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Developing Prospective Teachers' Skills in Analysing Educational Situations and Making Pedagogical Decisions

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Abstract: This article examines how prospective teachers can be taught to make reasoned decisions in complex educational situations during a Tarbiya teaching methodology course. The study is conceptual and methodological, drawing on a comparative analysis of literature on problem-based learning, pedagogical observation and reflection. It proposes tasks for distinguishing evidence from assumptions, understanding stakeholders' perspectives, comparing alternative responses and examining the consequences of a decision. Its methodological outputs comprise a procedure for revealing case information in stages, a practical session plan and criteria for assessing decision quality. The approach seeks to create learning conditions that enable prospective teachers to move from repeating ready-made recommendations towards independent pedagogical reasoning. The effectiveness of the proposed tools requires further empirical investigation.

Keywords: Prospective teachers, educational situations, case-based learning, pedagogical decisions, justification, reflection, Tarbiya teaching methodology.

Introduction: In educational work, teachers must consider pupils' behaviour, relationships within the group and learning objectives simultaneously. The visible features of a situation do not always reveal its causes. For example, a child who does not participate in a task may be deliberately resisting it, may not understand the instructions, or may be anxious about peers' reactions. Teacher preparation should therefore go beyond immediate judgements about behaviour and give particular attention to identifying and interpreting the information needed to make a decision.

Problem statement and research aim

The Tarbiya teaching methodology course includes methods such as individual conversations, discussion, role play and approaches tailored to individual learners. Knowing the definition of a method, however, does not fully demonstrate the ability to select it appropriately for a particular situation. A prospective teacher may recommend a conversation, but unless they specify with whom, when, through which questions and for what purpose, the recommendation does not become an actionable decision. This article examines that transition: translating knowledge of a method into action appropriate to the situation.

The study aims to propose a set of case tasks that help prospective teachers analyse educational situations using evidence and justify their pedagogical decisions. Its central question is how the content of a case and the procedure for discussing it can support a shift from superficial judgement to a reasoned pedagogical response. The study examines case-based learning in teaching methodology sessions, focusing specifically on tasks and assessment criteria that support the justification of decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

Hmelo-Silver associates problem-based learning with investigating a problem for which a ready-made answer

is not supplied, collaborative inquiry and independent learning [1]. This perspective provides a basis for ensuring that an educational case is more than a question-and-answer exercise: prospective teachers need opportunities to identify missing information and test their initial explanations. The application of this principle to Tarbiya teaching methodology is developed here as the author's methodological proposal.

In their work on developing prospective teachers' lesson analysis, Santagata and Guarino emphasise the relationship between objectives, evidence of pupil activity and alternative pedagogical strategies [2]. Their research concerns mathematics education. Its findings are therefore not treated as direct evidence of effectiveness in educational work; instead, the principle of evidence-based discussion is adapted to a different context. Loughran relates the professional significance of reflection to understanding and learning from experience [3].

The methods used were a comparative content analysis of purposively selected scholarly sources, the modelling of an educational situation and the instructional design of tasks. The units of analysis were the observable event, its interpretation, the selected action and the evidence used to review that action. Sources were selected to inform the methodological proposal rather than through a comprehensive systematic review. The results are instructional tools developed through this process, not measurements from an experiment. The people and events in the examples are fictional and were created for instructional purposes.

RESULTS AND PRINCIPLES OF CASE DESIGN

On the basis of the theoretical analysis, the primary purpose of a case was defined as making a prospective teacher's reasoning about a problem visible. Both the final response and the reasoning leading to it are recorded in writing. The prospective teacher first describes the event and then explains its possible causes. For example, "the pupil began speaking twice during group work, but the others did not listen" is an observation; "the pupil does not want to work with others" is an assumption requiring investigation. This distinction provides the initial criterion for the task.

The case is written so that not all information is disclosed at the outset. The first part presents the event and its immediate consequence. The second adds the pupil's explanation or an observation record. The third introduces new evidence that may require the initial decision to be reconsidered. This staged disclosure is intended to provide practice in reassessing a professional judgement when new evidence becomes available, rather than to expose a prospective teacher's mistaken view.

Case complexity increases gradually. The first task uses a short case involving one problem and a small number of participants. A subsequent task presents conflicting accounts from a pupil, a peer and a teacher. A more complex case introduces a time constraint or the need to communicate with a parent. Complexity is therefore determined by the need to compare alternative interpretations and the consequences of decisions, rather than by the length of the text.

Table 1. Case tasks and the analytical outputs they produce

Analytical focus	Task for the prospective teacher	Expected output
Evidence	Separate established information from assumptions	A list of observations and assumptions
Problem	Identify who and what has been affected	A specific educational problem
Alternatives	Compare at least two possible actions	An account of benefits and limitations
Decision	Specify the action, responsible person and timing	An actionable plan

Review	Identify how the outcome will be assessed	Observable evidence and a condition for reconsideration

The outputs in the table are brought together in a brief decision record. This enables the teacher educator to identify where the prospective teacher needs further support: recognising the problem, interpreting it or planning a response.

An illustrative case and its discussion

Fictional instructional case: during a Tarbiya lesson, a class is preparing group presentations on “Responsible cooperation”. One pupil is assigned to produce decorative drawings, while the others prepare the content. The pupil who made the drawings does not speak during the presentation. The group leader describes this pupil as having “failed to participate actively” and objects to all group members receiving the same mark. The teacher must decide how to respond but does not yet know how the tasks were allocated.

During the initial discussion, prospective teachers suspend judgement and record what is known and what information is missing. Not speaking during the presentation is an observable event, whereas not participating in its preparation remains an unverified conclusion. Clarifying questions address who allocated the tasks, whether the pupil’s suggestions were heard, whether assessment criteria were explained in advance and who contributed to the completed work. The wording of a question should not presume blame.

The second part reveals additional information: the pupil had suggested content for the presentation, but the group leader did not include the suggestion in the discussion. Producing the drawings had been assigned to the pupil by agreement within the group. This information shows that the problem cannot be adequately explained in terms of individual activity alone. The prospective teacher must now consider opportunities for participation, task allocation and assessment transparency together. The initial response is retained, and the parts that change in the light of new evidence are identified.

Alternative responses might include supplementing the presentation with individual explanations, using brief records to establish each member’s contribution, or rotating roles in the next session. Each option has limitations. Additional speaking time may place the pupil in an uncomfortable position, while reliance on self-assessment alone may lead to exaggerated accounts of individual contributions. The chosen response should therefore be supported by an impartial conversation with the pupil, the work produced and observations of the group process.

One possible decision is to clarify the contributions already made without publicly blaming the group, apply the assessment criteria provided in advance and rotate substantive roles in the next task. To review the outcome, the teacher could record each member’s suggestions during the next activity and observe how the group responds to them. This is not the only acceptable solution. Other decisions may also be considered reasonable if they are supported by evidence, preserve the child’s dignity and can be evaluated in practice.

Session organisation and assessment

In the proposed 80-minute session, the first 10 minutes are allocated to reading the case and writing an individual response. Small groups then spend 15 minutes distinguishing evidence from assumptions and a further 15 minutes examining new information and comparing alternative decisions. This is followed by 20 minutes of role play to rehearse teacher–pupil interaction, 10 minutes of peer feedback and a final 10 minutes for revising individual decisions in writing. This allocation is the author’s recommendation and can be adapted to the group’s circumstances.

The teacher educator does not immediately provide a ready-made solution. Instead, reasoning is guided by questions such as “What evidence supports this conclusion?”, “What other explanation is possible?” and “Who will be affected by the chosen action, and how?” If a prospective teacher suggests a response that humiliates a child or treats an unexamined cause as an established fact, its consequences are discussed explicitly. Freedom to choose a pedagogical approach does not justify overlooking a child’s dignity or right to participate.

Decision quality is described using four criteria: reliance on evidence, comparison of alternative responses, specificity of action and the possibility of evaluating the outcome. Reliance on evidence is assessed through the distinction between observation and assumption; consideration of alternatives requires explaining the conditions associated with at least two options. Specificity means identifying who will do what and when. The evaluation criterion identifies which observable feature of pupil activity would justify retaining or revising the decision.

Three descriptive levels may be used: an initial response is dominated by general recommendations and unsupported judgements; a developing response contains evidence and a specific action but lacks an alternative or a condition for review; a reasoned response links evidence, alternatives, action and monitoring. These descriptions do not constitute a standardised diagnostic instrument. Expert review and investigation of agreement between assessors are required before they can be converted into a formal scoring system.

When initial and final responses are compared, the change in reasoning matters more than text length. Revising “a conversation is needed” to “I will speak privately with the pupil to establish their involvement in choosing the task” indicates that the proposed action has become more specific. This single example does not, however, demonstrate fully developed professional competence. Independently addressing a case with different content in a later session can help examine whether the skill transfers to a new situation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The methodological feature of this proposal is that it extends case discussion into a written account of the evidence supporting a decision. Revising a view in response to new information is treated as a normal part of professional reasoning. Reflection is thus directed from general impressions towards examining the conditions and consequences of a specific decision. The approach develops the possibilities for case analysis and role play identified in the dissertation section by focusing on a particular practical skill [4].

A limitation is that a written case cannot fully reproduce the emotional pressure, rapid interaction and complete detail of an actual classroom event. In group discussion, a more capable prospective teacher’s view may also determine others’ responses. It is therefore advisable to retain individual initial and final written responses, rotate roles and supplement case work with observation during teaching practice. If real situations are used, details that could identify children should be removed.

In conclusion, preparation for pedagogical decision-making should organise the description and interpretation of a situation, together with the justification of action, as interconnected learning tasks. Staged disclosure of case information and revision against explicit criteria are methodological tools for this purpose. Their evaluation could combine independent responses before and after the session, a transfer task involving a new case and observations during teaching practice. This article provides a concrete methodological basis for such evaluation rather than empirical proof of effectiveness.

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