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# An Online Experiment of Using Case Studies and Scenarios to Teach Preservice Teachers About the Code of Ethics

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## Abstract

Preservice teachers are required to learn about code of ethics and principles of professional conduct for the education profession to restrain from inappropriate conducts, unethical behaviors, illegal activities and endangering student safety. However, many preservice teachers find the theories and concepts they learn in university classrooms too abstract to help address code of ethics during their program. Case study method and case writing are two approaches that have been used in teacher education programs to connect theory and practice. This study describes a technology-based case study analysis approach to preparation of preservice teachers for dealing with code of ethics.

## 1. Introduction

The Code of Ethics for Educators defines the professional behavior of educators and serves as a guide to ethical conduct. More than 60 countries have created or adopted standards that represent the conduct generally accepted by the education profession. The code defines unethical conduct justifying disciplinary sanction and provides guidance for protecting the health, safety and general welfare of students and educators, and assuring the citizens of each country a degree of accountability within the education profession [1].

“The code of ethics determines what we find acceptable or unacceptable, admirable or contemptible. It determines our conception of when things are going well and when they are going badly. It determines our conception of what is due to us, and what is due from us, as we relate to others. It shapes our emotional response, determining what is a cause of pride and shame, or anger or gratitude, or what can be forgiven and what cannot. It gives us our standards – our standards of behavior.... it shapes our identities” [2].

In addition, the code of ethics permit: (1) occupational groups to articulate their aspirations for desirable behavior; (2) individual practitioners to evaluate their practice in terms of shared norms; (3) the day-to-day decisions of practitioners to be questioned by those both inside and outside the occupational group; and (4) the ‘gentle discipline’ or ‘correct training’ of practitioners through self-regulation of occupational behavior [3].

Adherence to a code of ethics is, one of the important characteristics that differentiate professions from other occupations [4]. Professionals who know how to “do ethics” think systematically when they face difficult moral decisions, those instances that involve questions concerning what is right, just, and fair; considerations of what they ought and ought not do [5], [6]. Practitioners guided by their profession’s code of ethics have learned its content and have become skilled in its application.

Fenstermacher [7] stated that “teaching is a profoundly moral activity” (p. 133) and that “nearly everything a teacher does while in contact with students carries moral weight” (p. 134). Goodlad’s [8] comprehensive study of teacher education programs reported, however, that while prospective teachers invest a great deal of time and energy collecting tricks of the trade, efforts to develop their moral dispositions have been largely ignored. He challenged those who teach teachers to equip their students with the sensibilities, dispositions and abilities that will make them alert to the ethical dimensions of their work. Beyer [9] likewise argued that the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching deserve a prominent place in the preservice curriculum. He contended that “a decontextualized, technical approach to learning, classroom management, student achievement, teacher competency, and standards-driven instruction... implies that reflections on the moral significance of teachers’ actions are unimportant aspects of school practice” (p. 247). This premise was furthered by Ladson-Billings [10] who focused on the challenges created by the diversity that characterizes modern America’s classrooms. She asserted that “unless teachers pay attention to the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching, the technical aspects of the craft are for naught” (p. 239). All of these professional leaders are making the case that doing the right thing does not always come naturally. They would agree that personal morality and ethical instincts are necessary but not sufficient for teachers striving to live up to the highest standards of their profession. Their writings strengthen the argument that preservice teachers need to learn to systematically apply ethical codes. This is a skill which needs to be taught, needs to be learned, and needs to be practiced.

The case-based approach (i.e., using factual or fictional scenarios exemplifying the issues at hand) to learning and instruction has been regarded as a highly valuable and effective method across multiple disciplines, among them law, medicine, and business [11], [12]. Using cases and scenarios is also a valuable tool in preparing teachers and school administrators to learn about code of ethics as it has proven to have clear benefits for individuals facing ill-defined, high-risk problem scenarios [13], [14]. Because the case method presents a story in practice, it offers students an active learning opportunity. Cases involve real world situations and consider the perspectives of various stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, parents, students, and other community members. Through case-based discussion, students enhance their critical thinking and

problem-solving skills and consider multiple perspectives. The current study describes a technology-based case study analysis approach to preparation of preservice and inservice teachers for code of ethics.

Ethical issues are multifaceted, dynamic, full of conflicting goals, and difficult to resolve [15]. Case-based reasoning, an underlying function of case-based learning, aids in understanding ethical dilemmas by providing examples of similar situations along with methods that may be employed to resolve them [16]. Some of the classroom situations might be relatively straightforward. Such situations could be well-defined problems to which clear goals and general rules can be applied for problem solving. However, many other issues related to ethics involve uncertainties about problem definitions (i.e., what happened and how did it happen here?), conflicting perspectives among different stakeholders (i.e., a colleague says one thing while principal says another thing about what happened), and the need for multiple solutions and multiple criteria for solution evaluation (i.e., let’s try this, if this doesn’t work, let’s sit down to think about what is a better way of working together). These are the general features of ill-structured problems [17]. In fact, the various dilemmas teachers face through their work might be the most difficult ill-structured problems [18].

Unlike well-structured problems, the way that ill-structured problems are dealt with is greatly influenced by problem solvers’ personal opinions or beliefs about problem situations [19]. Although to date not many empirical studies have been conducted in this area, problem-solving researchers have identified several essential factors influencing general performance of solving ill-structured problems. Those factors include epistemological beliefs—respecting multiple perspectives [20], justification/argumentation skills—reconciling conflicting interpretations and solutions [17], metacognition—planning and monitoring solutions and processes [17], and domain-knowledge [21].

Advantages and disadvantages of using case method teaching are summarized from [22], [23]. For example, cases provide a versatile learning method, but they are highly dependent on the instructional and educational characteristics of the instructor. Common practical problems involving case study methods are the class size, unfamiliarity with the methodology, problems with written expression, time, physical setting for the discussion, teaching style of the case leader, and case preparation and complexity. Advantages of case study methodology include greater student and faculty interest and interactivity, vicarious learning, and increased reflection. Issues specific to undergraduates include the complexity of the case issues, inexperience with case analysis, and difficulties with writing.

The current project was implemented in two undergraduate face to face “Instructional Design and Classroom Management” courses in a midsize university in the southeast. In order to implement the project, the researchers created online tool to publish short case studies on issues

related to code of ethics. These case studies were made available to students on [www.teachersserver.com](http://www.teachersserver.com). The researchers are experienced teacher educators and the first researcher has taught the courses for many years. The cases were written as dilemma cases to prompt as many and as varied responses as possible. Also, all the cases were written in a first-person language to give the impression that the characters described in the cases were asking for help. An example of a case as follows.

*I could not help it! I'm a teacher that loves to get personable with her students. I show them that I care about them outside of my classroom. One night, I was supporting my students at a basketball game and one of my students needed a ride home from the game. She attempted to call her grandparents, parents, but no one answered. It was very dark*

*outside. I decided to give her a ride. Is this against the code of ethics?*

The case study project was integrated into the course as part of the last learning module which was a general discussion of culturally responsive pedagogy. Students were given two weeks to go on the teachersserver website and post original solutions to the dilemmas described in the cases. At the end of the learning module, students were given a 10 question survey with 2 open ended questions to provide their opinions on the functionality of the website, quality of the cases, the points system, the way case study assignment was integrated into the course. In this paper, we describe students' opinions on the case study project and potential improvements to the website and to the assignment based on students' ideas (Figure 1).

[Home](#) >> **Code of Ethics**

### Code of Ethics Cases

Cases are narratives, situations, problems, or statements that present unresolved and provocative issues, situations, or questions. As a teaching/learning tool, cases challenge participants to analyze, critique, make judgments, speculate and express reasoned opinions. Above all, although information can be real or invented, a case must be realistic and believable. The information included must be rich enough to make the situation credible. Cases are important for bringing real world problems into a classroom or a workshop - they ensure active participation and may lead to innovative solutions to problems.

[+ Submit New Case](#)

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Title	SubTopic	Solutions	Author	Views	Last Post	Last Post By
<a href="#">Oh the politics</a>	General	4	<a href="#">eHebah</a>	345	07-10-2017	<a href="#">Ramirez</a>
<a href="#">Really, you did that?</a>	General	8	<a href="#">eHebah</a>	433	10-10-2017	<a href="#">vugage</a>
<a href="#">Cranky Teacher</a>	General	10	<a href="#">QaNese</a>	436	10-10-2017	<a href="#">jysema</a>
<a href="#">Teacher instructing wrong-doing</a>	General	2	<a href="#">LeWuVy</a>	271	10-03-2017	<a href="#">pyGyga</a>
<a href="#">Teacher playing favorites</a>	General	3	<a href="#">LeWuVy</a>	221	10-08-2017	<a href="#">anaXan</a>
<a href="#">Dress Code</a>	General	11	<a href="#">yDaTes</a>	856	10-10-2017	<a href="#">vugage</a>
<a href="#">Tone of Voice</a>	General	9	<a href="#">yDaTes</a>	558	10-10-2017	<a href="#">vugage</a>
<a href="#">Teacher Cleavage</a>	General	12	<a href="#">ypuqum</a>	870	10-09-2017	<a href="#">useZyt</a>
<a href="#">BYOD</a>	General	9	<a href="#">ypuqum</a>	721	10-03-2017	<a href="#">aNaMej</a>
<a href="#">Assisting Student Teachers</a>	General	6	<a href="#">apePev</a>	503	02-26-2017	<a href="#">Dison</a>
<a href="#">Kids or Products?</a>	General	4	<a href="#">vapaju</a>	718	07-07-2017	<a href="#">ePeHuG</a>
<a href="#">Reading Assessments Aloud</a>	General	4	<a href="#">vapaju</a>	412	02-26-2016	<a href="#">eQyVuj</a>
<a href="#">Social Media and Teachers</a>	General	8	<a href="#">uNeNuD</a>	577	07-09-2017	<a href="#">NaPeqe</a>

Figure 1. Screenshot from [www.teachersserver.com](http://www.teachersserver.com).

*Not just another discussion activity.* The researchers made special effort to inform students that the case study activity was not like online discussions that are very common in fully-online courses. Students were told that they were not to respond to each other's postings. Rather, they were to respond

to the issues and questions raised in the specific cases and offer solutions that have not been offered by anyone else. The originality of the solution requirement was added to the activity to ensure that students read each other's' responses; therefore, they were aware of alternative ways of approaching

the problems described. Figure 2 below illustrates through a screenshot what the case response section looked like.

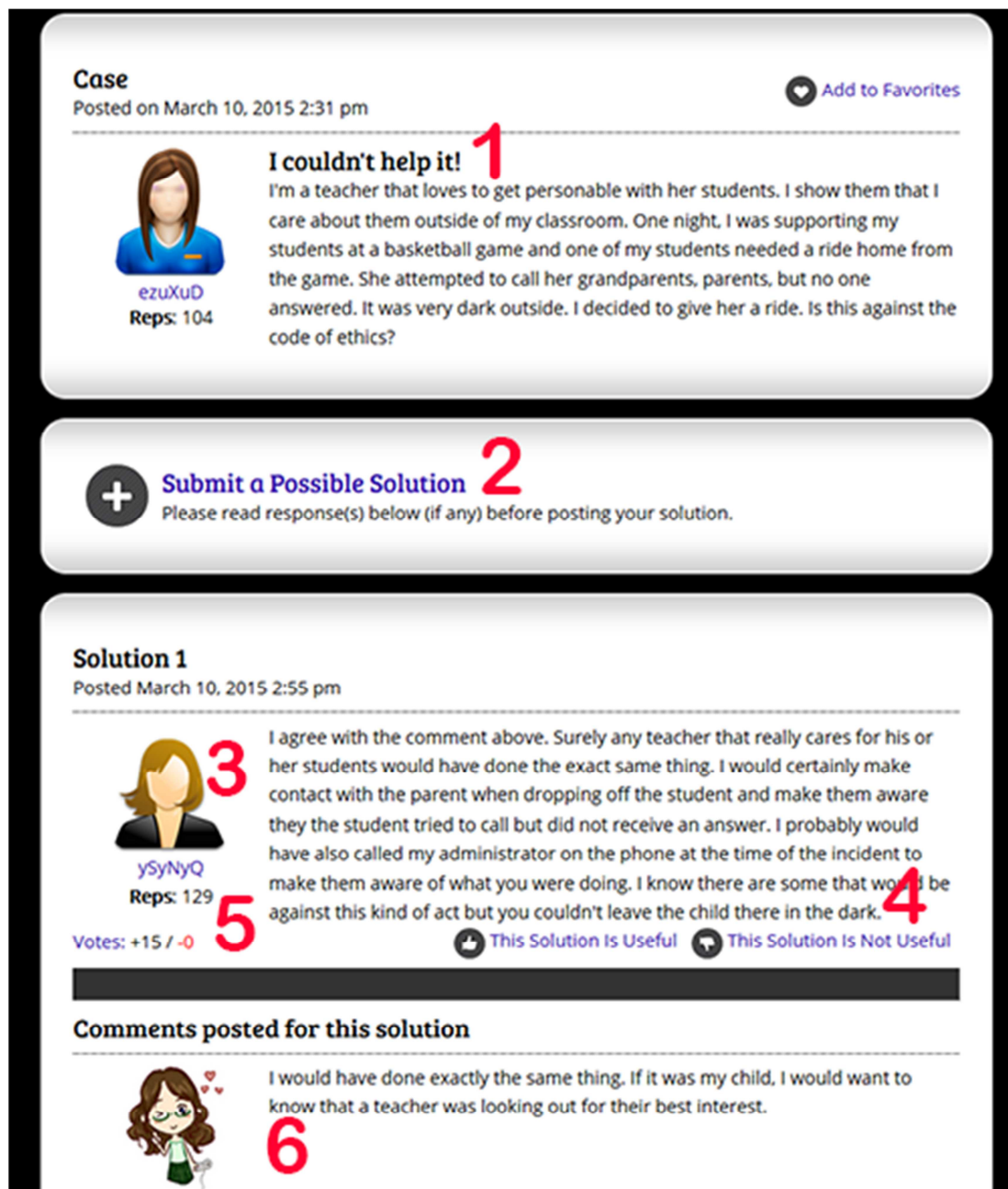


Figure 2. Screenshot of a case.

1. Subject and content of the case, 2. A link to submit a possible solution, 3. A sample solution posted by a member, 4. A rating for the posted solution, 5. Current votes submitted for the solution, 6. Comments and discussions for the solution, 7. A link to save the case as favorite for easy access.

**Gamification.** Gamification is the application of game mechanics to a non-game environment for the purpose of influencing human behavior. Game mechanics include elements such as points, levels, challenges, virtual goods and spaces, leaderboards, and gifts and charity. Users or players interact with these game mechanics to create game dynamics, or the motivation fueling their willingness to play the game.

Game dynamics are motivating factors, such as reward, status, achievement, self-expression, competition, and altruism [24], [25]. In order to encourage participation and posting of original responses, gamification (a point system) was implemented on the website. Students received points for variety of activities on the website. For example, they received 5 points for each case response, 1 point for each case they posted, 1 point daily for login into the website, and etc. They also received points if their case responses were found “useful” by other participants. The case study assignment required students to achieve a minimum of 100 points on the website (Figure 3).



Earning Reward Points	
Reward points are earned when you contribute positively to the community, in particular by responding to questions with helpful answers. Conversely, you may lose points (or lose your account) if you post a question or answer that is abusive or inappropriate	
General	
+1 point	When you <b>login</b> each day (each time)
Articles	
+5 points	When you <b>post</b> an article that is approved and published (each time)
+1 point	When your article <b>favorited</b> by another member (each time)
Questions	
+5 points	When you <b>post</b> a realistic question/case/problem with specific descriptions (each time)
+5 points	When you <b>respond</b> to a question with original and helpful answer (each time)
+1 point	When your response <b>favorited</b> by another member (each time)
+1 point	When you <b>rate</b> a solution (each time)
Tips	
+5 points	When you <b>post</b> a useful tip with specific description (each time)
+1 point	When your response <b>favorited</b> by another member (each time)
+1 point	When your tip receives "This Tip Is Useful" <b>votes</b> (each time)

Figure 3. Screenshot of earning reward point system (Gamification).

## 2. Method

The current study is an exploratory descriptive study that investigated the effectiveness of an online tool for integrating case studies into a code of ethics course through student opinions. The online tool was [www.teacherserver.com](http://www.teacherserver.com). This section of the paper describes the course, the participants, the data, data analysis, and findings.

The Instructional Design and Classroom Management course was the site of this investigation. This course is one of the required courses for students majoring in education. The course explores the current knowledge of best practices of a variety of classroom management and code of ethics strategies and methods deemed appropriate for diverse elementary and middle school settings. The course is offered face-to-face with multiple sections every semester.

A total 71 undergraduate students were enrolled in the course. At the end of the case study activity, all students were

asked to provide feedback on a voluntary basis. All students provided feedback however 7 responses were disqualified because they were blank ( $n=64$ ). The results are presented based on the data obtained from these students. At the end of the case study activity, the researcher provided students a survey in class. The survey had 10 likert-scale and two-open-ended questions. Students were informed that the study would not affect their course grades or participation, however, reminded that their experiences and reports will help course instructor, researchers and future participants of the course. The survey was conducted paper-based in class before recess.

## 3. Result

All of enrolled students in the course agreed to participate in the study by completing the survey. The table 1 below shows the quantitative data from the results of the survey ( $n=64$ ).

**Table 1.** Survey Results.

#	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
01	Case activity helped me develop a deeper understanding of code of ethics concepts	91%	9%			
02	Case activity helped me have a better grasp of the practical application of core course concepts	89%	10%	1%		
03	Case activity helped me take a more active part in my learning process	86%	11%	3%		
04	Case activity helped me develop positive peer-to-peer relationships	95%	5%			
05	Case activity helped me to be more engaged (motivated)	96%	4%			
06	Website used for this activity looks clean and functions well	99%	1%			
07	Prompts, guides and examples integrated in the website was useful	93%	6%	1%		
08	The reward system (earning points) integrated in the website was engaging	90%	7%	2%		
09	Features such as voting, commenting, favoring member posts integrated in the website was engaging	99%	1%			
10	I recommend the use of website and case studies for the future students of this course	98%	2%			

Scale: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), N (Neutral), D (Disagree), SD (Strongly Disagree).

The open ended items were analyzed qualitatively to reveal patterns in students' responses. Each question was analyzed separately.

*What are the main things you liked about the case study activity you completed via online website tool?*

- I liked the project website: [www.teachersserver.com](http://www.teachersserver.com) (n=63) and earning points (n=37).
- The case study activity helped me understand that lack of awareness, knowledge, or understanding of the code of ethics is not, in itself, a defense to a charge of unethical conduct (n=54).
- The case study activity helped me understand that understand that when I get a teaching position I am agreeing to follow the code of ethics (n=47).
- I hadn't realized some of the things that were in code of ethics, the case study activity helped me understand them. (n=29).
- I am expected to be fair to all of my students and not to take advantage of my position in any way (n=28).
- The case activity was a great example of the application of core course concepts into practice (n=26).
- The case study activity helped me understand that in an ethical situation; there is no cookie-cutter solution that applies to all cases at all time. Each case can be unique with multiple possible solutions (n=24).
- In my respective role, I will be exercising power that have a significant impact on the lives of children and young people and consequently there is a community expectation that these power will be properly and prudently used (n=8).

*What are the main things you disliked about the case study activity you completed via online website tool?*

- The case study activity should be enhanced by adding more cases and more time to explore and discuss (n=23). In fact, half of the course time should be content oriented and the other half only focusing on case studies (n=6).
- Some of the cases provided on the website were not detailed enough for decision making (n=11).
- Recommendation: the case study activity should be integrated in other program courses (n=9).

## 4. Discussion

A case study is usually a "description of an actual situation, commonly involving a decision, a challenge, an opportunity, a problem or an issue faced by a person or persons in an organization" [26]. Cases do not give simple or explicit answers; rather, they provoke students' critical thinking, illustrate how to think professionally, and urge students to use theoretical concepts to highlight a practical problem [27]. Traditional case studies are presented to individuals or groups; most commonly, however, they are worked on in groups that can brainstorm solutions to problem/question presented. Cases may be presented in different forms, ranging from simple situations to complex scenarios; some include role play and real life data [28]. In teacher education, case study method relies on individuals or groups reading cases, writing up a response paper, and perhaps having a classroom discussion. Discussing cases encourages student-teacher interaction and collaboration. Students get to think about the situation and participate in identifying possible solutions. Different ideas can be examined from different perspectives.

In this study, the researchers experimented with an online case study method in which participants (preservice teachers) read a case, post a response, view other people's responses and rate each response as efficient or inefficient which further allow them to elaborate on others' points. The activity was certainly a positive experience for students. The participants in this study indicated that use of the tool helped them develop a deeper understanding of ethical concepts, have a better grasp of the practical application of core course concepts, take a more active part in their learning process, to become more engaged (motivated). They also expressed how the case-based instruction helped them to be aware of multiple perspectives and change their epistemological beliefs about knowledge (i.e., there might be multiple truths in the world, and those truths are constructed among people involved). Therefore, the use of this activity (or similar) in teacher education programs helps preservice teachers unlearn the tendency of always looking for the right answer, instead looking at the problems from multiple perspectives with the

use of multiple solutions (critical thinking). Finally, the instructors of the course also reported that this experiment was also beneficial for them. It helped to rethink their approach to teaching, renewing their interest in course material, and creating a higher level of enthusiasm that can be projected from them to students. They indicated that developing case studies and discussing them with students brought freshness and innovation to their instruction.

Literature on the use of gamification strategies in the classroom suggests that timely and frequent feedback increases user engagement with certain activities [29], [30]. This hypothesis is supported by data from this study, where student buy-in was at its highest when students could monitor their performance on a leaderboard as they gained points for the activities they participated in the project (posting a case, responding a case, rating solutions etc.) and received progress reports with detailed information about their point total.

## 5. Conclusion

One of the most practical implications of this study is that the study helped researchers create an online tool which is now publicly available free to all educators at [www.teacherserver.com](http://www.teacherserver.com). The tool is now being used by many institutions and educators around the world. The variation of people and cultures also has been providing different perspectives from different cultures/countries. Teacher educators are currently integrating the tool in their courses and field experiences and teachers are currently using the cases in order to seek help on their difficulties in code of ethics and other areas. In fact, the users requested that researchers add additional sections for different topics so that different cases were also created in addition to ethical issues. Currently, the topics are assessment, classroom management, dealing with ESOL students, multicultural education (diversity), dealing with parents and teaching job interview, and ethics. Hundreds of cases are added to the tool and more is being added daily. The researchers will keep the tool available for all educators (free) and improve as the future users offer suggestions for improvements.

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