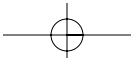
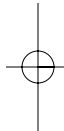
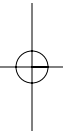


SECTION 1

EDUCATIONAL POLICY



CHAPTER 1

WHY TEACH

Objectives

By the end of this chapter the reader will be able to:

1. understand some of the key debates in forming a professional teacher identity;
2. recognise the importance of educational theory to better understand classroom practice;
3. understand the meaning of the term 'reflective practitioner';
4. see the importance of the interconnection of theory, practice and reflection for developing effective teaching skills;
5. recognise some important educational research on the nature of effective teaching.



Training to be a teacher

Learning to teach is both rewarding and challenging. In fact, the reward is intensified by the challenging nature of the role and of the profession. For a number of years now, teacher education has spoken of the importance of being a 'reflective practitioner' as an essential part of adopting a professional teaching role. As we shall also

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see, notions of 'professionalism' are very important for the trainee teacher as s/he starts out. In one's attempt to be a 'good' or an 'effective' teacher we look briefly here at the forces that shape and affect teachers and teaching, and we look at the rewards of the role. We would like to paint a picture of teaching as a complex social encounter, buttressed by wider social forces and yet, at the same time, a reflective process making teachers as much learners as those they teach.

Teacher training, or to use its other term, initial teacher education, is a tricky process to try and pin down. It is not one thing, but an interesting mixture of many different skills, disciplines and experiences. This tells you something very significant about what it means to be a teacher. On your course and through this book you will be introduced to a wide range of ideas, tools, techniques and tips drawing from a wide range of disciplines: politics, sociology, psychology and education studies itself. Teacher education is academic, and yet also practical. Teaching is as much to do with the physical activity of managing a class as it is the creative endeavour of preparing good quality resources. The teaching experience is also based upon developing an extensive and effective range of emotional and interpersonal skills; what we call the 'affective' domain of learning.

Perhaps more importantly, this is the time to fully immerse yourself in the possibilities and options that are available to you as a new teacher. It is a time for mistakes, experimentation and reflection. It is a time to build a solid base upon which to establish your future professional role.

Breaking through all the misunderstanding

It is almost impossible to get away from 'education, education, education' in our modern society. It is the source of frequent news items; almost constant and continuous media debate, 'spin' and policy-making. Every few years the government of the time announces the next great educational reform. Every summer the media lays siege to examination boards in an attempt to establish once and for all, are qualifications getting easier or not? It is equally impossible not to meet someone who has an opinion about education, or at least, in a more narrow sense, an opinion about schooling and teachers and teaching. We have all been to school – we all have experiences (good and bad). That makes us all an expert in our own way.

And yet, nothing could be further from the truth. So much is spoken about teachers and teaching, so much media attention is seemingly given to the profession, and yet most of us as adults are completely unaware of what schools, colleges and teaching are really like. Schools and colleges are still closed worlds. It would be a mistake to base our impressions on education on either our own limited experiences as a learner or on media-saturated accounts of moral panics and partial viewpoints.

'Everyone remembers a good teacher'

From the start we need to be clear that it is essential to separate ourselves as a learner or, at least, how we might (mis)remember learning from ourselves as a professional

teacher-in-the-making. Learning to teach is a strange mixture of many different skills and types of knowledge – it is practical, theoretical and reflective. Learning to teach means we need to juggle our own experiences and observations with the evidence we see in front of us. We need to use educational theories and research as a lens through which to help us focus our attention on what we are doing, why we are doing it, and whether or not it is working.

Sometimes teaching is highly pragmatic – things just seem to work. On other occasions, theory and research can be used to point you in useful directions; to shape and mould your practice in some specific way. Teaching is both a craft and an intellectual endeavour: It is practical, physical and changes over time, and yet, at the same time, to teach well requires not just an understanding of current educational theory but an awareness of how these theories aid and shape the practical ‘hands-on’ work that we do with learners in classrooms and other learning environments. We call this ‘evidence-based practice’; practically observed outcomes of your own teaching understood through the lens of theory and models. To teach well, you will need to become part craftsman, part pragmatist and opportunist, part sociologist, psychologist and actor!

Teaching is an immensely rich and rewarding profession. It is also very hard to communicate to trainee teachers at the start of their professional formation just how rewarding, exciting, challenging, tiring and life-changing the profession can be. As the adverts claim, ‘everyone remembers a good teacher’. This is certainly true, and one of the greatest rewards of the profession. What is not so clear-cut, however, is just what it is that makes a ‘good teacher’ ‘good’.

What is a ‘good teacher’?

Some teachers are ‘good’ because the support they offer learners makes them feel able and comfortable to learn and take risks learning where otherwise they might not; some good teachers inspire through the force of their personality, offering a charismatic persona for learners to respond to in an excited and interested way; some good teachers ‘simply’ put in the hours, time and effort to ensure that all their learners are as well equipped as possible to meet the challenges of examinations, growing up, the world of work and constant change. We hope through your journey as a trainee teacher you come to know the experience of being a good teacher, and in your changing professional identity and role, that you come to know the new you a little better. You can be sure of one thing – the experience of teacher training will change you as much as your teaching will change the lives of those you support in the classroom.

In many respects, the whole of this book is about becoming a ‘good teacher’. Earlier we have noted that good teachers unify theory, practice and reflection. They link these essential elements together in order to identify what works and to know why it does.

Ruddock (1985) warns us against slipping into comfortable ‘habit’. She argues that good teaching is experimental. If we allow our practice to slip into habit – to become

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unthinking and uncritical – we are in danger of losing sight of why something works; we are then a very short step away from being unable to identify the need for change, ever teaching in the same pattern and routine, separated from understanding the needs of our learners. Ruddock describes this process as a ‘hegemony of habit’ – we allow our teaching to become taken for granted. It becomes cemented into habit and we are unable to eventually break free.

Learners themselves are as much aware of good teaching as we are, sometimes more so. Consider these descriptions of a ‘good teacher’ by eight year old learners:

A good teacher ... is kind, is generous, listens to you, encourages you, has faith in you, keeps confidence, likes teaching children, likes teaching their subject, takes time to explain things, helps you when you’re stuck, tells you how you are doing, allows you to have your say, doesn’t give up on you, cares for your opinion, makes you feel clever, treats people equally, stands up for you, makes allowances, tells the truth, is forgiving. (Hay McBer Report, 2000: 2)

It is difficult to disagree with the importance of these sentiments. What is interesting, however, is that this collection of statements can be broken down into three subsections.

- Good teaching is emotionally supportive of learners and based upon successful interpersonal skills and relationships.
- Good teaching is based upon your clarity as an effective communicator and in how you engage with learners.
- Good teaching is expressed through your enjoyment and pleasure of the support of the learning of others.

At times you will find learning to teach hard. Maybe even harder than you once found learning to learn.

When you start to access the research literature, and for your reading of the rest of this book, you will quickly come across two very important terms.

The first is ‘teaching and learning’. A mouthful to keep saying, but it is important to be sensitive to the fact that by saying teaching and learning we are making an important statement – that teaching can not exist without learning having taken place. This is simply the only measurement of ‘good teaching’ that it is possible to have. This simple observation has massive implications for what we do and how we judge ourselves.

The second key term is pedagogy. The term ‘pedagogy’ is of great importance for the rest of this book and for the rest of your professional life. By pedagogy we mean thinking and theorising about how learners learn, with a view that this then shapes the teaching and learning strategies, tools and techniques we adopt. Strictly speaking, pedagogy means the study of how children learn, with ‘andragogy’ being used for how adults learn. In education studies and initial teacher education the term pedagogy tends to be favoured, and also used as a catch all term to describe the methods you adopt to engage learners and to maximise learning.



Discussion point

When I was learning to teach I really don't think I realised at the time the absolute importance of the idea that teaching and learning are so connected – to the point that the learning is more important than the teaching. This is hard – when we start we think so much about ourselves – and feel so much on show; exposed to a group of people. The idea that our behaviour in class is simply a vehicle to engage the learning behaviour of others is difficult to come to terms with – but once you do, it really shapes your planning and your classroom practice.

How might this observation help you to think about your own assumptions about teaching?

Can teachers 'make a difference'?



M-level thinking: situatedness

All social activity (of which education and classroom practice is but a part) is what some social scientists call 'situated'. This means that we can only understand the activity by thinking about where it occurs and about how the roles and relationships between those involved are constructed. Within education, the variables that affect classroom practice (inside and outside the school or college) are hotly contested. How might these variables affect or 'locate' teaching and learning to the environment it occurs within?

It is important to recognise that teaching is a 'social situation'. By this we mean that it takes place within a social context – it is open to bombardment by wider social forces. The doors of an educational institution might be closed, but they are open to the effects of class, gender, ethnicity, location, globalisation, policy and the trends and fashions of the media.

As a society, we often hold education up as both one of our most valuable assets and at the same time, one of our most valuable tools for social change. While this is true, education is but a part of a much wider complex society and in turn, part of a much wider global stage. Education alone can not compensate for the ills of society. And yet it sometimes feels as if teachers hold the weight of the rest of the society upon their shoulders.

Although education is shaped by some powerful social forces, it is still possible for us to identify teachers and teaching that are 'trend-breaking': practice that enables

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learners to obtain higher than would otherwise be indicated by national and regional trends in attainment according to social factors such as class, gender and ethnicity.

Who are you? What do you wish to become?

Within all this complex array of pressures, forces and theories at some point you need to recognise the role of choice in becoming a professional teacher. You need to adopt a style that you think ‘works’ – one that suits your own image of your ‘self’ and one that gets the intended outcomes with the learners you work with. You need to make decisions and choices regarding what sort of teacher you become. You need to choose what sources you will use for inspiration in making this journey and these changes.

There are a number of sources you might turn to, to model for you what is a good teacher – this book being a start. There is the wider research literature, the supportive relationship with your tutors and mentor(s) and wider colleagues. You need to seek different approaches and styles of classroom teaching and the wider teacher role, as acted out by those you meet around you. You need to question and reflect upon everything that you see: do things work? How can you tell? Why do things work? What is the factor making something successful?

Reflective practice and reflective practitioners



M-level thinking: the reflective practitioner

This term refers to the way in which professionals, by virtue of their professional roles, reflect upon what they do and engage with theory to make sense of their experience. There is a debate surrounding the extent to which teachers are and can be reflective and the extent to which reflection can change practice or not. Why do you think reflection might be a really powerful tool for teachers?

We feel that embarking on teacher training is a massive and exciting undertaking and one that warrants reflection:

- Reflection is a key process through which we make events ‘meaningful’ and therein construct our understanding of them.
- Reflection allows for the individual involved to ‘step back’ and think about action and practice.
- Reflection – with a view to improving practice – is one of the key characteristics of becoming and being a professional.
- Reflection enables us to make sense of theory which at times might seem distanced and abstracted from our own experiences.

Teacher training is a lifelong process. It is a journey through which pre-service trainees are able to begin to construct a professional identity and through which in-service teachers are able to further reinforce and shape their already existing identity.

Teaching is both reflective and also reflexive: it needs those involved (that is, teachers themselves) to think about their own actions and to think about their own identity and role.



Case study

A great deal of 'becoming a teacher' is about how the role feels, how the label 'teacher' fits comfortably within your own self-image and how learners are able to respond to this. Consider this example: Robert completed his teacher training two years ago. Through the duration of his initial teacher education he found classroom management really hard and at times confidence-destroying. He had a strong personality and was usually a 'larger than life' figure; yet found it very difficult to adopt the authority role within his own classroom. On a couple of occasions he almost left his training incomplete, thinking that maybe teaching was not for him. His tutors tried to reassure Robert that many trainees have difficulties with classroom management and that this was a common experience for new teachers. Happily, two years into his first post, Robert is now a very competent, successful and well-liked teacher who commands respect with ease. On reflection, Robert recognises that his original problems with classroom management were largely due to the artificiality of the 'student/trainee teacher role'; once he has his 'own class' and was 'there before the learners' at the very start of the year, he found it much easier to adopt with confidence an authority role and, by his own admission, 'believed in it' himself a little more. He no longer felt like a 'fake' teacher but as a fully established member of staff, albeit with much more still to learn. Now he really feels like a teacher and this identification with the role has made a genuine difference to his practice.

It has long been recognised that for effective teaching to take place, teachers need to unite both theory and practice – they are two sides of the same coin. Practice uninformed by theory is never going to be critical and will be blinkered – it will be always kept in the dark – whereas theory uninformed by practice will be pointless and merely abstract. Uniting theory and practice is essential for sound reflective thinking – being able to see the connections between what you do, how you feel about it, how you evaluate it and what research and theory also tells you. The unification of theory and practice is referred to as 'praxis' – attempts to link them result in a far greater outcome than simply having theory and practice separate from each other.

We have used the term 'reflective practitioner' in teacher education to refer to the ways in which good teachers, as part of their professionalism, reflect upon what

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they do with a view to making their practice more informed and ultimately improved. This term, developed by Schön (1983), is seen to be at the very heart of being a professional.

Teacher professionalism, and initial teacher education programmes, are what we might call a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). By this we mean that such training courses seek to induct the participants into a shared set of values and to help all involved feel a sense of belonging to a mutually supportive group.

Consider this quotation:

Reflective practice is thus always a joint activity to some extent. It is linked to and influenced by the reflective working of others and is influenced by a whole set of informal and formal reflective interactions ... In a variety of formal and informal roles, such as leaders, managers, mentors and coaches, others can influence an individual's reflection. The everyday professional interactions with fellow colleagues can facilitate mutual reflection or co-reflection. Professional dialogue of this kind can enhance creativity because it can bring together different perspectives. Teachers' experience of the practice of others is also likely to shape their reflections. (James, 2007: 34)

In the light of the above, we want you to develop the habit of always evaluating, reflecting and thinking about your teaching, but we also want you to develop the habit of talking with others about your work and your practice. We feel that there is a hugely important role for your colleagues and peers to play in helping you to think about your teaching and that this mutual dialogue is absolutely essential in being a professional.

Becoming a 'professional'

M-level thinking: professionalism

The notion of being a 'professional' and what is a 'profession' is a highly contested issue. It is a role that we undertake that is based upon a specialist and formal set of knowledge that is used by a community to reflect, self-regulate and meet particular standards in the field they have 'expert' status over. The degree to which the teaching profession is, in fact, a 'profession' in these terms is open to criticism and debate. With the increasing openness of learning, listening to the learner's voice, outside inspection from Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education) and other UK equivalents, for example, Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Training) in Wales, increased teacher practitioner research into 'what works' and attempts to make schools accountable to market and parental choice, we might begin to question to what extent is teaching a profession that regulates its own specialist knowledge? Why do you think teaching is such a 'hot political issue' that it needs to be regulated from the outside?

When entering a new ‘profession’ there is a period of time where you adopt a role of ‘trainee’ or ‘professional-in-the-making’ – this is a fluid and ongoing construction – time to think about yourself and your development. However, to continue to develop as a teacher, you need to retain, as we have argued above, this commitment to reflective practice. What we are talking about here, and at various other places in this book, is building your professional role. It is important to understand that role and identity are not the same thing, but affect each other. By ‘identity’ we mean how you think about yourself and what you think others think about you. You will probably have a range of aspects to your identity – and these will change over time. By ‘role’ we mean the norms and standards of behaviour that you ‘act out’ in specific contexts.

The professional teacher role is complex and contested. By ‘professional’ it is often meant an organised body of people who have acquired specialised and systematic knowledge that puts them in a separate social standing from others who do not possess this specialised knowledge. Doctors are an excellent example of this. Further, professionals are seen to belong to a community of practice, sharing knowledge and insight, and who regulate their own practice. They are also seen to be trusted by those they serve. This makes teaching as a profession problematic and raises some questions:

- Is it the case that teachers really regulate themselves within their own community? After all, inspections come from the outside and despite the hard work for all those involved, inspections often seem to teachers to be a process ‘done to them’.
- Is it the case that teacher knowledge is specialist? If so, then what exactly is this knowledge – is it the pedagogy or is it the subject-specific knowledge of the disciplines they teach, or both?
- Finally, is it the case that the media and society at large trusts teachers – and should they? Parents and learners have a right to be involved in the education process and commitments to these two groups erode the distance between the teacher and the learner.

Much good teaching is based upon the erosion of the gap between teacher and learner. So, are teachers professionals? Many teachers feel alienated by educational theory and the production of research-based knowledge. At the same time, much ‘evidence-based practice’ is pragmatic at the expense of any reference to the wider research community (Winch, 2007). Equally, many have noted that there is a wide gulf between the knowledge of researchers and the policies of policy-makers’ the two being ‘foreign territories’ to each other (Saunders, 2007). Having said this, there is now a ground-swell of practitioner-based evidence practice slowly taking hold through the ‘profession’ (see Hopkins, 2002; Petty, 2006).

Forde et al. (2006) argue that teaching is a profession but one that has undergone massive changes since educational policy in the mid to late 1980s onwards. The effects of these changes has been to erode teacher professional identity, making it complex and contradictory. Forde et al. suggest that it is time for teachers to ‘reclaim’ these identities – and that this can only be achieved through systematic reflection, professional development and engagement with research which in turn validates their own knowledge of their classroom experiences.

Welcome to the 'rollercoaster'

Your journey as a professional-in-the-making will have both ups and downs. This is to be expected. It is an emotional, academic, physical and practical journey. You will need to really drawn upon the support of those around you – your tutors, peers, colleagues and mentor. But it is important to remember that we have all been there at one time or another. The way to get the most out of your training, your course, your teaching and your learners, is to put the most that you can in. The most meaningful way that you can make sense of your training in this thing called 'education, education, education' is through 'reflection, reflection, reflection'.

All of this confused picture paints a highly complex world to the new entrant. It is a world waiting to be both discovered and claimed by those new to it. Training to be a teacher is more than being in the classroom, and more than developing some tricks here and there (useful, though, that the tricks are). New entrants need to understand the wider position of education in society and the wider effects of social forces on learners. They need to develop a repertoire of 'what works' and root their understanding of what works in both practical and research-based knowledge. All the while, new teachers need to get comfortable with their new role and comfortable with being in the classroom.

In later chapters of this book we look at all these issues in turn, uniting the claims of educational theory and research with practical tools we have found useful, and urging you, the reader, to reflect upon what you are doing and why you are doing it.

Chapter links →

Themes and ideas explored in this chapter link to corresponding ideas in Chapters 5, 6 and 20.

Suggested further reading

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