself, and her peers. She realized that the consequences could be both positive and negative.

#### *Helped Me Think About Multiple Perspectives*

Erin felt like the use of *cases* ...*caused me to kind of think outside of my box, instead of thinking what I'd automatically do....* She reiterated how it assisted her in looking at the perspectives of others and why that was useful to her. In her post-*case* interview she stated,

*...I think it was very helpful because it helped me to also see ... other people's perspectives in the class. To see what they thought about it... if we just take our own perspective, our own perspective is usually biased. ... we can see what other people think and kind of have a more rounded view. I thought it was really good to be able to do that....*

Erin felt that the use of *cases* assisted her in looking at the views and ...*different perspectives...* of others when making a decision. In her post-*case* interview she stated that the discussion of *cases* gave ...*more than one person's perspective...*

Using *cases* as a strategy assisted Erin in thinking about multiple perspectives. She concluded that her own perspective was biased. *Cases* gave her the opportunity to examine what other people think.

#### *Summary*

Erin believes that *cases* used as a strategy will assist her in the classroom because the *cases* made her think more about the situations presented. She realized that a problem may have many solutions, not just one, and using *cases* helped her to identify various

solutions to the problems presented. In addition, the use of *cases* as a strategy assisted her in examining the various consequences of these solutions. Finally, *cases* used as a strategy introduced her to various perspectives and gave her the opportunity to explore these as well as her own.

### *Summary of Findings*

<b>Erin</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Question #1 What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?	Field Experiences Personal Experiences Other People Outside Sources
Question #2 How do middle grades preservice teachers use <i>cases</i> as a strategy to foster decision making?	Gave me an opportunity to reflect Helped me identify solutions Helped me examine consequences of decisions Helped me think about multiple perspectives

*Figure 8.* Summary of findings for Case Three: Erin

Several factors influence the decisions Erin makes in the classroom. First, she is influenced by her field experiences, what she observes her cooperating teachers doing in the classroom as well as her own teaching experiences there. She is also influenced in her decision making by other people. She seeks advice from others, in particular other teachers and other preservice teachers. She particularly seeks advice from others who are more experienced in making decisions concerning certain situations. She uses her own personal experiences as a student in the classroom to help her with decision making. She also uses the experiences of others to assist her in making a decision. The knowledge that she has acquired at the college also influences Erin's decision making. Finally, her



decision making in the classroom is influenced by the information she gathers from outside sources, in particular the Internet.

*Cases* used as a strategy have given Erin the opportunity to reflect on the situations presented in the *cases*. They have assisted her in examining various solutions to the problems presented and the consequences of these particular solutions. In addition, the discussions have given her the opportunity to explore the perspectives of others which may differ from her own.

#### Case Four: Leanne

##### *Personal Context*

Leanne is a 20-year-old junior who lives in the county where the college is located. She graduated from the local high school in this county. She is an excellent student as indicated by her scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and her grade point average, which is a 4.0. Her primary concentration is language arts and her secondary concentration is social studies.

Leanne feels good about her decision to become a teacher. She believes that her field experiences have reassured her that teaching is the right career for her. In her pre-*case* interview she talked about that reassurance.

*I feel good about [my decision to become a teacher].... I've had a lot of reassurance through my field experiences because I feel like I can relate to the students. I enjoy the students and I... honestly care...I think that's important when I become a teacher.*

She feels that she can make a difference in students' lives by helping them. It makes her feel good to know that students understand after she has helped them.

*...when I see a student connect to what I'm showing them to do and I see that they're understanding because I'm able to help them, it makes me feel better and I ... realize that I can do this, I can help....that's something I feel I can do and make a difference.*

Since she has observed and worked with some lower ability level students in one of her field experiences, she has come to the realization that she might want to work with students who are below grade level. During her pre-case interview she talked about her decision to go into middle school education rather than special education.

*...I thought about special ed[ucation] before and I also thought about counseling in general. But I knew that it ...[would] be good for me to... get some experience and then if I feel like I need to move on from that I can. ...*

She does *...feel very strongly...* about helping students with lower ability levels, but knows that *...special ed[ucation]... would be very challenging...* In addition, she is not sure she could work with students who have physical disabilities. When talking about students with physical disabilities, she said, *...I know there's a lot of responsibility there for the teachers also and so that takes away from ... the teaching...that would be harder....*

Leanne is very soft spoken, yet in the classroom this does not appear to be a problem as I have observed her interactions with students in a classroom setting and her tone of voice was sufficient for all the students to hear. She is very conscientious about her class work and is always prepared. She does not speak out during class discussions as much as some of the other preservice teachers. Yet she listens attentively as the other preservice teachers talk, and expresses her opinion voluntarily. During the class

discussions of the *cases* presented, she presented her ideas and opinions to some degree, but not as much as her classmates.

*What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?*

Five themes emerged concerning what influenced Leanne's decision making in the classroom. These themes were based on her comments in her pre-*case* interview and her post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses she wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* she wrote herself. The themes were: field experiences, personal experiences, other people, examine possible outcomes, and needs and characteristics of students.

*Field Experiences*

Leanne enjoys her field experiences and feels as if she is learning more about the teaching profession and gaining experience in the classroom. In her pre-*case* interview she stated, *...I'm enjoying and learning a lot from them especially because of the different levels of the students. I'm learning to... notice that a lot more and getting more experience...* She observes her cooperating teachers and then makes a decision about whether what she has seen is something she will want to do in her own classroom.

*...there are certain situations that have happened that I'll have to deal with when I'm a teacher such as when the students come in rowdy. I have to learn ...different procedures. I'm getting to where I can see what other teachers do and I can make my own decision as to whether or not I want to use that same procedure in my classroom when I'm a teacher.....*

In her post-*case* interview, Leanne talked about an important advantage she feels she receives from her field experiences.

*...just the practice of getting to interact with the students, even though I'm not sure which grade level I'll be teaching. I know each level is different, but it's just good practice in general for me to be around them and work with them.*

She has learned *...that sometimes you have to give you know. There's some things that just seem to work better when you actually teach the lesson....*

Leanne believes that she is more comfortable in the classroom and will be more prepared to teach as a result of her field experiences. In her pre-case interview she stated, *...while I was in my field experiences the teachers have let me do certain things that have made me a little bit more comfortable in the classroom and have prepared me somewhat...*

Leanne related in her post-case interview that she has gained much insight into the field of teaching and has gained many ideas she can use in her own middle school classroom. She has been able to work with students of varying abilities and observe different teaching styles, which has been useful in assisting her in making decisions concerning her own teaching.

*...I got to work with different students with different ability levels and with different types of teachers, too. And the teachers were pretty encouraging and ... showed me different ...resources I could use when I did my lesson plans... I got a little bit more familiar with the classroom and making lesson plans and teaching...*

Finally, Leanne has learned about how the attitude of the teacher is an important element in the classroom. After working with lower ability students, she related,

*...I noticed some things I didn't want to do as far as my attitude toward students. I wanted to make sure that even the students who were EIP or low level ... I want to be sure to encourage them and ... I want to keep my motivation as a teacher. So that was something... I learned.*

Leanne was concerned about some of the things she observed in the classroom, in particular some of the comments made by one of her cooperating teachers about the students. She felt the comments made to the students were very discouraging and detrimental to their learning as stated in her pre-case interview.

*...the teacher I observe now ...[has] made comments about her students....I know they [the students] hear them. They're right there and she'll turn around in the middle of instruction and look at me and tell me ... that they're this low level.... I was very shocked to hear that because I thought you shouldn't say that and most of them kept to their work and didn't pay attention but I just felt like that was detrimental...that has to belittle or make them feel like they can't succeed and I just think it's important to encourage that they can....that was one thing that I thought was discouraging.*

Again in her pre-case interview she discussed how she would like to teach lower level students. However, she is concerned because the teachers just don't seem to care about the students. Leanne's observation of other teachers during her field experiences has led her to think about how she can teach these lower level students and not get burned out.

*...I've also seen that some teachers feel very frustrated. I know it has to be frustrating, but they don't seem to care and I'm sure that could be several factors*

*that I don't see...I hopefully won't burn out and if I start not to care so much, I wouldn't want to do it because I think it would harm the students....*

In her post-case interview, she discussed how the classes she observed in her field experiences were different which was helpful to her as a future teacher....*one class was totally different from the other. One had...all EIP students and the other one had very gifted students in it...so it was just different...*

Leanne used her field experiences to reflect on the decisions she made in the classroom. During her pre-case interview, she described a decision she made during the implementation of one of her lessons. She decided to deviate from her lesson plan. She was concerned about how this decision would benefit her students.

*...I was concerned as to whether or not it would be bad to go away from what I had planned because I wasn't sure I had to stick to a rigid plan. ...I was wondering ...whether or not it was beneficial...*

She reflected on her thoughts about her students and what continuing with this particular activity would mean to them. *...I thought... it might have been better for them. I thought they were all... into the drawing... what if some of them needed to see it visually on the board too instead of just hearing it...*

Leanne has taken into consideration the ability level of the students she is teaching when making a decision about what to teach and how to teach it.

*...after I saw... their ability level was a little bit lower, I did change things. And since then I've changed... my lesson plans. I will teach again and so I've gone back and I've made it a little bit lower to their level...*

Another decision described by Leanne in her post-*case* interview involved a decision she had to make when the teacher was not in the room. A substitute was there. She made a decision concerning how to handle the incident, but she did not tell the teacher about this particular incident.

*I was concerned...whether the teacher... would be upset that I hadn't mentioned it to her because it was her classroom...she had a right to know and I didn't tell her... maybe she did have a procedure I did not know that was totally different or how to deal with that...*

She was also concerned that she might not have made the right decision in this particular *case*.

*...I thought about maybe I should have been a little bit harder on that student...but I felt like I made a good decision based on what...I've learned in the classroom about how you would deal with it...*

In making decisions during her field experiences, she stated, ... *I don't feel like I have the authority to really make decisions like that....* She hoped that the decision that she made was appropriate for the situation, and she wanted to be consistent with the teacher's procedures.

*...I thought about what the teacher in that classroom would do....I wanted to respect her rules....I did not know her procedure for that....I knew...the way she interacts with students...I knew that she wouldn't put up with it, but I didn't...know how she would deal with it...*

Leanne's field experiences influence the decisions she makes. She observes the teachers and students to gain ideas about teaching and resources she can use in her

classroom as well as an avenue for gaining valuable experience in working with students in a classroom setting. Leanne reflects on the decisions that she made in the classroom. She is concerned about some of her decisions, but feels she made the right decision in most cases.

### *Personal Experiences*

The experiences that Leanne has had in the past play a role in her decision making process. In her pre-case interview, she said, *...I just think about what I've already had experience in...* This experience includes the work she has done with children as she related in her post-case interview....*just from my experiences with working with children...I worked with children before, especially in church...* In her analysis of the fifth case, she explains how she made a decision about the problem presented in the case based on her work with children in her church.

*...I made these decisions based on experiences I have had with young children at church. There have been children I have worked with who misbehaved and were rude, yet were acting out because of something they were facing at home.*

These experiences also include her own personal experiences as a student and observing what her teacher did in a particular situation. In her written case, she describes a situation that occurred during her teaching and how she recalled her past experiences when dealing with the situation.

*...in my past experiences as a student in school, I knew students who attempted to cheat occasionally due to laziness. After they were caught once by the teacher, they were afraid to cheat again because they knew the consequences would be*



*worse the second time. I had hoped that this would be the situation with Corbin and the ... other student...*

Her decisions are also based on the way she was taught. When asked during the pre-case interview why she made a decision she had just discussed, she said, *...probably from the way I was taught... certain teachers I've had... use a method...[to] try to get your attention first and then go on with the lesson....*

In her analysis of the fourth case, she also explained that she made her decision *...based on my past experiences in school throughout the years. I can remember several times in middle and high school when a student who had not finished a test during class was allowed to finish it in another classroom or the library....*

Many times during her interviews and case analyses, Leanne referred to her knowledge as influencing her decisions. Part of this knowledge came from classes she had taken at the college. In her analysis of the second case, she stated,

*...The teacher in this class needs to make decisions concerning what curriculum and instructional strategies to use. I think that the teacher should try using grouping techniques. I made this decision based on what I have learned in my curriculum class concerning grouping and how it has been proven beneficial for students with different learning abilities....*

Again, in her analysis of the third case she said *...I made the decision to implement classroom procedures based on what I have learned in my curriculum class concerning the importance of procedures...* In the class discussion of the fifth case, she talks about what she learned in her Multicultural class.

*...[with] African-American kids you should be very direct with your instructions.... you shouldn't just consistently plea, just tell them to do it because that is the way they are talked to at home... so when they said that she was rougher with her, I thought that might help some because that was probably the way she was talked to at home....*

In her pre-case interview, she related how she would like to use a variety of instructional strategies in her classroom and talked about some of the strategies discussed in her curriculum class at the college.

*...I want to use a lot of different instructional strategies in the classroom and I've already learned several of them, different presentation styles and then grouping and... cooperative learning and that there are a lot of decisions I'll have to make and I hope to incorporate a lot of them in the classroom.*

Leanne uses her own personal experiences as a decision making strategy. These past experiences include working with children in her church as well as her past experiences as a student. She also uses her observations of the decision making of the teachers who taught her. Leanne uses the knowledge she has gained in classes at the college when making decisions concerning curriculum and instruction. She related several strategies discussed in her various college courses.

#### *Other People*

Leanne also looks to other people for advice when making a decision. In her pre-case interview she stated *...sometimes I use people if it's someone experienced and has made that decision before. I know they can offer some wisdom....* One group of people

she asks for advice is her cooperating teachers. They give her advice concerning activities and strategies she can use with the students.

*...the teachers that I'm seeing now in my field experiences...I've asked if they have any ideas...especially Ms. [Hill]. She's offered ideas and creative things I can do in the classroom. They also have resources I can use. They told me different web sites I could go to...make certain activities or worksheets if I wanted to....they've been able to tell me more of what that class would prefer...*

She stated in her post-case interview that she didn't *...like to ask a lot of questions about everything....* However, she said, *...if it's something that I...think ... might...affect...the classroom...* then she might ask her cooperating teacher.

She also stated that she asks *...other teachers who are experienced and have maybe made the decision before...* As stated in her pre-case interview, these may include teachers she has had in the past.

*...I have ...teachers before in the past I've had. I go to church with some and so in conversation we talk about education and they'll ask me how my classes are going or how I feel about things. I'll ask them what they think about stuff... they always offer advice...*

In her analysis of the second case, Leanne reiterated that she thinks the teacher portrayed in this case *...should ask other experienced teachers for advice....*

Observation of other people has also contributed to Leanne's decision making. Sometimes other teachers she has observed in the classroom influence her decisions. *...I kind of learn from watching the teacher and how she deals with those kind of things...*

In her analysis of the third *case*, Leanne related what influenced the decision she made in the *case*.

*...From my past field experiences in different schools, I have noticed differences between classes with teachers who are actively involved with the students and classes in which the teachers are not. The classes I have observed where the teachers interacted well with their students seemed to have had more student participation, interest, and better understanding of the material being taught. This is a reason why I would have the teacher become more active in the classroom....*

Leanne also mentioned in her post-*case* interview that sometimes she seeks advice after she has made the decision.

*...after the fact maybe I might ask other people what they think they would do; other students who were in practicum experience I might mention to them, What would you have done? Have you ever been in that situation before?*

Leanne seeks advice from other people when making a decision, including her cooperating teachers. Many times her decision is based on what she has observed these cooperating teachers doing in the classroom. She likes to seek advice from those who are more experienced, because she feels they will have more wisdom concerning the matter. Sometimes she asks other preservice teachers for advice.

#### *Examine Possible Outcomes*

Leanne stated several times in her pre-*case* interview that *...when I make decisions I just try to think ahead, think about all the outcomes...of the decision.*

*I make a mental pros and cons when I make decisions for the most part. I try to...lay out the good and the bad to see what would be a better decision to make....if I have several different choices I do the same thing for all of them, to see what the outcome would be of each one. I think about the outcome....I try to as thoroughly as I can...that's how I usually make my decision..*

In her post-case interview, she described how she looks at how her decisions will affect those involved in the classroom.

*...I try to think about the effect of my decision and the different...options I have....then...I try to visualize how the results...will affect...the classroom, how it will affect the student. How it will effect the class in general and...all the people involved...*

When making a decision, Leanne examines the possible outcomes of the decision she is making. She looks at how each outcome will affect each of the people involved in her decision. She looks at both the good and bad effects of her decision.

#### *Needs and Characteristics of Students*

When making a decision, Leanne takes into consideration the students involved. When making a decision concerning instruction, she thinks about the interests of the students. In her pre-case interview she mentioned how this affected a decision she made during her field experiences. *...the way their interest was held... I made the decision to keep doing what I was doing at the time...* She made the decision to continue with what she was doing because the students were very interested in it. In addition, she thought it might be beneficial for those who were visual learners.

*... I thought that maybe... it might have been better for them [the students]. I thought they were all... into the drawing... what if some of them needed to see it visually on the board too instead of just hearing it...*

She discussed how her knowledge of the students affected her decision.

*...I guess I was thinking ... of them not having a ... very long attention span.... then I saw that they were ... very intrigued by the picture I was showing them and ... then I just remember thinking that ... they were ... contributing. I was asking them for their thoughts and they were giving them. They're very into it and I thought that if I turned my back and wrote the stuff up... onto the board that it would break the concentration....*

Another decision Leanne made concerned an incident where she caught a student cheating. In her post-case interview she talked about her knowledge of the students involved and how this influenced her decision. She had the well being of the students in mind.

*...I also thought about the students. I knew she was a good student and I thought about how it would affect her.... I didn't think she would do it again. I felt like she was embarrassed enough for me to have caught her... she seemed to care about what I thought.... So I thought about how embarrassed she would be if I made this incident any bigger... the other student was new, so I thought about how she was probably wanting acceptance because she was real quiet that day anyway.... I'd also thought about the class in general. I knew that if... I said something in front of the whole class and made a big deal out of it, that they probably would pick at that student or both of them and wouldn't ... continue doing their work...*

In her analysis of the first *case*, she related how she arrived at the decision to use peer mentoring in the classroom because of her knowledge of the students.

*...I arrived at the decision to use peer mentoring between Steve and his classmates. Steve needs to be paired with a student who has not teased him or, if possible, with a student from another class. I made this decision based on the fact that the students who had known Steve from previous grades did not like him to begin with.... The students in Steve's class would benefit from peer mentoring....*

Leanne is influenced in her decision making by the knowledge that she has of the students she is working with and by their needs. She examines ideas to try to make a decision that would be most beneficial to everyone involved in the decision.

### *Summary*

Leanne has several factors which influence her when she make decisions in the classroom. Her observation and participation in her field placements influence her decision making. At times she looks at her own personal experiences to determine the best solution to a problem. These experiences include her own experience with children as well as her own experience as a student in the classroom. She looks to other people for advice when making decisions. These people include other people who are more experienced, especially experienced teachers, her cooperating teachers, and other preservice teachers. She also uses the knowledge about teaching and learning she has gained from her college classes to help her make an informed decision. She examines the outcomes of the decisions she makes to determine what effect they will have on the people involved. Finally, she examines the needs and characteristics of the students who will be involved in the decision as well as how they will benefit from her decision.

*How do Middle Grades Teachers use Cases  
as a Strategy to Foster Their Decision Making?*

Four themes emerged concerning what happens when *cases* are used as a strategy to foster Leanne's decision making. These themes were based on her comments in her pre-*case* interview and her post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses she wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* she wrote herself. The four themes were: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me identify solutions, helped me examine consequences of decisions, and put me in the role of the teacher.

*Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect*

Using *cases* as a strategy gave Leanne an opportunity to reflect on the decisions made in the *cases*. In her post-*case* interview, she stated how *cases* used as a strategy helped her realize *...all the sources that are out there to use....* She stated that she *...hadn't thought about the...curriculum instructor or someone in the school that you could go talk to...about situations that arise in the classroom.* She reiterated, *...I hadn't thought about...all the different people you could turn to when you're a teacher and about questions you might have or problems that you have....* Again she stated, *...I hadn't even thought about the many decisions that I'll have to make and what would I do in that situation...*

In her post-*case* interview she related how *cases* used as a strategy had helped her *...think about all the factors involved....look at more background information...take that into consideration.* In her written *case*, Leanne reflected on a situation she had to handle in her field experiences.



*...I had never been placed in this situation before and had not thought before about how I would deal with cheating. I... debated on whether to report the cheating incident to the teacher. I thought she had a right to know...looking back I have wondered whether I should have discussed the situation with Mrs. [Hill]...I have questioned if I was too lenient towards the new girl...whether the approach I took was the best for that particular situation....*

In her analysis of the third case, Leanne reflected on the behaviors of the teacher. *...the teacher does not manage her class well and wastes valuable time...she...ignores the misbehavior and disruptions by students in the class....* Again, in her analysis of the fourth case she talked about the behavior of the teacher. *...I think the teacher in the case did a good job of dealing with the situation....other teachers and school faculty were insensitive to the need of the student...*

In her analysis of the fifth case she reflected on the behavior of the parent presented in the case.

*...This could mean that Patrice's mom works a night shift and is not at home at night. Patrice may have to take care of her younger sister and would not have help with her schoolwork....The fact that her mother slept throughout the class may relay to Patrice that school is not important....*

In the class discussion of this case, she reflected on the fact that Patrice was just passed on to the next grade. *It makes you wonder if they're gonna pass her every year, just push her on through...if she's ever gonna learn anything....*

Leanne uses cases as a strategy to think about the decisions made by all involved in the cases. The use of cases as a strategy has helped her realize that there are many

people in the schools who can be used as resources when teachers encounter problems in the classroom.

*Helped Me Identify Solutions*

According to Leanne, *cases* offer a way for preservice teachers to examine various ideas, suggestions, or options that a teacher may have when a problem arises. In her post-case interview she stated that ... *it [the case] offered... different suggestions, different ideas, options that [the] teacher took. I was able to look at them and see whether or not I thought they actually benefited or helped or not....* She said *cases* helped her ...*think about all the factors involved....*

She feels that the *cases* were particularly helpful to her in that she was able to listen to the various solutions offered by her classmates, many of which she had not thought about previously.

*...[in] some of the cases, the decisions I would have made... I couldn't really think of a lot of different options, and with the other students giving ideas too, we were able to all think of different... ways you could deal with it that I probably wouldn't have thought of on my own....*

In the *case* she wrote about an incident in her field experiences, she discussed the decision she made when she caught a student cheating.

*...I dealt with this situation by taking away both papers from Corbin. I told her that she was to do her own work...to get out a clean sheet of paper and start the homework assignment over. ...I gave the homework back to the other student, and told her that she was not to be giving her homework to others to copy because it was cheating....*

In her analysis of the first *case*, Leanne offered several solutions to the situation presented in the *case*. She said that

*...the teacher needs to try and create a positive classroom environment in which negative comments towards one another are not allowed....[she] should discipline each student individually for his or her misbehavior...tutor Steve after or before class...try using peer mentoring strategies...ignore the minor disruptions from Steve and the other students...*

Again in her analysis of the second *case*, Leanne offered solutions to the problem presented. *...the teacher needs to vary her instructional methods....try using grouping techniques.....ask other experienced teachers for advice....* These solutions varied from seeking advice to using different instructional strategies to solve the dilemma presented.

Her analysis of the third *case* gave solutions for the teacher to improve her interactions with the students in the classroom. *...the teacher needs to implement some classroom procedures in her class....she should be walking around the room, monitoring students' progress, and answering any questions they may have.....*

Leanne detailed in her analysis of the fourth *case* still other ways for the teacher to solve the problem presented in this particular *case*. She stated,

*...the teacher could speak with the faculty and other teachers in the school office and explain to them that the student is taking an important test and needs a quiet environment...put up a sign on the office door or behind the student's desk stating that the student is taking a test....ask the guidance counselor or assistant principal if the student could finish the test in another empty classroom or the library....*

Leanne described several solutions that she would recommend in the fifth *case*

that she analyzed. She stated that the teacher should ...*discipline Patrice for her misbehavior....[talk] with Patrice individually...use positive reinforcement...try to encourage Patrice...*

Leanne believes that *cases* used as a strategy have helped her to identify various solutions to the many problems presented in the *cases*. The class discussions gave her ideas and suggestions that she had not thought of herself.

#### *Put Me in the Role of the Teacher*

Leanne stated in her post-*case* interview that *cases* used as a strategy ...*helped me to think about what I would do in the future...in that situation....*The *cases* placed her in the role of the teacher. She felt that it was...*a good way to learn about how you would react to different situations in making decisions....* Again she stated, ...*it made me think about situations....helps you start thinking about all the possibilities of what you face as a teacher and all the different situations you will be put in...*

In the class discussion of the fifth *case*, Leanne put herself in the role of the teacher in the *case*. ...*I would try to find out what goes on after school....take a personal interest in her life...*

Leanne uses *cases* as a strategy to assist her in putting herself in the role of the teacher. *Cases* helped her to think about the many situations she will face as a middle school teacher.

#### *Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions*

Leanne believes *cases* assist her in examining the consequences of various solutions that are discussed in the *cases*. In her post-*case* interview she stated that she

*...was able to look at them and see whether or not I thought they actually benefited or helped...[the use of cases] helps you think about the effects of your decisions...*

In the class discussion of the first *case*, the teacher tried grouping as a way to solve the problem she had in the classroom. Leanne discussed the consequences of this solution. *...some of the students complained about working with Steve...it probably caused disruptions...* Later in the discussion she revealed that she felt if Steve's class could interact with other classes *...it could help...some of their social skills as well as their behavior problems....*

In her analysis of this *case*, she listed many consequences of the solutions she examined. *...they might be more likely to recognize and stop their bad behavior....this might help Steve stay focused...this would prepare him for each lesson and help him stay on task....*

Again in her analysis of the second *case*, she gives consequences for the decisions she has made.

*...if she were to use small groups, it might actually help her to use the curriculum to fit the needs of the students....the students might get more interested in reading short stories...the strategies that another teacher suggests may also be successful in her classroom....*

The class discussion of the third *case* prompted Leanne to make a statement concerning a decision made by the teacher in the *case*. Leanne felt that the decision made by the teacher *...distracted the other students who were trying to learn...* In her analysis of this *case*, Leanne stated consequences if the teacher were to implement classroom procedures. *...the teacher will have to practice procedures with the*

*students...it will take some time for the students to learn them.....the procedures will help create a more positive classroom environment...* In discussing the decision concerning the teacher monitoring the classroom more closely, she stated, *...the students will be alert and stay on task....*

In her analysis of the fourth *case*, Leanne stated the consequences of the decisions she thought the teacher should make. *...This might cause other teachers to be more considerate of the student....it would take time away from the guidance counselor or another teacher's day...*

During the discussion of the fifth case, Leanne discussed the consequences of talking to the belligerent student to find out if something is going on at home. She stated, *...Patrice might resent it....it would be a negative consequence....* Again in her analysis of this case, she stated, *...Patrice may resent the teacher for her efforts and clam up even more....* On the other hand, she said that *...Patrice might decide to open up to the teacher and tell her what is troubling her....*

Leanne uses *cases* as a strategy to help her examine the various consequences of the decisions that are made. She realizes that there are positive consequences and negative consequences to every decision made.

### *Summary*

Leanne feels that *cases* used as a strategy provide preservice teachers the opportunity to reflect on decisions made in the classroom. She believes that *cases* help her identify solutions to various problems presented, listen to the solutions provided by others, and examine the consequences of each of these decisions. She feels that *cases* are a way of preparing preservice teachers for their career as a teacher because they present

various situations that the preservice teacher may face in the classroom as a teacher. She can place herself in the role of the teacher.

*Summary of Findings*

<b>Leanne</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Question #1 What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?	Field Experiences Personal Experiences Other People Examine Possible Outcomes Needs and Characteristics of Students
Question #2 How do middle grades preservice teachers use <i>cases</i> as a strategy to foster decision making?	Gave me an opportunity to reflect Helped me identify solutions Put me in the role of the teacher Helped me examine consequences of decisions

*Figure 9.* Summary of findings for Case Four: Leanne

Leanne is influenced in her decision making by her encounters during her field experiences. She is able to reflect on the decisions she observes being made by her cooperating teachers as they interact with the students. She reflects on her own teaching as she examines the decisions that she has made in the classroom during her field experiences. Leanne is influenced by her own personal experiences as a student in the classroom when making decisions. She also recalls the experiences she has had working with children at her church. She calls on other people for advice, especially other teachers who are experienced in the classroom. Leanne uses the knowledge she has acquired from her classes at the college when making decisions in the classroom. She also examines all the possible outcomes of her decision and looks at how these outcomes will affect all the people involved in the decision. Finally, she thinks about the needs and characteristics of the students when making a decision.

*Cases* used as a strategy have given Leanne the opportunity to reflect on the situations presented in each *case*. It has given her the chance to identify and examine various solutions to the problems presented, rather than just one solution she came up with herself. In addition, it has given her the opportunity to examine both the positive and negative consequences of the decisions made in the *cases*. *Cases* used as a strategy have also put her in the role of the teacher by helping her examine ahead of time problems she might face in the future.

#### Case Five: Amber

##### *Personal Context*

Amber is a confident 20-year-old junior from a neighboring state. She lives on campus in the dormitory. Her primary concentration is math, and her secondary concentration is social studies. She is very sure about her decision to become a teacher. It is something that she has always wanted to do.

*I feel pretty confident about my decision to become a teacher.... it's always something that I've wanted to do and it was a little hard at first deciding what grade, but I think that I pretty much know exactly what I want to do and that I'm at the right place.*

She thinks that she would like to teach in a fourth or fifth grade classroom, but she has yet to observe in a middle school classroom, so she does not know this for sure.

Amber is very active in the extracurricular activities at the college, and is in a leadership position. She is a resident assistant in her dormitory. She serves as a liaison between the resident students and the resident director. She is very self-motivated and is able to work independently at any task assigned to her with few directions.



Amber has no problem with speaking out during class discussions. She is very vocal and feels free to state her opinion regardless of whether or not her classmates agree with her. She was very verbose during the class discussions, offering many suggestions as possible solutions for the situations presented in each *case*.

Preparation is very important to Amber. She is always prepared for class. In the pre-*case* interview, she related how she prepares when she is teaching in her field experiences. Because she was concerned about the behavior of the students during her teaching, she familiarized herself with her cooperating teacher's rules and the consequences for those rules so she could be prepared to deal with disruptions. ...*So before I got up and taught I made myself very familiar with the teacher's consequences and her rules and procedures so that in case something did happen, I could handle it....* She also talked with her cooperating teacher about the needs of the students before she taught. ...*I also went to my teacher and discussed individual needs in the classroom, classroom needs that I wouldn't necessarily know about just observing so that I could better assist the students....*

Both of the incidents Amber described in her post-*case* interview concerned her feelings about her teaching when she ...*wasn't prepared...* and she ...*wasn't as organized...* as she should have been. One of those incidents described the day she was to teach a lesson. She woke up late and was so rushed that she forgot her lesson plan. Her supervising teacher was observing her that day. Even though she felt that she ...*wasn't prepared...* she completed her lesson from memory, improvising when she did not have the worksheet she had planned to use by putting the work from it on the board.

*...I didn't have my lesson plan. My assessment ... was on a worksheet and I didn't have the worksheet run off for the students.... I had to assess my lesson... I just remembered what kind of stuff I had on the worksheet and drew it on the board. It was like a chart and I had the students copy it on their paper...*

She did the lesson from memory, demonstrating that she was prepared to teach this topic and that she was able to improvise when necessary.

In her written *case*, Amber wrote about an incident in her field experiences where once again she talked about being prepared to teach the lesson. *...I arrived a little early and got my materials together....* In her analysis of the fourth *case*, she stated, *...Before the teacher does anything, she needs to sit down and map out a plan of action to get things done....* Amber's idea that preparation is an important aspect of teaching is apparent.

Amber is a very confident young lady who is very sure about her decision to become a teacher. She is very active at the college and is in a leadership position. She is very vocal in classroom discussions, voluntarily giving her opinion on all subjects discussed. Amber considers preparation and organization important skills for teaching. It is important to her to always be prepared in all situations.

#### *What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?*

Four themes emerged concerning what influenced Amber when she made decisions. These themes were based on her comments in her pre-*case* interview and her post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses she wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* she wrote herself. The themes

were: her field experiences, personal experiences, other people, and needs and characteristics of students.

### *Field Experiences*

Amber perceived her encounters in the field as a place to learn from experience. In the pre-case interview, she talked about applying what she has learned in her classes at the college to the real world of teaching.

*I think that by being ... out in the classroom now you learn more than if you were to hear it in a book. I've been told time and time again, classroom management is... something you need to take a hold of. We watched Wong videos and we talked about how you need to have procedures.... it doesn't really click until you actually see it...*

From observing the students and teachers and the classroom itself, Amber is able see that there are many factors which contribute to the learning process as she stated in the pre-case interview. ... *my fifth grade classroom... it's a pretty good classroom. It's a little cluttered... that... shows me that the way your classroom is arranged ... actually does matter. And how ... the students learn. It actually makes a difference....*

Amber described in her pre-case interview what she had learned thus far from observing in the fourth grade classroom.

*...my fourth grade teacher isn't there a lot...her mom's real sick...I've seen a lot of substitutes in the classroom and how the kids interact with them....that has been something that has really opened my eyes to a lot of things that happen and... why lesson plans are so important....*

Amber reflected quite often in the pre-case interview and the post-case interview concerning the decisions she made during her field experiences. Before teaching one of her lessons, she was concerned about her ability to effectively manage the classroom during the teaching of a lesson. *I was very concerned that the students weren't going to pay any attention to me, that their behavior was going to be so bad that I was just going to have to... give it back over to the teacher.* She prepared herself for her lesson by familiarizing herself with the teacher's rules and consequences. She was happy to report that this fear never materialized. The students were very good. *... I was very wrong... they were very good.*

She also described how she had to make a decision concerning what to teach and how to teach it and why she made that decision.

*I had to make a decision on what I was going to teach this semester...I had to go through and say...this is something ...the kids need to learn. It's something they may not already know...then I had to make the decision on how I was going to present that ...at their level....I chose something for my first lesson that would be hands-on...their ability is lower...I had to choose the instructional strategies ...so that they would actually learn and...they would be able to understand and grasp the concept.*

In her pre-case interview, she also related why she did not use other strategies during this lesson. *...I knew that technology wasn't going to be the best lesson...because the way ...the classroom is set up...* In reflecting on this particular lesson, she related other strategies she could have used. *I think I could have used a game...I don't think I*

*could have used role-playing...but we might ... have used peer tutoring...* She also talked about what she might have done differently.

*I think that I would have been more organized for grouping. Grouping was very difficult the first time. It...took a lot more time...out of my lesson than I thought it would...I had planned extra time...but I didn't have it as organized as I should have had it.*

In her post-case interview, she described an incident in which she felt she *...wasn't prepared....* She left her lesson plan at home on the day she was to teach and her supervising teacher was coming to observe. In thinking about the decisions she made, she stated, *I really didn't have any choice....there ...[were] not other materials that I could have used at a moment....it was towards the end of my lesson and we were running out of time.*

Amber's field experiences influence her decision making. She learned from observing in the classroom things she may want to do in her own classroom and things she probably will not do in her own classroom. She also used her field experiences to reflect on her own teaching and the decisions she had to make before and during the implementation of her lesson.

### *Personal Experiences*

Amber is influenced by her own previous experiences when making decisions concerning situations in the classroom. During her post-case interview, she stated, *...I think it's good that you can use your personal experience in making a decision and just revert back to your background and your knowledge of what might work.* In her analyses of case two, case four, and case five, she reiterated, *...I made these decisions based on*

*personal experience... and ...I referred back to my own previous experiences during testing....*

In addition, Amber referred several times to her own personal experiences in school and how that affected her decision making. In the fifth *case*, she identified with the young girl in the *case*.

*... I went through that personally ... myself.... my parents were divorced.... and it got to the point where me and my sister were adults at nine... we didn't care about school because who needs school... You need someone there... to know that they care.*

In discussing ideas and making suggestions for ways to solve the dilemma of “Patrice” in the fifth *case*, Amber called on her own experiences in school.

*You can put them in... not necessarily an after school curricular program, but within school... I was involved in peer tutoring, peer mediation... there were all these different responsibilities that you can do right there while you're at school and it doesn't require you to stay afterwards....*

She also recalled how getting involved in activities made a difference with her, and therefore might be a solution to Patrice's problem.

*... I know that when I was in a school, when I did peer tutoring, I was making Cs and sometimes Bs and I just didn't care. I never turned in my homework... they started that peer tutoring thing and I did it in fifth grade... It's something that motivated me.... I'm going to help these other students do good, then I can do good, too.*

The knowledge Amber has acquired in her college classes plays a role in her decision making. She recalls various bits of knowledge as she is faced with a situation in which she has to make a decision. During the class discussions of the *cases*, Amber recounted several strategies discussed in her methods classes as potential ways to solve the different dilemmas presented. During her post-*case* interview, she said, *...I learned about instructional strategies in EM 300... which is our curriculum class here at [the college]. We... talked about different strategies that we could use within the classroom.* In the pre-*case* interview, she mentioned a project that was completed by the preservice teachers that was helpful to her when making a decision. *...we did a project in Curriculum where we researched all the instructional strategies and everyone presented them...*

In the discussion of the first *case*, she presented grouping as a way of helping the teacher solve the dilemma presented in the *case*. Grouping is one strategy that was discussed in her Curriculum class. *...I think that being in groups is going to push Steve to learn how to act socially. Interact with other people. Knowing that you have to....* Again in the discussion of the second *case*, she mentioned grouping. *If she did grouping that might be a way to insert peer tutoring.* Peer tutoring is another instructional strategy that has been discussed in her Curriculum class. She also mentioned other instructional strategies that have been discussed in this class during the class discussion of the third *case*. *She could have done a hands-on activity with pies...electronics or... technology. There are a lot of math games that you can use on a computer to help people.*

Amber also used her own philosophy of teaching and learning that she has acquired over the years to make decisions in the classroom. In the discussion of the first *case*, she details her ideas about what should be taught to students other than just facts.

*I think ... if you begin to teach the students about responsibility and encouragement and being positive and different character education words like that and have them actually begin to show those things in their lives for as a ... reward type thing, that it will actually encourage them to become responsible and to encourage others....I think that would play a big part in how Steve learns and how the classroom...environment is.*

Amber's past experiences influence her decision making in the classroom. She recalls her own experiences as a student when looking for ways to solve dilemmas that confront her in the classroom. Amber uses the knowledge she has gained from her college classes when making decisions concerning what she will teach, how she will teach it, and how she will assess the learners. The two classes mentioned several times in the pre-*case* interview, the post-*case* interview, and the class discussion of the fifth *case* were her Curriculum class and her class, Teaching in a Multicultural Society. In particular, she recalls the many instructional strategies discussed in these classes.

#### *Other People*

Amber is influenced by advice from other people when making a decision in the classroom. Sometimes Amber approaches other preservice teachers for advice. In her pre-*case* interview she stated, *...a lot of times I'll seek advice from students that are ... in the dorm who are also in education. We have quite a few... so I can say... what do you think... is this a good activity for this age group.* She considers these preservice teachers



a good source for advice because they may have already experienced her dilemma. She stated in her post-case interview, *...Other preservice teachers are a good source because... they may have had to do the same thing. They're learning right along with you.*

In addition, she related an opportunity that she had to observe another preservice teacher, and she feels like she learned a great deal from that observation. It changed her mind about a strategy. In her written case she described the incident.

*...I observed another student working on a practicum experience. Her lesson contained group work. I just knew that her lesson would turn out like mine, but it didn't. ....I was amazed at how smooth the grouping went. I learned by observation and consulting other preservice teachers that grouping can be effective.*

She also seeks advice from her cooperating teachers. She related one incident in her pre-case interview in which she asked her cooperating teacher about the needs of the students because she did not feel she had enough knowledge of the students just from what she had observed. *...I also went to my teacher and discussed individual needs in the classroom, classroom needs that I wouldn't necessarily know about just observing so that I could better assist the students.*

In the class discussion of the fifth case, Amber related how she has observed several of her cooperating teachers using behavior contracts with their students, and she suggests this as a possible solution to the problem presented in the case. *...I noticed... when I was out in the schools that a lot of behavior disorder kids...had contracts that all the teachers signed. They got so many points for how many things they did right....*

Amber said that sometimes she seeks advice from ...*the professors here at [the college]...* In the fifth *case*, Amber recalled something that was mentioned in her college class that the instructor did to help her get to know her students. ...*I remember... you were telling us ... you'll ... pass out a little sheet that has questions on them....* She suggests using one of these interest inventories as a way to get to know the student in the *case* better.

Asking the advice of several people is better than just seeking the advice of one person, according to Amber. In the second *case* she detailed how you can ask several people and then take parts from what each of them said and use it to fit the situation you are concerned about. ... *even though ... it seeks someone's opinion, it's just one person. If you ... asked several people, you might be able to take bits and pieces from what each person said and put it together, and I think that would work for me....*

Amber's decision making in the classroom is influenced by several different groups of people. First, she seeks advice from her cooperating teachers, or she uses ideas she has observed them using in the classroom to make her decision. In addition, she looks to other preservice teachers for advice. She asks them what they would do or what they have done in a similar situation. Finally, she seeks advice from her professors at the college. However, Amber feels that it is better to seek advice from several sources when faced with a dilemma in the classroom. That way she has several options to choose from and can decide what would be the best solution in her situation.

#### *Needs and Characteristics of Students*

Many times Amber uses her knowledge of the students in the classroom in making a decision. First, Amber looks at the various needs of her students and their

backgrounds. She feels this plays an important role in the decisions that are made in the classroom. In her post-case interview she stated,

*...first you have to look at the students and their background and how they've learned so far.... you have to do what's best for your students so you have to know... what they're good at and what they're not good at and what's going to help them and what's not.*

Before making a decision concerning what to teach during her field experiences, she described in her pre-case interview her thought processes.

*... I had to go through and say... this is something that the kids need to learn, it's something that they may not already know... then I had to make the decision on how I was going to present that ... at their level.*

Amber also takes into consideration the abilities of the students she is teaching when making a decision as related in her pre-case interview. *...their ability is lower than what it should [be]... for their grade level.... I had to choose the instructional strategies that I did so that they would actually learn and...[be] able to understand and grasp the concept.* She also made sure she knew everything she needed to know about these students before she made her decision about what to teach and how to teach it. She stated, *...I also went to my teacher and discussed individual needs in the classroom... that I wouldn't necessarily know about just observing so that I could better assist the students.*

Amber also considered what the students liked and enjoyed when making decisions about curriculum and instruction. She stated her reason for choosing the activities she did for her first lesson in her pre-case interview. *...they... like a lot of hands-on projects, so I chose something for my first lesson that would be hands-on....*

She also chose another strategy to use with the students because it was something they liked to do, even though she was uncertain about using it. *...I used grouping... which is something that they like. It was a little difficult for the first lesson... it takes trial and error to actually be able to get grouping down....*

Finally, Amber feels that it is necessary to get to know the students personally in order to make decisions that will best meet all their needs, whether it is instructional or behavioral. In the discussion of the first *case*, she reiterated how important it is for teachers to know their students so that they can make more informed decisions.

*I would have definitely looked at Steve's background information and the other students in my classroom that were causing disruptions. You know, have they done this before? Is this... normal behavior for them? And if it is, how can I have this behavior become not normal in my classroom?*

Amber considers the individual needs of her students when making a decision about what to teach, how to teach it, and how to manage the classroom. She uses her knowledge of her students' abilities and her knowledge of their backgrounds when making these decisions. In addition, she considers the kinds of activities they like to do when planning her instruction. The needs and characteristics of the students influence her decision making.

### *Summary*

Amber is influenced by several factors when making decisions in the classroom. She is influenced by the many encounters she has during her field placements. She recalls her own personal experiences and ideas she has gained from these experiences to help her in making decisions. Many of these experiences come from the time she has

spent in the classroom as a student. Amber also seeks advice from other people, among them her cooperating teachers, other preservice teachers, and her professors at the college. She believes that seeking advice from several people is more beneficial because it gives her more options for solving the dilemma with which she is faced. Amber also uses her own knowledge gained mainly from her college classes when making a decision. Finally, Amber uses her knowledge of the students' characteristics and needs when making a decision in the classroom. She considers the abilities of the students, their backgrounds, and the instructional strategies they enjoy when making these decisions.

*How do Middle Grades Preservice Teachers use Cases  
as a Strategy to Foster Their Decision Making?*

Four themes emerged concerning what happens when *cases* are used as a strategy to foster Amber's decision making. These themes were based on her comments in her *pre-case* interview and her *post-case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses she wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* she wrote herself. The four themes were: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me identify solutions, helped me examine consequences of decisions, and put me in the role of the teacher.

*Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect*

Using *cases* as a strategy has given Amber an opportunity to reflect on the decisions made in the *cases* and decisions that she has made. In the *case* she wrote about an encounter she experienced in her field placements, she reflected on the lesson she taught. *...I feel as though the students didn't receive the full amount of potential from this activity. I decided from that class on that I would not do groups again.* After observing

another preservice teacher, she stated, *...I was amazed about how smooth the grouping went. I learned ...that grouping can be effective. Grouping requires organization. I am no longer scared to use grouping as an instructional strategy.*

In her analysis of the first *case* and the discussion of this *case*, Amber reflected on the problem of the student presented in the *case*.

*...sometimes when a child has ADHD or some type of learning...disability  
...parents tend to use that as an excuse....I think that if his mother would take the  
time to actually get Steve to accomplish his work and believe that he can...Steve  
would begin to believe in himself....*

In reflecting on the teacher's perspective of the dilemma presented in the second *case*, Amber wrote in her analysis,

*...how to please everyone in the class...is near impossible...it is hard to get every  
student interested and still give them the curriculum they need. Your first priority  
as a teacher should be to educate all students with the appropriate curriculum....*

Amber was concerned with the behaviors of the teacher in the third *case*. In her analysis of the *case* and in the class discussion, she reflected on these behaviors. She stated that the teacher *...does not take teaching seriously. ...It seems to me she is lazy and doesn't want to change her methods of teaching....if...students...don't understand...you do something else...*

In the fourth *case*, she discussed how the teacher might have felt during the incident presented in the *case*. *...if this is only her second year at the school...she may have felt intimidated...like she didn't have the power to do anything....*

Amber used *cases* as a strategy to reflect on the situations presented in the *cases* and the situation she detailed in her written *case*. She reflected on both the behaviors of the students and the teachers involved in the *cases*.

#### *Helped Me to Identify Solutions*

Using *cases* as a strategy helped Amber identify solutions to the various problems presented and to listen to the solutions of her classmates. She stated that *...it gave us a lot of advice...a lot of different ways to handle things...it ...provided us with a useful tool.*

Amber provided several solutions to the situation presented in the first *case*, both in her written analysis of the *case* and in the class discussion. First, she said that *...the focus needs to be on providing a caring environment where people can actually learn.* This could be done by forming *... a program for Steve....establish a character education program...help Steve individually...*

In her analysis and discussion of the second *case*, Amber described several solutions the teacher could use to help her with her classroom of varying abilities.

*...The teacher could split the students into groups according to their ability levels for reading...that might be a way to insert peer tutoring....She could find books that will interest each group...on their...ability level....find more interesting activities to get the students involved ...*

In the third *case* analysis and discussion, Amber described what the teacher could do to interact more with the students in her classroom. She said the teacher could *...walk around...help the students...see if they're really... understanding her... [do a] ...hands-on activity...[or use] ...technology.* She also stated that there were *...a lot of math games... for the computer that could be used.*

Amber talked about two decisions that should be made in her analysis of the fourth *case*. She stated that *...the first thing to do is to talk with the student...* Then she stated that the teacher needed to *...talk with the principal about the situation....*

In the class discussion and her analysis of the fifth *case*, she related several courses of action the teacher might take to help her with the belligerent student. These included,

*...checking in to what was going on in Patrice's life...take interest in Patrice...put Patrice in a supporting and encouraging group during group work...fill out student interest forms...implement...peer tutoring...find things within the classroom to motivate her...*

Amber uses *cases* as a strategy to help her identify and examine many solutions to a dilemma. The types of decisions she would make would depend on the circumstances in the *case* presented.

#### *Put Me in the Role of the Teacher*

*Cases* were used by Amber to put herself in the role of the teacher. In her post-*case* interview, she stated that using *cases* as a strategy helps her think more about the situations she will face as a teacher of middle school students.

*...It's given me time to think about what I would do in certain situations...when I go into my classroom, I'm going to remember those cases and what was said about them...how I would deal with that situation.*

She believes that without the use of *cases*, *...I probably wouldn't have thought about it until it came up....*



In the discussion of the first *case*, Amber related what she would have done in the situation had she been the teacher. *...I would have ...looked at Steve's background information...maybe talk to past teachers that had...these students or visit the guidance counselor or the principal and see if...they can help...*

When discussing the actions of the assistant principal towards the teacher in the fourth *case*, Amber put herself in the role of the teacher when she stated *...that would have made me feel really stupid and really little....* Later in the discussion, she put herself in the role of the teacher and stated what she would have done in the situation. *...I would have made sure ...there was no talking around him because it's hard to read with someone talking...*

Amber used *cases* as a strategy to put herself in the role of the teacher. She felt that *cases* helped her think more about the situations she will encounter as a middle school teacher. She has some practice in actually making decisions about dilemmas she will face in the classroom.

#### *Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions*

*Cases* used as a strategy assisted Amber in examining the consequences of the decisions presented for each *case*. In the discussion and analysis of the first *case*, Amber related some consequences of the decisions proposed. *...being in groups is going to push Steve to learn how to act socially...* She felt that establishing a character education program would *...teach students how to be encouraging and responsible for their actions....* These were positive consequences. Amber also noted *...one negative consequence... was that the decisions would ...require considerable amounts of time on the parts of the parents, teachers, and school....*

In the class discussion of the second *case*, she discussed both the positive and negative consequences of the decisions proposed by her classmates. Concerning the use of grouping as a solution to the problem, she stated,

*...while you're at one group something may be going on in the other group that you may not know....if you put them...into smaller groups then it wouldn't be everyone staring at them...the higher level kids may actually pay attention...*

When talking about the decision to implement classroom procedures in the third *case*, Amber stated that the teacher would have to *...enforce them really hard at the beginning because...the children...might not obey the rules since they haven't had any this whole time....*

In her written analysis of the fifth *case*, Amber listed several consequences of the decisions she had proposed.

*...Some of the consequences...it might cause Patrice to create more resentment toward adults. All of the decisions would require more time of teachers and students....might cause tension between the parent and teacher. Peers may resent Patrice is she doesn't do her part during group work....*

Amber used *cases* as a strategy to examine the consequences of the decisions proposed in each dilemma. She recognized that many times the consequences are positive, while at other times they are negative.

### *Summary*

Amber perceives the use of *cases* as a useful tool in preparing her to teach in a middle school classroom. It gives her experience in examining various alternatives to given situations by listening to her classmates discuss what they would do in given

situations. Therefore, the use of *cases* was helpful in providing her with ideas that would not have been part of her decision making process otherwise. The use of *cases* as a strategy also put her in the role of the teacher and helped her examine both the positive and negative consequences of the decisions presented.

*Summary of Findings*

<b>Amber</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Question #1 What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?	Field Experiences Personal Experiences Other People Needs and Characteristics of Students
Question #2 How do middle grades preservice teachers use <i>cases</i> as a strategy to foster decision making?	Gave me an opportunity to reflect Helped me identify solutions Put me in the role of the teacher Helped me examine consequences of decisions

*Figure 10.* Summary of findings for Case Five: Amber

Amber is influenced in her decision making by her field experiences. Her observation of the interactions of the teacher and the students as well as her experiences in planning and implementing instruction help her reflect on her own decision making in order to better improve her teaching. Her decision making is also influenced by her personal experiences. She also seeks advice from other people such as her cooperating teachers, other preservice teachers, and her professors when making a decision. She feels that if she seeks advice from several people, then she will have more alternatives to choose from when making a decision. She also uses the knowledge she has acquired in her college classes and her own philosophy of teaching when making a decision. Finally,

the needs of the students and her knowledge of the students influence her decision making.

Amber feels that the use of *cases* as a strategy has better prepared her for her career as a teacher. It has given her an opportunity to reflect on the situations presented and to think about situations that she would not have thought about otherwise. The discussion and analyses of the *cases* have given her an opportunity to examine various solutions to a given problem and the consequences of those decisions. In addition, the use of *cases* as a strategy has put her in the role of the teacher.

#### Case Six: Sheila

##### *Personal Context*

Sheila is 21 years old and commutes to the college from a neighboring community. Her primary concentration is language arts and her secondary concentration is social science. She has changed her major several times, from education to communications and back to education. When I first met Sheila, she wanted to be a high school science teacher. She approached me last year about coming back into the School of Education. She wanted to know which major would get her out of college the quickest, Early Childhood or Middle Grades. After looking at the courses she had already taken, she decided to enter the Middle Grades program.

Sheila is excited about teaching. She has worked as a swimming instructor at the local YMCA for several years and finds it very rewarding to see the children learn. *...seeing the kids after you've taught them. I guess it's rewarding to see...what they know.*

Sheila is very emphatic that students should respect the teacher at all times. In her pre-case interview she said, *...the first thing they need to know when they're in the*

*classroom is to respect their teachers. She was very concerned about how disrespectful she thought the students were to one of her cooperating teachers. ...they're talking while their teacher is teaching.....it's kind of aggravating to get up there and teach a class and them not listen...it's very disrespectful...*

Sheila has much empathy for students. This became apparent in her interviews and in the class discussions. In the discussion of the fourth *case* she stated, *...that would not be fair to that child. They are getting penalized for something they had no control over....I would have looked out for the best interest of the student...* In her analysis of this *case* she stated *...I feel that it was the teacher [ 's] responsibility to stand up for the rights of her student...* Later she stated *...This is a student's future they were dealing with ...matters shouldn't have been taken lightly....*

Again in the discussion of the fifth *case* she reiterated *...I think that's part of teaching...nurturing students and being that friend that they may not have.* In her analysis of this *case* she stated *...The bottom line in this case [is] that Patrice's teacher and family need to help Patrice find the problem so they all can help her in fixing the problem.*

During the post-*case* interview, Sheila related how she has definite views about certain situations and that she does not always agree with her peers. *...I'm too stubborn and headstrong....I think my way is a good way....some of the ideas ... my classmates and I really didn't see eye-to-eye with.* She became very emphatic during the discussion of the third *case* when talking about the teacher. She stated *...It makes me so mad...they're not grasping it...she needs to do something about it....* Later on during the discussion she stated, *She wasn't interacting with the students. That's her job. She wants to sit on a*

*desk, get a job as a secretary. Don't teach.* In the class discussion of the fourth *case* she stated, *If I was this kid's parent, I would be so mad if I knew what went on.*

Sheila is a young lady who has much empathy for students. She is very emphatic in her beliefs and does not mind defending those beliefs with her peers. She expects the students in the classroom to respect the teacher at all times, and has no tolerance when respect is not shown to the teacher.

#### *What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?*

Five themes emerged concerning what influenced Sheila's decision making. These themes were based on her comments in her pre-*case* interview and her post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses she wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* she wrote herself. The themes were: field experiences, personal experiences, other people, examine possible outcomes, and needs and characteristics of students.

#### *Field Experiences*

Sheila is influenced in her decision making by her field experiences. She uses the many experiences she encounters in the classroom as a learning process to better prepare her for the middle school classroom. She looks at the different teaching styles and how the students respond to the teacher. In her pre-*case* interview she talked about each of her classes she is observing this semester.

*...I'm in a fourth grade class, language arts. I love that class! ...They sit there and listen to the teacher. They're respectful. ....Seems like they want to learn...as much as possible....My fifth grade...I'm having ...trouble as far as*

*respect for the teacher I'm observing. The kids don't...show respect towards her and they don't show respect toward other students....*

In her post-case interview, she talked about what she considers the most important thing she has learned in her experiences.

*The biggest thing that stands out for me is the diversity between one class that I observed and the other class that I observed...They were totally opposite and that was really beneficial for me because I got to see...ideal students and ...not ideal students...you're going to have that in every classroom, so it was very beneficial for me to see two different classroom settings.*

Sheila believes that observing in different classrooms helps her make decisions concerning what she wants to do and not do in her own classroom. In her pre-case interview she stated, *...I think...it shows me the things that I want to do different than what she's doing... there's not really any classroom control...so I think I'll be different in that aspect.* She reiterated once again *...I've noticed that when...the class...is reading the students will whisper, pass notes...just do disrespectful things while the teacher is teaching...*

The time Sheila spends in the classroom during her field experiences gives her a chance to make some decisions while she is there. She related in her pre-case interview how the biggest decision she made during her experiences was how to manage the classroom, in particular the behavior of the students. She stated, *...the biggest decision that I have made is...to make them [the students] listen to me and not talk so.* She made this decision because of how the students had reacted to her cooperating teacher. She stated, *...it's just degrading to get up there and teach a class and them not listen to you.*

*That's what they're there for. They're there to learn and you're there to teach them....*

*She believes that the...first thing they need to know when they're in the classroom is to respect their teachers.*

*Sheila made the decision to ...talk very quietly...I would just say...if you can't hear my voice, you're not going to know what we're [doing] next...they would all listen up. She was a bit concerned about how her cooperating teacher would react. ...She lets them talk while she's teaching...I kind of had a hard time...I didn't want to step on her shoes when I taught my lesson.*

Sheila's field experiences influence her decision making. She observes her cooperating teachers and makes decisions about strategies she will want to use in her classroom and those she will not want to use. She is able to observe the students' different learning styles as well, which will help her in making decisions concerning instruction. In addition, her field experiences gave her time to reflect on the decisions she made while teaching a few lessons.

#### *Personal Experiences*

Sheila's personal experiences influence the decisions she makes. In her pre-case interview, she recalled her own experiences as a student in the classroom and how that influences the decisions she makes. She stated that she remembered *...sitting in the classroom and knowing ....how maybe my peers weren't listening to the teacher and how it bothered me....I guess that's...what led me to know how I want to teach in my classroom.* She related how her elementary teacher used a soft voice to gain the attention of the students, so that is what she used during her lesson. *...I guess I just remember how*



*the teacher... in elementary school... would soften her voice and everybody would listen....*

In the discussion and analysis of the fourth *case*, she recalled the actions of her previous teacher when standardized tests were given. *...we were not allowed to move from our desk...our teachers ...were only allowed to read the directions...*

Sheila also recalled personal experiences when discussing solutions to the problems presented in the second *case*. *...I know sometimes with me...I may have to read it twice. Maybe the kids need to do that....* In the class discussion of the fourth *case* she relates to the student in the *case* by describing her own experiences. *...I was slower at taking tests....*

In the discussion of the fifth *case* she related her experiences of working with children at the YMCA. *...I've worked with kids like this...at the YMCA for eight years...you can't believe the responsibilities they have...they want to open up because they hold it inside...they need to tell somebody...*

Sheila is influenced in her decision making by her personal experiences as a student in the classroom. She recalls the decisions made by her former teachers. In addition, she relates to the students who have some of the same problems she has experienced. Finally, she is influenced in her decision making by the experiences she has gained working with children.

#### *Other People*

Other people influence the decisions made by Sheila, *...especially other teachers*. In her written *case*, Sheila wrote that *...because Mrs. Jones had noticed the lack of interest in Elizabeth, she approached the other two teachers on Elizabeth's team....* In

her pre-case interview, she said that she asked ....*teachers that had been out there teaching for years and years how they would do something....* In her post-case interview she stated that she was influenced by ...*my past teachers. That's helped me...with the lessons I've taught and the lesson plans that I've made up....* She reiterated that she would go to ...*my elementary teachers, my middle school teachers...to see if they would use this in their classroom....*

She also related in her analysis of the fifth case how watching the students in her field experiences influenced her decision making. ...*I have seen many students like Patrice in my field experience and many of them could not focus on their schoolwork because all they could think about was going home to a bad environment....*

Sheila recalled how she had observed the teachers in her field experiences and how they influenced the decisions she proposed in her analyses of the second and third cases. ...*my teacher usually uses a different teaching strategy each time I observe her....[and] ...I have actually observed in a classroom that had disturbances such as Mrs. Anderson's class and this was because of the lack of procedures....*

Sheila also is influenced in her decision making by other preservice teachers. In her post-case interview she stated that she had learned about a particular strategy she used in her lesson ...*from other classmates using it in their lesson....*

Other people influence Sheila's decision making. She especially seeks advice from other teachers. Many times she is influenced by the observation of her cooperating teachers and what she has heard her other classmates do in the classroom.

### *Examine Possible Outcomes*

Sheila is influenced in her decision making by the possible outcomes of a situation. In her pre-case interview she said, *I think the first thing I think of is the outcomes. She thinks about how the people involved will benefit. ...whether it's going to be beneficial to me, beneficial to others...* She thinks about *...what's going to... [happen] after I make that decision. Again she stated,...before I make the decision...the biggest thing that I think of [is] ...the outcome...* In her post-case interview she stated, *...I think about the future outcome when I analyze a decision....I think about...positive effects it's going to have or negative effects it's going to have...*

Sheila thinks about the possible effects on everyone involved before making a decision. She looks at how everyone involved in the decision will benefit.

### *Needs and Characteristics of Students*

Sheila is influenced in her decision making by the needs and characteristics of the students. In her post-case interview she stated that the strategy she would use with the students would depend on their ability level. *...I'd make the decisions on what type of strategy to use depending on the learning levels of my students....*

When planning a lesson, she was influenced by the needs of her students. In her post-case interview she said, *...I know that some of the students weren't really into reading....I thought that [strategy] might make it a little more appealing to them....* She continued, *I was thinking ...about how the kids would respond....how they would benefit from reading. I thought that ...if it was a little more fun, they [might] be able to comprehend...a little better; they'd be more interested.*

In the class discussion and in her analysis of the third *case*, Sheila related that the teacher needed to use a variety of instructional strategies for two reasons. First, she said *...the students seemed bored...* [and second] *...some of the kids still didn't get it...* so she should use different strategies in order to keep their attention and make sure they understand it.

Sheila stated in the class discussion of the second *case* that the teacher needed to look at the individual needs of the students. *...Some students read better silently. They don't want to read aloud...she could try to have them read to ...[themselves].*

In the discussion of the fourth *case*, Sheila stated how she would take into consideration the best interest of the child, showing how she is influenced in her decision making by their needs. *...I would have looked out for the best interest of the student instead of just sending him to the office... I think I would have ...asked the counselor... what was best for him...*

Sheila is influenced in her decision making by the needs and characteristics of the students. She wants to do what is best for them and make learning interesting and fun for them. She also looks at their ability level when making decisions about instruction to better meet their needs.

### *Summary*

Sheila is influenced in her decision making by her field experiences and by her own personal experiences as a student and her experiences working with children. She is also influenced by other people, especially teachers. In addition, she examines the outcomes of a decision for potential benefits to all involved. Finally, she is influenced by the needs and characteristics of the students.

*How do Middle Grades Teachers use Cases  
as a Strategy to Foster Their Decision Making?*

Four themes emerged concerning what happens when *cases* are used as a strategy to foster Sheila's decision making. These themes were based on her comments in her pre-*case* interview and her post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses she wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* she wrote herself. The four themes were: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me identify solutions, helped me examine consequences of decisions, and helped me think about multiple perspectives.

*Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect*

Sheila used *cases* as a strategy to help her reflect on the situations presented in each of the *cases*. In her analysis of the first *case*, she reflected on why the student might have been having problems in school.

*...I feel that he may not have been able to control many of his actions because of his ADHD. He also could have sensed that the students were always teasing him and felt that he had to retaliate...*

In her discussion and analysis of the second *case*, she reflected on why the lower level students did not want to read out loud and just wanted to work on worksheets. *I feel that the below level students may want to work on the worksheets because they are embarrassed to read aloud...they weren't ...as good at reading...that's why they didn't enjoy it....*

Sheila reflected in her analysis of the third *case* about the behaviors of the teacher and her interactions with the students. *...I feel that Mrs. Anderson needs someone ...to*

*tell her that she doesn't interact with her entire class...she never called on the other students...if she used various procedures...things would run ...smoother...*

In her discussion and analysis of the fourth *case*, she couldn't understand the behaviors of the assistant principal and the guidance counselor. She stated, *...I do not understand how the assistant princi[pal] and counselor felt they could benefit this student by removing him from his normal testing environment...* She felt that the teacher had no *...control over... the situation.*

Sheila reflected on the behavior of the teacher in the fifth case, wondering why she had not recommended that the guidance counselor see the belligerent student. *...they didn't mention having the student sit down and talk with the counselor....I thought ...that's one of the first [things that should be done].*

Using *cases* as a strategy gave Sheila the opportunity to reflect on the dilemmas presented in each case. She also reflected on the behaviors of all parties involved in the *cases*.

#### *Helped Me Identify Solutions*

Sheila used *cases* as a strategy to help her identify solutions to the dilemmas presented. In her post-*case* interview she stated that each of her classmates *...had a different solution for all the cases.* It helped her identify many solutions for the same problem.

In the class discussion of the second *case*, Sheila offered several solutions to the problem presented. Among those solutions were *...peer tutoring...a teacher's aide to help with that group of students...media and technology...they can read at home...read it*

*as a group in class...read the story off the computer...* These were various solutions she felt would help the teacher who had many reading levels in her class.

In her analysis of the third *case*, Sheila stated that *...Mrs. Anderson should try a different teaching strategy instead of just lecturing and putting problems on the board...* In the class discussion, she related that the teacher could do *...a fraction game...anything other than just standing up there...she could have done peer tutoring....*

Sheila stated in her analysis of the fifth *case* that *...There are many actions...that could have helped Patrice...the teachers could have established a peer-mentoring group.. involved [Patrice] in extracurricular activities...* She felt these might motivate Patrice to do better in school.

Using *cases* as a strategy helped Sheila identify various solutions for the dilemmas presented. She was able to provide several solutions to each of the problems presented in the *cases*.

#### *Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions*

Using *cases* as a strategy also helped Sheila examine the consequences of decisions proposed in the *cases*. In her discussion and analysis of the second *case*, Sheila reiterated several consequences of the solutions she proposed. Concerning using technology, she stated that *...classes may not have the computers in the classroom or enough for each group...technology may not be available.* She also discussed the positive and negative consequences of the teacher trying various instructional strategies. She reiterated that this would *...take more time and effort... [but] the students own abilities would show....*

Again in her analysis of the third *case*, she stated that implementing the solution proposed would take *...time and planning...* on the part of the teacher. In the class discussion of this *case*, she also stated how this decision would *...take a while for the students to get used to it....*

In her analysis of the fifth *case*, she stated the consequences of the solutions presented for helping the belligerent student. She stated that

*...to participate in these extracurricular activities she would have to make good grades....the extracurricular activities would get her involved with school and ...peers [but] it could ...be harmful for her because of the competition...if she didn't succeed she wouldn't feel good about herself...Patrice may not have transportation after school for these activities...*

She listed numerous consequences for this one decision. Some of the consequences were positive and some were negative.

Sheila used *cases* as a strategy to examine the consequences of decisions. She realized that one decision could have many consequences, some of these consequences positive and some of them negative.

#### *Helped Me Think About Multiple Perspectives*

Using *cases* as a strategy helped Sheila think about multiple perspectives. In her post-*case* interview she stated that *cases* helped her *...to see other ways, which is hard for me...* She stated that she tended to be *...narrow minded...stubborn and headstrong. I guess I think my way is a good way....* She stated that *...instead of just looking at your own perspective, you're looking at other perspectives as well...* when *cases* are used as a



strategy. She reiterated, ...*they made me see things from other people's perspectives, not just how I would handle the situation...*

*Cases* used as a strategy helped Sheila think about the perspectives of others, not just her own. They helped her see what other people thought about a situation and how that differed from her own thoughts.

### *Summary*

Sheila uses *cases* as a strategy to help her identify different solutions for a problem and to examine the consequences of the decisions that are made. She realizes that there may be many consequences for one decision, and that the consequences can be positive or negative. *Cases* also give her an opportunity to reflect about the behaviors of the people involved in the *cases*. Finally, *cases* help her think about multiple perspectives, not just her own.

### *Summary of Findings*

<b>Sheila</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Question #1 What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?	Field Experiences Personal Experiences Other People Examine Possible Outcomes Needs and Characteristics of Students
Question #2 How do middle grades preservice teachers use <i>cases</i> as a strategy to foster decision making?	Gave me an opportunity to reflect Helped me identify solutions Helped me examine consequences of decisions Helped me think about multiple perspectives

*Figure 11.* Summary of findings for Case Six: Sheila

Sheila's decision making is influenced by her field experiences where she can observe her teachers as they interact with the students and implement instruction as well

as reflect on the decisions she makes while planning and implementing instruction.

Sheila's personal experiences in the classroom as a student and in working with children influence her decision making. Other people also influence the decisions she makes. She is influenced especially by other teachers. Sheila examines the possible outcomes of any decision she makes to determine the effects it will have on the people involved. Finally, she is influenced by the needs and characteristics of the students.

Sheila uses *cases* as a strategy to foster her decision making by reflecting on the situations presented in the *cases*. She also uses *cases* to foster her decision making by identifying solutions to the problems presented in the *cases* and then examining both the positive and negative consequences of those solutions. Finally, *cases* foster her decision making because they help her think about multiple perspectives rather than just looking at the situation from her own perspective.

#### Case Seven: Susan

##### *Personal Context*

Susan is a 20-year-old junior from a town located in another county in the state. She is a transfer student from a junior college and plays basketball for the college. Her concentrations are math and social studies. Susan actively participates in class discussions and does not mind letting other students know when she disagrees with them. In the class discussion of the fourth *case*, another preservice teacher stated that she did not feel like the teacher in the *case* was very concerned about the student. Susan disagreed, *...I think she's concerned about the student because the first thing it talks about is that she couldn't believe...all...[the people] walking around and talking in circles....*

Susan is very excited about teaching and in her pre-case interview professed that this is the career she has always wanted.

*...I'm excited. I can't wait. I want to be a teacher really...bad. I'm ready to get out of school here so that I can go ahead and start teaching...I feel like that's what I've wanted to do my entire life...*

She has always admired her teachers, and she wants to be a role model for her students like her teachers have been for her. She stated, *...I've always looked up to teachers and they've always been my role models... I really want to be a role model to other students, have students look up to me...*

In her pre-case interview, Susan related how she has worked with children in a variety of settings for many years, and feels that has influenced her decision to become a teacher. *...I've grown up working with children.... working with them through my church, through camps...*

Susan looks to her sister, who has been teaching middle school for two years, for guidance and answers to questions she has concerning teaching. She stated in her pre-case interview, *...my sister is a middle school teacher. ... she's been teaching for two years now.... she's been experiencing what I'll be experiencing very soon...she's helped me ... a lot and told me different ideas...*

Susan wants to make learning exciting and fun for her students. She feels that if an activity is enjoyable, students will learn more. During the pre-case interview, she related an incident where she was planning a lesson and how she wanted that lesson to be fun. She stated that learning that is fun is *...definitely important... students get tired of doing the exact same thing over and over again.... things that I enjoy is what I learn the*

*most.... In her post-case interview, she said that she ...would just like to model myself more after the teacher that has different approaches and that the students really seem to enjoy learning....*

Being prepared when teaching is important for Susan. When relating an incident about going to a field experience and the substitute just telling her to take over, she was concerned that she was not prepared, that she had not received notice ahead of time so that she could have been better prepared. In her pre-case interview she related, ... *I want to be the best prepared that I can be.* In her analysis of the third case, she also stated that the teacher in the case needed to be prepared. ...*For time management, the teacher needs to be prepared with the right worksheets and know exactly what she plans to do during the class period....* Later on in her analysis, she stated again, ...*If I was Mrs. Anderson, I would first incorporate classroom procedures. I would try to stop wasting class time by being prepared and helping the students...* Before teaching her lesson during her field experiences, she detailed how she prepared herself. ...*I went ahead and before the class I made sure that I knew all the definitions myself. I made sure that... I read over everything that I needed to know. I tried to prepare myself...*

Susan is very excited about teaching because it is what she has always wanted to do. She has worked with children in a variety of settings. She wants to make learning exciting and fun for her students because she thinks they will learn more. She also wants to be a role model for her students. Susan considers being prepared an important aspect of teaching.

*What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?*

Five themes emerged concerning what influenced Susan's decision making.

These themes were based on her comments in her pre-case interview and her post-case interview, the five class discussions of each case, the analyses she wrote of each of the five cases discussed in class, and the case she wrote herself. The themes were: field experiences, personal experiences, other people, examine possible outcomes, and needs and characteristics of the students.

*Field Experiences*

Susan is influenced by her field experiences. As she observes the teachers, she makes decisions about what strategies she will use in her own classroom. In her pre-case interview, she described the two field placements she had this semester and how they influenced her decision making.

*I think it helps me [see] a lot of things that I want to do and that I don't want to do..... Actually being in the classroom I get to look and see what the teachers are doing... Right now I'm doing two classes...they're ... totally different ... which gives me a wide experience... one of them has 12 students while the other one has 29 ... [one] stays mainly on just one instructional strategy and doesn't like to use a wide variety [of strategies]... my other teacher is totally opposite... she comes up with new ideas every single day... giving me new ideas all the time...*

Susan's field experiences give her a chance to observe what others do and decide if that is something she would like to do in her own classroom. In her pre-case interview she stated that her field experiences help her see...*a totally different perspective...* In her post-case interview she stated how being in two classrooms was good ...*because if I was*

*only in one classroom, then I'd only... [see] one side of a situation...I would...like to model myself more after the teacher that has different approaches...*

She believes that the experience she gains from actually teaching lessons is important. It gives her a chance to make decisions about what to teach and how to teach it. In her pre-case interview she stated that she liked being able to *...teach a couple of lessons...work... [myself] into it. I think that helps a lot....*

In her pre-case interview, Susan talked about the process she went through when she was making a decision about what to teach during her field experiences and how she was going to teach it.

*... one of my teachers... told me that I could... come up with whatever ...[I wanted] to do. ... that was a huge decision because she didn't give me any guidelines. ... one of them had to do with dividing the class... but the class only had... twelve ... that I would group with so that would be individual. I only had one class period ...I didn't have enough time to do some of the projects because they take more than 45 minutes....some of them had to use a ton of materials. I thought that by the time I got all the materials passed [out] ... then over half the class would be used up... time was a big issue...*

Susan related another incident in her field experience which influenced her decision making. She related how she showed up and her teacher was absent. The substitute turned the class over to her. She was concerned because she was not prepared as she related in her pre-case interview.

*...I had one incidence where I ... didn't know what to do...I ... showed up for a class and ... there was a substitute. He was like ...you can take over....I ... passed*

*out the worksheets like I was told to do... but on the worksheet there... [were] questions that I didn't know. The students were all asking me what it was ... I did not know what to do. I had to make a decision about what... [to] tell them... I ... wrote a note to the teacher saying I didn't know it and that I told them to just put down their best answer and they would go over it later with the teacher when she got back.... [that] was difficult for me because I didn't know the answer... I want to be well prepared...*

In her post-case interview, Susan related another incident that happened in her field experience and the process she went through in making a decision concerning the incident.

*...I knew that I didn't know the teacher very well...I didn't know her procedures...I didn't know the students that well...I didn't think ...I had the authority to make a decision for the students...some teachers...want to handle things...other teachers want you to take control...I didn't know what she...wanted...*

Susan decided to get the students on task and let the teacher handle it when she returned to class. In her written case, she stated...*I chose not to handle it myself because I felt I hadn't been ...[there] long enough to have the right to actually assign a punishment....*

Susan's decision making is influenced by her field experiences. She uses her observations of the students and teachers to decide how she wants to conduct her own classroom. In addition, she reflects on the decisions she made during her own teaching experience to decide what she would do if the situation arose again.

### *Personal Experiences*

The experiences Susan has had in the past influence her decision making. Several times in her pre-case interview and her post-case interview she mentioned past experiences as influencing the decision she made. She said, *...I thought about some of my past experiences...which one I ...had experience with the most, which I've done before...* Again she stated, *...your own past experiences [would] be information to go by....*

In her pre-case interview, Susan related why she chose a particular instructional strategy to use with the students. *...I wanted something for them that they would enjoy and be fun and be able to learn at the same time....things that I enjoy is what I learn the most....that's what I remember about looking back...*

Susan's decision making is also influenced by her experiences with children. In her pre-case interview she related,

*... I've grown up working with children. I guess that's where I got my love for ...wanting to go [in]to ... education, working with them through my church, through camps... I've taught through basketball and camps and variety of past experiences.*

In her analysis of the fifth case, she stated that she arrived at her decision because of her experiences with working with abused children. *... I chose these options from working with abused children in the past. Her actions remind me of some of those children, so I would use the techniques taught during my training such as developing a relationship....*

She also uses her own experiences as a student in the classroom when making decisions. In the class discussion of the third case, she proposed a way for the teacher to alleviate a problem by recalling her own experience in the classroom. *...we usually had*



*three or four [pencil sharpeners] in our classroom when I was growing up. That way they could get their materials ready faster.*

Susan uses her own personal experiences when making a decision. She uses her own experiences with working with children and from her own experiences as a student in the classroom.

### *Other People*

Other people influence Susan's decision making, especially other teachers. In her pre-case interview she stated *...I think other teachers would be the best...if I'm ...a new teacher. Somebody that's been there...* She feels these teachers could tell her *...what's worked best...*

Susan's sister is a teacher, so Susan goes to her for advice about teaching quite often. In her pre-case interview she talked about how her sister has influenced her decision making concerning curriculum and instruction. She stated, *...my sister is a middle school teacher. She's ... been teaching for two years now.... she's been experiencing what I'll be experiencing very soon ... she's helped me with a lot and told me different ideas...*

Susan is also influenced in her decision making by her cooperating teachers. She stated in her pre-case interview, *[I go to]...the teachers I have right now for my practicum.* In her pre-case interview she related how she had talked to one of her cooperating teachers about ideas for teaching. *... I talked to my other teacher... the one ... that has all these different ideas and information ... [she] gave me some different ideas that I could use.* In her post-case interview she continued talking about how this teacher had an influence on her decision making.

*...she would talk to me about her other classes and show me what she was doing in the other classes... she told me ...different projects that they did and different ways that her students would learn... her students seemed to ... enjoy themselves and have fun and want to learn... they knew exactly what was coming every day... I would ... like to model myself more after the teacher that has different approaches...*

Teachers she had when she was a student also influence the decisions she makes. In her post-case interview she stated that *... if I liked a certain teacher, the way she went about things, I'd probably go to that teacher to ask her how she would approach something...* In her post-case interview she talked about going to her *...high school [ and] my middle school teachers. I talk to them a lot....ask them for advice and suggestions...*

In her post-case interview, she also said that she asked *...other students that are in the classroom with me that are going through the exact same thing....* for advice.

Therefore, Susan seeks advice from other preservice teachers.

Susan also mentioned talking with other people in general. She said in her post-case interview, *...I always talk to my parents....just talking to other people, seeing if...they had been in the situation before or they...knew something about that field...*

Susan seeks advice from other people when making a decision, especially other teachers. These teachers include her sister, her cooperating teachers, teachers she had when she was a student, and other preservice teachers. She also seeks advice from her parents and others who have been in the same situation she is experiencing.

### *Examine Possible Outcomes*

When making a decision, Susan examines the possible outcomes of that decision. She looks at both the positive and negative consequences of her decision. In her pre-case interview she stated that she tries *...to think of the consequences ...the positive and the negative...* In her post-case interview, she said *...I ...come up with ...different possible solutions first and then I try to think of the consequences of each of the solutions...* After thinking about the possible outcomes, she tries *... to go with the best ...outcome... .whichever has the best consequences, that's the one I try...*

Susan looks at all the possible outcomes when making a decision. After examining both the positive and negative consequences of her decision, she makes the decision that she thinks is best based on the outcomes.

### *Needs and Characteristics of the Students*

Susan takes into consideration the needs and characteristics of the students when making a decision. In her pre-case interview, she stated that when planning a lesson the teachers needs to *...observe ...students and decide ...what instructional methods you'd want to use and which ones would be best for your students...there's a lot of variety in students, all learn in different ways...*

In her pre-case interview, Susan talked about how she made the decision about what to teach for one of her lessons. She wanted to do something that would be beneficial for the students while at the same time being fun and enjoyable for them.

*...I had to decide...what would best help the student...something ...that would be beneficial to them...I decided to review...it would be something that could [be]*

*fun, they could enjoy...[it would] be something different from their every day routine...*

Again she stated that she wanted to do what *...would be most appropriate for the students...they'd all like...* She wanted *...something for them that they would enjoy and be fun and be able to learn at the same time....*

Susan believes that learning should be fun. According to her, making learning fun is an important part of teaching. She stated in her pre-case interview that learning that's fun is *...definitely important...students get tired of doing the ...same thing over and over again...things that I enjoy is what I learn the most...*

Susan is influenced in her decision making by the needs and characteristics of the students. She believes a teacher must consider what the students know and how they learn as well as what would be fun and enjoyable to them. She believes that making learning fun is an important aspect of teaching.

### *Summary*

Susan is influenced in her decision making by her field experiences. She observes her teachers and decides what she wants to do or not do in her own classroom. In addition, she reflects on her own teaching as well. Susan also uses her personal experiences when making decisions. These experiences include her experiences as a student and her experiences with working with children. Susan seeks advice from other people when making a decision, especially from other teachers. When making a decision, Susan looks at all the possible outcomes of a decision, both positive and negative, and then makes what she considers the best decision based on those outcomes.

Finally, Susan takes into consideration the needs and characteristics of the students when making a decision.

*How do Middle Grades Preservice Teachers use Cases  
as a Strategy to Foster Their Decision Making?*

Four themes emerged concerning what happens when *cases* are used as a strategy to foster Susan's decision making. These themes were based on her comments in her pre-*case* interview and her post-*case* interview, the five class discussions of each *case*, the analyses she wrote of each of the five *cases* discussed in class, and the *case* she wrote herself. The four themes were: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me identify solutions, helped me examine consequences of decisions, and put me in the role of the teacher.

*Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect*

*Cases* used as a strategy gave Susan an opportunity to reflect on various situations. In her written *case*, she reflected on an incident that had happened during her field experiences.

*...I knew no one was in harm at the time...I didn't want to take time right then to talk with Brittany and Zack...I wanted to get the other students on task reading. I figured the longer I let the students go free, the more chaos would take place....*

After reflection, she *...felt I chose the right decision.*

In her analysis of the first *case*, Susan reflected about what she considers to be the problem in the case. *...I think the teacher does not have good classroom management ...the teacher must decide if she is going to allow this type of behavior to exist or if she is gong to put an end to it....* Again in her analysis of the second *case*, she reflected on the

problem the teacher was experiencing. *...I think the dilemma began when Karen decided to do worksheets for two weeks straight. This dilemma probably occurs everyday in classrooms....*

In her analysis and discussion of the fourth *case*, Susan reflected on the actions of the teacher when she said, *...I thought the teacher tried to act properly and did the best that she could.* In her analysis she said that the situation needed to be taken care of immediately. *...I think something needs to be done right then.*

Susan discussed the attitude of the belligerent student in her analysis of the fifth *case*. She stated, *...Patrice's behavior is probably being caused by something much deeper than just not wanting to do school work because she was doing her work well at the beginning of the year.* In the class discussion, she reflected on the idea presented by another student concerning talking with Patrice and getting her to open up. She said that Patrice *...doesn't seem like a kid ...that's just going to open up to you....she does her own thing...she doesn't want to do anything.....*

Susan uses *cases* as a strategy to reflect on the situations presented in the *cases*. They give her the opportunity to reflect on the behaviors of all persons involved in the dilemmas presented in the *cases*.

#### *Helped Me to Identify Solutions*

*Cases* used as a strategy helped Susan identify solutions to the dilemmas presented. In her post-*case* interview, she stated that *cases* helped you *...find the best outcome or...discuss ...the best solutions to the problem....it...makes me look at ...a variety of possible answers...* Later she stated that the class would discuss each *case* and *...give a bunch of different solutions.....*

In her analysis of the first *case*, she provided a solution to the problem of a student nobody wanted to work with during group work. She stated that a ... *solution would be bringing Character Education into the classroom...if there were a rewards system based on characteristics displayed by the students that were taught in Character Education ...students could possibly refrain from bad behavior to get rewards.*

Susan discussed two possible solutions to the teacher's problem in her analysis of the third *case*. She felt that the teacher needed to ...*enforce classroom procedures...* She also felt that the teacher could interact better with her students by trying... *different teaching strategies... such as math games or hands-on projects.*

In her analysis of the fourth *case*, she offered three possible solutions for the problem presented. She said the teacher could ...*ignore the problem...* or ...*go to the principal or higher authority to let him know the situation.* The last solution she offered was that the ...*students who have on their IEP that they need extra time to take a test be put in a resource room...* In her analysis of the fifth *case*, she stated that ...*peer counseling is a good option....*

Susan used *cases* as a strategy to help her identify various solutions to the problems presented in the *cases*. The *cases* gave her an opportunity to think of the various solutions she would use as well as examine the solutions of her peers.

#### *Put Me in the Role of the Teacher*

*Cases* used as a strategy fostered Susan's decision making by giving her the opportunity to put herself in the role of the teacher. In her post-*case* interview she stated, ...*you always wonder what would I do in that situation...* In the discussion of the first *case*, she stated what she would do if she were the teacher. She stated, [I would] ...*make*

*sure you...have something written down...if he's not paying attention, you can...point to it and he can go back over it and reread it...*

In the class discussion and her analysis of the second *case* Susan again described what she would do if she were the teacher in this situation. *...I would combine... worksheets...and ... reading...I'd mix them up....let the students know that there is no need to complain...she is open for suggestions...*

Susan again placed herself in the role of the teacher during the class discussion and in her analysis of the third *case*.

*...If I was Mrs. Anderson, I would first incorporate classroom procedures. I would...stop wasting class time by being prepared and helping the students...the teacher's got to be ready, too...I would use different teaching techniques to keep the students['] attention and to make sure... [there] were different ways that would help them grasp fractions.*

In her analyses of both the fourth and fifth *cases*, Susan assumed the role of the teacher and stated what she would do in those situations. In the analysis of the fourth *case*, she wrote, *...I would approach the counselor or principal and ask if Dee could be relocated [to a] resource room where he could finish his test in desirable test taking conditions...* In her analysis of the fifth *case* she stated,

*...As the teacher, I would first look in her records and talk to previous teachers and others who may know her well to see if there is anything in her past that may be affecting her....I would try to develop a relationship with Patrice...I would try to talk to Patrice...*



Susan used *cases* as a strategy to put herself in the role of the teacher presented in the *cases*. She discussed what she would do if she were placed in the situations presented in the *cases*.

*Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions*

*Cases* used as a strategy helped Susan examine the consequences of decisions that were made concerning each *case*. In her analysis and in the class discussion of the first *case*, she listed several consequences of the decisions proposed in the *case*. ...*bringing Character Education...might help students realize ...their taunting is not appropriate....may also help the students...get along better....a worse case scenario is ...something doesn't work and you just have to try something else...*

In her analysis of the second *case*, not only did Susan describe the consequences of the decisions, but she related both the positive and negative consequences.

*...Grouping has positive and negative consequences. If grouped by reading level, the lower level students may have lower self-esteem....may even have a harder time with no one to be a role model reader....if grouped variously, ...higher level readers may have a positive impact on the lower level readers...the lower level readers don't have to worry about the class listening to them read...*

Susan listed consequences of the decision to establish classroom procedures and vary instructional strategies in her analysis of the third *case*. She stated that implementing classroom procedures will help because *...there will not be as much wasted time and there will be more organization. Students will know what is expected of them.* Varying instructional strategies, she stated, *...would give her students a different perspective on fractions and would probably keep their attention better....*

Susan reiterated in the class discussion of the fifth *case* that decisions have both positive and negative consequences. She mentioned both when decisions to be made were discussed. She felt that if the student in this *case* was given a major role during cooperative grouping she would know *...that her group's... depending on her...to fulfill her role...maybe that would help bring her around....* Then she mentioned the negative consequence of another decision as. *...You don't know that she's going to fulfill her job...you don't know how she's going to react to it....*

Susan used *cases* as a strategy to help her examine the consequences of the decisions made in each *case* presented. She was able to examine both the negative and positive consequences of the solutions offered to the problems.

### *Summary*

Susan used *cases* as a strategy to reflect on the situations presented in each of the *cases* and on the thoughts of her classmates concerning the *cases*. *Cases* helped her identify solutions to the various problems presented and to examine the consequences of those decisions. She examined both the positive and the negative consequences. Finally, *cases* used as a strategy put her in the role of the teacher. She looked at many of the situations as if she were the teacher and reflected about what she would do.

*Summary of Findings*

<b>Susan</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Question #1 What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers?	Field Experiences Personal Experiences Other People Examine Possible Outcomes Needs and Characteristics of the Students
Question #2 How do middle grades preservice teachers use <i>cases</i> as a strategy to foster decision making?	Gave me an opportunity to reflect Helped me identify solutions Put Me in the Role of the Teacher Helped me examine consequences of decisions

*Figure 12.* Summary of findings for Case Seven: Susan

Susan's decision making is influenced by her field experiences. She observes the decisions made by her cooperating teachers to decide if she would do the same in her classroom. In addition, she uses her own experiences in teaching during her field placements to reflect on the decisions she made and how she would do things differently if presented with a similar situation in the future. She also uses her personal experiences when making a decision. These include her experiences as a student as well as her experiences in working with children. Susan talks to other people when making a decision, especially to other teachers. She also talks with her parents and other preservice teachers. Susan examines the outcomes of a decision, the effects it will have on all involved, before she makes a final decision. Finally, she takes into consideration the needs and characteristics of the students, their learning styles and abilities as well as what they enjoy.

Susan uses *cases* as a strategy to foster her decision making by reflecting on the situations that are presented in the *cases* and by putting herself in the role of the teacher.

She also uses *cases* as a strategy to foster her decision making by identifying solutions to the problems presented and examining the consequences of these decisions, both positive and negative.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings and interpretations of the seven case studies, Keith, Michael, Erin, Amber, Leanne, Sheila, and Susan. Chapter 5 presents the cross case analysis of these seven cases.

## CHAPTER 5

### CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

In this chapter I present findings from the cross case analysis of my seven participants: Keith, Michael, Erin, Leanne, Amber, Sheila and Susan. Each were preservice teachers enrolled in the Middle Grades Program at a small Christian college located in the southeast. Findings in this chapter answer my two research questions. For each research question, I first present common themes and then differing themes for the participants followed by a discussion. I then summarize findings across participants for each research question.

#### Common Themes: What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?

Looking across all seven participants, there are three common themes regarding decision making influences of middle grades preservice teachers. These themes are: field experiences, personal experiences, and other people (see Figure 13).

#### *Field Experiences*

Keith's field experiences influence his decision making. While participating in these experiences, he observes ways to manage a classroom and implement instruction to meet the individual needs of a diverse classroom. He also gets practice in planning and implementing instruction, thereby making decisions that teachers make each day in the classroom. He is concerned about some of the decisions he made in the field and about the perceptions his cooperating teachers and the students have of him.

<b>Case</b>	<b>Common Themes</b>		
<b>Keith</b>	Field Experiences	Personal Experiences	Other People
<b>Michael</b>	Field Experiences	Personal Experiences	Other People
<b>Erin</b>	Field Experiences	Personal Experiences	Other People
<b>Leanne</b>	Field Experiences	Personal Experiences	Other People
<b>Amber</b>	Field Experiences	Personal Experiences	Other People
<b>Sheila</b>	Field Experiences	Personal Experiences	Other People
<b>Susan</b>	Field Experiences	Personal Experiences	Other People

*Figure 13 . Common themes for what influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers*

It is evident that Michael is influenced in his decision making by his field experiences. His observations of different teaching and learning styles during his field experiences will assist him in making decisions in his own classroom. However, he feels somewhat limited in the decisions he can make during his field experiences because it is not his classroom.

Erin is influenced in her decision making by her field experiences. During this time, she gains experience in making decisions concerning teaching and implementing lessons as well as experience in interacting with students. By observing her cooperating teachers interacting with students and implementing instruction, she gains a better understanding of strategies she will want to use in her own classroom. Finally, Erin reflects on the decisions she makes while being involved in the teaching process to make more informed decisions when she has her own classroom.

Leanne is influenced in her decision making as she observes the teachers and students interacting in a classroom setting. She gains ideas about teaching and resources she can use in her own classroom. She also gains valuable experience in interacting with students in a classroom setting. As Leanne reflects on the decisions that she made while planning and implementing instruction in the classroom, she gains valuable insight into situations she will face as a middle school teacher.

The time Amber spends in the classroom gives her actual experience in making decisions concerning planning and implementing lessons. Her decision making is influenced as she observes the interactions of the students and teachers and looks at the setup of the classroom. By reflecting on the decisions she makes while in the classroom, she gains a better understanding of the situations she will face as a classroom teacher.

Sheila's observation of different teaching and learning styles gives her the opportunity to think about the kinds of decisions she will have to make as a middle school teacher. Her observation of ideas she likes and doesn't like provide her with an opportunity to think about how she will manage her own classroom as well as implement instruction. She also has a chance to examine the decisions she makes while planning and implementing instruction, thus influencing what she will do in her own classroom.

Susan uses her observations of the students and teachers and how they interact during her field experiences to decide how she wants to conduct her own classroom. She gains valuable experience from teaching lessons and reflecting on the decisions she makes during her teaching experience to decide what she would do if the situation arose again.

### *Discussion*

The decision making of all seven participants was influenced by field experiences. All seven participants felt that their experiences in the field gave them valuable experience in learning from others in the field of education. Each of the seven participants discussed the different teaching styles they were able to observe. Keith, Leanne, Sheila, and Susan all discussed ideas they had observed that they wanted to implement in the classroom as well as ideas they did not want to use in the classroom. All seven participants tended to talk more favorably about one classroom or teacher than the other.

All seven participants expressed some concerns they had about the decisions they made while planning and implementing instruction. All but Sheila were concerned about their interactions with the students and how the students reacted to their teaching.



Leanne, Susan, and Sheila were concerned about what their cooperating teacher would say about a decision they made. Amber and Michael were concerned about what their supervising teacher would say about the decisions they made while she was observing them teaching. Michael, Leanne, and Susan felt somewhat limited in what they could do during their field experiences because it was not their classroom.

All seven participants felt that getting to actually plan and implement instruction during their field experiences was very helpful. It gave them the opportunity to make decisions that they will have to make every day as a middle school teacher.

### *Personal Experiences*

Keith recalls his own personal experiences when he makes decisions. These experiences include those he has had as a student in the classroom as well as his experiences working with his youth group at his church. In addition, he recalls his own personal feelings about a situation to assist him in making decisions in given situations. Some of the knowledge he uses to make decisions has been acquired in his classes at the college, while other knowledge comes from his own theories of teaching and learning.

When looking for ways to deal with situations in the classroom, Michael recalls his own experiences as a student. He also recalls what he has observed others doing in different situations before he makes a decision concerning what he should do in a similar situation. When making a decision concerning curriculum and instruction, Michael calls on the knowledge he has acquired in several of his courses at the college.

Erin calls on her own past experiences when making decisions. She recalls her own personal experiences in school where she observed or participated in various activities. Additionally, she recalls the experiences of some of her family members.

Finally, she uses the knowledge she had acquired in her courses at the college when making decisions.

Leanne uses her own personal experiences as a decision making strategy. These past experiences include her experiences as a student in the classroom as well as her experiences with children in her church. She also uses her observations of the decision making of the teachers who taught her when making decisions. Leanne uses the knowledge she has gained in classes at the college when making decisions concerning curriculum and instruction. She related several strategies discussed in her various college courses.

Amber's past experiences influence her decision making in the classroom. When looking for ways to solve dilemmas that confront her in the classroom, she recalls her own experiences as a student. Amber uses the knowledge she has gained from her college classes when making decisions concerning what she will teach, how she will teach it, and how she will assess the learners. In particular, she recalls the many instructional strategies discussed in these classes.

Sheila is influenced in her decision making by her personal experiences as a student in the classroom. In addition, she recalls problems she has experienced which are similar to the ones in question. She recalls the decisions made by her former teachers when making decisions. Finally, she is influenced in her decision making by the experiences she has gained working with children.

Her own personal experiences influence Susan when she makes a decision, especially her experiences as a student in the classroom. When making a decision, she

recalls what she has had the most experience with. Finally, she uses her own experiences with working with children when making a decision.

### *Discussion*

All seven participants were influenced in their decision making by their experiences in the classroom as a student. Each described incidents where they made a decision based on what they had been taught or what they had observed their teachers doing in the classroom. In addition, all seven participants related past experiences other than that of a student as influencing their decision making. They related personal experiences in which they identified with the children in the *cases* being presented.

Leanne, Sheila, Susan, and Keith related that their work with children influenced their decision making. Keith, Susan, and Leanne all mentioned working with children at church as influencing their decision making while Sheila mentioned her work with children at the YMCA. They felt their experiences with working with children were beneficial in aiding their decision making process.

Of the seven participants, only two, Leanne and Michael, mentioned their past experience in teaching in the classroom as influencing their decision making. Three of the seven participants, Amber, Michael, and Keith, felt that their college classes influenced their decision making. They used the knowledge they gained in these classes when making decisions, especially decisions concerning curriculum and instruction.

### *Other People*

Keith seeks advice from other people when making a decision. He looks to his family for advice, especially his parents. When making a decision, he approaches other teachers for advice, especially his former teachers because they have experience in

teacher decision making. Finally, other preservice teachers are used by Keith when making a decision because they are encountering some of the same situations in which he finds himself.

Michael's decision making is influenced by other people, particularly other teachers and other preservice teachers. However, he likes to seek advice from those who are more experienced concerning the decision he is trying to make. In addition, he likes to get different perspectives about the situation before making a decision so he can make a more informed decision.

Erin seeks the advice of other people when making a decision. She consults with other preservice teachers and other teachers, in particular her friends who are teachers, if it is a decision concerning the classroom. Erin feels that talking with someone who has experience in a similar situation assists her in evaluating the situation, thus making her decision making easier.

When making a decision, Leanne seeks advice from other people, including her cooperating teachers. Many times her decision is based on what she has observed these cooperating teachers do in the classroom. She likes to seek advice from those who are more experienced, because she feels they will have more wisdom concerning the matter. At times she seeks advice from other preservice teachers who are in similar situations.

Several different groups of people influence Amber's decision making in the classroom. First, she uses ideas she has observed her cooperating teachers using in the classroom to make a decision. In addition, she looks to other preservice teachers for advice, asking them what they would do or what they have done in a similar situation. Finally, she seeks advice from her professors at the college. When faced with a decision,

Amber feels that it is better to seek advice from several sources in order to have several options from which she can choose. Then she can decide what would be the best solution in her situation.

Sheila's decision making is influenced by other people, especially other teachers. Many times these teachers are her cooperating teachers from her field experiences. At times, she is influenced in her decision making by what she has heard her classmates do in the classroom.

Susan seeks advice from other people when making a decision, especially other teachers. These teachers include her sister, her cooperating teachers, and teachers she had when she was a student. In addition, she sometimes asks other preservice teachers for help in making a decision. Her parents and others who have been in the same situation she is experiencing are also good sources of advice.

### *Discussion*

All seven participants reiterated that other people had an influence on their decision making, especially other teachers. These teachers included teachers they had in the past or just other teachers in general. Susan, Leanne, Erin, and Michael sought the advice of others who were experienced because they had been in a similar situation and could relate the decision they had made and the consequences of that decision. Amber and Michael liked to ask several people for advice when making decisions. They felt they could get different perspectives about the situation and choose from the alternatives offered.

Six of the cases, Keith, Susan, Leanne, Sheila, Michael, and Amber, sought advice from their cooperating teachers in the field. Erin is the only one who did not

mention using the advice of the cooperating teacher when making a decision. Keith, Leanne, Erin, and Amber asked other preservice teachers for advice when making a decision. These preservice teachers were involved in the same kinds of situations, thereby making those seeking advice feel more comfortable in doing so. Of the seven cases, only two, Susan and Amber, mentioned going to one of the professors at the college for advice. Three cases, Keith, Susan, and Michael, also sought advice from family members when making a decision. Some of these family members were teachers, but others were not.

#### Differing Themes: What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?

Looking across all seven participants, there are three differing themes regarding decision making influences of middle grades preservice teachers. These themes are: outside sources, examine possible outcomes, and needs and characteristics of students. Keith and Erin both had the theme of outside sources. Keith, Susan, Amber, Sheila, and Leanne all had the theme of needs and characteristics of students. The theme of examine possible outcomes was attributed only to Susan, Sheila and Leanne (see Figure 14).

##### *Outside Sources*

When making a decision, Keith sometimes consults outside sources. In particular, he consults the Bible because it teaches people how to live. He also uses the Internet to gain ideas and information. When making a decision, Keith also thinks about his own personal values as well as the values of our society in general.

<b>Case</b>	<b>Differing Themes</b>		
<b>Keith</b>		Outside sources	Needs and Characteristics of Students
<b>Michael</b>			
<b>Erin</b>		Outside sources	
<b>Leanne</b>	Examine Possible Outcomes		Needs and Characteristics of Students
<b>Amber</b>			Needs and Characteristics of Students
<b>Sheila</b>	Examine Possible Outcomes		Needs and Characteristics of Students
<b>Susan</b>	Examine Possible Outcomes		Needs and Characteristics of Students

*Figure 14.* Differing themes for what influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers

At times, Erin uses outside sources when making a decision. She uses the Internet to find information which will assist her in making a decision. Sometimes she consults other books to see how other people handled the situation with which she is faced.

### *Discussion*

When making a decision, Keith and Erin used outside sources. These outside sources varied. Both Keith and Erin used the Internet when making a decision. They looked up information concerning the situation in which they had to make a decision to assist them in making the decision. They also used it to gain ideas about teaching strategies. Erin sometimes used other books to gain information and ideas as well while Keith used the Bible as a source for decision making. Keith also considered his own personal values as well as society's values when making a decision. However, he used his own personal values more than society's values.

### *Needs and Characteristics of Students*

When Keith makes a decision, he is influenced by the needs and characteristics of the students. This may be knowledge about their individual needs or how much they already know about the subject matter. In addition, the interests of the students and what they like to do influence his decision making.

Leanne is influenced in her decision making by the knowledge that she has of the students she is working with and by their individual needs. She examines ideas to try to make a decision that would be most beneficial to everyone involved in the decision, while at the same time taking into consideration the interests of the students.

Amber considers the individual needs of her students when making decisions involving these students. She uses her knowledge of the abilities of the students and her



knowledge of their backgrounds when making these decisions. In addition, she considers what activities they consider enjoyable.

Sheila's decision making is influenced by her students, in particular their needs and characteristics. She wants to make sure that her decision will benefit the students and make learning interesting and fun for them. She also takes into consideration their ability level when making decisions to better meet their needs.

Susan is influenced in her decision making by the characteristics of the students and the individual needs they have. When making a decision, she considers what the students know and how they learn as well as what they consider fun and enjoyable. She believes that making learning fun is an important aspect of teaching.

### *Discussion*

Of the seven participants, five identified the needs and characteristics of students as influencing their decision making process. Those five were Keith, Susan, Amber, Sheila, and Leanne. All five were influenced by the particular needs of the students. Keith and Amber take into consideration what the students already know when making a decision. Keith, Leanne, and Amber also look at the interests the students have about various topics when making a decision. Whether or not students will enjoy an activity is taken into consideration by Keith, Amber, Sheila, and Susan when making a decision. When making a decision, Leanne, Amber, Sheila, and Susan all examine how the students will benefit. Knowledge of the students themselves, for example knowledge about their background, is taken into consideration by Keith, Leanne, Amber, and Sheila.

### *Examine Possible Outcomes*

When she makes a decision, Susan looks at all the possible outcomes of that decision. She examines both the positive and negative consequences of her decision, and then makes the decision that she thinks is best based on the outcomes she has examined.

Sheila thinks about the possible effects, both positive and negative, on everyone involved before making a decision. She looks at how everyone involved in the decision will benefit and what will happen after the decision is made.

Leanne examines the possible outcomes of the decision she is making. She looks at how each outcome will affect each of the people involved in her decision. She looks at both the good effects and the bad effects of her decision.

### *Discussion*

Sheila, Leanne, and Susan are influenced in their decision making by the potential outcomes of the situation. They look at how the decision will affect the people involved in the decision. They examine both the positive consequences and the negative consequences of the decision they will make to determine how best to resolve the situation. Susan thinks about what will happen after the decision is made.

### *Summary*

These seven middle grades preservice teachers have three themes in common concerning what influences their decision making: field experiences, personal experiences, and other people. The encounters they had in the field gave them valuable experience in learning from about the teaching/learning process. They were able to observe different teaching and learning styles as the teachers interacted with the students in the classroom to gain a better understanding of the types of decisions they will have to

make in the classroom. In addition, they gain ideas about what they want to do and what they do not want to do in their own classrooms.

These seven middle school preservice teachers also gained experience in making decisions in the classroom themselves while planning and implementing instruction. All were concerned about the decisions they made. Most were concerned about their interactions with the students and how the students perceived their actions. Leanne, Susan, and Sheila were also concerned about the thoughts of the cooperating teachers concerning the decisions they made while teaching. Amber and Michael were concerned about how their supervising teacher would perceive the decisions they made while teaching. Three preservice teachers, Leanne, Michael, and Susan, felt somewhat limited in the decisions they could make while teaching because this was not their own classroom. They did not want to do anything contrary to what their cooperating teacher would want them to do.

The personal experiences of these seven middle school preservice teachers also influenced their decision making. Each related personal incidents that contributed to their decision making in certain situations. Some of these incidents were situations that had happened to them in the classroom when they were a student, and some were situations that had happened to them outside the classroom.

Four of the preservice teachers, Leanne, Sheila, Susan, and Keith, are influenced in their decision making by their work with children in various settings. The knowledge gained from the courses taken at the college influenced the decision making of Amber, Michael, and Keith.

The decision making of all seven participants was influenced by other people. These people included teachers the seven participants had in the past or other teachers. Amber and Michael felt that asking more than one person would help them make a more informed decision because they could choose from the options given by the people with whom they talked. Susan, Leanne, Erin, and Michael all liked to talk to people who were more experienced in a situation before they made a decision because that person would already have made a decision in a similar situation and could relate the consequences of the decision they made. Keith, Susan, Leanne, Sheila, Michael, and Amber were influenced in their decision making by their cooperating teachers. Other preservice teachers had influence on the decision making of Keith, Leanne, Erin, and Amber. Other people who influenced the decision making of some of the participants were family members and professors at the college.

Erin and Keith sought information from outside sources when making a decision. The needs and characteristics of the students influenced the decision making of Keith, Susan, Amber, Sheila, and Leanne. These needs and characteristics included the abilities of the students, the interests of the students, what the students would enjoy, and benefits for students. Keith, Leanne, and Amber also took into consideration their knowledge of the students when making a decision. What effect their decision would have on others and what the outcomes would be influenced the decisions made by Sheila and Susan. Both the positive and negative consequences of the decision were considered by Sheila and Susan before they made a decision.

### Common Themes: How do Middle Grades

#### Preservice Teachers use *Cases* as a Strategy to Foster Decision Making?

Looking across all seven participants, there are three common themes regarding how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. These themes are: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me identify solutions, and helped me examine consequences of decisions (see Figure 15).

#### *Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect*

Keith uses *cases* as a strategy to help him reflect of the situations presented in each of the *cases* and the behaviors of the people involved in the *case*. Not only did he reflect on the behaviors of the people involved, but also on the possible reasons for the behaviors.

Using *cases* as a strategy gives Michael the opportunity to reflect about the situations presented and what his peers have to say about the situation. He can think about his own ideas and the ideas of others. He thinks about whether he would handle the situation presented the same way as those involved in the *case* or differently from those involved in the *case* and the reasons for his actions.

Erin reflects on the situations of the students and teachers presented in the *cases* when using *cases* as a strategy. She uses it as a time to ask questions of her peers about possible reasons for the actions of all the people involved in the *case* and reflect on what they have to say.

Leanne uses *cases* a strategy to think about the decisions made by all involved in the *cases*. At times, she reflects on information presented in the *case* that she had not

<b>Case</b>	<b>Common Themes</b>		
<b>Keith</b>	Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect	Helped Me Identify Solutions	Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions
<b>Michael</b>	Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect	Helped Me Identify Solutions	Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions
<b>Erin</b>	Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect	Helped Me Identify Solutions	Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions
<b>Leanne</b>	Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect	Helped Me Identify Solutions	Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions
<b>Amber</b>	Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect	Helped Me Identify Solutions	Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions
<b>Sheila</b>	Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect	Helped Me Identify Solutions	Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions
<b>Susan</b>	Gave Me an Opportunity to Reflect	Helped Me Identify Solutions	Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions

*Figure 15 . Common themes for how middle grades preservice teachers use cases as a strategy to foster decision making*

thought about previously. The use of *cases* as a strategy has helped her realize that there are many people in the schools who can be used as resources when teachers encounter problems in the classroom.

*Cases* used as a strategy gives Amber an opportunity to reflect on the situations presented in the *cases* and the situation she detailed in her written case. She reflected on both the behaviors of the students and the teachers involved in the *cases* and the feelings of all involved.

Using *cases* as a strategy gave Sheila the opportunity to reflect on the dilemmas presented in each case. She reflected on the behaviors of all parties involved in the *cases*, students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

Susan uses *cases* as a strategy to reflect on the situations presented in the *cases* and in her own written *case*. They give her the opportunity to reflect on the behaviors and actions of all persons involved in the dilemmas presented in the *cases* and the possible reasons for these actions and behaviors.

### *Discussion*

Michael and Leanne felt that using *cases* as a strategy gave them the opportunity to think more about the situations presented in the *cases* and the decisions that were made. It gave them the opportunity to reflect on situations they might not have thought about previously. Erin also used *cases* as an opportunity to pose questions to her peers about the situations presented in the *cases* in the hopes of clarifying the situation.

An opportunity to reflect on the actions and behaviors of the teachers mentioned in the *cases* was used by all seven *cases*. Keith, Erin, Amber, and Susan all reflected on the actions and behaviors of the students as well. In addition, Susan, Sheila, and Keith

reflected on the feelings of the students involved in the case. The actions and behaviors of others, such as parents or administrators, was reflected on by Erin, Amber, and Sheila.

Leanne, Amber, and Susan used *cases* as a strategy to reflect on their own experience while teaching in the classroom. They thought about the decisions they made while teaching and their reasons for making these decisions. In addition, Leanne used *cases* as a strategy to reflect on the various resources mentioned in one of the *cases* of which she had not previously been aware.

### *Helped Me Identify Solutions*

Keith used *cases* as a strategy to help him identify various solutions to the problems in the five *cases*. In many of the case analyses, he identified several solutions to the problems presented in the *cases*. Michael offered various solutions to the problems presented in the *cases*. He uses *cases* as a strategy to make his own decision about what should be done in the situation presented in the *case*. Using *cases* as a strategy gave Erin the opportunity to identify alternatives to the dilemmas presented in each of the *cases* and examine the alternatives proposed by her classmates. She was able to provide many alternatives to each of the situations presented.

Using *cases* as a strategy has helped Leanne to identify various solutions to the many problems presented in the *cases*. The class discussions gave her ideas and suggestions that she had not thought of herself. Amber uses *cases* as a strategy to help her identify and examine many solutions to a dilemma. The types of decisions she would make would depend on the circumstances presented in the *case*.



Sheila used *cases* as a strategy to help her identify many solutions, not just one, to the dilemmas presented. Susan used *cases* as a strategy to help her think of the various solutions she would use as well as examine the solutions of her peers.

### *Discussion*

All seven participants identified various solutions to the dilemmas presented in the *cases* when using *cases* as a strategy. All seven said that using *cases* was a way to identify various alternatives that could be used in the given situations. Using *cases* as a strategy helped them identify the various solutions the teacher could use to solve the problem and decide which alternative provided would be the best in this particular situation.

Michael and Leanne felt using *cases* as a strategy helped them make their own decision about what should be done in the situation presented in the *case*. Erin and Leanne said that discussing the *case* with their peers assisted them in thinking about alternatives of which they had not previously been aware.

Of the many solutions offered by the students when using *cases* as a strategy, several were mentioned many times by the seven participants. Getting to know and trying to understand the student better was mentioned by Keith, Leanne, Amber, and Sheila. Creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom was discussed by Leanne and Amber. Other solutions discussed by the seven participants at some time during the discussion of the five *cases* were using a variety of instructional strategies, implementing classroom procedures, establishing a character education program in the school, and peer mentoring or peer tutoring.

### *Helped Me Examine Consequences of Decisions*

*Cases* were used as a strategy by Keith to help him examine the consequences of the decisions that were made in the *cases*. He examines both the positive and the negative consequences of these decisions. Using *cases* as a strategy to examine the consequences of decisions gives Michael the opportunity to look at the possible effects of the decisions he makes. Erin used *cases* as a strategy to examine the consequences of the decisions made by the people involved in the *cases*, herself, and her peers. She realizes that the consequences could be both positive and negative. Leanne, Susan, and Amber used *cases* as a strategy to examine both the positive and negative consequences of the decisions offered in the discussion of each *case*. Sheila also realizes from using *cases* as a strategy that one decision could have many consequences, some of these consequences positive and some of them negative.

### *Discussion*

*Cases* were used as a strategy to foster decision making by all seven cases to examine the consequences of the decisions made in the discussion of the *cases*. All seven felt that *cases* used as a strategy assisted them in examining all the possible effects a decision might have on all parties involved in the situation. The stated that *cases* used as a strategy helped them think about their own decisions as well as those proposed by the peers and those made by the persons involved in the case. All seven cases realized that decisions they make may have positive consequences, or they may have negative consequences. Using *cases* as a strategy assisted them in examining both the positive and negative consequences of the decisions. In addition, they realized that a decision may have many consequences, some of them positive and some of them negative.

### Differing Themes: How do Middle Grades

#### Preservice Teachers use *Cases* as a Strategy to Foster Decision Making?

Looking across all seven participants, there are two differing themes regarding how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. These themes are: put me in the role of the teacher and helped me think about multiple perspectives. Keith, Susan, Amber, and Leanne had the theme of put me in the role of the teacher. Michael, Keith, Sheila, and Erin all had the theme of helped me think about multiple perspectives (see Figure 16).

#### *Put Me in the Role of the Teacher*

Keith used *cases* as a strategy to put himself in the role of the teacher. By doing so, he can think more clearly about these situations that he might encounter as the teacher of middle school students. Leanne used *cases* as a strategy to assist her in putting herself in the role of the teacher. *Cases* help her to think about the many situations she will face as a middle school teacher. Amber used *cases* as a strategy to put herself in the role of the teacher as a way to practice making decisions about dilemmas she will face in the classroom. Susan used *cases* as a strategy to put herself in the role of the teacher presented in the *cases* to determine what she might do if she was placed in the situations presented in the *cases*.

#### *Discussion*

Keith, Leanne, Amber, and Susan all placed themselves in the role of the teacher when discussing and analyzing the *cases*. All of them identified various actions they would take if they were the teacher identified in the *case*. Keith felt that *cases* used as a strategy to foster decision making was a better way for a preservice teacher to examine

<b>Case</b>	<b>Differing Themes</b>	
<b>Keith</b>	Put Me in the Role of the teacher	Helped Me Think About Multiple Perspectives
<b>Michael</b>		Helped Me Think About Multiple Perspectives
<b>Erin</b>		Helped Me Think About Multiple Perspectives
<b>Leanne</b>	Put Me in the Role of the teacher	
<b>Amber</b>	Put Me in the Role of the teacher	
<b>Sheila</b>		Helped Me Think About Multiple Perspectives
<b>Susan</b>	Put Me in the Role of the teacher	

*Figure 16.* Differing themes for how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making

the role of the teacher in the classroom. He stated that many times his field experiences didn't present a true picture of the teaching/learning process because the teacher and students were aware of the presence of someone else, thus altering their actions and behaviors. He felt that *cases* used as a strategy gave him a truer picture of the real classroom.

Leanne felt that *cases* used as a strategy to foster decision making assisted her in thinking about what she would do if she were the teacher in the *case* and what she would do in the future as a teacher if that situation arose in her classroom. Amber stated that after using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making, she would remember the *cases* discussed when she was a teacher and a similar situation presented itself. She felt that had *cases* not been used as a strategy to foster decision making, she might not have been introduced to specific situations until she was an actual teacher.

#### *Helped Me Think About Multiple Perspectives*

The discussion of the *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making assisted Keith in gaining a better understanding of the situation presented. In addition, the class discussions of the *cases* gave him an opportunity to examine the ideas of others when solving the dilemmas. Some of these ideas he had not thought of before the discussion ensued. Michael feels that using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making has helped him think about multiple perspectives of the situation, including the perspectives of his peers as well as the perspectives of the different people involved in the dilemma. Using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making assisted Erin in thinking about multiple perspectives because she concluded that her own perspective was biased. *Cases* gave her the opportunity to examine what other people think. Sheila thought about the

perspectives of others, not just her own, when using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. The *cases* helped her see what other people thought about a situation and how that differed from her own thoughts.

### *Discussion*

Keith, Michael, Sheila, and Erin all used *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making by thinking about other perspectives. They believed that using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making gave them the opportunity to think about their own perspective as well as the perspectives of their classmates and the people involved in the *cases*, which sometimes included students, teachers, parents, and administrative personnel. Erin concluded that her own perspective was biased, so it was helpful to listen to the perspectives of others to gain a better understanding of the situation and make a more informed decision. These preservice teachers were able to explore how the perspectives of others differed from their own.

### *Summary*

These seven middle grades preservice teachers have three themes in common concerning how they used *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me to identify solutions, and helped me examine consequences of decisions. All seven participants related that using *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making gave them an opportunity to reflect. They reflected on the situations presented in the *cases*, some of which they had not previously thought about before reading the *cases*. The seven participants reflected on the actions and behaviors of the teachers, the students, and all others involved in the *cases* presented. In addition, Leanne, Amber, and Susan reflected on their own experiences with classroom teaching.

They reflected on the decisions they made during this time and how they affected the people involved as well as themselves.

All seven participants also used *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making because it helped them identify various solutions to the dilemmas presented in the *cases*. Discussing solutions to the problems presented in the *cases* gave these preservice teachers the opportunity to look at many alternatives presented by their peers, many of which they had not been aware.

Using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making gave all seven participants the opportunity to examine the consequences of the decisions proposed in the *case* and by themselves and their peers. All seven participants related that they were able to examine both the positive and negative consequences of decisions to determine the best alternative to use in each situation. Using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making also made them realize that there could be many consequences of just one decision, some of these consequences positive and some of them negative.

Four preservice teachers, Keith, Leanne, Amber, and Susan, placed themselves in the role of the teacher when using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. Each identified what decisions they would make if they were the teacher described in the *case*. Keith felt that *cases* used as a strategy to foster decision making gave a better picture of what the real classroom will be like than did field experiences. He felt the teacher and students he observed during his field experiences altered their behaviors when he was there. Leanne and Amber felt that using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making made them think about what they would do in the future if a similar situation arose in their classroom.

Michael, Keith, Sheila, and Erin used *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making by thinking about multiple perspectives. They thought about their own perspective, the perspectives of their peers, and the perspectives of the characters involved in the *cases*. This was helpful to them because they listened to ideas that were different from their own and it made them think more before they made a decision. According to Erin, her own perspective is biased so listening to and thinking about other perspectives helped her gain a better understanding of the situation.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the cross case analysis of my seven participants. In Chapter 6, I will present a brief summary of my study. Then I will examine each of the two research questions based on the findings from each case and link the findings to the literature. Next, I will provide suggestions for the use of *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making in preservice teacher education. Finally, I will present implications for research in the future.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I present a discussion of my study in which I relate what influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers and how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. First I present a brief summary of my study in which I give the purpose, the rationale, and findings in general of the study. Second, I examine each of my two research questions based on the findings from each *case*. I then link those findings to the literature. Third, I provide recommendations for the use of *cases* as a strategy in preservice teacher education. Fourth, I discuss how this study could have been improved. Finally, I present implications for future research.

#### Summary of the Study

Teachers are confronted with many decisions they must make in the classroom each day. Therefore, decision making is an important teaching skill. Fostering the decision making skills of preservice teachers may assist them in approaching these many decisions they may make as teachers. My desire as a teacher educator is to prepare these future educators to become more effective decision makers in the middle school classroom. This desire led me to examine how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making.

There are many ways to foster the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers. Field experiences and discussion are just two examples. I wanted to examine

how the use of *cases* as a strategy with middle grades preservice teachers might engage them in the decision making process as they explored their own ideas as well as the ideas of others. I developed two research questions to guide my study: 1. What influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers? 2. How do middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making?

Seven middle grades preservice teachers volunteered to participate in the study. All seven participants were members of a class I taught entitled Curriculum: Essentials of Middle School Instruction. All were traditional college students in that they had entered college immediately upon graduation from high school, and were 20-22 years of age. There were five females and two males.

Data was collected in the fall semester of 2002. The data collected included two interviews with each preservice teacher (one before the use of *cases* as a strategy and one after the use of *cases* as a strategy) and class discussions of each of the five *cases*. In addition, artifacts were collected. These included written analyses of each of the five *cases* from all seven participants and a closed *case* written by participants detailing a decision made during their own field experiences.

From these data sources, three common themes emerged to assist me in answering the first research question as to what influences the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers. These common themes were: field experiences, personal experiences, and other people. In addition to these three themes, Keith and Erin were influenced in their decision making by outside sources. Susan, Sheila, and Leanne were also influenced in their decision making by examining possible outcomes in addition to the three common themes. Keith, Susan, Amber, Sheila, and Leanne were influenced in

their decision making by the needs and characteristics of students as well as the three common themes.

Three common themes were also developed from the data sources to assist me in finding how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. These common themes were: gave me an opportunity to reflect, helped me identify solutions, and helped me examine consequences of decisions. Keith, Susan, Amber, and Leanne also used *cases* as a strategy to put them in the role of the teacher. Michael, Keith, Sheila, and Erin used *cases* as a strategy to help them think about multiple perspectives.

#### Discussion of Findings Related to Research Questions

In this discussion of findings, I examine my two research questions. I answer each question based on findings from each case and link those findings to the literature.

##### *What Influences the Decision Making of Middle Grades Preservice Teachers?*

It is impossible to teach preservice teachers all they will need to know to make decisions in the classroom. However, it is important to examine what influences the decisions these preservice teachers make so they can better understand themselves as decision makers and evaluate their own beliefs and perceptions.

##### *What Influenced the Decision Making of Participants?*

Three common themes were established for what influenced the decision making of Michael, Keith, Susan, Amber, Sheila, Erin, and Leanne. These themes were: field experiences, personal experiences, and other people. All seven preservice teachers were influenced in their decision making by their field experiences. They were influenced by

watching the interactions of the teachers and students as they engaged in the teaching/learning process. They were able to observe different teaching styles and learning styles and make decisions concerning what they would like to use in their own classrooms.

All seven preservice teachers engaged in planning and implementing instruction during their field experiences, and all expressed some concerns about the decisions they made during their teaching. Michael, Keith, Susan, Amber, Erin, and Leanne were all concerned about how they interacted with the students and how the students perceived the lesson. Three participants, Leanne, Susan, and Sheila, were concerned about what their cooperating teacher would say about the lesson they were teaching. Amber and Michael were also concerned about what their supervising teacher from the college would say about the decisions they made while teaching. In addition, Michael, Leanne, and Susan felt they were somewhat limited in the decisions they could make in their field experiences. They were very cognizant of the fact that this was not their classroom, and as such, they were limited in the decisions they could make. All felt that actually planning and implementing instruction gave them an opportunity to make the same kinds of decisions they may have to make in the middle school classroom, which they found helpful.

Each of the seven preservice teachers was influenced by their own personal experiences, especially their experiences as a student in the classroom. However, other personal experiences outside the classroom also influenced their decision making. Knowledge gained from their college classes influenced the decision making of Amber, Michael, and Keith. Four preservice teachers, Leanne, Sheila, Susan, and Keith, were

influenced in their decision making by their experiences in working with children. These experiences included working with children and youth at their church as well as other places such as the local YMCA and other camps.

Other people had an influence on the decision making of each of the seven preservice teachers. Other teachers were mentioned most often as the person the preservice teachers asked for advice concerning curriculum and instruction. These teachers included teachers the preservice teachers had in the past, the teachers they had during their field experiences, and family members and friends who were teachers. They felt other teachers were experienced in their decision making in the classroom and could therefore offer better advice about teaching. Keith, Leanne, Erin, and Amber asked other preservice teachers for advice because they felt more comfortable asking someone who was encountering the same experiences. Susan, Leanne, Erin, and Michael felt it was important to ask someone who was more experienced when seeking advice concerning a situation because that person had been through the same experience and could identify better with the decision the preservice teacher had to make. Amber and Michael liked to ask several people when making a decision. They felt this gave them different perspectives about the situation, and could give them more alternatives from which to choose when making the decision.

In addition to field experiences, personal experiences, and other people influencing their decision making, Leanne, Sheila, and Susan also looked at the possible outcomes of a decision before making the final decision. The effects their decision might have on all the people involved influenced the decisions they made. They examined both the positive and negative consequences of their actions before making the final decision.

After they examined the effects their decision would have on the parties involved, then they made their decision.

Keith and Erin were also influenced in their decision making by outside sources. These sources included information found in books as well as on the Internet. Keith was influenced in his decision making by the Bible. He felt that the Bible teaches people how to live, and he was influenced in his decision making by its teachings. In addition, Keith's decision making was influenced by his own personal values as well as society's values. However, he was more influenced by his own values than by society's values.

Both Erin and Keith used the Internet as a source of information when making decisions. They felt the information they found on the Internet gave them ideas they could use to make a better decision concerning the situation in which they were involved. In addition, Erin used other books to gain ideas and information to use in her decision making.

Five participants, Keith, Leanne, Amber, Sheila, and Susan, were influenced in their decision making by the needs and characteristics of the students. The knowledge the students already had, the knowledge the participants had about the individual abilities of the students, and the interests of the students all played a role in the decision making of these participants. Keith, Leanne, Amber, and Sheila took into consideration the background of the students when making a decision. Leanne, Amber, Sheila, and Susan all examined how their decisions would benefit the students. Keith, Amber, Sheila, and Susan all looked at what the students would enjoy doing when making a decision that affected the students.

### *Link to the Literature*

As discussed in my review of the literature, Shulman (1986) presented five factors that influence teacher decisions: student needs and characteristics, subject matter, learning theories and techniques, context surrounding teaching and learning, and teacher characteristics and beliefs. These characteristics are similar to those proposed by Muth and Alvermann (1999) who stated that the makeup of the student body, the interactions between the teacher and the students, the time of year, the physical surroundings, how the teacher presents instruction, and the choice of textbooks all play a role in the decision making of teachers. I found that most of these did influence the decision making of the seven participants. Keith, Susan, Amber, Sheila, and Leanne were influenced by the needs and characteristics of the students. All seven participants were influenced by their own beliefs and personal experiences. Michael, Leanne, and Susan felt limited in their decision making because it was not their classroom, therefore the context surrounding teaching and learning influenced their decision making.

Harrington (1995) stated that preservice teachers must learn to deal with a variety of dilemmas they may face in the classroom so it is important for teacher preparation programs to contain a strong clinical component that can assist preservice teachers in acquiring problem solving strategies for the classroom. In addition, Jackson and Davis (2000) stated that preservice teachers should have opportunities to interact with students in a variety of situations, including field experiences. They stated that field experiences provide an opportunity for these preservice teachers to apply the knowledge they have gained to the real classroom. I found this evident in that the field experiences of all seven participants influenced their decision making. All were influenced by the actions of the

students and teachers they observed engaging in the teaching/learning process. Teaching their own lessons also gave them an opportunity to practice their decision making skills in a real classroom setting.

As stated by Borger and Tillema (1993), the personal beliefs about classrooms and students and the images the preservice teachers have of themselves as teachers is associated with the relationships they have had with teachers in the past. They also recall their past experiences as a student in the classroom. This was evident in the study as the participants recalled personal experiences they had as students in the classroom when making decisions. However, many times the preconceptions the preservice teachers have are resistant to change because they are based on the beliefs and experiences that have been present for a long time. This was apparent in the class discussions of the *cases* as many presented their solutions and were not swayed by the arguments of their peers. Sheila, as an example, commented in her post-*case* interview that her mind was not changed by the arguments of her peers.

The decision making of the participants was influenced by their prior experiences. According to Oldfather, et al. (1999), students construct their own meanings based on their prior knowledge and experiences as they interact with others in various social situations, including the classroom. This was apparent as the participants related numerous personal experiences which influenced their decision making. Some of these experiences took place in the classroom when they were students, but some of these experiences took place outside the classroom. Nonetheless, these experiences had a major influence on the decision making of these middle grades preservice teachers.



The encounters these preservice teachers had during their field experiences influenced their decision making. Some of the participants were exposed to situations where the classroom was very diverse, situations in which they had not found themselves previously. They had to make decisions concerning their interactions with students they had not made before these experiences. According to Richardson (1996), experiences and reflection on actions may lead to changes in beliefs and attitudes. I did not find that the experiences changed their beliefs, but it did make them more aware of the diversity of the classroom and expose them to a variety of situations they may encounter as a middle school teacher. In addition, it gave them an opportunity to examine different perspectives. Fosnot (1996) states that preservice teachers need to be involved in learning experiences that may challenge their traditional beliefs. These encounters during their field experiences did challenge the beliefs of some of the preservice teachers.

Ryan and Cooper (2000) state that teachers make many kinds of decisions each day, among them planning, management, implementation, and reflective decisions. These participants did make these kinds of decisions as they taught lessons in the classroom and as they interacted with the students. They planned instruction, deciding what to teach and how to teach it. They implemented instruction, during which time they recognized that at times the lesson does not go as planned and has to be changed or that they must deviate from their plan. They made management decisions as they taught their lessons and as they interacted with the students to keep their attention focused on the activities. Finally, they reflected on their teaching and what they would do differently if they taught that lesson again.

The students had a chance to look at real classroom situations and make decisions during their field experiences. They participated in the decision making process as defined by Greenwood and Parkay (1989). They looked at a situation and decided how to deal with it, gathered data to further examine the situation, interpreted the data, arrived at a decision, examined the decision to determine its feasibility, and carried out and evaluated the decision as they taught lessons in the classroom and then reflected on their experiences in class and through journal writing.

#### *Implications of Findings for Research Question One*

Findings from my seven participants indicate that the decision making of middle grades preservice teachers is influenced by several factors, depending on the individual. The decision making of these preservice teachers was influenced by such things as field experiences, personal experiences, and other people. In some instances, it depended on what type of decision was being made as to what influenced the decision.

Findings reveal that each participant was influenced in some way by their field experiences, where they were exposed to a wide variety of experiences. Here they were able to examine different teaching and learning styles and the teaching/learning process as a whole. They were able to engage in their own decision making by planning and implementing instruction in the classroom, which produced concerns from all participants about the decisions they made. Some were concerned about how they would be perceived by the students, by their cooperating teachers, and by their college supervising teachers. Still others were concerned with management decisions. Did they make the correct decision in dealing with a particular student? Still others were concerned with decisions they made about how to teach a particular topic. Nonetheless, field experiences

gave these preservice teachers a chance to practice their own decision making in the classroom as well as observe the decision making of the teachers.

Findings from this study reveal that the personal experiences the preservice teachers have influenced their decision making. They, as students in the classroom, have observed teachers as they interacted with the students and made decisions. Some of the decisions made by the preservice teachers are reflected in the ways they were taught. Additionally, they have learned from personal experience ways they do not want to handle decisions in the classroom. Prior experience plays a major role in the decision making process of these preservice teachers, according to this study.

The study also revealed that other people influence the decision making of preservice teachers, especially other teachers. All teachers need to be aware of this and be careful in the advice they give these preservice teachers, understanding that the advice they give may be used by these preservice teachers in their own classrooms. The preservice teachers look to these people for advice because they feel these people are more experienced in making the kinds of decisions they may have to make in the classroom.

As the findings in this study reveal, other factors also influence the decision making of preservice teachers. They are influenced by information they find from outside sources, such as books and the Internet. Preservice teachers need to realize that all sources must be looked at carefully to determine the reliability of the information provided by the source if they are to use that source in making effective decisions.

The needs and characteristics of students also influence the decision making of preservice teachers as demonstrated in this study. These needs vary from classroom to

classroom, and preservice teachers need to be aware of this fact. What works well in one classroom may not work well in another because the make up of the classroom is different. Therefore, each classroom needs to be examined individually to determine what strategies would best benefit these particular students.

As found in this study, when making a decision, some preservice teachers take into consideration what effects their decisions may have on the people involved when making a decision. They carefully think about the outcomes of their decision before making a final decision. They look at both the positive and negative consequences of a decision. However, some decisions have to be made quickly, and as such, cannot be examined as thoroughly to determine how the decision may affect those involved. Preservice teachers need to think carefully about the consequences of each decision if possible to understand the far reaching consequences it may have.

#### *How do Middle Grades Preservice Teachers*

##### *Use Cases as a Strategy to Foster Decision Making?*

In reading about *cases*, using *cases* as a strategy, and talking with preservice teachers about the use of *cases* as a strategy, I have found that middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making in different ways. Findings from this study may give teacher educators a better understanding of how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* to foster decision making, and how teacher educators can use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making in their own preservice teachers.

##### *How Did Participants Use Cases as a Strategy to Foster Decision Making?*

The seven middle grades preservice teachers in this study had three common themes when they used *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. Each of the

participants used *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making by reflecting on the *cases* presented, identifying solutions to the dilemmas presented, and examining the consequences of the solutions they proposed to the dilemmas presented in the *cases*.

The participants reflected about the actions of the teachers and the students involved in the *cases*. The use of *cases* as a strategy gave them the opportunity to think about each situation and the people involved in the situation. Some of the situations were not situations that the preservice teachers had been involved in before, so it gave them a chance to think about situations that they may encounter as teachers of middle school students. *Cases* used as a strategy also gave them an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences when teaching in the classroom.

In addition, these seven middle grades preservice teachers used *cases* as a strategy to help them identify solutions to the dilemmas presented in the *cases*. They identified as many solutions as they could and listened to the solutions provided by their peers.

Michael and Leanne used *cases* as a strategy to help them make a decision about what should be done in a particular situation. Erin and Leanne felt that *cases* helped them think of solutions they had not thought of previously. Many of the solutions offered to the problems presented in the *cases* were strategies that had been discussed in the curriculum class during the semester.

*Cases* were used as a strategy to foster decision making to help the seven participants examine the consequences of the decisions proposed. It assisted them in examining all the effects their decisions might have on the people involved in the situation. The use of *cases* helped them think about the consequences of their own decisions as well as the consequences of the decisions of their peers. In addition, the

participants realized that all decisions have both positive and negative consequences, and that these must be taken into account when making a decision. Finally, they realized that there could be many consequences, both positive and negative, for one decision that is made in the classroom.

In addition, Keith, Leanne, Amber, and Susan put themselves in the role of the teacher when using *cases* to foster decision making. Each of them identified various actions they would take if they were the teacher in that particular situation. Keith felt that *cases* gave him a truer picture of the classroom than did his field experiences because he felt that the teachers and students in his field experiences were conscious of the fact that he was there and altered their behaviors. Leanne felt that using *cases* as a strategy put her in the role of the teacher and made her think about what she would do if she encountered this situation in the future. Amber felt she would remember the *cases* when as a teacher she faced a similar situation and would call on the solutions provided to help her at that future time.

Michael, Keith, Sheila, and Erin used *cases* as a strategy to help them think about multiple perspectives. Using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making assisted them in thinking not only about their own perspectives, but the perspectives of their classmates as well. By doing so, they gained a better understanding of the situations presented in the *cases*. In addition, they were able to think about the perspectives of every one involved in the *cases*. They examined how their perspectives were different from those of their peers.

Using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making is particularly relevant to these middle grades preservice teachers as they are introduced to problems they will face in the

middle school. All five *cases* were focused on grades 6-8, thus requiring these preservice teachers to make decisions similar to those they will have to make as middle grades teachers. For example, one *case* focused on teaming and how the teachers on the team had to be consistent in their approach to a student's problem for it to be solved in a timely manner. Finally, using *cases* as a strategy gave the preservice teachers an opportunity to take into consideration the developmental process of middle school students and how this affects their attitude toward the learning process. They were able to explore how the developmental levels of the students could affect the actions of the students in the middle school classroom.

#### *Link to the Literature*

According to Eggen and Kauchak (1998), students who are actively engaged in the learning process learn more effectively than those who are just passive recipients of knowledge. The use of *cases* with middle grades preservice teachers as a strategy to foster decision making actively engaged them in the learning process as they explored their own ideas and understandings as well as the ideas and understandings of others. It allowed them to examine classroom situations from different perspectives, including their own perspective, the perspectives of their classmates, and the perspectives of the people portrayed in the *cases*.

These seven middle grades preservice teachers read each *case* and analyzed it (outside of class) using a guide provided. Then they brought that analysis with them to class where they engaged in a class discussion of the *case*. Hausfather (2001) stated that providing opportunities for preservice teachers to learn in cooperative or discourse groups may help them analyze their experiences and serve as a guide to their teaching as

they make decisions in the classroom. *Cases* used as a strategy to foster decision making engaged the preservice teachers in class discussions of the *cases* and assisted them in thinking about the decisions they would make in similar situations. According to Koballa and Tippins (2000), there may be many meanings or theoretical perspectives presented in each *case*. These meanings and perspectives may increase the preservice teachers' understanding of the complex world of teaching middle school students. Using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making gave these preservice teachers the opportunity to examine the many meanings and perspectives offered in each *case* as they discussed the *case* in class with their peers.

As stated in the literature review, using *cases* as a strategy with preservice teachers encourages multiple perspectives about issues, emphasizes critical thinking, and explores various answers and approaches as they look at different viewpoints and hear the ideas of other preservice teachers and professionals (Miller & Kantrov, 1998). These seven preservice teachers engaged in critical thinking and decision making as they examined various solutions provided by their peers for the dilemmas presented in each *case*. They listened to the various ideas of their peers as they made a decision concerning the problem presented. The *case* allowed these preservice teachers to test their own ideas in a nonthreatening environment, present ideas and solutions to problems, and share their personal resources, perspectives, and ideas with other preservice teachers as stated by Harrington (1991). In addition, they evaluated their own beliefs, perceptions, and misconceptions as well as the various perspectives of their peers.

Greenwood and Parkay (1989) stated that teacher educators need to provide extensive practice in decision making in a variety of situations. *Cases* used as a strategy



is just one way of providing practice in decision making. As the *cases* were discussed, the preservice teachers thought about the decisions they would make if they were in that situation and examined the consequences of those decisions, thus gaining practice in making decisions they may have to make in the real classroom.

According to Pate (1997), middle school teachers may have to make many important decisions about curriculum and instruction. They make decisions regarding organization of the classroom, how the classroom is managed, what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, how the content will be assessed, and how students will be grouped. The preservice teachers were given the opportunity to practice making these types of decisions when using *cases* as a strategy.

Muth and Glynn (2002) state that during the middle school years, students form attitudes about education and its relevance to their future. The students make decisions about whether they should remain in school and whether to continue their education. As they are moving from childhood into adolescence, many changes are occurring. These changes can have an effect on how they learn in the classroom. Therefore, using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making is important so that these preservice teachers can examine some of the problems they may encounter as these students make this transition.

The communities in which these preservice teachers have been raised are not very diverse, and at times these preservice teachers are naive concerning the diversity they may face in many classrooms. The use of *cases* as a strategy provided these preservice teachers the opportunity to make decisions in situations where the classrooms were diverse, thus giving them practice in making decisions they may encounter as middle school teachers. As stated by Wright (1996), the preservice teachers read and

discussed the *cases*, proposing solutions to the dilemmas by applying educational theory to an actual classroom setting.

Wasserman (1994) stated that many preservice teachers want to know the correct way of solving the dilemma, and therefore find it difficult to accept the idea that the answer or solution is not always clear. The findings in this study support this. Four of the seven preservice teachers indicated that they would like to have known the decision that was actually made in the *case*. They wanted to know if the solutions they provided were the correct solutions. They stated they would have preferred to see what the teacher did, or what an expert said should be done in the situation, after they had made their own decisions.

Using *cases* as a strategy fostered the decision making skills of preservice teachers because they solved the dilemmas presented in the *cases* which caused them to think creatively and critically about all involved in the situation. This in turn fostered their decision making. As related in the literature review, Thompson (1995) stated that critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving are interdependent. They do not exist independently of one another. The use of *cases* gave the preservice teachers an opportunity to engage in problem solving, thus fostering their critical thinking.

According to Green and Gredler (2002), social constructivism is knowledge that is shared socially. It is co-constructed within a community of learners. The class discussions of the *cases* gave the preservice teachers the opportunity to construct and reconstruct knowledge and understanding through social interaction with their peers as each *case* was examined. They actively engaged in the learning process as they examined their own perspectives and the perspectives of their peers. As stated by

Gideonse (1999), *cases* used as a strategy to foster decision making actively involved the participants in the learning process as they tested their own understandings and perceptions as well as the understandings and perceptions of others.

As Lundeborg and Scheurman (1997) stated, the students interacted in the *case* discussions and socially constructed knowledge that strengthened their previous understandings as well as the knowledge they had learned in the college classroom. Through the use of *cases* as a strategy, students were provided with real classroom situations in which they identified problems and discussed possible solutions. In addition, they examined the consequences of these decisions on all involved in the *case*.

The instructor who uses *cases* as a strategy must learn along with the preservice teachers. Hudson-Ross and Graham (2000) stated that teacher educators need to engage in reflective practice and make public their teaching tensions and decisions. I did this throughout the entire semester as the class examined various ideas and strategies that could be used in the middle school classroom. I continuously discussed what worked for me as a teacher of middle school students, reiterating that just because it worked for me, did not mean it would work for other teachers. In addition, I attempted to engage my students in the social construction of knowledge by using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. I related my own ideas and understandings about various situations while encouraging them to examine their own ideas and understandings as well as the ideas and understandings of others as they engaged in the social construction of knowledge through the class discussions of the *cases*.

Educators who are most successful with using *cases* as a strategy are flexible, reflective facilitators who co-construct knowledge along with their preservice teachers,

according to Sudzina (1999). I attempted to do this by not passing judgment on the solutions offered by the preservice teachers, but assisting them in examining the consequences of the decisions they made by asking questions during the class discussions concerning the consequences their proposed solution might have for those involved in the *case*.

I found being a facilitator difficult at times, as Shulman (1998) stated. The preservice teachers were more outspoken and assertive during the class discussions. The discussions of the *cases* at times went in unexpected directions. It was interesting how the experience of one participant made others recall experiences which they all wanted to relate. Some of the participants became very emphatic and at times concerned with what some of the other participants said. As the facilitator, I never knew what direction the discussion would take and if it would lead where I wanted it to go. One particular *case*, “*A Class Divided*,” sparked very little discussion, and I had to probe deeply to get any discussion at all. The participants informed me this was because it was something that happened every day in every classroom. No one felt very strongly about this particular situation. Thus, it produced little discussion.

Doebler, et al. (1998) found that analyzing the *case* responses of preservice teachers is one way to show how these prospective teachers mature in their responses as they progress through the teacher education program. I did not find that the responses of the preservice teachers matured as they analyzed the *cases*. This could be due to the fact that the *cases* were used over a short period of time, rather than an entire semester.

### *Implications of Findings*

Findings from this study suggest that middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making in several ways. All seven participants used *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making by reflecting on the situations presented in the *cases*. They all felt that *cases* used as a strategy made them think more about the situations they would face in the middle school classroom. *Cases* also helped them to identify many solutions to the dilemmas presented in the *cases* and to examine the consequences of each of the decisions proposed as solutions to the problems presented. In addition, some of the participants were able to put themselves in the role of the teacher when reading and discussing the *cases*. Finally, four of the participants used *cases* as a strategy to help them think about and examine perspectives that were different from their own.

Some of the *cases* sparked more discussion than did other *cases*. The second *case* did not generate as much discussion as did the other four *cases*. When asked why, the participants related that this was because it was such a common occurrence in the classroom. They stated that it was something that teachers see every day. They considered the dilemma a difficult one for teachers, but still did not have much to say about it. Therefore, it is important to examine the content of the *cases* very carefully when choosing which *cases* to use with the preservice teachers.

Four out of seven of the participants stated that they had rather I had used closed *cases* than open *cases*. I had hoped that using open *cases* would lead them to the realization that there are no correct answers to the dilemmas presented. However, these four stated that they would like to know what the teacher actually did in the situation or

what an expert would say should be done to solve the problem presented. They were not confident in the solutions they generated. A discussion emphasizing how all problems have different solutions depending on the circumstances might be helpful when using *cases* with preservice teachers if open *cases* are to be used.

I chose to have my participants write a closed case because it was similar to an experience they had encountered during their field experiences (e.g., instructional dilemma, management dilemma). I felt this would give them a chance to share this experience with their peers and get ideas about other ways they could have managed this situation.

Susan stated that she did not like writing the analyses of the *cases*. She felt they were time consuming and a waste of her time because she had already given her perspective and opinion concerning the *case* in the class discussion. However, all the participants enjoyed writing their own *case*, which emphasizes that they like to discuss situations that are real to them. Their written *case* was about a decision they had made during their field experiences.

Michael felt that *cases* should be used throughout the entire course, not just during one part of the course. Susan suggested using *cases* as a strategy before the preservice teachers went out into the field so they could gain a better understanding of some of the situations they might encounter while they were in a classroom setting. In addition, it would give them possible alternatives to use if a similar situation did arise in their field experiences.

*Cases* were used as a strategy to foster decision making at the end of the semester in the hopes that the students would know each other better and therefore feel more

comfortable in speaking out during the discussions and relating their opinions and beliefs. This is important as most of the participants did not have a problem stating their own perspectives and disagreeing with their peers. Most of the participants had used *cases* in a college class before this study, and so felt more comfortable with using *cases* and discussing them.

Michael stated that the *cases* needed to be harder and longer. He felt that the problems presented in the *cases* should increase in difficulty as more *cases* were used in the course and that the *cases* should be lengthier. Keith said that the *cases* needed to be relevant to them. *Cases* needed to be about situations the preservice teachers would encounter often in a real classroom teaching situation. They needed to be realistic.

Amber, Leanne, and Michael felt that the *cases* needed to give more background information than was presented in the *case*, especially background information about the students involved. Michael said that the *cases* needed to state background information about the setting, such as what time of day the dilemma took place or what part of the school year it was. This implies that the students consider the backgrounds of the students and the classroom context when making decisions.

Sheila related how she became frustrated at times when discussing the *cases* because she felt that some of her peers were not taking into account the well being of the students. She also said that the discussions did not change her mind about her decisions, although they did make her think more about the decision. Using *cases* as a strategy does not always change the beliefs held by the preservice teachers, but it does make them think about their own beliefs and the beliefs of the others discussing the *case*.

The findings of the study reveal that all participants used *cases* as a strategy to foster their decision making, but in several different ways. They all had various ideas about how *cases* could be used as a strategy in the future to foster decision making in middle grades preservice teachers.

#### Suggestions for the Use of *Cases* as a Strategy in Preservice Teacher Education

*Cases* are not for everyone. The instructor who uses *cases* must be open to relinquishing control of the classroom as the discussions of the *cases* may go in various directions over which he/she has no control. The instructor serves more as a facilitator of the discussion rather than an actual participant. Also, the instructor must be aware that the preservice teachers may have to be prompted if the *case* they are discussing is of little interest to them.

As stated by Sudzina (1996) and Powell (in press), there are no set guidelines for teaching with *cases*. However, careful planning is essential when teacher educators contemplate the use of *cases* as an instructional tool with preservice teachers. The *cases* that are used should be carefully chosen from a variety of sources. Careful planning by the instructor is of importance. When selecting *cases*, examining various *case* books can assist the instructor in finding the *cases* that would benefit the preservice teachers the most. Many *case* books have been published in the last decade. Neuharth-Pritchett, Payne, and Reiff (in press) are publishing a new *case* book with cases that help preservice teachers critically analyze issues of diversity. *Cases* about culture, academic performance and expectations, safety and prosocial behaviors, social issues, special needs, and the family are included. The *cases* need to be relevant and realistic and



contain enough background information for the preservice teachers to make an informed decision.

In using *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making in preservice teachers, I would recommend that they be used over the entire semester, not just a small portion of the semester. This may give the preservice teachers a chance to react to different situations presented in the *cases* and allow teacher educators to observe how or if the responses of the preservice teachers mature as the semester progresses and they are introduced to more theoretical ideas and instructional strategies. Using *cases* as a strategy before the preservice teachers go out into the field may give them a better foundation to deal with the dilemmas they may encounter in the field.

Another recommendation would be to perhaps begin with closed *cases*. Four of my participants related that they would like to have known how the situation was actually handled or how an expert would handle the situation. They wanted to know whether their solution was the correct one. I think beginning with closed *cases* and then progressing to open *cases* would give them time to mature in their thinking and become more confident in their ability to solve the dilemma presented.

My participants expressed that they liked writing their own *cases*. This may have been because they were able to write about an actual experience they had during their field experiences and examine the decisions they made during this time. I would suggest that students be guided more carefully and taken through the process of writing a *case* in a step-by-step fashion. Have the preservice teachers write a rough draft of the *case* and turn it in to the instructor. The instructor could then read the *case*, give suggestions for

improvement, and return it to the preservice teacher for further editing. This process could be repeated until a well written *case* evolved.

One participant stated that she did not like to write an analysis of each case because she thought it was redundant and time consuming. The participants had already discussed the *case*, and she felt this was sufficient. If an analysis of each *case* is required, I would suggest that the instructor think carefully about when this analysis is to be written. The instructor might want to use various approaches, such as just discussing some of the *cases* and writing analyses of others.

Westerman (1991) and Yost, et al. (2000) stated that teacher educators need to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to discuss issues that relate directly or indirectly to the classroom, based on problems that are school wide, and provide opportunities for practice in decision making. *Cases* used as a strategy do just that. It provides the preservice teachers an opportunity to practice their decision making skills by identifying the dilemmas presented in the *cases*, proposing possible solutions to these dilemmas while examining the consequences of their solutions and the solutions presented by their peers, and making a decision concerning what they think should be done in the situation presented.

*Cases* can be used by teacher educators to give preservice teachers the opportunity to practice their critical thinking. As stated by Martinez (1998), teacher preparation programs need to engage preservice teachers in critical reflection of all aspects of their programs and practices by including small group discussions and debates concerning the intellectual, emotional, political, and ethical dilemmas that make up the field of education. *Cases* engage the preservice teachers in thinking critically about the

situation presented as they discuss the case and listen to the perspectives of their peers. As stated by Harrington (1999), encouraging the development of reasoned argumentation may better prepare teachers to deal with the challenges they face in today's classroom and may help them respond to these challenges in more effective and responsible ways.

The instructor who uses *cases* must be willing to learn along with the students and to relinquish control of the classroom as the discussions may go in many different directions. According to Sudzina (1999), the instructor must be a flexible, reflective facilitator who co-constructs knowledge along with the preservice teachers. The instructor must be open to the views and perspectives of others which may differ from their own. Therefore, the instructor must understand that they are not there to pass judgment on the solutions offered, but to help the preservice teachers examine each decision for the possible positive and negative consequences of each decision that is made.

It takes just as much practice in decision making and being aware of one's thinking during the decision making process as it does to acquire other kinds of knowledge. Extensive practice in decision making in a variety of situations is important when preparing teachers to teach in the diverse classrooms of today. Teacher preparation programs need to examine their curriculum and implement appropriate strategies that foster critical thinking. Preservice teachers need to be provided with opportunities to connect theory and practice in order for them to become effective decision makers in the classroom. The use of *cases* is one strategy that can be used by teacher educators to prepare preservice teachers for the decisions they may have to make in the classroom. When combined with other strategies such as field experience and class discussion,

preservice teachers may gain more experience in making the kinds of decisions they may make each day in the middle school classroom.

In examining the findings from the study, a claim could be made that they were all positive influences for these preservice teachers. However, preservice teachers need to be aware of the potential influences and how sometimes they can be positive, while at other times negative. For example, using outside sources such as the Internet when making a decision can provide valuable insight into a particular dilemma. However, caution must be used since many sources are biased or misleading and as such could affect the preservice teacher's decision making in a negative way. Also, other people as sources for aiding in decision making may have a major impact on the preservice teacher's decision. The preservice teacher must recognize that everyone is influenced by their own experiences, and what works for one teacher may not necessarily work for another. Discussing potential influences will help preservice teachers become more aware of potential problems they may face in using suggestions from other people and other sources as they make decisions.

#### Improvement of the Study

I feel this study could have been improved in several ways. First, I had little experience with research, so I sometimes felt uncomfortable in my role as a researcher. I had a difficult time trying to analyze the data from so many cases. I spent a lot of time trying to decide what I thought was pertinent and what was not. I reconfigured my themes several times, but I know that is what the constant comparative method is all about. I was constantly refining the themes. However, I feel that I learned much and that I better understand the research process after participating in it.

I would also consider using videotaping in a study similar to this. The audiotaping was difficult to hear at times and did not capture the vocal or the facial expressions of the participants, which could have added to the study. However, I feel that the participants were somewhat inhibited by the tape recorders, and I wonder if video taping would not inhibit them more. Therefore, if videotaping were used, I would use it often in my classroom before the study so that the students were used to it being there.

The study might have been improved if it had been conducted over the course of the semester. I would make sure the class had time to read, discuss, and analyze each *case*. In addition, I would spend more time on taking the students through the process of writing their own *case* instead of just giving them the assignment with few instructions.

#### Implications for Future Research

Additional research is needed on how *cases* can be used as a strategy to foster decision making in middle grades preservice teachers. One study might involve looking at how preservice teachers of varying ages use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making. All my participants were traditional students in that they had entered college immediately upon graduating from high school. It would be interesting to compare how traditional students and nontraditional students, with their varying experiences, used *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making.

Varying how *cases* were used as a strategy might also be interesting. A study in which half the class read the *cases* and then analyzed them with no discussion and the other half of the class read and analyzed the *cases* and then discussed them would be informative. A comparison could be made between those who constructed knowledge without guidance and discussion and those who socially constructed knowledge.

A follow up study in which I used *cases* again with these same preservice teachers in their senior year would contribute to a better understanding of how *cases* are used as a strategy to foster decision making. Comparing their analyses and discussions to examine what most influences their decision making after a year in the School of Education and more experience in the classroom might yield very different results. It would also be informative to do a follow up study during their first year of teaching.

Studying how *cases* are used to foster decision making by preservice teachers in different programs such as early childhood and secondary programs would also be informative. A comparison of what influenced the decision making of each group and how each group used *cases* to foster decision making would provide more insight into the similarities and differences among these groups of preservice teachers.

A study comparing the use of *cases* with preservice teachers before they go out into the field and after their field experiences would also be informative. This would provide teacher educators with a better understanding of the role of field experiences in the decision making process.

Still another informative study would be to use a class where more than seven students were involved. This would give teacher educators a better insight into how middle grades preservice teachers use *cases* as a strategy to foster decision making.

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APPENDIX A  
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

## Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to take part in a research study titled “Using Cases as an Instructional Strategy to Foster Decision Making in Middle Grades Preservice Teachers” conducted by Vicki Hollinshead, Department of Elementary Education, University of Georgia at Athens under the direction of Dr. Elizabeth Pate, School of Education, who may be contacted at 706 542-4244. Ms. Hollinshead may be contacted at 706 245-2834. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and, if at any time, I decide I no longer want to participate, I can withdraw as a participant from this study without any question or penalty. I understand that I can ask to have all information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed. No special treatment will be given to those who volunteer to participate in the study. **Participation is voluntary. NONPARTICIPATION OR WITHDRAWAL OF PARTICIPATION WILL HAVE NO EFFECT ON GRADES OR EVALUATION.**

The purpose of this study is to understand what happens when cases are used as an instructional strategy to foster decision making in middle grades preservice teachers. A case is a particular form of narrative that can be used to explicate and clarify the professional knowledge of teachers. Decision making is an important teaching skill, and therefore it is important that I explore techniques or strategies to foster my decision making skills.

I may benefit from this research by opportunities to reflect on my own decision making skills and how they may affect my actions in the classroom. In addition, other teacher educators may benefit by utilizing the information gained from this study in their own practice.

Participation in this research involves the following procedures:

- 1) I will be interviewed before the in class case studies are used. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour and will be conducted at a time convenient to me.
- 2) I understand that the researcher will utilize my case analysis as research data.
- 3) Each case will then be discussed by the class as a whole and these discussions will be audio taped and transcribed by the researcher at a later date.
- 4) The researcher will also use my written case as research data.
- 5) I understand that I will be interviewed a second time for approximately 30 minutes to an hour. This interview will be tape recorded and transcribed at a later date.

No discomforts or stresses are anticipated during this research. Information given by me during this study will be kept confidential and will be discussed only with my permission or as required by law. A pseudonym will be used in place of my actual name on all documentation and data collected from me. Information gathered from this study may be used in future publications, again, with actual names removed and replaced by pseudonyms. I understand that class discussion involves all the students in the class. However, if I choose not to participate in this research study, I understand that my written materials or comments made by me during class discussions will not be used in resultant research write-ups. All data will be stored in a locked cabinet designated for this study and will be kept until 12/30/03 when it will be destroyed. I will have the right to review all taped interviews.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 706 245-8234.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

---

Signature of Participant

Date

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7441; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu)

APPENDIX B  
PRE-CASE INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Pre-Case Interview Guide

- How has your field experience been going?
- Tell me about it.
- How will it help you as a future teacher?
- How do you feel about your decision to become a teacher?
- What kinds of decisions regarding curriculum and instruction do you anticipate making as a teacher?
- What is the process by which you make decisions?
- What information do you use to make decisions?
- Can you describe a decision you had to make in your field experiences?
- What strategies did you use in making that decision? What process did you go through?
- What led you to respond in this way? How did you reach the decision to respond in this way?
- What concerns did you have when making that decision?
- What other strategies did you think about trying and reject? Why?
- Now that you've thought about it, would you do anything differently?
- What other strategies did you think about later?
- Where did you learn these strategies?
- Did you feel adequately prepared to make this decision?
- What helped prepare you to make this decision?
- When you make a decision regarding curriculum and instruction, do you seek advice from other people? If so, from whom and why?
- Have you ever used cases or been exposed to the use of cases? If so, in what context?
- What is a case?

APPENDIX C  
POST-INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Post Case Interview Guide

- What kinds of decisions regarding curriculum and instruction do you anticipate making as a teacher?
- What is the process by which you make decisions?
- What information do you use to make decisions?
- Can you describe a decision you had to make in your field experiences?
- What strategies did you use in making that decision?
- What led you to respond in this way? How did you reach the decision to respond in this way?
- What concerns did you have when making the decision?
- Were there any other strategies you thought about using and that you rejected? Why?
- Where did you learn these strategies?
- Now that you've thought about it, would you do anything differently?
- Did you feel adequately prepared to make this decision? Why or why not?
- What could have been done to adequately prepare you for this decision you had to make?
- When you make a decision regarding curriculum and instruction, do you seek advice from other people? If so, from whom and why?
- What is a case?
- What information was not provided in the cases presented that would have helped you to make a more informed decision?
- Was the class discussion of each case helpful? Why or why not?
- What has the use of cases done to foster your decision making?

APPENDIX D  
CLASS DISCUSSION GUIDE

### **Class Discussion Guide**

- ❑ What is the focus or dilemma presented in this case?
- ❑ What decisions were made by the teacher?
- ❑ How did these decisions affect others (students, parents, other teachers)?
- ❑ What decisions would you make in this situation?
- ❑ Why would you make these decisions? What strategies would you use to arrive at these decisions?
- ❑ What would be the consequences of these decisions?
- ❑ What do you think about (a comment made by another student)?
- ❑ Why?

(Adapted from Allen, J. D. (1999). Teaching with cases and lessons learned: The journey of an educational psychologist. In M. R. Sudzina (Ed.). *Case study applications for teacher education*. (p. 43). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.



APPENDIX E  
CASE ANALYSIS GUIDE

## Case Analysis Guide

A written analysis will be required for each case we read and discuss in class. Carefully consider each item listed below as you write your analysis. Check your analysis carefully for correct use of grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

- ❑ A clear statement of the dilemma/situation presented in the case
- ❑ The teacher's perspective of the dilemma
- ❑ Your perspective of the dilemma
- ❑ Evidence to support that this is indeed the dilemma
- ❑ Relevant knowledge related to the case
- ❑ Possible solutions to the dilemma(s)
- ❑ Consequences of each of these solutions
- ❑ How you arrived at the decision (solution) – what helped you to make this particular decision
- ❑ What kinds of decisions need to be made

(Adapted from Allen, J. D. (1999). Teaching with cases and lessons learned: The journey of an educational psychologist. In M. R. Sudzina (Ed.), *Case study applications for teacher education*. (pp. 54-55). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

APPENDIX F  
WRITTEN CASE GUIDE

### Writing a Case

We have been reading cases written by others for a few weeks. Now it is time to use your own experiences in the classroom to write a case of your own. Reflect on the time you have spent in the classroom. Was there a particularly challenging situation or dilemma that you faced while teaching in the classroom? Describe this challenge/dilemma/incident, giving detailed information that will help the reader understand the situation. Include the context for the case: background information concerning the school, the classroom, and the students. Why was this a challenge/dilemma for you? What happened? What did you do? What process did you use to make the decision involving this dilemma? Be specific and detailed.

#### Rubric

Criteria	Excellent 3	Good 2	Needs Improvement 1	
<b>Challenge/incident/ dilemma</b>	The incident is written clearly with details provided which enhance the reader's understanding of the incident	The incident is written with some details provided which enhance the reader's understanding of the incident	Few details are given for the incident. It is difficult for the reader to understand the incident	___X3.33=___
<b>Context</b>	The setting and other information related to the understanding of the case are provided in rich detail	The setting and other information related to the understanding of the case are provided in some detail	The setting and other information related to the understanding of the case are not sufficient to understand the nature of the case	___X3.33=___
<b>Solution</b>	How the dilemma is resolved and the process used to arrive at this decision is described in detail	How the dilemma is resolved and the process used to arrive at this decision is described to some extent	How the dilemma is resolved and the process used to arrive at this decision is not detailed enough to understand	___X3.33=___