Using Case Studies To Assess Candidates' Knowledge and Skills in a Graduate Reading Program

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Introduction

In this age of heightened accountability, academia is increasingly being asked to link assessment to candidate performance outcomes in multiple ways. Research demonstrates the importance of aligning assessment with content standards but cautions that it is critical that assessments match the content, cover a wide range of knowledge, are cognitively demanding, and avoid irrelevant materials (AERA, 2003). Case-based pedagogy is one way to link program content to classroom practice. Much of the research on case methods calls for the use of cases to "create bridges across the great chasm that divides policy from practice" (Shulman, 2000, p. 2) in order to help teachers understand *how* practice is constructed in the classroom. Within case-based pedagogy, the cases become teaching tools that serve as a context for making meaning of concepts presented during instruction in a variety of instructional settings, and thus make understanding transparent.

In this article we examine the use of candidate-authored case studies as a culminating assessment activity in one Reading and Language Arts Specialist Credential Program (RRLA) in a large, urban public university with a diverse student population in south-

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ern California. Candidates in the program earn an M.A. in Education, Option in Reading, along with the state-issued specialist credential. We ask the following research questions in order to examine the use of case-based assessment in the RRLA program:

1. Are case studies an effective way for graduate candidates to demonstrate knowledge and skills learned in the program?

2. Can candidates use case studies to demonstrate what they know about serving culturally and linguistically diverse urban students?

Theoretical Framework

Much has been written about how assessment practices have and have not changed in the past 100 years (Brown, 1996; Shepard, 2004). While experts argue that there is reciprocity between assessment and instruction, the construction of school practice is often informed by outdated theories that do not consider new understandings from the field (Brown, 1996), frequently creating a disconnect between assessment and instruction. Shepard (2004) argues that "the content of assessments should match challenging subject matter standards and serve to instantiate what it means to know and learn in each of the disciplines" (p.1621) and she proposes a social-constructivist concept of assessment where dynamic, ongoing assessment offers candidates explicit evaluation criteria, in addition to support and assistance as feedback as they progress through the program. Thus the instructional program leads candidates towards the desired competencies that the assessment seeks to measure.

The use of case-based methodology to measure teacher competence is one way to link assessment to practice (Shulman, 2002) and to shift from traditional modes of evaluation into a more dynamic and authentic review of learning. While the professional fields of business and law have used cases and case methods for years, the idea of using them in education has emerged over the last 15 years as a promising idea. Merseth (1991) argues that the current move toward a case-based pedagogy is due to a growing interest in teacher knowledge and cognition as well as an acknowledgement of the complexities of teaching.

With this growing awareness, the efforts to define case studies have gained prominence. According to Merseth (1994) a case is "a descriptive narrative document that is based on a real life situation or event" (p. 2). The author further describes the case as having three essential elements: a firm base in reality, a reliance on research, and the development of multiple perspectives by those who use them. Complicating these efforts are the various uses of case studies. For example, cases can be used as stimulants for reflection, techniques to enrich field experiences, and tools for professional evaluation. They can further serve to frame conversations between mentors and novices, orient individuals to particular ways of thinking and initiate discussions from different perspectives (Merseth). Cases methods may be

used during large- and small-group discussions, role-playing, written analysis or team-based discussion (Merseth). Additionally, the use of cases for assessment can help teachers to reflect on their own practice and make more informed decisions regarding that practice (Harrington, 1995; Merseth, 1996; Shulman, 1987).

Why the growing interest in case-based methodology? What do cases or case studies offer that differs from other, more traditional research methods? While opinions may vary, the fundamental responses to these questions include context and authenticity. Not only do the cases themselves provide compelling contexts for discussing and making sense of classroom practice, but the notion that they are authentic representations of such practice also supports their use. Authenticity enhances the effectiveness of cases by adding context to theory (Colbert, Trimble & Desberg, 1996). The paramount concern is to make cases real and to use true-life stories that illustrate key educational theories and bring up issues that are critical to the professional growth of teachers. In this way cases can help students think productively about concrete experiences and enhance the ability to learn from their own experiences as they employ theoretical concepts to illuminate a practice problem or situation and practice how to think professionally about real problems and situations (Kleinfeld, 1996).

While much can be related to the use of case-based pedagogy as a teaching tool where students read and respond to cases, its use as a form of assessment where students create their own cases as a means of demonstrating competencies is relatively new. When using case studies for assessment it is important to consider not only the benefits but also the drawbacks. The benefits of utilizing case studies in instruction include the way that cases model how to think professionally about real problems and situations, helping candidates to think productively about concrete experiences (Kleinfeld, 1990). When cases are used for assessment, candidates can be presented with situations that require them to apply their knowledge and skills to solve real problems in the field. Tellis (1994) suggests that while case studies are dynamic, authentic, contextualized and linked to reality, they also present the candidate with challenges in terms of time expended, bias, objectivity/subjectivity, and other obstacles that arise, including blocked access and inability to build rapport with the case study student. Furthermore, even though the use of case studies as a means of authentic assessment linking theory to practice leans toward a more qualitative approach to assessment, current and national trends in education favor more quantitative systematic approaches.

Context for the Study

The Reading and Language Arts Specialist Credential is a state-authorized advanced credential issued to teachers who have a minimum of three years of teaching experience. Courses in the RRLA, which is accredited by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) and the National Council for Ac-

creditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), also meet the standards of the International Reading Association. Program standards emphasize foundational knowledge, instructional strategies and curriculum materials, assessment, diagnosis and evaluation. The RRLA further includes a focus on literacy instruction for English language learners (ELLs).

In addition to all coursework in the program, candidates must successfully complete a comprehensive exam (comps), which serves as a culminating activity for the program. Traditionally, all candidates in M.A. programs in education at this campus sit for a three-hour comps exam offered twice a year (during fall and spring quarter). During this exam candidates write essay responses to a series of questions prepared by faculty within their specific graduate programs. At the beginning of the quarter, candidates are provided with a series of practice or study questions. Typically, between the time candidates receive the questions and the actual date of the exam, they form study groups and work together in preparing responses to those questions. They also may ask faculty to clarify questions and review their responses before the date of the exam. For the RRLA program, candidates were given ten study questions, two of which showed up as mandatory questions on the exam. The candidates answered two additional questions, which were chosen from the rest of the questions. Each response was scored by a minimum of two faculty members, with some faculty scoring responses to more than one question. At times, some faculty scored more than 40 responses.

Although the RRLA faculty rewrote some comps questions each year, those faculty who scored the exams began to notice similarities between candidates' responses due to the fact that candidates studied together and often memorized similar, if not identical, responses to the study questions. Because of the similarity of exams and a general dissatisfaction with the traditional measure of using a sit-down written examination to assess our candidates, we looked for more authentic and meaningful ways to assess our candidates' knowledge and skills.

In fall quarter, 2004, the faculty decided to change the nature of the RRLA comprehensive exam in order to more effectively measure candidates' knowledge and skills in conditions where they would be able to demonstrate competence situated in the context of working with "real students." We designed an exam to give our candidates different opportunities to examine, understand, and demonstrate their knowledge of relationships among theory, research, practice, and decision-making. The idea was to simulate a clinical experience, to have the candidate act as a reading specialist and demonstrate the knowledge and skills learned in the program. In other words, we asked our candidates to "apply and show what they know." We utilized a common six-step model in designing the case method that asked candidates to: (1) identify the educational issues involved; (2) think about the case from multiple points of view (e.g., parent, student, teacher, principal); (3) use professional knowledge (e.g., learning theory) to discuss the case; (4) project courses of action that might solve the problem; (5) determine the consequence that

might follow from each course of action generated; (6) after evaluating each, choose courses of action to be followed and decide how to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan (Greenwood, 1996, p. 59).

Thus, the new comps exam asked candidates to administer a battery of assessments to one child; analyze the assessment results in terms of reading, writing and English language development (ELD); and determine the child's strengths and weaknesses in each area and write an appropriate intervention plan. It is important to note that our campus not only serves a diverse population, but teachers who attend our programs themselves teach an extremely diverse range of students including a considerable number of ELLs, most of whom initially learn to read in English, their second language. As a result, our graduates need the knowledge and skills to work effectively with ELLs.

Therefore we asked each candidate to develop his/her own individually written case study of a "real" struggling reader. Guidelines required candidates to begin by describing the student's background and then to construct the case study using data from the assessments and their knowledge about effective literacy instruction in order to make recommendations for the student. Within the case study, candidates must demonstrate and apply deep knowledge of curriculum and instructional approaches to use with struggling readers, including a broad and in-depth knowledge of instructional programs and specialized materials.

Once the new comps exam was conceptualized, agreed upon, developed, and implemented, faculty members were faced with the challenge of evaluating the case studies that candidates generated. First, we needed to decide on the rubric that would be most effective to score the cases, since the existing department rubric was no longer appropriate for the new exam. Because our candidates were no longer writing exams by hand in one sitting, we analyzed the issues that scoring the cases presented. For example, faculty believed that since students would have more time to write and would theoretically submit more polished word-processed exams, the new rubric should allow for grammar, spelling, writing style, and use of references to be weighted differently in the scoring.

The authors of this study applied for and received a small assessment grant in winter quarter, 2005, to address issues related to evaluating the case studies developed by our candidates for the comprehensive exam. We used the grant to develop a new scoring rubric (see Figure One), guidelines for scoring and the *gateway requirements* (see Figure Two), which documented the use of current research on reading, writing and ELD, APA format, page numbers, and the use of www.turnitin.com to scan for plagiarism, etc. The purpose of the gateway was to immediately screen out any case studies that had missing requirements prior to the faculty evaluators scoring them. Exams that did not meet the gateway requirements were not accepted and candidates were given 24 hours to complete the exam.

Figure One: RRLA Comprehensive Exam Scoring Rubric.

Reader # _____   Student CEID # _____   ☐ Reading   ☐ Writing   ☐ ELD   Score _____

Rubric for Reading M.A. and Reading and Language Arts Specialist Credential Comprehensive Exam (Ulanoff, Fingon and Beltrán, 2005)

Scoring: Candidates are scored on three sections: reading, writing, and English language development using the following rubric. Candidates must have an average score of no less than 2.5, and no sections with a rating below 2 to pass. In general, a "3" rating is considered passing or meeting the requirements. Please check the bullets that were key in your decision rating and list comments as necessary. Plus (+) or minus (−) ratings can be given in any section.

Evaluation Criteria	Rating 4—Exceptional, "Above and Beyond" (pass)	Level 3—Passing (Pass)	Level 2—Minimal, needs improvement (fail)	Level 1—Unacceptable (fail)
Format and organization: gateway requirements, exam organization, writing skills, and grammar, spelling and punctuation	Excellent organization, writing skills and mechanics.	Very good or good organization, writing skills and mechanics.	Fair organization and overall writing skills with few minor errors.	Poor organization; poorly structured writing and many errors.
Provides background information about the student: academic, social/emotional/physical, and sociological information necessary to describe student in terms of reading, writing and ELD.	Concise, detailed, relevant and accurate overall information.	Detailed, relevant and accurate overall information	Accurate and relevant information.	Limited, inaccurate or irrelevant overall information.
Understanding of overall assessment task: Description of testing instruments and interpretation of results.	Accurate description and interpretation.	Accurate description and adequate interpretation.	Accurate description and limited interpretations.	Inaccurate description and/or poor interpretation
Administration and interpretation of reading, writing and ELD assessments and uses results to plan an intervention based on student needs.	Correctly administers and thoroughly interprets required assessments (may include others) and uses data appropriately.	Correctly administers and interprets required assessments and uses data appropriately.	Adequately administers and interprets required assessments and uses results with a few minor errors.	Makes significant errors during administration and interpretation of assessments and plans intervention based on erroneous data.
Knowledge of current research and theory and connection to practice in reading, writing and ELD and application to intervention plan.	Demonstrates and effectively applies in-depth knowledge.	Demonstrates and applies good knowledge	Demonstrates and adequately applies basic knowledge.	Demonstrates very limited knowledge without consistent application.
Selects 3 intervention strategies and recommendations for reading, writing and ELD based on student needs.	Highly appropriate (highest priority).	Appropriate.	Mostly appropriate, but lacks full detail.	Inappropriate or less than 3 intervention strategies regardless of demonstrated needs.
Explanations of test data and details to support generalizations about interpretation and intervention for reading, writing and ELD.	Accurate and justified explanations with excellent details and at least 3 relevant references or sources per area.	Accurate and justified with good details, including relevant references or sources.	Mostly accurate and justified with some details and somewhat relevant references.	Inaccurate with limited or no details or references.
Mastery of the professional vocabulary and terminology and terminology in reading, writing, ELD, and R/LA standards.	Clear and extensive mastery.	Clear and good mastery.	Minimal knowledge and mastery.	Lacks overall mastery.
Request for additional information (not previously acquired) to assist candidate in establishing the the best intervention plan based on student needs.	5 or more insightful and well-written questions.	5 well-written questions	3—5 adequately written questions.	No questions or poorly written or irrelevant questions.
Appropriate usage of intervention plan: Understanding of the overall concept of an intervention plan.	Excellent understanding.	Good understanding.	Basic understanding.	Lacks understanding.

Figure Two. Gateway Requirements (Fingon, Ulanoff & Beltrán, 2005).

Candidates must first meet these minimal overall requirements before final evaluation takes place. If all gateway requirements are not met the candidate will be given 24 hours to successfully meet these requirements in order for his/her work to be accepted for the final evaluation phase.

_____3 hard copies of exam	_____Classroom observation form
_____Cover sheet w/ CEID on exam	_____Assessment summary data sheet (listing all assessments and results)
_____CEID only (no name) on all pages	_____Samples of required assessments and writing samples (in Appendices)
_____Maximum 25 pages + appendices	_____Reference page (9 minimum required references)
_____Pages are numbered	_____APA style
_____Typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. font, w/ one-inch margins	_____Copy of turnitin.com receipt
_____Table of contents (w/page numbers) organized according to the specified sections of the exam	_____One audiocassette with assessments

Please place all 3 copies of the exam + audiocassette, classroom observation form and turnitin.com digital receipt copy in a manila envelope identified only by CEID. No other papers will be accepted. Please note: file uploaded to www.turnitin.com must be identical to each of the 3 hard copies (minus the classroom observation form and turnitin.com digital receipt).

Decision:

Exam complete/accept as is (please check one): Yes ❏ No ❏
Exam missing section(s) (see above). Revise and submit by _____.

Signature of faculty member accepting exam: _____.

Methodology

Setting and Sample

Data were collected in one Charter College of Education (CCOE) at a large, diverse, urban state university in Southern California. At the time of the study, the CCOE enrolled 15% of the total campus population of 20,000. The student population was approximately 50% Latino, 19% Asian-American or Pacific Islander, 14% White, Non-Latino, 1.5% African-American, 9% unknown, 5.5% non-resident undocumented and .4% American Indian. Moreover 62.3% of students were women and the average age of graduate students was 34.

The sample for this study consisted of 110 candidates in three cohorts of candidates (graduate students) taking the comprehensive exam as a culminating activity in the previously described RRLA program, which was the 5th largest graduate program on campus. All candidates held at least a preliminary teaching

credential and 92% of them were teaching in K-12 public schools. The rest taught in charter and private schools, or served as substitute teachers.

Method

Data collection took place from September 2004 to December 2005 and was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. All 110 candidates completed a comprehensive exam that required them to generate a case study of a struggling reader, who was also an ELL. The intention of the exam was to have students demonstrate the knowledge and skills related to their future roles as reading specialists in linguistically and culturally diverse urban settings. The exam was delivered through a course-based technology website (WebCT) and candidates were given four weeks to complete the exam. All exams were submitted through www.turnitin.com and as hard copies. In addition to writing the case study, candidates were required to meet a series of gateway requirements (see Figure Two).

A team of three faculty members (evaluators) scored each exam. The number of teams varied each quarter depending on the number of exams and this served to stabilize faculty workload related to scoring. On average each evaluator scored 10-15 exams. Each evaluator in a team read for one of three foci: reading, writing or ELD. The evaluators used the 4-point rubric (see Figure One) developed for the case study and an overall "3" rating was considered passing or meeting the requirements. Candidates needed to receive a mean score of at least 2.5 or better, with no score of less than 2.0 in any one section, in order to pass the exam. One score below 2 allowed a rewrite of that focus area. It is important to note that the same evaluators scored the exams at all three data points, Fall 2004—Fall 2005.

Data Sources

The qualitative data set consisted of the following: (1) comprehensive exams created and submitted by the candidates; (2) exit survey completed by the candidates (see Appendix); (3) rubrics; (4) evaluator comments; and (5) e-mail exchanges between candidates and faculty. Quantitative data consisted of exam scores, which were analyzed according to focus area.

Data analysis was based on a review of each data source and coding of data. Patterns were identified as they surfaced and these were used to further identify salient themes, and categories within and across each data set. Exams were assessed based on how well the candidates demonstrated the following:

• scoring, analyzing, and interpreting multiple sources of authentic data related to the case study student;

• examining and using data in context;

• translating theory into practice;

• engaging in higher order thinking, problem solving, and learning at a higher cognitive level; and

• generating and evaluating possible solutions and making recommendations based on results.

In essence, the evaluators were interested in finding out how candidates "apply what they know" and transform what is learned from the experience into practice. The major themes that emerged from the data highlighted *candidate strengths, the link between theory and practice,* and *candidate weaknesses.* These themes further served to identify matches and gaps between program content and candidate knowledge and skills.

Findings

Overall findings indicate that we were able to use the case studies to measure program content knowledge and also to identify the matches and gaps between program content and candidate knowledge and skills. A total of 114 candidates attempted the exam, but only 110 completed the exam; 104 candidates passed the exam. In Fall 2004, 95% of candidates passed the exam (42 out of 44) and there were 6 rewrites on one focus area. In Spring 2005, 92% candidates passed the exam (48 out of 52), and there were a total of 8 rewrites. All 14 candidates (100%) who took the exam in fall 2005 passed without the need to rewrite any one area. The candidates who failed the exam in Fall 2004 and Spring 2005 received low scores in all three focus areas. Table one shows mean scores for all focus areas as well as the mean composite score for each cohort, Fall 2004, Spring 2005, and Fall 2005.

Candidate Strengths

Candidates who successfully completed the exam demonstrated knowledge and skills related to the teaching of reading, writing and ELD as measured by the case studies produced for the comprehensive exam. As can be seen from table one, there was little difference in scores over the course of the study, with candidates in Spring 2005 scoring slightly lower than the candidates in each of the other two quarters examined. Ninety percent of exit survey respondents in spring and fall 2005 indicated that they felt well or extremely well prepared to be reading specialists.

Table One. Mean Passing Comprehensive Exam Scores, Fall 2004 to Fall 2005 (n=104).

	Reading	Writing	ELD	Mean Composite Score
Fall 2004 (n=42)	2.95	3.08	3.17	3.07
Spring 2005 (n=48)	2.87	2.92	2.62	2.80
Fall 2005 (n=14)	2.96	3.14	3.18	3.09

Upon analyzing the exams, rubrics, and evaluator comments from three candidate cohorts over a two-year period, we found that there was greater specificity in the instructions given to the candidates, the requirements of the exam, and faculty expectations for procedure and content. By Spring 2005, both evaluators and candidates more clearly understood the content of the exam as well as what was required in terms of collection and analysis of the case study student data, making recommendations for student practice, and linking analysis and recommendations to research in the field.

Facilitating candidate strengths with the gateway and the four-point rubric: As we transitioned from the old ten-point rubric to the new four-point rubric for evaluation of the case studies, initially there was a lack of understanding and consistency among faculty about interpreting and using the rubric. The gateway requirements (Figure Two) were created to spell out the minimal requirements in terms of acceptable content and format for candidates. Since only exams that met the gateway requirements were accepted, the evaluators scored only complete exams. In essence, the gateway requirements helped to explain exam procedures for candidates as well as faculty who served as evaluators. While the gateway requirements clarified procedural issues (e.g., how many pages, the use of APA format, the use of the id number, the number of references, etc.) the 4-point scoring rubric clarified faculty expectations regarding the content of the exam.

It is important to note that the RRLA program coordinator, one of the authors of this paper, oversaw the exam process. She met with students to review expectations for the case study, the online delivery and submission systems, and served as the contact person for support during the exam. The coordinator organized the blind review of exams, including the assignment of exams to faculty for scoring, and determined the timeline for the exam. She also compiled scores and notified students as to their pass/fail status. The same program coordinator served throughout the study.

Examining content for demonstration of candidate strengths: We found that we were able to use the case studies to help identity candidate strengths in terms of the content knowledge and skills of our candidates. The candidates consistently provided evidence that they understood how to assess students and use assessment results to make recommendations for effective instruction, and as noted, scores were fairly stable over the course of the study. For example, one of the requirements in the case study was to identify strategies that best met the needs of their student for remediation in the areas of reading, writing, and ELD, based on their interpretation of assessment results. Table two lists the specific intervention strategies used in recommendations for the case study students in Fall 2005. These strategies reflect the application and understanding of course content and, in most cases, were used appropriately in the context of the case study.

Table Two. Spring 2005 Comps Case Study Student Strategies.

Reading	*Writing*	*ELD*
Directed Listening Thinking Activity (DLTA)*	Graphic organizers*	Read alouds
Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)*	Writers workshop*	DRTA
Story mapping	Dialogue journals	Scaffolding*
Language Experience Approach (LEA)	Interactive writing*	K-W-L (What you know, what you want to know, what you learned)* or K-W-L Plus
Vocabulary Self Selection (VSS)*	Shared writing*	Writer's workshop
Guided reading*	Author study	Daily reading
Directed Reading Activity (DRA)	Scaffolding	Contextual redefinition*
Literature Circles	Conferencing	VSS
ReQuest	LEA	Guided reading
Question-Answer-Relationship (QAR)	Story mapping	Retelling*
Story board	Word walls	Grand conversations
Text structure	Word building	Multicultural literature
Reader's Theatre	Learning logs	Sheltered English approach
Retelling	Peer editing	Semantic feature analysis
Imaging	Webbing	Show and tell
Reciprocal teaching	Word sorts	LEA
Independent reading		
Semantic mapping		
Cloze		
Repeated reading		

Overlap of some strategies occur in more than one area
* = most frequently described as a strategy by a student in the case study

The Link Between Theory and Practice

Candidates were required to link theory to practice, using published research to support their analyses and recommendations, which was demonstrated in their analysis of the data from their case study and the recommendations for practice, including the strategies listed in table two. The strategies that they chose were generally linked to research presented in their coursework. By and large, the case studies provided candidates with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge of the professional research related to reading, writing and ELD.

We analyzed all case studies described in this paper and used the following excerpts to illuminate how the case studies enabled candidates to demonstrate their ability to link reading, writing, and ELD theory and practice for culturally and linguistically diverse urban students. We thought it best to provide excerpts from one case study that received a "3," or passing rating, in the areas of reading, writing and ELD to provide a glimpse into a complete case study. All of the examples come from one female candidate's case study of an 8-year-old boy named José (a pseudonym), who was born in Mexico and came to the United States in 2004. The exam was completed in Spring 2005 when José was in the 3rd grade.

Reading: In this excerpt the candidate determined that one of José's reading needs was in the area of word attack skills. The candidate described and prioritized José's needs based on an Individualized Reading Inventory (IRI) and gave specific examples of miscues in another portion of the case study. The candidate then provided relevant theoretical research sources to support the recommendations she suggested for José when she offered another approach to learning word attack skills.

> *A need displayed by José is in the area of word attack skills and many of his miscues on the IRI were substitutions for other words with the same initial sound such as "laughed" for "left". Although he is in a systematic phonics program there are several other strategies available for decoding and learning unknown words. For example, Cooper (2003) suggests structural analysis because it requires the reader to look at the word for meaningful units or parts in order to decode the word or figure out its meaning. Another area of need which was made evident through the CELDT [California English Language Development Test], IRI, and Slosson [Slosson Intelligence Test] was reading comprehension....*

Writing: In this excerpt on writing the candidate made recommendations regarding José's need to develop a good attitude and willingness to write and the need for good models to inspire his writing.

> *There has to be enthusiasm for writing. That means a teacher who continually "sells" writing to his or her students, who knows compelling arguments for the importance in writing in today's society and who makes an event of most writing occasions from writing (Walshe, 1979). According to Walshe and others reading is inextricably linked to writing, just as talk of adults is linked to infant's acquisition of speech. José would benefit from daily mini-lessons that model writing skills....*

ELD: In this third excerpt the candidate referred to José's ELD needs by referencing his emerging language skills since his recent arrival in the United States (mentioned previously) and the need to increase his overall English language learning:

Although José has developed Basic Interpersonal Communications Skills (BICS) he has not acquired academic language and does not have "language proficiency or ability to use a language effectively and appropriately throughout the range of social, personal, school, work situations required for daily living in a given society" (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001, p. 29). His vocabulary can be improved by providing additional scaffolding to his lessons with comprehensible input. Interactive opportunities between José and other students will also allow him to strengthen his English and acquire additional BICS and eventually Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

The candidate concluded this section of the case study by linking many of José's areas of need (reading comprehension, word attack skills, and vocabulary) with ELD and documenting these suggestions supported in the literature:

Transferring prior knowledge, translating passages to his native language and reflecting on the text in his native language has the potential for improving his reading comprehension (Jimenez, 1997). The teacher should try to learn about things that are of more interest to José and perhaps call on him for his expertise during appropriate class discussions. It is also important to include multicultural children's literature, which is representative of his Mexican culture… to develop a sense of belonging.

Requesting additional information: A final section, recently added to the case study, asks candidates for additional information they wished they had known regarding their student (since there were strict time limitations on the exam). They were asked to elaborate on whom they might ask and to provide a rationale. In this final excerpt, the candidate demonstrated her knowledge and skills beyond the confines of student and assessor/reading specialist, allowing an indication of understanding within a broader school community context. The candidate responded as follows:

If I had had additional time to work with this student and this project I would have liked to have interviewed José's current teacher and asked José's study habits and what type of vocabulary instruction was currently being provided? I would have liked to know more about his interests and performed an interest inventory, what types of books he liked what sort of things he does in his spare time? I would have liked to have known his grades from Mexico or had spoken to his previous teacher to get more background information about José. I would have also liked to have observed José more in his classroom to get a more realistic picture of who he is in class… and performed other assessments in order to help José … this information could also have been beneficial in individualizing an instructional plan to fit José's needs.

Post exam survey responses indicated that candidates felt that the exam was a measure of the program content—98% in Spring 2005 and 100% in Fall 2005 responded that they either agreed or strongly agreed that the content of the exam was representative of the program content. However, candidates stated that they felt more confident about content related to reading than either writing or ELD based on program courses.

Examination of the data from all 110 candidates who successfully completed the exam between Fall 2004 and Fall 2005 demonstrated candidate weaknesses in linking theory to practice in the area of ELD. Candidates specifically struggled with identifying ways in which to scaffold instruction for ELLs, arguing that "there was only one ELD class and I didn't think that there was enough emphasis on ELD in each of the other classes." Since the RRLA program is designed to infuse content related to the assessment and instruction of ELLs throughout the program, comments such as this one serve to highlight the need for further program examination. This finding mirrors a recent report from the California State University Chancellor's Office, and this content is especially important in relation to the preparation of our RRLA candidates since they teach in classrooms with high numbers of ELLs and need knowledge and skills related to ELD in order to effectively serve their students.

Another pattern of candidate weakness identified by the exams, post exam survey data, and evaluator comments was found in the administration and interpretation of writing analyses. A third of the faculty who evaluated the exams complained about the limitations of required writing assessments, citing candidates' lack of proficiency in this area. This pattern of weakness generated ongoing debate about how best to teach and assess candidate knowledge and skills related to teaching writing. One candidate's post exam survey response stated, "I would have preferred to have some [more] experience using the [required] vocabulary index and the t-unit analysis [writing assessments]." Faculty felt that further examination of these data would be helpful in program evaluation for ongoing program revision, including the revision of course content that addresses knowledge and skills aligned to program standards.

Conclusions and Implications

Moje and Wade (1997) argue that case-based discussions in general can help teachers to challenge preconceived notions about teaching and learning as they explore the relationships between "…knowledge, ability and literacy" (p. 705). As teachers move beyond discussions to examine student artifacts (including assessment results) as direct records of the classroom experience, these artifacts support the development of a case as an interpretive account of the subject's strengths and weaknesses (Shulman & Kepner, 1999). As the teachers in the RRLA program examined the strengths and weakness of their case study students, we look at the cases they developed to measure their knowledge and skills as reading specialists.

While some research has been done in the area of case-based assessment, limited practice exists using candidate-generated case studies as assessment to measure student outcomes in graduate programs. Upon close examination of these case studies, we see how they demonstrate the ways in which candidates process information and apply it to "real life" situations. Most importantly, our study demonstrates the multiple uses of candidate-generated case studies for assessment as they provide evidence of individuals' knowledge and skills, and of the knowledge and skills of the group as a whole. They further afford us a glimpse into overall program effectiveness.

As faculty researchers, we have begun to see more benefits from doing assessment consciously and conscientiously. The three authors of this paper have operated as a small team, systematically examining candidates' work. Our collaboration has led us to new insights and the particular action of improving the RRLA program. We have come to view the graduate case studies as part of a non-linear, recursive data analysis cycle that is process of noticing, collecting and thinking (Seidel, 1998, p. 2). Because our data analysis cycle builds on existing understanding and action to create new understanding and action, with each iteration we notice new things in the data and react. As we have moved through our process and gained insight into the potential of our graduate case studies, we have returned frequently to our earlier sources to gather new data for improving our course content. Because the case studies are authentic applications contextualized within simulated practice with real students, the varied competencies developed in our program become transparent for program faculty. Like our candidates in the analysis of their own assessment data, we have access to a more complex set of data than was previously available, allowing us to examine the RRLA program more effectively.

Central to our work is the importance of looking more closely at candidates' original work that was produced in the case studies. In essence, our focus as a team examining a culminating activity (the comprehensive exam) shifted from more formative assessment of our *course* content to summative assessment of *program* content. This shift of focus was also noticeable in the faculty who scored the cases, as the matches and gaps between the exam and program content became more transparent. While an external or outside evaluator might have been useful for investigating program outcomes, what emerged from our study was the importance of faculty examining authentic work samples as one means of measuring program outcomes, specifically the ways in which the RRLA candidates were able to demonstrate understanding of program content and its application to "real life" situations.

Some of the unexpected outcomes of this study for faculty included a better understanding of the overall graduate program. With the inception of the use of the case studies, faculty meetings and conversations were much more centered on the interrelationship between course requirements, program goals, and our candidates' overall abilities to write about and reference what they know. Moreover, the RRLA program standards allowed us to examine more closely which courses might cause

information gaps or overlaps for students in applying their coursework to the preparation of the case study. Our new understandings led us to launch a collaborative effort to ensure a stronger alignment of standards across courses. Close examination of the case studies also gave faculty more insight into each candidate's understanding of linkages between theory and practice in the areas of reading, writing, and ELD. Over the course of the refinement of both the process and content of the exam, we have regularly shared our findings with program faculty in formal and informal forums. As a result of these focused conversations, faculty members have engaged in more meaningful dialogue about desired expectations and how course features and assignments support both formative and summative assessment.

Other positive outcomes that came out of this study included the success of the new gateway requirement and rubric in establishing more consistency in the scoring process both across cases and among evaluators. Additional interesting evidence showed that while candidates were responding to our criteria, they also had issues and concerns related to course and program standards and expectations. Clearly, we have just begun to understand the value of the case studies and what other powerful messages they offer.

Our inquiry involved us in a dynamic, ongoing process and the result has been the emerging social construction of a "learning culture" (Shepard, 2004). While our study is limited in scope, the findings offer an interesting and different perspective on uses of cases studies, specifically candidate-written cases studies for assessment purposes. In addition, the study's outcomes seem timely and relevant in contributing to the growing body of research that supports alternative assessment methods.

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Appendix
EDCI 596 Student Comprehensive Exam Exit Survey
(© Fingon, Ulanoff, & Beltrán, 2004)

Quarter entered program _____

1. Describe your current position.

2. What is your approximate GPA?

Please rate each of the following on a 1-5 scale, where (1) is "Strongly Disagree," (2) is "Disagree," (3) is "No opinion/neutral," (4) is "Agree," and (5) is "Strongly Agree."

3. The case study tasks and questions were representative of the content of the MA in the RRLA program.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 No-Opinion/ neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree

4. The support I received regarding my questions about the exam was helpful to the process.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 No-Opinion/ neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree

5. I enjoyed the take-home format of the exam.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 No-Opinion/ neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree

6. Which of the following were helpful to you during the exam? Check all that apply?*

❏ The comps meeting	❏ The exam instructions
❏ The comps WebCT	❏ The exam "test pilot"
❏ The gateway requirements	❏ The tech support
❏ The scoring rubric	❏ The exam timeline

7. Please list any challenges that you had taking the exam.

8. Please list any positive outcomes you experienced during the exam.*

9. Do you have any suggestions for improving the exam?

10. How well do you feel prepared to be a Reading Specialist?

1 Unprepared	2 Minimally Prepared	3 Somewhat Prepared	4 Well-prepared	5 Extremely Well-prepared

11. How likely do you think it is that you will become a reading specialist in the near future?

Don't Know	Unlikely	Somewhat Likely	Likely	Highly Likely

* Questions 6 and 8 were added to the survey in Fall 2005.