

A bit of

TLC



**T**alking and **L**istening  
**T**hrough **C**ase-Based Learning  
**f**or **S**chool **C**ommunities

## SECTION 1

# Case-Based Learning is...

## SECTION 2

*A Case is...*

## SECTION 3

# Ready, Steady...

## SECTION 4

*Go...*

## SECTION 5

# Worked Examples of Case-Based Learning

## SECTION 6

# Partially Worked Examples of Case-Based Learning

## SECTION 7

Case-Based Learning:  
a great way to  
engage young people  
and parents



## SECTION 8

# Trying Case-Based Learning

## SECTION 9

# Writing and Using Your Own Cases

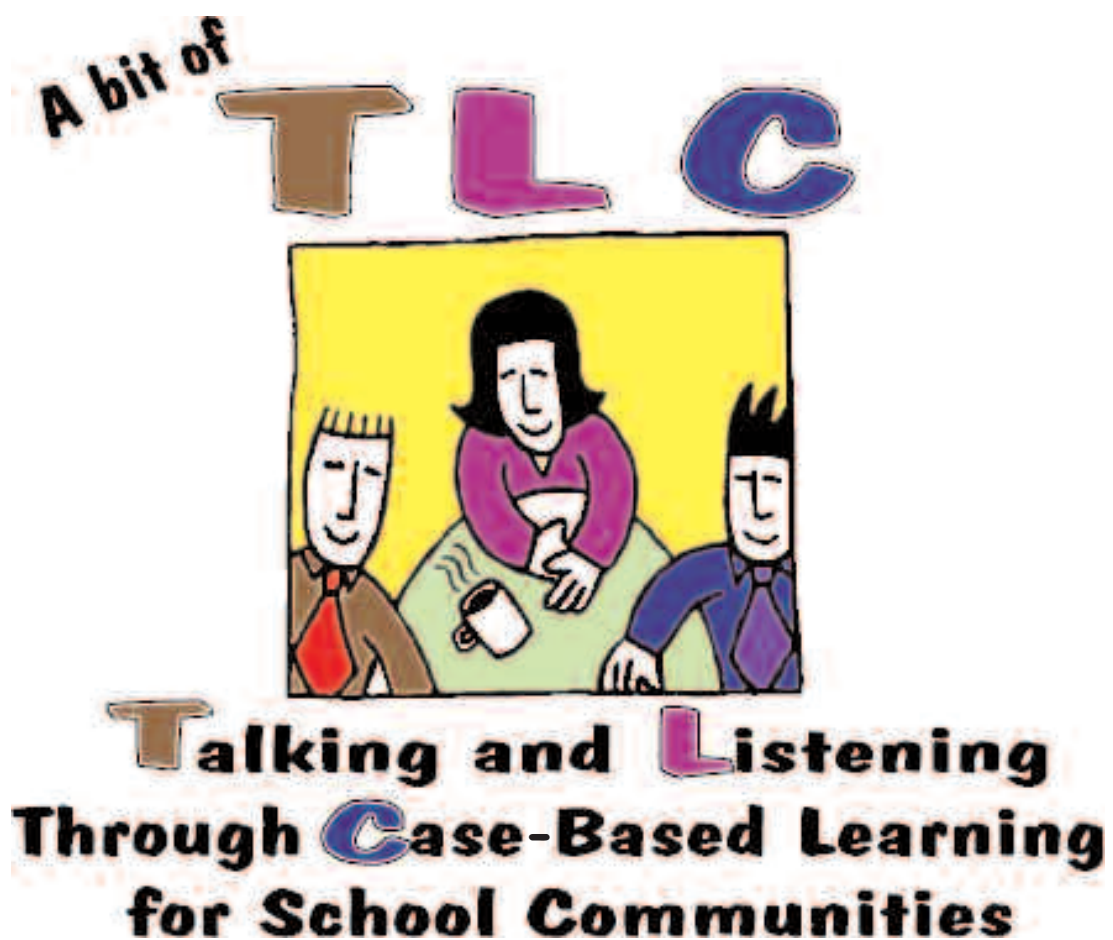
## SECTION 10

# Case-Based Learning: a personal reflection

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# **Steering Committee: Cross-Border Professional Exchange Programme**

**Special Educational Needs  
Cross-Border  
Professional Exchange  
Programme under  
PEACE II**





## Foreword

Every day, individual teachers and school staff bring dedication, imagination and skill to their work with children. By sharing these more widely across school communities, we ensure that all children on this island have greater opportunities to achieve to their full potential.

The Special Educational Needs Cross-Border Professional Exchange Programme was funded under Measure 5.5: 'Education, Cross-Border School and Youth Co-operation' of the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (Peace II). The programme enabled teachers, educational psychologists and other professionals from the border counties of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to build on peace and stability by coming together and exchanging experiences and models of best practice. These participants formed three North-South cluster groups and based their joint programmes of work on the key areas of Autism, Dyslexia and Marginalised Youth, respectively.

Through the project, close links were forged in the field of special education, North and South. The benefits to the whole of the island are many, as the clusters shared and learned from each other's good practice and began to develop their expertise together. These links extended beyond the professional; they increased mutual understanding and respect and have led to the formation of positive and sustainable relationships.

We owe our gratitude, in the first instance, to all those who so willingly gave of their time and expertise to participate in the core work of the project. We are also grateful to the members of the Steering Group, to the Special Education Support Service for its work in overseeing the project, to Seamus McDermott of Monaghan Education Centre, who so willingly gave us a home, and to Andrea Quinn, the Project Manager, whose commitment and enthusiasm added greatly to the success of the project.

This resource, as well as those produced by the other two cluster groups, are the result of a truly collaborative effort and they reflect the wealth of knowledge and experience within those groups. We hope that they will be an invaluable tool to teachers throughout both education systems.

**John Hunter**

**Breandán Ó Murchú**

**Project Principals**

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# INTRODUCTION

The members of this cluster group were brought together so that they could benefit from the sharing of experience and expertise and, as part of that process, develop a training resource for other relevant professionals and for parents.

The group chose Case-Based Learning as an approach to their work because they felt that it was particularly suitable for their purposes. Case-Based Learning is a strategy which uses stories of real-life events as a vehicle for discussion and creative thinking around issues relevant to school communities.

A DVD accompanies this publication. The DVD serves as a record of the case-based sessions held by the cluster participants.

## Key to the main sections



**A quick overview of each section**



**More detailed information**



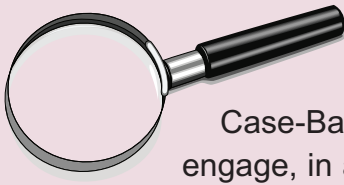


# SECTION 1

## Case-Based Learning is...



- Fun
- Simple to use and leads to useful solutions
- A toolkit that provides a step-by-step guide to problem solving in real life situations
- A useful way for adults and young people to reflect together on important issues



Case-Based Learning requires teachers, parents and pupils to engage, in an active way, in their own development. It involves joint problem solving and joint thinking. It acknowledges the skills and competence of school communities. It recognises that teachers, parents and pupils can find unique solutions to problems that arise in their own situations, and that they have the necessary resources to make helpful changes.

Case-Based Learning uses real-life stories as a tool to engage school communities in relevant action planning such as, for example, in behaviour management, conflict resolution and other areas of school community development. The possibilities are endless.

We are more motivated to learn when:

- our own experience and learning provides a starting point
- the focus of our learning is of immediate practical application
- personal experience is used as a resource for shared discussion
- we collaboratively direct and assess our own learning.



## SECTION 2

### A Case is...



- An interesting story
- Told simply, just as it happened
- Open-ended
- A story which provokes thought and discussion
- A reflection of the challenges of everyday life



Cases are the stories of real events at a particular time and place. They challenge participants to reflect, consult and to take evidence-based action in a methodical and reflective way.

Critical and challenging events occur constantly in interactions between:

- teachers and pupils
- teachers and other teachers
- teachers and parents
- managers and teachers
- schools and other schools
- schools and responsible authorities / agencies
- pupils, parents and community.



## SECTION 3

### Ready, Steady...

To use Case-Based Learning all you need is:

- A written story
- Someone to lead the discussion
- Someone to act as scribe – recording elements of process
- A copy of case / story
- Flipchart / pen / timer
- Courage and a sense of humour



#### Leadership of discussion

The task of leading a discussion based on a written case is a skilled and important one. When it is done well, there are significant opportunities for reflection and learning in the group. Discussion needs to be well managed; otherwise, it becomes unstructured, repetitive or negative.

#### Participants

It is important that each member of the group is encouraged to participate because all contributions are important and valid. The 'round robin' contribution system is found to achieve a high level of participation and inclusion. The eight-step process, as detailed in section 4, allows for thorough examination of the case. Each step is time-limited and encourages a different thinking style in order to draw out a variety of viewpoints and perspectives.

The steps enable us to progress from hearing the facts of a story or situation to the point where we consider the implication of issues raised in that story or situation. Progressing to step 8 allows us to identify practical solutions to the specific issues or problems that have emerged.

#### Things you will need

- A copy of the 'Framework for Discussion and Action' (adapted from Jay and Johnson [2002]) for group leader<sup>1</sup>
- A copy of the case for each participant (oral presentation of the case is also advised to ensure that it is clear to all)
- Copy of Users' Quick Guide card for the group leader
- Blackboard / whiteboard / flip chart or otherwise, for recording
- Timer
- Pens / paper, if required

<sup>1</sup> The framework for discussion and action is further detailed on page 11.

## People you will need

- Group leader
- Scribe
- Group of people who will discuss cases but respect each other's contributions

## Introducing the activity

1. Outline the steps, emphasising the need to move on once a step has been completed.
2. Assign a scribe.
3. Emphasise how important it is that each group member contributes to the discussion, making clear that many and varied contributions are useful to the process.
4. Agree a case study to begin the discussion. It is best to start with stories from this resource before moving on to stories that relate to your school.
5. Hand out the case study for self-reading / perusal while case is being read aloud to the group.
6. Remind the group that each step is time-bound and that it will probably be necessary to time-limit the contributions.

## Try using Case-Based Learning in

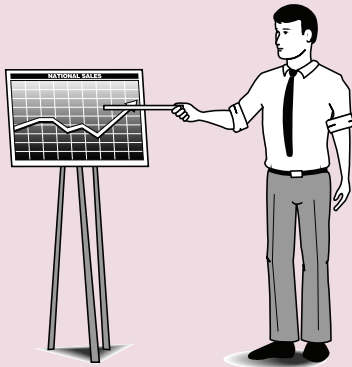
- School staff meetings
- Subject-department / year-group meetings
- Cluster groups
- Mentoring beginning-teachers
- Senior management team meetings
- Multi-disciplinary groups (e.g. involving other professionals who work in support of schools and / or parents)
- Meetings with parents
- Meetings with students / pupils

## SECTION 4

Go...



**Leader**



**Group**



**Scribe**



**Step 1**

*Getting to know the story*

**Step 2, 3, 4, 5, 6**

*Dissecting the story*

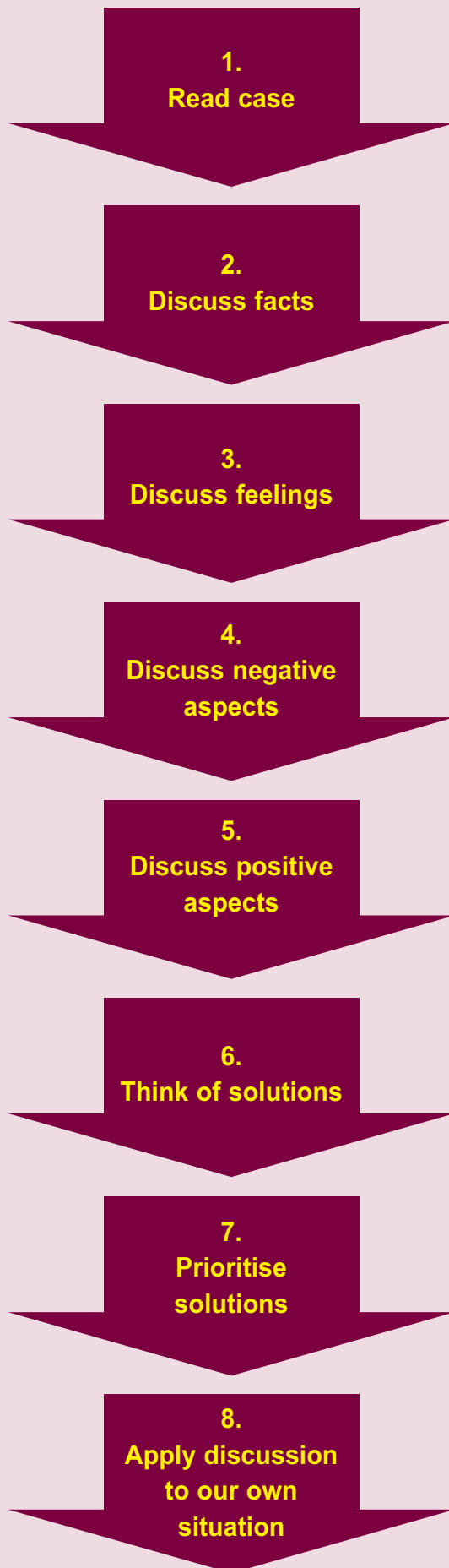
*Exploring the options*

**Step 7, 8**

*Problem solving*

*Applying the lesson to our own situation*

## Users' Quick Guide





## Framework for discussion and action \*



Guidance	Points to note
<b>Step 1</b> <i>Everyone reads the case</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Remember to time-limit each step</li></ul>
<b>Step 2</b> <i>Leader asks group to think of facts</i> <i>Group members brainstorm known facts</i> <i>Scribe records them</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Stick to the facts</li><li>Avoid speculation and opinion</li></ul>
<b>Step 3</b> <i>Leader asks group to think of how the story makes them feel</i> <i>Group members brainstorm feelings</i> <i>Scribe records them</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>How does it make you feel?</li><li>What is your reaction?</li></ul>
<b>Step 4</b> <i>Leader asks group to think of negative aspects of story</i> <i>Group members brainstorm negatives</i> <i>Scribe records them</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Remember to move on</li></ul>

\* Jay, K. and Johnson, K. L. (2002) Capturing Complexity: a typology of reflective practice for teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. Vol. 18 pp. 73-85. Pergamon Press

### Step 5

*Leader asks group to think of positive aspects of story*

*Group members brainstorm positives*

*Scribe records them*

- Even when these are hard to find

### Step 6

*Leader asks group to think of solutions*

*Group members brainstorm solutions*

*Scribe records them*

- All solutions are valid

### Step 7

*Leader asks group to prioritise three solutions*

*Each member each chooses three and states them*

*Scribe records / tallies*

- Each person should choose three solutions from the complete list

### Step 8

*Leader asks group to think of priorities in relation to their own situation*

*Group discusses using these questions*

*Scribe records them*

- Ask: Is it really worth doing?
- Why?
- Which strategy will work better than others?

## Further guidance for the group leader



### Guidance

### Points to note

#### Step 1

*This may be read aloud to the group, or silently by individuals*

Time limit should be appropriate to the group e.g. one or two minutes per section

#### Step 2

*Give the participants time to think about or record the facts of the case themselves, then after time is complete, ask the scribe to record contributions*

- Facts only – do not allow speculation or opinion
- Scribe should record all relevant contributions

#### *Supplementary questions*

- How have / might others construe(d) it differently?
- Do you accept other interpretations? Why?
- What information is missing / are there gaps in our knowledge?

#### Step 3

*Accept all feelings as valid, whether negative or positive*

- No need for people to justify their feelings
- Questions that may help: What are your feelings? What are your reactions?
- Participants can record / describe their feelings in relation to the people within the case study
- A variety of prompts can be used to facilitate this
- Scribe should record all relevant contributions

**Step 4**

*Not necessary for everyone to communicate negative opinions*

- Comments must be relevant to the story
- Questions that may help: What problems might arise? What cautions would you suggest?
- Warning: negative thinking is important but should not be allowed to take over the discussion
- Scribe should record all relevant contributions

**Step 5**

*Not necessary for everyone to communicate positive opinions*

- Comments must be relevant to the story
- Participants may give reasons to justify comments
- Scribe should record all relevant contributions

**Step 6**

*Encourage creative thinking*

- Accept novel ideas and creative solutions
- Contributors don't have to justify (encourage to think outside box)
- Facilitate diverse comments, without judgement, from others
- Creative thinking can target the whole school, classroom or individual child
- This step may require more time than others
- Scribe should record all relevant contributions

*Supplementary questions*

- Should you try to change things?
- How should you try to change things?
- What strategies are likely to succeed for you?
- How have others acted in such situations?
- What have they achieved?

**Step 7**

*Each person is given three votes to note their preferred priorities*

- The most popular priorities of the group form the basis of the next step
- Warning: the priority solution may be different to the expectation at the outset of the exercise – it may identify gaps not realised initially
- Scribe should record all relevant votes

**Step 8**

*Now take the agreed priorities and apply them to the relevant situation using these questions*

*For each priority, ask the following questions:*

- Are we doing this?
- Should we be doing this?
- Is it necessary or worthwhile?
- Is it specific, realistic, attainable within reasonable period?
- What should we do first?
- Is there a better way to achieve the same ends?

You will now have priorities which you can 'action plan' in your own context

## Further advice for group leaders

1. Read and reflect on the case yourself in advance of the discussion.
2. Even though these discussions can be fairly informal, it is important that the group leader ensures that there is focus and progression through the steps.
3. Keep in mind that, although individuals may want / need opportunities to share personal anecdotes similar to the case presented, the eventual aim is to discuss the actual case presented in a way that raises the issues, prompts alternative views, generates solutions and adds something to the experience of every group member.
4. Allow the discussion to flow naturally. Usually people will talk spontaneously; sometimes they will need to be encouraged to take turns so that maximum benefit is derived from the case.
5. Don't be discouraged if the discussion doesn't follow the course you hoped it would. The learning that takes place in case discussion results from deeper levels of reflection, sharing views, seeing alternative perspectives and, in particular, from having the luxury of a set amount of time to do these things. It is important for the discussion to reach a conclusion, but do not be surprised if it is different from what you expected.
6. It is important to remember that case discussion must be time-limited. Therefore, decide, prior to the meeting, on a time allocation for each step.

## SECTION 5

### Worked Examples of Case-Based Learning

In order to fully illustrate the working of Case-Based Learning, the cluster group made a short film of three selected groups working. A group of pupils discussed a child's story and a group of teachers and a group of parents separately discussed a parent's story. Action plans were set by all three of the filmed groups.

#### Sample Case 1

##### Pupils' workshop

##### Step 1. Read the case

###### Pupil's case

*I had a ball and I was playing with my friend. A boy called Tommy came and kicked the ball out of my hand and he kicked my hand too. Then I got very angry. I told him to get the ball, he said, 'No!' and he pushed me and punched me in my chest. It really hurt and he called me a bad word.*

##### Step 2. Facts of the case

- A boy
- Playing ball
- Very angry
- Bad word
- Tommy pushed him / punched him
- Kicked ball hard
- Told boy to get ball

##### Step 3. Feelings generated by the case

- Angry
- Sad
- Hurt
- Annoyed
- Emotional / physical hurt
- Depressed
- Unhappy

#### Step 4. Negative aspects of the case

- Being bullied
- Unhappy

#### Step 5. Positive aspects of the case

- Stood up for himself
- Fun
- Kept anger inside
- Happy playing ball

#### Step 6. Create as many solutions as possible

- Tell teacher
- Let bully join in games
- Make friends
- Tell teacher to make him stay away
- Ask principal to have a word
- Stay with friends
- Ask why did you do it?
- Tell bully you know karate
- Tell parents

#### Step 7. Decide which solutions take priority

- Tell teacher
- Stay with friends
- Tell parents

#### Step 8. Prepare and implement an action plan

1. Tell teacher	2. Stay with friends	3. Tell parents
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#### Evaluation / feedback

##### Strengths of process

- Everyone got the opportunity to speak
- We all had to listen
- We came up with a solution

##### Challenges of process

- Need to have smaller group / ideas (other than those prioritised) put forward by people in the group
- Need contributions from all the members, not just a few



## Sample Case 2

### Teachers' workshop

#### Step 1. Read the case

##### Case 2.

*My son recently went out with friends to celebrate his exam results. The club was teeming with 18-year-olds celebrating the same event.*

*During the next couple of hours he met with school friends from his primary school, many of whom had been scattered around five or six post-primary schools in the area.*

*They began to recall their days in primary school and the years since they had last been together. At the end of the evening they concluded as a group that, if they had a wish, it would be to repeat their final year in primary school together. It had been a great time with friends and teacher.*

*My daughter is now in her final year in primary school but she is fearful of her teacher. I would like that she would have the same experience as her brother.*

### Teachers' workshop

The participants were given thirty seconds thinking time for each step.

#### Step 2. Facts of the case

- Young people celebrating exam results
- Recalling good times at primary school
- Sister not having same happy experience of primary school
- Great times: good memories of friends and teachers

#### Step 3. Feelings generated by the case

- Empathy
- Curiosity
- Upset
- Understanding
- Sadness / sorrow / unhappiness
- Concern
- Suspicion
- Injustice
- Responsibility
- Cynicism

#### Step 4. Negative aspects of the case

- Mother judging children identically
- Doubt about fear of teacher / why should this fear exist?
- Not enough facts
- Negative relationship with teacher
- One-sided story

#### Step 5. Positive aspects of the case

- Parent went to school to voice concerns
- Good times for son
- Fears verbalised
- Boy enjoyed primary school / primary school positive
- Boy's good relationship with teacher
- Bond of friendship established in primary school
- Parent realises problem
- Wants positive experience for daughter

#### Step 6. Create as many solutions as possible

- Principal / teacher / parent meeting
- Parent / teacher discussion
- Active listening (all parties)
- Communication important / listening to girl / discussing
- Parent / management team discussion
- Fact-finding process to acquire more information and clarify situation
- Change girl's class / school
- Plan a 'stepped' response

#### Step 7. Decide which three solutions take priority

- Fact-finding
- Principal / teacher meeting
- Listening to girl / communication

#### Step 8. Prepare and implement an action plan

Fact-finding	Principal / teacher meeting	Listening to pupil / communication
Chat with pupil	Parent / child / teacher / principal meeting	Observe pupil discreetly / check attendance record
Chat with parent		Parent / daughter
Chat with teacher		Teacher / parent
Observe pupil discreetly / check attendance record		Principal / parent / teacher / pupil

## **Evaluation / feedback**

### **Strengths of process**

- Everyone contributed
- Structured framework, focused
- Different views / thinking clarified
- Collective solutions
- Action plan easy
- Easy to raise difficult questions
- Process develops thinking skills
- Process respects opinions

### **Challenges of process**

- Hard to keep balance between positive and negative
- Need different personnel involved in case study (could benefit more from mixed group of teachers, parents and psychologists to get different views)

## **Parents' workshop**

### **Step 1. Read the case (same story as teachers' workshop)**

#### **Step 2. Facts of the case**

- Daughter fearful
- Son had a good experience
- Son liked teacher
- Son out to celebrate exam results
- Son 18 years old – celebration important
- Son out with friends, reminiscing

#### **Step 3. Feelings generated by the case**

- Sadness
- Joy for son who was celebrating results of examinations
- Happiness
- Fulfilment
- Fear
- Togetherness
- Bonding

#### **Step 4. Negative aspects of the case**

- Daughter fearful / fear factor for daughter
- Daughter not having same positive experience (in primary school) as brother had
- 18-year-old boys under pressure to celebrate (regardless of exam result)
- Alcohol probably part of celebration; possible bad times in primary school forgotten
- Could be looking back through rose-tinted glasses
- Mother fearful

#### **Step 5. Positive aspects of the case**

- Boy did well / good communication with teacher
- Togetherness / celebration
- Mother knows daughter is fearful / good bond between mother and daughter
- Final year happy for son / respect for teacher
- Met up with friends from past
- Mother can help daughter

#### **Step 6. Create as many solutions as possible**

- Parent to see teacher
- Parent – chat with daughter / sit and explain
- Teacher and parents to boost pupil's confidence
- Find out if other pupils are having the same problem
- Parents' meeting – approach gently
- Quality of daughter / teacher relationship (personality clash?) to be checked
- Work with liaison officer
- Parent / teacher and parent / pupil / teacher meetings
- Liaison with principal / teacher / parent / pupil
- See if it is a problem with the particular class
- Re-examine facts

#### **Step 7. Decide which solutions take priority**

- Parent to chat with daughter
- Quality of daughter / teacher relationship (personality clash?) to be checked
- Facts to be re-examined

## Step 8. Prepare and implement an action plan

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Mother / daughter chat	Daughter / teacher relationship discussed <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Parent to talk to teacher to see if aware of situation</li><li>● Where? Who? How? When?</li></ul>	Facts to be examined <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Parent listens to daughter / teacher</li><li>● Liaison teacher / principal to be involved</li><li>● Write down what daughter / teacher says</li><li>● 12-year-old girl – difficult age – need to be careful</li></ul>

### Evaluation / feedback

#### Strengths of process

- Opportunity to hear other people's points of view
- Everyone given a time to speak / listen
- Looked at both positive and negative
- Sequencing of steps proves valuable when constructing action plan
- Very interactive
- Easier to find solution using a group
- Not on your own

#### Challenges of process

- Dealing with stress (process 'nerve-racking')
- Overcoming shyness



## SECTION 6

### Partially Worked Examples of Case-Based Learning

Here are several examples that have been worked only to step 6. Prioritise and complete an action plan for these cases.

#### Step 1. Read the case

##### Case

*We were five weeks into the new term. I was teaching a difficult year group. One girl was determined to unsettle others in the class, indulged in unacceptable behaviour, distracting some, causing them to lose concentration and join her in an attempt to create 'fun' at my expense. I kept this girl back at the end of the class to discuss her behaviour, how it needed to change and the consequences if it did not. Despite being very vocal during class time she decided to be uncommunicative and she refused to speak to me. As a result I asked her to think overnight about what I had said and added that I would talk with her again the next day, before she came into my class. I told her that my expectation was that she would have thought out a plan of co-operative action.*

*Next day, I was in the room as the group assembled. She bounced in and proceeded to head towards her desk. I extended my arm in front of her saying that she was to wait outside until we had our chat. She turned immediately and went out into the corridor. I settled the class before going to speak with her. When I did, she was nowhere to be seen. I sent a note to her year-head to inform her that the pupil was missing. I received a note in return to say she had arrived at the year-head's office and had been put into another class until the year-head had time to deal with her. The year-head spoke to her at the end of the period. The pupil claimed that I had grabbed her by the arm and had hurt her. She had some redness on her upper arm. The year-head spoke to her about her conduct but I was not approached and knew nothing about what had transpired until I spoke to the year-head at the end of the day. I put in a written report about the incident. The pupil took the next few days off. I heard that she had photographs taken of her injuries and that her mother was going to take the matter up with a solicitor. I asked for a meeting to be set up with her mother and herself. This was arranged.*

*On the morning of the meeting, another pupil from the same class came to see me before 9am. She told me that, on the previous evening, the pupil had telephoned five of her classmates including her, asking them to be her witnesses. She wanted them to say that they had seen me grabbing her by the arm on the day of the incident. This girl's mother had discussed the situation with her and had advised her to do the right thing and tell me what was being planned.*

The participants were given two minutes to read the case.

## **Step 2. Facts of the case**

- Bad behaviour
- In a classroom
- Early in term
- Went on for a few days
- Teacher privately challenged the bad behaviour
- Year-head involved
- Communication slow
- Written report
- One pupil spoke up for teacher

## **Step 3. Feelings generated by the case**

- Empathy with teacher
- Frustration
- Anger
- Stress / emotional involvement
- Attacked
- Hope
- Disappointment / resentment
- Fearful of outcome for teacher
- Concern regarding injustice
- Understanding / sympathy for teacher
- Vulnerability
- Admiration for other girl, at end of story

## **Step 4. Negative aspects of the case**

- Events going against teacher
- Reaction of girl to incident is negative, uncooperative
- Teacher is negative initially
- Pupil's perspective not heard initially
- Teacher made physical contact with child
- Pupil negative and teacher's approach counter-productive
- Poor communication
- Class relations were poor / staff relations poor
- Pupil placed outside door



### **Step 5. Positive aspects of the case**

- Measured response
- Girl at end of story did right thing / advice from parent / discussed situation with parent
- Good intentions from teacher
- Loyalty
- Teacher considers actions
- Year-head acted immediately
- Thinking time given
- Report written

### **Step 6. Create as many solutions as possible**

- Whole administration / organisation of school needs to be addressed
- Report writing needs to be addressed
- Staff training to deal with discipline / conflict resolution
- Need to deal with situation before the end of the day
- Discussion should take place in front of a third party
- Have case-based learning perspective in school to gain pupil perspective
- Mentoring / support system in school
- Discussion on how to manage group / better preparation
- Open lines of communication
- Build on positive

Complete steps 7 and 8 using the guidance for group leaders (page 11).

### **Step 7. Decide which solutions take priority**

### **Step 8. Prepare and implement an action plan**

## Step 1. Read the case

### Case

*I was working in a youth centre, teaching a group of ten young people who had just left school and they were on a job skills programme. Most of the participants were involved in youth wings of paramilitary groups. The session was going well and we were working on basic money management. During a short break in the work an argument broke out between two of the boys and looked as if it was going to develop into a physical fight. The main protagonist, Jim, picked up a chair and was about to hit it down on top of the other, less aggressive, boy called John. Without a second thought I walked between the two boys, formed a barrier between the two, and faced Jim. This gave John a chance to back away from the situation and, thankfully, it broke the aggression in Jim. I also gave Jim a way out of the confrontation without losing face, because an adult had stopped him and not another young person. Jim put the chair down and, once they had calmed down, the staff eventually found out that the confrontation was linked to an incident that happened the night before, in the town centre. Unfortunately, because there was a sectarian element in this school-based attack, the situation was not resolved. The difficulty was added to by the fact that Jim's father backed his son for a 'legitimate attack' and would not chastise him. In the end, the victim had to be transferred to another scheme for his own safety.*

*From my point of view, I have to ask myself the following questions:*

*What would have happened if I hadn't intervened and John had been seriously injured?*

*What if Jim had carried through and hit me with the chair?*

*Had Jim only picked up the chair because he knew I was there to stop him?*

*Could the situation have been resolved or brought to a better conclusion?*

The participants were given two minutes to read the case.

## Step 2. Facts of the case

- Violent exchange in youth centre
- Paramilitary background
- A disruption of service

## Step 3. Feelings generated by the case

- Annoyance at events
- Frustration
- Understanding
- Troubled by story
- Sad, disturbed

#### **Step 4. Negative aspects of the case**

- Sectarianism
- Outside events taking over
- Aggressive / violent response
- Lack of control
- Power struggle

#### **Step 5. Positive aspects of the case**

- Youth centre – coping with sectarianism fallout
- Committed youth leader / thinking
- Leader stopped escalation
- Transfer of student to allow progress
- That such a programme has exit strategies for pupils at risk

#### **Step 6. Create as many solutions as possible**

- A meeting of all parties to discuss problem
- Work with all persons in a restorative manner
- More work before such a group is brought together
- Community needs to know its responsibilities
- Need to break the cycle of violence
- Youth centre not enough by itself to deal with issues
- Need to work with parents and pupils
- More preparatory work
- Training in conflict resolution and reconciliation
- What are the implications of transfer for the student?
- Strategies required to avoid any suggestion of support for, or acceptance of, intimidation
- Counselling for those exposed to such violence

Complete steps 7 and 8 using the guidance for group leaders (page 11).

#### **Step 7. Decide which solutions take priority**

#### **Step 8. Prepare and implement an action plan**

## Step 1. Read the case

### Case

*One day, my mum and dad called up to my classroom door and called my teacher out. They told him that I had to go for an operation on my ear. When my teacher called me out I didn't know what was going on. When I went out my dad said we were going on holiday to Dublin. Then my mum said we were going to the hospital for my operation and I was shocked because I was so scared. It was a very serious operation that could have left me deaf. When I was outside my mum asked me if I was alright and if I was scared. I wasn't alright because I had never had an operation before. When I went back into the classroom my parents left because they had to go to work. I told my friends and one of them told me not to worry, that they had the same operation and that everything would be fine.*

The participants were given two minutes to read the case.

## Step 2. Facts of the case

- A child is called from class to speak with parents to be informed that he is to have an ear operation the following day
- Child upset and confused

## Step 3. Feelings generated by the case

- Empathy with, and sympathy for, child
- Frustration and disappointment at how parents handle situation

## Step 4. Negative aspects of the case

- Not ideal way to handle situation
- Child very vulnerable
- Confused and frightened
- Poor communication
- School day disrupted

## Step 5. Positive aspects of the case

- Both parents involved
- Child has good awareness and supportive friends
- Child coped well with difficult situation
- It is good that medical needs are being met

### **Step 6. Create as many solutions as possible**

- Plan of action for dealing with unforeseen situations
- Parenting programmes
- Parents could talk to other school personnel before arriving at classroom  
e.g. Home School Liaison Officer
- Child's school day should not be interrupted
- Circle time to address fears of children

Complete steps 7 and 8 using the guidance for group leaders (page 11).

### **Step 7. Decide which solutions take priority**

### **Step 8. Prepare and implement an action plan**

## Step 1. Read the case

### Case

*I am a single father of a teenage girl, May, and this is the story of my experience in trying to get a good education for her. All was well until she went to secondary school. She was immediately labelled as coming from a rough area and as if she was a low achiever. She was labelled as being reared by her father, as 'having no mother' and as being in projects for 'at risk' pupils. She came home from school feeling lost, left out, not valued and full of fear. School was a place of fear, bullying, name-calling, objects-throwing - and all this in front of teachers! The boys dominated the classroom and picked on vulnerable people. Some teachers were afraid of these boys. Other teachers humoured them, to keep them on football teams etc.*

*I went up constantly to the school. This was a surprise as teachers expected me to have no interest. One year-head who knew me from years back was nice to me and tried to help. Things got worse and my daughter got more unsettled and, yes, disruptive. She could take no more. We suffered for three years and finally the school expelled her for her 'behaviour' and 'attitude'. She is no angel, I know that, but no one seemed to care or want to help. I made an appointment to go meet the principal of another school. Myself and my daughter arrived. I explained the problem and why we were there. They asked May why she had caused problems - she said she had caused problems and explained as best she could what had happened. He turned to May and said, 'I think you are a liar and a trouble maker'.*

The participants were given two minutes to read the case.

## Step 2. Facts of the case

- Very disadvantaged child – low achiever?
- Teenage girl
- Second-level school
- Father visited school
- Year-head tried to help
- Went on for three years
- Bullying in school
- Single parent
- Labelling causing a problem
- A one-sided view
- Girl was expelled
- Met principal of another school

### **Step 3. Feelings generated by the case**

- Sympathy for parent and child
- Curiosity about lead-up
- Suspicion because only one side of story heard
- Understanding – it could happen today
- Guilty – that our schools can do this
- Anger – at principal of second school
- Frustration at the case
- Upset by events

### **Step 4. Negative aspects of the case**

- Child did not get a hearing
- Poor communication
- Labelling because of background
- Going on too long
- Poor leadership by school
- Alienation of parent and child
- Judgemental system
- Lack of support

### **Step 5. Positive aspects of the case**

- Father-daughter relationship
- Father's interest
- The fact that the story has been told
- A positive year-head
- All went well in primary school
- Parental love

### **Step 6. Create as many solutions as possible**

- Review of communication
- Training for schools
- Training for parents
- Strategy to listen to children at risk
- Need for someone to listen to parent and child
- Management review
- Strategies to develop self-esteem
- Staff training to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils
- Strategy to hear all sides
- More consultation with parents

Complete steps 7 and 8 using the guidance for group leaders (page 11).

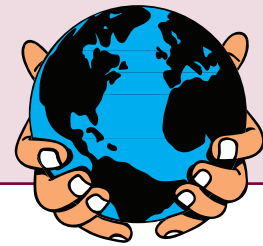
**Step 7. Decide which solutions take priority**

**Step 8. Prepare and implement an action plan.**



## SECTION 7

### Case-Based Learning: a great way to engage young people and parents



- Consultation with young people and parents is increasingly important to schools and is here to stay!
- The process of involving adults and young people benefits schools and their users
- Case-Based Learning is a great way to develop good quality consultation



Asking consumers what we think about a service or product has now become common practice for companies and public service providers. Education policy, both North and South, acknowledges the right of children to express their views on matters that affect them (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Educators have been slow to realise the potential of consulting with their 'consumers' (i.e. young people and their parents), but there are many benefits including:

- Increased learning and achievement is promoted
- Taking into account the views and opinions of others can improve decision making and make services more responsive to need
- Involving pupils and parents increases their motivation and commitment
- Participating in the process develops interpersonal skills, a sense of openness and mutual understanding between home and school.

There are various ways of consulting with parents and pupils, such as questionnaires and sentence-completion tasks, comment-boxes, and one-to-one conversations. Case-Based Learning is particularly good way of doing this.

It is possible to use the case-based learning approach with young people and / or parents by:

1. Discussing a given case (such as one of the cases included in this resource)
2. Having them write their own cases
3. Having them discuss their own cases
4. Involving them in discussion of cases with school staff.

When young people are writing their own cases they can include accounts of:

- success they experience in their lessons
- teachers' or young people's comments which helped them
- times when they valued working on their own
- times when they felt they really made progress
- situations they found too easy or too difficult
- times when they learned best
- 'my best day at school'
- 'my worst day at school'.

Parents can write about positive or negative experiences they have had.

Alternatively, teachers can record parents' experiences for discussion. Teachers who have specific responsibility to work with parents will often have great insight into family situations and can help by writing accounts of these experiences.

It is felt that Case-Based Learning and pupil consultation in general can play a vital role in building better relationships.

## SECTION 8

### Trying Case-Based Learning...

The following cases are examples that may be used freely within your own context. Their purpose is to allow participants to practise using the framework for discussion and action (p11), and to apply the learning by constructing an action plan.

The cases are divided into the following categories:

- Pupils' cases
- Parents' cases
- Teachers' cases
- Psychologists' cases
- Staff cases

#### Pupils' cases

##### Case 1

*One day in school, I slipped and split my head and everyone laughed at me. I had a black eye and I was in pain for a couple of weeks. The wound healed up after a while. I battered the people that laughed at me and I got in trouble. My Mammy was called into the school. I was grounded for two weeks. I had to say 'sorry' to the boys that I kicked. I said 'sorry' but I still didn't like them...*

##### Case 2

*One day, someone pulled off the toilet in the toilet area for pupils in second class. At lunchtime my friend and I told the teacher on yard duty that the toilet was pulled off and that the whole bathroom was flooded with water. All the teachers were thinking, 'who could have done this?' but even the principal didn't know. He was asking people if they knew who had done this to the toilet. When the water was all cleaned up, the caretaker fixed the toilet. To this day it is still a mystery who broke the toilet.*

##### Case 3

*One day in school a boy went mad; he put his fist through a window. He chased me with a chair and nearly tripped beside the computer. He broke the computer and it took us ages to fix it. We eventually got the computer to work. He was still going mad and broke more windows and spilled all the Lego across the room. The rest of us had to pick it all up. He wasn't allowed to play in the yard for weeks. A couple of weeks later he broke the screen of the computer. He threw it on the ground and it smashed. He was made pay for it.*

#### **Case 4**

*It was a very bad day for me because I got accused of giving cheek to the teacher and I got sent to the office. I went mad and started to shout at the principal and I was told to get back up to my class. I went out to the yard and got two rocks and threw them at a window. So then I went back to the class and, on the way back, I started to kick a door in, and I went back to my class and another pupil was getting into trouble for writing his name on a window. Then another teacher came into my classroom and told my teacher that I had broken a window in the office. I said, 'No, I didn't.' She started to give out to me again and I was about to go mad again when my friend tried to calm me down. Another pupil tried to calm me down as well - I hit the boy twice and he told the teacher. I ran home and the teacher followed me.*

#### **Case 5**

*The day I will never forget in school was when a boy went mad and started throwing chairs and books. He hit another boy in the leg and then started to fight with him. The second boy got the better of him. The first boy calmed down and we started to play the PlayStation. He then came back and threatened to break the PlayStation. The two boys started to fight again. The second boy said, 'If you break it, I will kill you.' The first boy wanted to play and we eventually let him, but he did like to be beaten and ran out of the room into another class and turned some tables over and threw a lot of chairs.*

## Parents' cases

### Case 1

*I never imagined secondary school for my son would have begun the way it did. For the first few months he appeared to like school and appeared happy, but that was soon to change. He began protesting in the morning, not wanting to go into school, hiding, and some mornings running away. He would panic as we approached the school. Some mornings he would start sweating or vomiting. Missing so many days from school, I knew we were in trouble. At first the help came when the school sent a welfare officer to our house. He spoke to us and explained the law regarding school. John knew he would have no choice but to attend school until he was 16 years old. The Learning-Support Team in the school set up a special programme for him. The Educational Psychologist helped my son by arranging extra help at home for him. Home-tuition was set up to help him to make up for all the time he missed during that first year. The dedicated team never gave up on him. If plan A didn't work plan B then came into action, and, in our case, I'd say we went through the whole alphabet. Today my son is getting an education he would not have had if it weren't for people willing to help him succeed. With the help of all the people concerned some sanity was restored for me. Today no child will be left behind. The support is there. The parents must care enough to ask for help. Education has come a long way. Education will give your child more opportunities and choices in life. I'm hoping in June 2006 my son will sit a Junior Cert and all the efforts and struggling to get him there will all be worthwhile. I thank all the people concerned in helping my son to get as far on as he is today. So, parents, don't despair - the help is there.*

### Case 2

*Katie is a grandmother in her 60s and this is a story that she told me. Katie is literate and all her children and grandchildren have availed of primary and post-primary education.*

*'My father was a tinsmith and we moved from place to place. There were only three children in our family, which was very unusual at the time. My father and mother wanted us to go to school and we were known as scholars. I really loved school. I wanted to be a nurse, but of course, that wasn't possible in those days. I got married at sixteen to a good man and we had our children. I sent all my children to school and the boys did their Intermediate Certificate, but only some of the girls did their exams. Mind you, the grandchildren are all doing well in school and I have a grandson at college. I also want my granddaughter who lives with me to go to college. I am going to get her some extra tuition in maths because she needs it. I am now a primary healthcare worker with the HSE. I did a course five years ago and now I work - visiting families, explaining the importance of good health and of attending school. Although I did not become a nurse I do have a job all these years later with the HSE.'*

## Teachers' cases

### Case 1

*Today, as I started teaching in a fairly challenging Primary Four class, I met a quite nervous child whom I had also taught in Primary Two. To encourage her to talk, I began reminiscing about our time together in Primary Two and the child told me that she remembered the day I had told her off for something that wasn't her fault. I was taken aback because I would always pride myself on assessing a situation accurately in the classroom before pointing a finger. So I asked her to tell me more because I could not remember the event. She said that someone had spilled something and that I had told her off, even though it wasn't she who had done it. The fact that a child so young had remembered this two years later, when I didn't (and still don't) remember at all, showed me the effect that this incident had had on her.*

### Case 2

*I was teaching music to a Primary Four class and was instructing the children on holding a recorder when one child asked again what he was supposed to do. My immediate reaction was one of impatience and I told him I had already explained this. As I hesitated, he explained that he has a 'funny' left hand, which meant he could not do as I had asked. I had no idea what he was talking about and I rather briskly asked him to be clear on what the matter was. He became tearful and asked to talk to me outside. This unsettled me, being so unexpected. I had prepared thoroughly for this lesson. The resources were ready and my entire strategies and outcomes were planned. What I had not done was find anything out about that class and this child. The boy had a deformed hand. You could not tell by looking. The child was made to feel inadequate, which in turn made me feel so guilty and ill-prepared, and also inadequate as a teacher. My concern at the time had been more for the content of the lesson than for individual children's difficulties or feelings. I still don't know how I could have avoided this and I'm sure that, with the pressures of teaching, I could well make the same mistake again.*

### Case 3

*Six Primary Seven boys were playing in a den at lunchtime. Two of the boys were smoking and they asked Michael to keep a lookout at the entrance to the den. A younger boy, JJ, came along and wanted to know what was going on. They told him to get lost but he persisted and got a bloody nose for his efforts. JJ was brought to the principal's office, as was Michael. The matter was recorded and the two boys were spoken to. JJ is on the autistic spectrum. Michael has significant autistic tendencies and is on Ritalin. The den group leader has severe emotional problems and some behavioural problems. Two days later JJ's grandmother came into school to pursue the incident.*

#### **Case 4**

*It is a wet Thursday afternoon in mid-September. A young teacher is busy doing English reading with a class of ten year olds. The classroom is hot, stuffy and damp. There is a knock at the door. One of the pupils answers. The pupil returns and tells the teacher, 'Mrs C is at the door.' The teacher knows the woman. She has taught four of her children but they have now left and are at secondary school. The young teacher thinks nervously: 'What did I do wrong now?' 'What does she want?' She goes out of the classroom to the corridor, anxiously. The mother greets her. 'I just called over to say thanks', she says nervously. 'For what?' she says. 'For all you did for the boys', says Mrs C. 'Thanks', says the teacher, visibly shocked and puzzled. Unsure how to react, she blurts out a self-conscious 'thank you very much'. She shakes Mrs C's hand and awkwardly returns to the class.*

#### **Case 5**

*One day something happened that I'll never forget.*

*I was invited to a case conference on a child in care. A large number of those involved in the case were present - from health board staff to educationalists to social workers - as well as the parent of the child. At the outset, people were advised of the confidentiality of the meeting, asked to speak in turn and with respect for everyone present. I did not fully understand this until the meeting began. The mother interrupted constantly and made personal and threatening remarks about individuals. It was a highly emotive meeting. I sat throughout it feeling that it would be dangerous to draw attention to myself by saying what was truly in my mind about the child's situation and progress, as the threat of physical violence was very real. The chairperson obviously wanted to keep the parents at the meeting. Although warnings were issued several times that the mother would be asked to leave if she continued to behave as she did, both parents remained in the room. The meeting was greatly delayed because of all the interruptions. I had to leave before it ended. The mother rushed out in tears just before I intended leaving. I was afraid to leave until she returned because I didn't feel it was physically safe to do so.*



## Psychologists' cases

### Case 1

*It was a rural school in a village. The travelling family lived within the environs of the village and requested me to seek enrolment in the local school because the principal was known to me. I went to the school anticipating no difficulties but I was wrong, however. There had been other traveller families in the community who had attended the school and who had not been well behaved. The principal refused 'point blank' to enrol this family. I brought the mother to the school the next day so that, if he persisted in his view, he would have to refuse her face-to-face. I found this very distressing when it happened and the mother was heroic in her fortitude. I then approached the parish priest who was chairperson of the board of management. He was in favour of the enrolment and it went ahead. Strangely enough, because the family were so easy to deal with, the school really did everything it could to assist them. It was strange that a school, which refused initially, did deliver quality education to the family.*

### Case 2

*Many schools that I go to congratulate themselves on their work with the travelling community. They tell me about all they do for 'them'. However there is often an underlying contempt for the travellers and no matter what the school does the children sense it and are not happy there.*

*I have seen a situation where staff felt they were tolerant but constantly referred to the travellers as 'always looking for something' and also liked referring to situations reported in the media where travellers were misbehaving – 'I see your crowd were causing trouble again'. Why is it that, as a settled person, I do not have to answer for the deeds of other settled people while all travellers are tarred with the same brush?*

### Case 3

*I was asked to assess Shane, a student in a secondary school. His teachers reported that he had learning and behavioural problems. I visited the school and carried out an assessment during which Shane was very co-operative. I found that he had a literacy problem, poor attention and also showed challenging behaviour. I then arranged a meeting involving his teachers, his parents and Shane himself, to discuss the findings and to devise a support plan. This was completed and we arranged to meet again in six weeks to check progress.*

*I was advised that Shane was well behaved for a short period but that this deteriorated quickly. One teacher felt that all this attention was a bad thing for Shane and that we were merely rewarding bad behaviour. Another teacher noted that Shane had reported to him that he had no intention of complying with any plan. It soon became clear that we were not working together as a team. The teachers were frustrated and felt alienated by Shane's behaviour and attitude. They probably found it easier to teach when Shane was not there.*



#### **Case 4**

*A post-primary school requested my support as educational psychologist to help the school address difficulties with the behaviour of growing numbers of defiant and 'reluctant' students. A meeting was held between principal, vice-principal, staff development officer and myself. An afternoon was planned where staff views could be audited and discussed, whole staff consensus achieved and decisions made collaboratively on the way forward. I arrived at the school forty minutes early on the agreed afternoon with a view to organising the room and checking equipment. I was left waiting in reception for over ten minutes, as no one was available to meet me. I was discouraged from going to find the meeting room myself. At last I was taken to the room and met the principal who apologised that he was on his way out and would not be attending the meeting at all. In the library room, seating was arranged for a lecture rather than for group discussion. My request to rearrange the chairs was strongly resisted and I had to proceed with things as they were. Staff arrived gradually, some friendly and some clearly peeved. I encouraged discussion of our suggested aims for the afternoon and requested some views on staff expectations. Some disgruntled members indicated that similar discussions, chaired by the vice-principal, had already taken place only two weeks earlier. There appeared to be growing consternation that their time would now be wasted through pointless repetition of staff views when their original points had not been listened to. Some staff muttered discontentedly throughout the meeting. I had to abandon the planned content of the afternoon. My input was not of the quality I had hoped for. My confidence in the content of the input and in my relationship with the school was shaken and I began to question the processes whereby schools seek support for their teachers.*

## **School case**

*The school in question has a zero-tolerance policy towards drug dealing and taking drugs at school.*

*One morning three girls were sent to the school office, as they were 'ill'. Their condition deteriorated and an ambulance came and took them to hospital, accompanied by a senior staff member. There it was established that they had taken ecstasy tablets at one girl's home before coming to school.*

*The local newspaper recorded the incident on its front page as 'Local School Calls Ambulance for Drug Takers!' The report did not state that the girls took drugs 'out of school' but, on the contrary, appeared to suggest it happened at school. The principal was not consulted nor was she asked to comment on the article or the event, before the story was published.*

*The next morning a number of parents phoned asking to speak to the principal, and a national newspaper also phoned to request an interview.*

## SECTION 9

### Writing and Using Your Own Cases



- Case-Based Learning is a useful process
- There are benefits to writing your own cases and discussing these
- Anyone can write a case
- Cases are simply accounts of something that happened



#### Benefits

- Telling or writing stories helps us to understand relevant issues
- Writing our cases helps us transfer to real-life situations the lessons we have learned
- Using our own cases brings an added relevance to case discussion

#### Hints

- Write about a significant event that happened to you
- Write in the third person without using real names and places
- Don't try to reach a conclusion or solution. It is ok to leave a case unresolved
- Respect everyone's accounts. Don't judge the account or question its accuracy

#### Be Careful

- Sometimes personal accounts can be seen to be 'too close to home'
- It is the role of the group leader to ensure that difficult situations are handled sensitively by the group



## SECTION 10

### Case-Based Learning: A personal reflection...

The representatives from St Joseph's National School, Dundalk, having participated in the Case-Based Learning element of the Special Educational Needs Cross-Border Professional Exchange Programme under PEACE II, are very impressed by the approach and by its potential. They believe that education in marginalised areas has unique dynamics that can only change and develop from within. Teachers, pupils, parents and community share in a culture that is marginalised in relation to mainstream social, economic, and educational opportunities. Whole-school development is the only way forward and all partners need to be fully involved. Case-Based Learning can present the experience of real people in the schools and can reveal the underlying values, attitudes, feelings and judgments that surround the cases. In doing so, it also presents the opportunity to examine the professionalism of our schools in dealing with similar situations.

In a society of 'expectocracy' where individuals' needs overshadow the group's welfare, case-based learning demand group reflection and a group response. Theory and practice blend together and the school personnel are enabled to expand their thinking and, therefore, their approaches.

Case-Based Learning offers professional debate that is more than empathy or counselling and that is closer to real analysis, evaluation and power sharing. Used in a staff development setting, it can enlighten areas such as interpersonal breakdowns, victimisation and exclusion, all of which can cripple pupils, teachers and parents equally. The school community, using this approach, can successfully and confidently move the education agenda forward in a revolutionary way.

### Evaluation of process – St Joseph's National School

#### Format

This was found to be popular and efficient:

- Provided firm framework
- All-inclusive model
- Covered all areas of response
- Required listening, thinking, speaking, evaluating
- Non-threatening analysis
- Requires teamwork and leadership

## Case-Based Learning

- Very relevant and topical
- Room to air contentious issues safely
- Non-judgmental approach
- Provides opportunity to look at all aspects of situation
- Excellent whole-staff process
- Provides professional learning opportunities
- Allows for different levels of thinking
- Must be handled by experienced person
- Could mean additional pressure for some staff

### Steering Committee: SEN Cross-Border Professional Exchange Programme

John Hunter, Department of Education, Northern Ireland

Breandán Ó Murchú, Department of Education and Science

Susan Carnson, Department of Education, Northern Ireland

Jimmy Malone, Department of Education and Science (to January 2005)

Carmel Reilly, Department of Education and Science (to June 2005)

Niall McLoughlin, Department of Education and Science

Siobhán Fields, Department of Education and Science

Michael Travers, Department of Education and Science

Marina Ní Threasaigh, Department of Education and Science

Joan Crowley O'Sullivan, Special Education Support Service

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Joan Walshe, National Educational Psychological Service

Maureen Costello, National Educational Psychological Service

Linda Shields, Psychological Services, Southern Education and Library Board

Eugene Toolan, St Angela's College, Sligo

Stuart Rooney, Psychological Services, Southern Education and Library Board  
(to February 2005)

