The Challenges of Creating Inclusive Classrooms:
Experiences of Teacher Candidates in a Field-Based Course

By Nancy L. Hutchinson & Andrea K. Martin

This article documents and interprets the reports of five teacher candidates on their efforts to create inclusive classrooms for exceptional learners. The five candidates worked as a group, at one school, in the innovative program of teacher education at Queen's University. They were participating in a field-based course that included discussions in school of the cases of children they were teaching and discussion of dilemma-based cases during on-campus classes.

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Learning to Teach All Students in Inclusive Classrooms

With increasing diversity in classrooms, preservice teachers must recognize and meet the challenges of creating classrooms that include, and accommodate the needs of, all students including exceptional learners (Bullough, 1995). Teacher educators recommend that special education information and experience are included early in general education programs (Hinders, 1995; Straw-derman & Lindsey, 1995).

Recently, a number of teacher education programs have documented their efforts to prepare preservice teachers for diversity. For example, Carol Ann Tomlinson et al. (1997) observed and interviewed preservice teachers attempting to differentiate instruction. They found that, following workshops, preservice teachers expressed a belief in adapting classrooms to meet individual student needs but could not practice what they believed. Tomlinson and her colleagues recommended that preservice teachers needed more examples of differentiated instruction in their coursework and in their classrooms in addition to opportunities to discuss their beliefs and practices about differentiated instruction.

In her reviews of the literature on teachers' beliefs and practices, Virginia Richardson (1994, 1996) suggested that the relationship between the two is interactive. She also described teacher education programs reported to have had an impact on the beliefs of preservice and inservice teachers. Teacher candidates and teachers in these programs had experiences that led them to question or confront their beliefs (Hollingsworth, 1989; Marx, et al., 1994; Richardson, 1994; Richardson & Kile, 1992). Other researchers have suggested that when teachers are not encouraged to confront their beliefs, little change takes place (McDiarmid, 1992; Olson, 1993). Promoting change in both beliefs and practices appears to be easier than focusing exclusively on beliefs or practices and to take place through conversations that allow participants to understand their own beliefs and practices and to experiment with new beliefs and practices (Richardson, 1996). She also suggests that experience helps teachers generate alternative practices when faced with dilemmas. To stimulate discussion of beliefs and practices, teacher educators have begun to use dilemma cases which simulate the complexity of classrooms and elicit a range of challenging perspectives (Merseth, 1996; Sykes & Bird, 1992).

Case discussions push preservice teachers to consider the range of beliefs and practices held by their colleagues (Harrington, 1997; Levin, 1994). Helen Harrington has shown that discussion and written analysis of dilemma cases foster reasoning (1995), consideration of the consequences of teaching decisions (Harrington & Quinn-Leering, 1996), and critical reflection (Harrington, Quinn-Leering, & Hodson, 1996). In addition to discussing and analyzing dilemma cases, pre-service teachers have authored cases based in experience in which they write about their beliefs and practices for accommodating diversity in inclusive classrooms (Hutchinson, 1996, 1998).

The restructured teacher education program at Queen's offered an opportunity to focus on beliefs and practices both on campus and in schools (Richardson, 1994, 1996) through discussions of dilemmas in cases and in experience.

Learning from Experience and through Field-Based Courses

The restructured program at Queen's is described in detail elsewhere (Upitis, this issue). In the first term of a nine-month program, teacher candidates complete

two field-based university courses while teaching in a school. The emphasis is on candidates' learning from classroom experience, from each other, and from "stand[ing] back from experience and collectively interpret[ing] its meaning and its authority" (Chin & Russell, 1996, p. 56). One of the field-based courses, Critical Issues, focuses on equity issues, inclusion of exceptional learners, and legal issues (Appendix A). The candidates within each associate school are expected to meet as a study group an average of an hour per day each week during the four-month practicum. At this time, they support each other in learning to teach from experience, and work together on the group assignments in the Critical Issues course and the other field-based course.

During 1996-1997, the pilot of this program, the first author (Nancy Hutchinson) was the faculty liaison for the group of teacher candidates who are the focus of the current research. She met with the candidates as a group approximately every second week, during the practicum, when she visited the school to observe the candidates in their classrooms. For the middle two weeks of the 14-week practicum, the candidates returned to the university for intensive coursework similar to classes during the Orientation Week at the end of August and the Consolidation Week at the beginning of January. During the winter term, candidates focused on courses and took part in two short practica.

Critical Issues: The Component on Inclusion of Exceptional Learners

Two of the three topics in the Critical Issues course were taught in an integrated fashion: equity and inclusion of exceptional learners. (The schedule for components of Critical Issues is in Appendix B.) Equity was described as treating students fairly rather than necessarily treating them the same. Inclusion of exceptional learners was described as a specific instance of equitable teaching, in which adaptations were necessary to meet student needs. For the third topic, legal issues, the two major themes were: a case that was before the courts at the time concerning the inclusion of a severely, multi-disabled student; and issues of violence in schools.

In most class sessions on inclusion of exceptional learners, candidates discussed dilemma cases written by the first author or by members of the class. Candidates were encouraged to reflect on experience, confront their taken-for-granted assumptions, and maintain a critical stance toward their own teaching and education in general. The instructor modelled questioning assumptions, confronting beliefs, and pondering the relationship between beliefs and practices revealed in case discussions.

Early in the practicum, each candidate wrote an observation of the inclusion of an exceptional learner, and the group in each school submitted a list of inclusive practices they had observed in their school. They were encouraged to question assumptions held by them or their school about these practices. For the major assignment about inclusion of exceptional learners, each candidate wrote a brief case, based on an experienced dilemma, about creating an inclusive classroom for

one or more exceptional learners. Candidates led discussions of their peers in the school about their cases and debriefed classmates from other schools while on campus. Each written case was to be responded to by two peers. (This assignment is described in Appendix C.)

The purpose of the current research is to document and interpret the case study reports of five teacher candidates, focusing on their efforts to create inclusive classrooms for exceptional learners. This was accomplished using frameworks for analysis that have been refined in earlier research (Harrington, et al, 1996; Hutchinson, 1996). The paper provides support for the recommendations to infuse, into the teacher education of all candidates, early experience with diversity and with creating inclusive learning environments. It also indicates the extent to which pre-service teachers carry out inclusive teaching, that is, make use of what they learn in a case-based course during their practicum when the practicum and field-based course are deliberately interactive. Evidence is available of changes in beliefs and practices.

Method

Setting: Lakeside Public School

The five candidates whose case studies are described below were all arbitrarily assigned to Lakeside Public School (a fictitious name), located in a neighbourhood with a mix of single-family dwellings and subsidized rental housing. This kindergarten to Grade 8 school had about 500 students and 20 classroom teachers, plus specialist and educational assistants. The principal and vice-principal worked as an administrative team. For example, with the support of a resource teacher, the administrative team provided a "Quiet Room," where children could be assigned for support and to prevent them from disrupting their classroom peers. Many teachers in the school used a collaborative, community-building program called "Tribes" in their classrooms for establishing and maintaining positive classroom climate (Gibbs, 1995). The school embraced the teacher candidates as fellow teachers and involved them in all parts of the school's life including fund-raising bingos, staff parties, and the classroom photographs. The principal and one of the associate teachers took part in information sessions to help other schools learn about the pilot for the field-based teacher education program. Both principal and vice-principal supported the extended practicum and expressed their positive opinions to the candidates.

The candidates and teachers found it difficult to preserve a common hour daily for the candidates to meet and discuss their field-based courses. The arrangement that was used most of the term comprised half an hour prior to the lunch period and half an hour of the lunch period. Two or three days most weeks, some or all of the candidates organized cooperative games in the school yard over the lunch period. The candidates met in a teacher work room that they could book ahead for their sessions. This meant they were free from being overheard by the teachers and administrators while discussing their experiences or wrestling with assignments for

field-based courses. All candidates at Lakeside started in a primary classroom and then moved into a junior placement.

Analysis of Data

The authors reviewed the criteria that had been used in previous research on the quality of candidate-authored dilemma cases (Harrington, et al., 1996; Hutchinson, 1996) and read and re-read the five cases under analysis. Previous research had shown that when teacher candidates represented their cases as dilemmas, rather than vignettes, they were more likely to engage in high levels of critical reflection (Hutchinson, 1996). First, we examined the five cases to discern whether they represented *dilemmas* or *vignettes*. As developed in Hutchinson (1996) dilemmas in teaching take the form of paradoxes where a chosen course of action may simultaneously ameliorate one problem and prompt another (Carter, 1991), or a challenge suggests a number of solutions among which it is difficult to choose. Vignettes, on the other hand, describe critical incidents that elicit teachers' immediate reactions, and a clear right or wrong choice can be made (Carter, p. 15).

Then, using the method of constant comparison, we found that three themes emerged from the cases that described the quality of actions taken to enhance inclusive classroom climate and described the quality of critical reflection. The first emergent theme concerned *tensions* and *maintaining a critical stance*. This referred to the candidates fighting in some way against being co-opted by the status quo, giving up on a child, or blaming a child. *Equity* and *questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions* was the second emergent theme. Equity involved candidates trying to distinguish between treating students the same and treating students equitably. The clarification of equity issues led to candidates changing previously held ideas and questioning taken-for-granted assumptions. One candidate said during an on-campus discussion in Critical Issues, "Everyone arrives with preconceived notions, and experience has to overcome these if it [experience] is to be our teacher." The instructor described the cases discussed in class as dilemmas and the assignment directed the candidates to write about a dilemma. The two themes of maintaining a critical stance and equity were emphasized throughout the Inclusion of Exceptional Children section of the Critical Issues course. These two themes were similar to the aspects of critical reflection examined in Hutchinson (1996).

The third emergent theme was *the challenge that remains*. This referred to the candidates' perceptions that all resolutions were context-bound and could not be seen as definitive rules for how to respond in the future. The theme of the challenge that remains showed the high tolerance for ambiguity displayed in the candidate-authored cases and the peer responses. Finally, we examined *the content of the peer responses*. These responses were thoughtful, and tended to reflect in a brief, dense way the essence of the cases being responded to. These responses demonstrate the power of conversations engaged in by supportive peers while learning from

experience and field-based courses simultaneously. The theme of remaining challenges was implicit in the case discussions held on-campus, but not addressed explicitly. We decided to include the theme of peer responses because these illustrated the rich and wholehearted discussions that the instructor heard on-campus and in the school.

Descriptions of Five Teacher Candidates and Their Cases

When elementary candidates were notified of their acceptance into the teacher education program, they were informed about the pilot program and invited to respond on a first-come, first-served basis (for 31 positions). Of the approximately 22 pilot elementary candidates who chose to complete the practicum in the city where the university was located, five were assigned to Lakeside Public School. Of these five, four had completed honors degrees in their undergraduate programs (all at different universities) and one had completed a general degree followed by five years' employment. The candidates assigned to Lakeside included four women and one man: Trudy, Andrew, Hannah, Krista, and Wanda. The four women were assigned fictitious names. Andrew's name has been used, with his permission, because a paper by Andrew appears in this issue which makes reference to some of the issues discussed here.

These five teacher candidates had rich experiential backgrounds and strong academic records prior to participating in the pilot program. They are, however, representative of the candidates accepted by Queen's Faculty of Education, and were arbitrarily assigned to their faculty liaison (the first author) and to Lakeside Public School. Four of the five happened to be enrolled in the Program Focus on Exceptional Children (taught by their faculty liaison, the first author). Only 21 of the 31 elementary candidates were enrolled in this Program Focus with the remainder evenly divided between Issues in Primary Grades and International Education. More detail about each teacher candidate appears with the description and analysis of the candidate's case study.

Trudy

Trudy had completed an honors degree in science one year before beginning the program, and had extensive experience working at a summer camp in positions of increasing responsibility. In the summer following the teacher education program, she directed a summer camp. She had also participated in action research as an apprentice on a research team in the year between her undergraduate and education programs, and had been a member of a university emergency first aid response team for two years. She taught in a kindergarten classroom and a Grade 5/6 classroom. In both settings, I observed her taking risks that the teachers applauded, like using collaborative, hands-on science experiments in Grade 5/6. She engaged the students completely and held their attention while she taught.

Trudy expressed great interest in equity issues, especially related to how student gender influences teachers' decision-making.

Trudy's Case: "Making Exceptions"

The *dilemma* facing Trudy involved meeting individual needs without rewarding and appearing to reward unacceptable behavior. Trudy was confronted with a Senior Kindergarten child, Allison, who posed three challenges. Allison was very determined, had no prior knowledge of letters and numbers, and demanded attention. As a result, Allison would repeatedly call a teacher's name when the teacher was praising another child's work, and interrupt group lessons by standing up and declaring that she did not want to take part. Trudy understood the context of Allison's behavior. Allison's parents had repeatedly separated and reunited; there were serious financial pressures; and her younger brother was developmentally delayed with a hyperactivity disorder. However, understanding the attention-seeking behavior did not resolve the problem of how to address it. One day Allison refused to join her peers to learn the sound and how to print the letter "F." When Trudy could not coax her, Trudy asked Allison if she wanted to learn the letters. Allison said, "No." Trudy recognized that it was not defiance or belligerence, but simple disinterest, that characterized Allison's response. Suddenly, Trudy saw it all differently. She taught Allison alone after she had taught the group and sent them to their tables to print the new letter. After a few minutes of individual attention, Allison smiled and walked off to find her book. She printed a page of respectable "Fs."

Trudy described the *tension* resulting from her desire to support this child by giving her more attention than the other children in the class received. Trudy's perception was that "catering to her inappropriate method of asking for attention may have started a trend with her and/or with other students who had seen us working together." To Trudy's surprise, her "fear turned out to be unfounded. It seemed that the other students accepted the concept of treating students with fairness as opposed to sameness more easily than I!"

Trudy confronted the issue of *equality vs. equity* because she thought that by giving Allison more attention she would necessarily be providing less to some of the other students, thereby "not treating all the students equally." Trudy said that until that point, "I did my best to give the *same* learning opportunities to all students. But I couldn't see that inclusion for some exceptional students requires *making exceptions,* even responding positively to a behavior that in any other would be unacceptable." Trudy discovered that equity required providing Allison with what she needed, namely individual attention and teaching within a context that would encourage effort and success. Trudy rejected her belief that good teaching meant the provision of "the same learning opportunities to all students."

Trudy articulated the *challenge of ambiguity that remained* after she had confronted the dilemma. She saw that solutions are situationally contingent: "This solution may not be the answer to every similar situation, as unintentionally reinforc-

ing undesirable behavior often leads to an escalated problem, but this case has made me realize that there is never a standard behavior problem with a standard solution."

Two *peer responses* to Trudy's case were written by Wanda and Hannah. Wanda supported Trudy's perception that "the need for attention is only part of the child's difficulties"—motivating Allison was also necessary. This required the "ability to distinguish the child's tone as disinterest in learning the letter "F," allowing Trudy to give "Allison the one-on-one tutoring she needed to see the value of the task...and alter Allison's vision of learning." Wanda also "found most interesting...the children's ability to see that fairness and sameness are different." Hannah highlighted the questioning of assumptions that was required and the need to see each child as unique: "Teachers need to be careful with labels and preconceived ideas and have to form their own opinion of their students, as well as dealing with the students in their own appropriate way."

Andrew

Andrew had completed an honors degree in the humanities while enrolled in the concurrent teacher education program at Queen's before entering the field-based pilot program. He had taught, for a minimum of two weeks, each year during his undergraduate program, and always received positive reports on his initiative and teaching in the classroom. He had volunteer experience with hospitalized children. At Lakeside Andrew taught in a Grade 2/3 classroom for most of the practicum and a 4/5 classroom for 3 weeks. He began teaching half-days by the end of the first week of school, and the Grade 2/3 teacher commented explicitly in his evaluation that he had transformed from student to teacher in the four months. Andrew volunteered to speak to a panel, which was reviewing the Faculty of Education, and to school administrators interested in learning about the pilot; he also represented the Faculty of Education at a conference on preservice teacher education. He applied to graduate school as well as to districts of education, and has enrolled in the graduate program in Education at Queen's.

Andrew's Case: "A Source of Bewilderment to Me"

Andrew wrote about a gifted student who perplexed him during the three weeks of his practicum that he spent with a Grade 4/5 class of about 35 children. Andrew wrote near the end of his case that Paul and his defiant behavior remained "a source of bewilderment to me." The *dilemma* was that Paul, a gifted student, was repeatedly disrespectful to Andrew beginning on Andrew's first day with the class. The school policy stated that disrespectful behavior toward a fellow student or teacher resulted in a two-day visit to the Quiet Room. However, this removal from the classroom was problematic for Andrew: "How could Paul work on his social skills and improve upon his [relationship] with me if he was in another room for two days?" Andrew did not ask Paul to attend the Quiet Room and tried, rather, to improve rapport with Paul. With the situation deteriorating, Andrew thought his

decision led to Paul having less respect for Andrew because he did not enforce the rules. Andrew asked himself, "Why is this child, for whom everything comes so easily, exhibiting such disruptive tendencies? ...he is aware of the impact of certain behavior upon others, so I remain confused as to his negative response to me."

There were many *tensions*. Andrew was told by his associate teacher, when he first arrived at the class, that Paul was gifted. The associate teacher implied that gifted students should not be asked to attend the Quiet Room. Andrew perceived the Quiet Room to be a place for "time out," but he learned that his associate teacher had defined it for her class as "a method of punishment. With this mentality prevalent in the classroom, I decided that sending Paul there would only further diminish any hopes of positive communication between Paul and myself." Andrew felt, as the three-week practicum in this classroom passed, that he should not have been co-opted by the associate teacher's views of the student when "she unintentionally created a categorization of students [gifted] that I would rather have achieved from my own observations." Finally in the third week, the associate teacher assigned Paul to spend two days in the Quiet Room. Andrew said, "It undercut my authority." Andrew encountered the difficulties of many teacher candidates—being a newcomer to a culture and not viewing teaching in quite the same way as the established culture.

Andrew's case shows him struggling with what could constitute *equity* and *questioning his own assumptions*. If Andrew had been consistent in his treatment of Paul, he would have assigned Paul to the Quiet Room, but he thought a more equitable solution was to teach Paul by interacting with him, rather than banishing him. "Even though my concerns about Paul's behavior still remain, I feel confident in knowing that I acted in ways I thought were in his best interest, responding to his specific needs and seeking an equitable solution for a group of individuals, not simply a class of students." Andrew articulated changes in his beliefs. He had found it challenging but possible to treat individuals fairly in the Grade 2/3 class where he and the associate teacher shared many beliefs about teaching and fairness. He found no satisfactory solution in the case of Paul when he and the associate teacher had different views of practice, like the purpose of the Quiet Room, and different beliefs about equity. In his indecision about Paul, Andrew came to question what he had previously understood: "Before this experience, I believed that educators should and could treat all students with equality. My experience with Paul, however, forced me to reconsider and evaluate this very perception and, in so doing, altered in my personal perspective in teaching. Fairness, not sameness of process."

The remaining challenge of ambiguity is apparent because Andrew never resolved his dilemma with Paul. "I would like to say that I have arrived at a nice, tidy conclusion and that everything worked out, but my experiences these past four months have demonstrated that this simply does not happen."

Trudy and Krista wrote *peer responses*. Trudy provided an insight that Andrew never reached on his own: "The central problem, his relationship with Paul, was

unresolved because he had not yet been able to determine the source of Paul's antagonism towards him." She also raised an issue that the group had discussed: "...on the appropriate use of a student's OSR [records] from when to read it to how to interpret it." Krista focused on the assumptions Andrew had made that "proved false." These were: "He believed that he should be treating students equally, and that the lower [ability] students would cause him the most difficulties."

Hannah

Hannah, who is bilingual, had moved from another province for the teacher education program. She had an honors degree in fine arts and extensive experience performing and teaching music. She taught in a Grade 1/2 class with two teachers and 42 students for 11 weeks, and in Grade 5/6 for 3 weeks. In the team-teaching situation, she sometimes taught only the children from one grade, and on occasions I observed her leading activities effectively with all the children. With encouragement from the principal and the support of the other candidates and the primary teachers, she organized and conducted a primary choir for Lakeside School. This caught the attention of the direction of education for the district who visited to observe Hannah in action. Hannah started teaching as a music specialist in the autumn following the pilot.

Hannah's Case: "He Just Needed a Different Environment"

Hannah wrote about Shayne who was "dubbed a problem" and about whom teachers said, "...just has to be endured as best as possible." Hanna's *dilemma* concerned a young, socially immature, attention-seeking boy in a large class. She had to move beyond labelling him as a behavior problem who was "just another misfit" to see him as a child who had particular learning needs. Hannah described the *tensions*: she felt "caught between reproving and teaching." Shayne's problematic behaviors were glaring. Hannah's professional responsibility was to help him learn. When Shayne was sitting on the carpet during a group lesson, "When not talking to a neighbor at the back of the rug, he was playing with a toy, or looking around at the various displays and objects in the large room. His self-control is minimal." During seatwork, "Shayne sat with his friends and talked and fooled around, resulting in poor work that took much time to complete." When Hannah discussed Shayne's behaviors with her associate teachers, they "brought up his immaturity." The conversations did not include discussions about capturing his attention and meeting his needs.

Equity concerns made Hannah critical of her own teaching. By asking, "but couldn't he be helped?" Hannah puzzled over interventions that would be "fair" to Shayne. Her concern that "he won't be lost as a child that just has to be endured" motivated her to attempt a variety of accommodations, "that little extra push to center his attention." She tried giving Shayne opportunities to both work and play with math manipulatives. Hannah built on her observation that, when "Shayne had

been seated at the front of the class with only a couple of students with whom he'd be unlikely to fool around...his seat work had improved in quality and the time required to do it was reduced. He could do the work!" Responding to his behavior on the carpet, Hannah structured where he sat. On one occasion, she removed him from the carpet "to sit on a chair for the story. This upset him, but to my amazement he sat wonderfully still and quiet and listened to the whole story." She followed this up by speaking with him to ensure that "he knew why he was sent to the chair." On another occasion, Hannah placed Shayne on the carpet, directly in front of her. "This worked tremendously well as Shayne realized that I was too close for him to try anything, so he'd better listen." The absence of distractions enabled him to remain more focused. Hannah came to realize "that he could be helped; he just needed a different environment and a little help."

Challenge and *ambiguity remained* because Shayne did not become a model student. He "hasn't changed overnight—he still tries to get away with things and acts immaturely, but I have discovered that there are ways of helping him so that he won't be lost as a child that just has to be endured." Hannah showed both personal and professional growth as she moved beyond the label to consider Shayne's needs. "Working with Shayne has encouraged me to try a little harder for each and every child to meet his/her need...I realized that trying to meet the individual needs of 41 students is nigh on impossible, but helping them to get on the right path is possible." Ultimately, Hannah embraced a paradox: "The student who was one of my biggest griefs turned into a victory when I switched a couple of seats. This has really shown me that no child is impossible to work with as long as I am willing to find what turns my grief into my victory—and theirs!"

Peer responses by Krista and Andrew acknowledged Hannah's growth. Krista said, "She rejected that a student is just that way...and changed her mindset.... Instead of continuing along with the status quo, she became proactive and made extra effort to help her student." Andrew, in his response, identified what Hannah had learned: "the importance of questioning everything, choosing to make her own decisions and conclusions about students." Challenging her own assumptions meant dropping "defeatist attitudes towards certain children [and] recognizing the value of each and every one."

Krista

Krista had graduated five years before she entered the teacher education program and had worked in a variety of settings including teaching English in Japan. She is a member of a visible minority, one of only about eight in 62 students in the pilot program, and particularly interested in equity issues related to gender and race. Krista taught in a Grade 3/4 classroom for eight weeks and in a Grade 6 classroom for six weeks. Her first associate teacher was team leader for the primary division at Lakeside. This teacher had many changes in her class roster at the end of the first week of school, to accommodate changes due to new students who

enrolled at the beginning of school. Although experienced teachers handle this kind of upheaval frequently, it was challenging for Krista to deal with a new class of children the second week of school. Krista showed initiative and imagination in making a child with severe hearing loss feel comfortable when the child arrived ten days after the beginning of the year. Krista taught all the children in the class about the child's amplification system and made many effective accommodations for the child with hearing loss. Krista made extensive efforts to attend professional development workshops during her year in the pilot program, and accepted a position in a private school following the pilot.

Krista's Case: "Losing Another Girl"

Krista's *dilemma* involved minimizing her concern with gender stereotypes to maximize her focus on the particular learning needs of an individual female student in Grade 6. "I am genuinely concerned that the teaching of mathematics should be done in a way that is as accessible to girls as to boys. When a girl experiences such great difficulties with math, I feel reactions that go much deeper than that of one single student having trouble. This...can... distract me from the fact that I am dealing with an individual, not a gender." Rachel was a Grade 6 student whose overall performance was below average. She was easily distracted, went off-task quickly, and appeared to "often tune out and miss important sections." Her attitude was negative and defeatist and "her self-perception was inability."

Tensions abounded in Krista's work with Rachel. When Krista worked with Rachel individually on some math problems that were causing her great difficulty, Krista reported Rachel was feeling overwhelmed by her inability to understand any part of the math problems. Not wanting to give up on Rachel meant that Krista had to see Rachel as an individual whose anxiety was preventing her from learning. By sequencing the steps to a solution, introducing manipulatives, and giving Rachel opportunities to use them, Krista created a context for success. To effect the level of understanding that Krista wanted Rachel to achieve required risk-taking on both their parts. Rachel had to risk failure, while Krista had to risk the possibility of embarrassing Rachel in front of her peers by introducing manipulatives. "I wondered if she would be embarrassed if other students realized we were using them to complete simple steps." When Rachel's confidence spiralled because she could solve the problems, Krista's confidence grew, confirming that the "risk was well worth it."

Addressing *equity* meant that Krista had to set aside her preconceptions that Rachel was disinterested in learning math and making no effort to learn, shaped by the knowledge that Rachel's academic performance was weak. Empathizing with Rachel's feeling of being overwhelmed led Krista "to focus myself and reframe my own challenges with her into more manageable pieces.... Deciding to *question my own assumptions* about her attitudes and take some risks to help her understand also worked in my favor." Krista's refocusing enabled her to understand that motivation can manifest itself in a variety of ways, and frustration can mask a desire to learn.

Krista was *left with the challenge* of remembering to temper preconceptions about gender, motivation, and performance, working to see each student as an individual with unique and particular needs and abilities. "In another situation, at another time, with a female student with more of a record of academic success, I question whether or not I would feel that overwhelming sense of losing another girl so quickly."

Wanda and Trudy wrote *peer responses*. Wanda emphasized Krista's personal growth: "What I consider to be the most compelling aspect...was her ability to put her preoccupation with gender stereotypes aside to focus on the individual needs of the student seeking her help." Trudy highlighted Krista's new learning about the "importance [of] drawing conclusions about the motivation for a student's behavior from working closely with the individual rather than from general observations such as gender or previous academic performance." Trudy also acknowledged the remaining challenge and her own tolerance for ambiguity as she concluded her response: "This [drawing conclusions] is an important and troubling issue in the context of today's large classrooms which make it difficult to provide needed attention on an individual basis."

Wanda

Wanda had completed an honors degree in social sciences and fine arts a year before entering the teacher education program. She had extensive experience working as an employee and a volunteer with preschoolers, street youth, and adolescents in summer recreation programs. She taught in a Grade 1 classroom for eight weeks and a Grade 5/6 classroom for six weeks. In a reflective discussion with her peers, facilitated by the first author, she disclosed how she was coming to know the kind of teacher she wanted to be, and also coming to know that she could not yet be the kind of teacher she wanted to be. She reassured her peers she was "all right with that." Shortly after that disclosure, Wanda became the first candidate in this group of five to sign a contract for a teaching position. She was hired by a school district in the United States that recruited at Queen's during the Fall term.

Wanda's Case: "Not the Teacher I Want to Be"

Wanda wrote about Alex, a student with many learning difficulties, whose behavior provoked responses that made her feel that she was "not the teacher I want to be." The *dilemma* that Wanda explored was two-tiered. She was in a busy Grade 5/6 class of 32 students, with "four students whom I would see as having an exceptionality." Of these four, Alex was the most problematic, with learning challenges in all subject areas. He was "socially immature" with "occasional outbursts and inappropriate attention-seeking behaviors." She found herself frustrated with the congestion of the classroom: "I find it difficult to assist all the students since I tend to respond more to the students at the front since they are closest to me in proximity. I find group work unorganized and difficult to monitor.... I look

around the classroom and it makes me uncomfortable." Her frustration was aggravated by Alex who disturbed and annoyed the other students and made Wanda "wonder who jumped into my body and made such useless and self-serving comments to Alex." The physical set-up of the classroom masked a deeper concern about her inability to understand and address the individual learning needs of Alex.

Tensions were evident. The teacher that Wanda wanted to be would "provide my students with the education and support that they have a right to." Yet her frustrations caused her to feel "intolerant and directive...not the teacher I want to be." Wanda had to fight against blaming Alex for his disruptions and his seeming inability to compete his work. She had to work towards enabling him to achieve some success and contextualizing his behaviors. "Alex isn't doing his work because he doesn't understand the material that I haven't modified for him. Alex is out of his seat because he wants to interact with his peer which his seating arrangement doesn't allow."

Wanda struggled with her recognition that she was not meeting Alex's learning needs. She needed to "improve my own teaching by modifying lessons for Alex for all the necessary activities." She wrote, "I am still puzzled by how to do this." At the same time, she remained constrained by the physical limitations of the classroom space: "Overcrowded classrooms make teaching difficult, and I wonder how to create an effective seating arrangement that can overcome such congestion and meet the needs of the students."

As Wanda considered the implications of changing Alex's seating, concerns about *equity* surfaced: "Seating Alex in a group may work really well for him. What about the other exceptional student who copes better when seated by himself? I can't very well sit him by himself while the rest of the class sits in groups." She addressed the varying possibilities as she reflected on Alex's behavior in class when, sitting on his own, he would, at any opportunity, get up, move around, and generally irritate his peers. But, if provided with legitimate opportunity to interact with his peers, his annoying behaviors could lessen. Wanda had seen this demonstrated when, to her surprise, Alex worked diligently on an art project. "He was socializing well with his peers as he stood around a group of desks that was designated the paint station. He helped others, praised their work, and was considerate of my time as he waited patiently for my help. I saw an Alex that I hadn't yet come to know." Nonetheless, "It is also possible that Alex would impede the learning of his group members if some of his disruptive behaviors were not solved by the new arrangement. Is that fair to the other students?" Yet, if Alex were seated in a group, "his social skills would improve and he would receive the help from peers that the teacher cannot always provide."

Wanda was left with the *challenge* of trying to confront the twin challenges of creating an inclusive classroom climate within a congested setting, and being the kind of teacher who "must take the time to really get to know her class and then be flexible enough to create a classroom environment accordingly."

Peer responses by Hannah and Andrew praised Wanda. Hannah commended Wanda on her personal and professional growth as she encountered her frustration

and persevered "to get past her feelings—to see things as they were and not as she felt." Andrew neatly targeted the paradox of Alex's situation: "Alex was seated alone because he would distract the persons sitting next to him...[yet] his isolation further perpetuated his disruptive tendencies." Andrew also praised Wanda's "critical eye" in questioning her assumptions about herself as a teacher. "She acknowledged that she assumed she would be drawn to all children, regardless of their behavior in class. However, her experiences with Alex demonstrated to her that she has to learn how to handle her sense of non-attachment to certain students in the future."

Discussion

A previous study suggested that about two-thirds of a group of teacher candidates represented their case, based on experience, as a dilemma rather than a vignette, and that this appeared to be a precursor to candidates' displaying the highest levels of three aspects of critical reflection and making recommendations for intensely inclusive courses of action (Hutchinson, 1996). Intensely inclusive courses of action were those that could realistically be implemented in a classroom and were intense enough to be likely to facilitate learning by the exceptional students and ensure the student was included beyond mere physical presence in the classroom. The teacher candidates had been enrolled in a traditional Ontario program of teacher education with three 3-week placements for teaching practice.

The five teacher candidates whose cases are described in the current article were taking part in a pilot for an innovative teacher education program that involves early, extended practicum and field-based courses completed during this practicum in school-based groups. The analysis of their cases suggests that all five wrote dilemmas rather than vignettes. They engaged in high levels of critical reflection about their beliefs and practices and the beliefs and practices of their peers. Beliefs and practices seemed interactive in that challenges to practice seemed to contribute to questioning of beliefs, and changes in beliefs seemed to emerge with new practices (Richardson, 1994, 1996). All of this took place in the context of a field-based course that raised candidates' awareness of equity issues and the expectation that they would adapt teaching to meet individual needs of exceptional learners.

Discussion of dilemma cases was the main thrust of the classes in Critical Issues (Inclusion of Exceptional Learners) during two weeks on-campus in October. The case studies written by the candidates contained themes of equity and questioning assumptions like the cases and discussions in class. The tensions apparent in the cases suggested the candidates had a realistic understanding of the complexities of creating and maintaining inclusive classrooms and understood the reciprocal relationship between treating all students equitably and including exceptional learners in regular classrooms. In every case there were examples of the candidate trying to accommodate individuals, sometimes with success, sometimes without success. In contrast to some earlier work (e.g., Tomlinson et al., 1997), the

candidates focused on their efforts to create inclusive classrooms while simultaneously acknowledging their failures. However, they never sounded like they had found themselves defeated by the school's prevailing culture, to the extent that they had abandoned their efforts. They demonstrated a high tolerance for ambiguity, often expressing that they had a great deal to learn, and that they were questioning assumptions they had made in the past.

The field-based courses during a four-month practicum appeared to have contributed to a supportive school group, and the components of Critical Issues on equity and inclusion appeared to have contributed to high levels of inclusive teaching and critical reflection in teacher candidates. Perhaps the structured assignments to carry out adaptations and write a case study contributed to the willingness of the candidates and their associate teachers to try adaptations. All five candidates discussed a number of dilemmas with me that had arisen in teaching exceptional learners, and could have written about other experiences. In many of these case studies, a series of adaptive actions was taken over a period of time to create an inclusive classroom. These candidates were adapting teaching, not always successfully, and conducting daily discussions about their efforts, successes, failures, and changing beliefs. The case discussions and field-based course appeared to influence practice and beliefs (Levin, 1994).

Closing Comment

In evaluating a pilot program to learn what teacher candidates are accomplishing in their efforts to become teachers and to learn which program elements to keep and which to change, it is important to include examinations of the practices and beliefs of candidates within specific program elements. The data examined in this article suggest that teacher candidates can learn to question and change beliefs and practices within a field-based course on including exceptional learners that provides structures for frequent case discussions, both on-campus and in school. The quality of peer responses suggests that, with modelling by a case facilitator on campus, and structures to guide participation, candidates can conduct challenging and supportive dialogues without an instructor.

The candidates' resonance with the emphasis on equity as the basis for adapting teaching encouraged the first author and her colleagues to redevelop the Critical Issues course so the components on Equity and Inclusion of Exceptional Learners were more integrated and taught by one instructor for each section of students, and case discussions were used for both Equity Issues (including racism, gender equity, homophobia, etc.) and Inclusion of Exceptional Learners in the year following the pilot. School-based groups were kept intact within sections of 30 to 38 candidates to foster the quality of dialogue on-campus and in schools that was exemplified by the peer responses in the five cases examined in this paper. The challenges are myriad in supporting 600 individual teacher candidates, during an extended

practicum, to learn with a group of peers to change beliefs and practices about the inclusion of exceptional learners.

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Appendix A

Excerpts from the Course Syllabus for the Critical Issues Course

Issues (p.1):

This course includes three critical issues in Education: Critical Legal Issues in Education, Critical Issues in Teaching Exceptional Learners, and Critical Equity Issues in Education. For the most part, work for this course will be carried out in small "study groups" in the associate Schools over the Fall term. As well, large group sessions will be led by each of the three instructors for each of their course components. Two components, Critical Issues in Teaching Exceptional Learners and Critical Equity Issues in Education, are somewhat integrated by having similar outcomes and a combined introductory session.

Critical Issues in Teaching Exceptional Learners (p. 4):

This component will provide an introduction to the critical issues in teaching exceptional learners. Current policy suggest that, whenever possible, education for students who are gifted and students with disabilities be provided in inclusive settings, that is, with peers without disabilities or giftedness. Teacher candidates will learn about current expectations of teachers by reading provincial policies and exploring policies and practices of the school and district in which they are teaching. Through observation, reflection, group discussion and reading, candidates will identify and then experience inclusive teaching practices.

Outcomes (p. 5):

Both this component, Critical Issues in Teaching Exceptional Learners, and Critical Equity Issues in Education have combined their outcomes listed below.

Candidates will:

1. understand the following terms: equity, diversity, children with disabilities, giftedness, students at risk, exceptional learners, inclusion, accommodation.
2. identify and describe examples of equity and inclusive practices in education, and provide reasoning as to why or how these practices are considered equitable or inclusive.
3. identify and describe examples of inequity and exclusionary practices in

education, and provide reasoning as to why and how these practices are considered inequitable and exclusionary.

4. identify teaching strategies which address issues of equity and inclusion, and provide reasoning as to why or how these practices are considered equitable or inclusive.

Components of the course syllabus related to Inclusion of Exceptional Learners:
Self-Assessment of Readiness and Checklist on Diversity and Inclusion in Education (pp. 9-14).
Reading List and List of Journals on Education of Exceptional Learners (pp. 15-18).
Abridged version of chapter, "Teaching and Learning of Exceptional Adolescents" (pp. 19-25).
Excerpts from Proposed Regulations and Definitions for Exceptional Learners (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training) (pp. 26-26).
Adapting Learning Environments, Assessment, and Homework for Inclusion (pp. 27-28).

Appendix B

Scheduling of Components in the Critical Issues Course, with Emphasis on the Inclusion of Exceptional Learners

August Orientation (August 26-August 30, 1996):
Day 3 (of 5):
Legal Issues (2 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Equity (2 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Day 4 (of 5):
Legal Issues (2 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Inclusion (2 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)

On-Campus Weeks (October 28-November 8, 1996):
Day 4 (of 10):
Inclusion (1.5 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Equity (1.5 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Day 5 (of 10):
Legal Issues (3 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *combined*)
Day 7 (of 10):
Inclusion (1.5 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate)*
Equity (1.5 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Day 9 (of 10):
Legal Issues (1 hour) (Elementary and Secondary sections *combined*)
Inclusion (1 hour) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Equity (1 hour) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)

Consolidation Week (January 6-January 10, 1997):
Day 2 (of 5):
Legal Issues (2 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *combined*)
Inclusion (1 hour) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Equity (1 hour (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Day 4 (of 5):
Legal Issues (2 hours) (Elementary and Secondary sections *combined*)

Inclusion (1 hour) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)
Equity (1 hour) (Elementary and Secondary sections *separate*)

Appendix C

Critical Issues:
Inclusion of Exceptional Learners Assignment for Phase Two Fall Practicum

1. Write a brief case based on *your* teaching experiences with an exceptional learner (or a group of learners) in the context of your classroom. Focus on a dilemma that challenged you. Describe the student, the student's needs, your actions to include the student, the implications of your action.

Six steps are often used as a guide for the novice case writer. (1) Describe the situation in detail. Use your observations. Create, for the reader, the setting in which the case took place. (2) Develop the incidents, situations that occurred in the setting. (3) Develop the characters, give them names (not their real names), describe their ways of learning and exceptionalities, as well as their roles, actions, attitudes. (Try to show how your observations were followed by inferences and judgments.) (4) Finish writing the description of the characters, incidents, and consequences. You are telling your story with a beginning, a middle, and an end (like a short story). (5) Analyze the case. Reflect on the situation. Think about and write about why it might have developed the way it did. Question your own taken-for-granted assumptions. Why did you believe that might not be true? 6) Summarize what has been learned, what remains puzzling, perhaps the difficulties of learning general principles from specific cases and experience.

Question: What kinds of experiences or situations should I consider writing about?

Answer: Situations that you found troubling, puzzling, or that aroused your emotions are usually the dilemmas of practice that make thought-provoking cases. Such a situation may concern an individual child or adolescent, a group, or a class.

Question: What do you mean by "dilemma?"

Answer: Picture yourself on the horns of a dilemma. There are no obvious answers; rather, each competing solution has advantages and disadvantages.

2. Ask two peers to respond to your case. Their responses may vary from a paragraph to a page. Then you must also respond to the cases of two peers. Ask your associate teacher (or another associate teacher who expressed interest) to respond to the case. If the associate teachers cannot, do not worry. (Attach your first assignment to this case assignment.)

3. Lead a case discussion, with the study group in your school, on your case. Because each of you must fit this in by end of term, an action plan for getting all of it done would be wise. Try to include associate teachers whenever possible.

4. Conduct a self-assessment for your case. In a paragraph, tell me why this is a satisfactory assignment, according to your understanding of the criteria described above.

5. Conduct a group assessment. This may be a checklist, created or found by members of the group, on which you list the criteria for successful small group work.

6. Submit the cases of all members of your group as well as individual and group self-assessments by January 20, 1997.