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Introduction

Justin Dillon and
Meg Maguire

If you are learning how to be a teacher, then this book has been written for you. It has been written by a group of people who have two things in common. The first is that they have devoted most of their lives to education – teaching, researching or a combination of the two. The second thing that they have in common is that they have all worked in the Department of Education at King’s College London. Those two powerful bonds have resulted in what you hold in your hands – thoughts, ideas, words, questions, answers, wit and wisdom.

Some time ago, a visit from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate encouraged us to look at the amount of reading that our own PGCE students did. For many reasons, including accessibility of libraries, the cost of books and funding, the amount of reading that students did was much less than we thought appropriate. Looking around we could not find an appropriate textbook that addressed the issues that we knew concerned our students. So we wrote one ourselves – for internal consumption. It proved to be popular so, with the help of Open University Press, we produced, in 1997, a more polished version. The first edition proved to be popular and had to be reprinted. However, education changes rapidly and books date – even if many ideas remain valid over decades. We decided that a second edition could and should be written.

This edition contains three more chapters than the first edition. There are new chapters on inspection, parents, citizenship and school and teacher quality. There are some new contributors and many new ideas and issues. However, the overall philosophy of the book remains unchanged. This is not a tips for teachers book – although some chapters do focus on technical issues. Each chapter is designed to give you some background in terms of, say, historical context and to illuminate the key issues that you will be faced with every day. Some of the chapters should enable you to make sense of what goes on in school and should help you to gain an overview of a particular topic. The authors have tried to give you evidence to
support points of view - there is too much unsubstantiated opinion in education that has affected teachers and children detrimentally for too many years. This book will give you some evidence from the literature to back up, or maybe to challenge, your own opinions and experience.

Much of teaching relies on confidence. You need to be confident in your knowledge of your subject. Your students need to be confident in you as a teacher. You need to appear confident when you work with a class. Confidence can develop through experience and through feedback from other people. This book is designed to help you to become more confident in your understanding of what learning to teach involves. There will be much in this book that you have not thought of before – things that you disagree with or things that you feel are obvious. It is designed to be dipped into rather than read sequentially and, we hope, will point you in the direction of further reading.

How to use the book

Each chapter is designed to be read on its own although you will find recurrent themes. If you are doing an essay on a topic such as learning or special educational needs or you feel that there are areas of education about which you know very little, then you can use the chapters here as starting points. Some of the chapters are linked in terms of content, so if you’re interested in learning, you will find that the chapters on adolescence, differentiation and assessment are interrelated. Indeed, the complexity of education is what makes it such an interesting area to work in.

The book is divided into four major sections. We have called Part 1, First thoughts, because it sets the scene – addressing some fundamental areas of concern for a new teacher.

Part 2, Policy, society and schooling, provides a grounding in the broader context in which education sits. As well as looking at the historical roots of the problems facing teachers and learners, particularly in the inner city, the part provides a vision of alternative and possible futures.

In the classroom, most of your concerns will be more immediate than those outlined above and Part 3, Teaching and learning, is a collection of interrelated articles addressing issues such as classroom management, adolescence and assessment. In each chapter you will find practical advice based on sound theoretical understandings as well as some key issues to consider.

Part 4, Across the curriculum, appears daunting. The responsibilities of teachers beyond that of subject specialist has grown steadily over the years. The authors of the chapters in this part provide information about roles and responsibilities in areas including health education, information technology, literacy and citizenship. A key role that almost all new teachers now find themselves in is that of form tutor – the final chapter in the part looks at some of the roles and responsibilities involved.
And finally

In putting together this book we have tried to emphasize the three Rs: reading, reflection and research. Good teachers are able to learn from their experiences, reflecting on both positive and negative feedback. The best teachers are often those who not only learn from their experience but also learn from the experiences of others. Reading offers access to the wisdom of others as well as providing tools to interpret your own experiences. We have encouraged the authors contributing to this book to provide evidence from research to justify the points that they make. We encourage you to reflect on that evidence and on the related issues during the process of becoming a teacher. Over to you.
Part 1

First thoughts
Developing as a student teacher

Meg Maguire and Justin Dillon

Anticipating teaching

If you are engaged in a course of teacher training you face what may be the most challenging period of your life. But take heart - the stimulation and the enjoyment of working with learners can be immense. Looks on faces, words of thanks, the physical excitement that young people are able to generate come frequently enough to justify the effort.

Most of your own experience of education will probably have been spent sitting down, facing the front being directed by an older person. Your teacher training will involve a series of rapid dislocations; some of the time you will be the teacher and some of the time you will be a learner. It is not a dichotomous situation though - you will be learning and teaching simultaneously.

What sort of teacher are you going to be? At the moment your model may be based on teachers that you have had or, possibly, based on the teachers you wished that you had had. This is common in new teachers and you will find yourself saying and doing things that your teachers said and did to you. Your first concern may well be with the behaviour of your students and there will be times, usually just before a lesson, when you look back at your decision to become a teacher and think, ‘Why did I do that?’ As you become more confident and more competent at teaching your concern will shift from behaviour to learning. The two are intrinsically linked. It is difficult for students to learn if they are not working in a well-managed environment and if they feel they are learning something worthwhile they are more likely to respond to being managed (see Chapter 14 for a full discussion of classroom management).

Learning to teach involves a range of practical skills 'and a subtle appreciation of when and how to apply them' (Claxton 1990: 16).
Whether you like it or not, how you teach and how you learn to teach are bound up with your own personality, philosophy and values. Somewhere inside there is a set of personal standards – whether tacit or articulated, ill-informed or carefully thought out – that determine what shocks you, interests you or angers you about schools, and that serve as the benchmarks which you will use to guide and evaluate your progress as a teacher.

(Claxton 1990: 18)

Training to become a teacher can therefore be a challenging as well as a frustrating business. A lot of ground is covered in a short time and this can result in feelings of stress and anxiety (Troman 2000). Your undergraduate learning experience may have focused on a formalized acquisition of content. In seminars you may well have looked at prepared papers or had content-driven academic debates. While these forms of learning feature in current teacher training, and while there is a necessary emphasis on classroom techniques and skills, learning to teach is fundamentally a personal challenge where practical, personal and emotional attributes are just as salient as intellectual capacities. The PGCE provides a vocational training built around a demanding and challenging induction into the teaching profession. ‘The PGCE is a complex and unique part of becoming a teacher’ (Head et al. 1996: 83).

Many secondary trainee teachers (but not all) come into teaching as mature students, with a rich and broad experience of working in a variety of settings. Many are parents and have first-hand experience of their own children’s schooling. Sometimes in the light of these experiences, teaching can seem to be a common-sense affair – all about conveying some useful and hopefully interesting aspects in a lively manner which motivates young people to succeed. For people who think this way, becoming a teacher can sometimes explode any ‘simple’ model of teaching and learning. Teaching children who are less motivated than ourselves or who do not seem like the children we know, can present practical and personal difficulties where we may ‘blame’ the children instead of our own inexperience. However, it can also make for a stimulating and rewarding work setting.

Teacher qualities

At the heart of this book is a concern with becoming a teacher. Teachers are in an extremely privileged position; educating other people’s children is a critical and influential task in any society. But this job is made more complex in times of acute social, economic and political change. One way in which to approach becoming a contemporary teacher is from the trainee perspective – hinted at above. Another way might be to ask what is involved in teaching and what might we, as a society, want to prioritize at particular moments in time? Do we want compliant pupils who can apply what they have learned? Do we want problem-solvers and flexible learners? Do we want specialists or generalists? Are there any common strands that are recognizable as key components of a good teacher? In what follows we will consider four main themes through which we hope to
Developing as a student teacher

raise questions about the central qualities involved in being and becoming a teacher: classroom management, the wider role of the teacher, professional and personal qualities.

Classroom management

There are some well-known key aspects that are fundamental to good teaching. Good classroom management and organization, the capability of teaching effectively in a mixed ‘ability’ classroom (and are not all classrooms mixed ability, however they are arranged?), good knowledge of subject and subject application, assessment, record-keeping and all the other criteria listed by the government are important. But what is important to recognize is that all of these variables depend on the degree to which a teacher can maintain a positive and open climate in the classroom. The research into classroom life demonstrates that teachers and school students are in constant negotiation over boundaries, relationships, curriculum content sequencing and pacing (Beynon 1985; Delamont 1990). This means that there are not simple codes or regimes which have a totality of application. This does not mean that new teachers cannot be helped with these issues either, but these are not just aspects of performance that are incrementally added to the teaching repertoire. They require a different type of learning and a different type of understanding.

We all know that the very best teaching depends on sensitive communication. We all know very well qualified people who really understand their subject but cannot help others into it in a user-friendly manner. It is not only important to be able to help our school students understand by clear and effective communication modes, it is important that teachers listen, observe and become sensitive to the children and ‘where they are at’ in relation to their understanding. Teachers need to be able to listen to and ‘read’ their students. This too takes time and practice to refine, and even for the most experienced of teachers, it sometimes goes wrong. Dealing with adolescent people is not always straightforward or predictable. Sometimes it is the unrecognized forms of communication - non-verbal expressions or aspects of body language that need consideration (Neill 1991; Wooton 1993). At other times there is the basic issue of respect for persons, sometimes ignored when dealing with youngsters. Thus, ‘every job that requires significant interaction with other people (such as teaching) is an emotional practice’ (Hargreaves 1999: 8).

Trainee teachers frequently worry about ‘control’ and eagerly seek out strategies to help them in their school experience settings. Experienced teachers know only too well that controlling – or creating a climate to allow learning to happen – is intimately bound up with a knowledge of the children. Trainee teachers are placed in a novel situation of attempting to manipulate the atmosphere in large grouped settings. This is an unusual skill to develop and is not the same as managing adults in a workplace setting. It takes time and personal investment in good relationships with school students and it would be unrealistic for new teachers to achieve this overnight. All this suggests that ‘control’ is more related to relationships than external strategies or mechanistic skills.
The wider role of the secondary school teacher

Teaching in contemporary schools involves building relationships with many different students with a variety of backgrounds, needs, expectations, motivations and aspirations. It is not possible to help children learn effectively unless you have some knowledge and insight into their concerns. The pastoral role of a teacher is related to the widest aims of teaching (see Chapter 26 for a discussion of a teacher’s pastoral role). The National Curriculum places a statutory responsibility upon schools to promote ‘the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development’ of the school students. This means being interested in the children, getting to know them, feeling comfortable about discussing issues related to their learning and perhaps advising them in certain ways. The revised National Curriculum, launched in 2000, introduced the theme of citizenship in order to address important matters which had perhaps become marginal to the work of schools (see Chapter 21 on citizenship). At particular times issues related to health, sexuality, substance abuse, and so on, become salient in the classroom, and society expects schools to address and educate round these concerns. Teachers need to know what they can do, as well as what they cannot, in this context (see Chapter 23 on ‘Healthy schools’).

From this pastoral role comes an obvious extension – working with parents. In the current policy setting, this aspect of the role of the teacher has significance for the maintenance of a healthy developing school (Munn 1993; Gewirtz et al. 1995). Communicating clearly and professionally with parents is a core attribute for effective teaching; it is recognized that parents and schools working together provides a continuity and coherence for the school student and is critical for achievement (Vincent 1996; see also Chapter 9 on parents and schooling).

Professional qualities

New teachers do need to be oriented to the fact that becoming a teacher means entering into membership of a particular community. They are members of a school staff, they are involved in a profession that needs to hold debates within itself and they have to participate in these debates. They need to keep up with their subject(s) and should be encouraged to join a relevant subject association or phase-specific group. Essentially teachers need a feeling of responsibility and control over their work. They need to participate in decision-making and indeed hopefully will develop over time to take a lead in this process. The General Teaching Council (established in 2000) will have a role to play in this development. Other professional qualities which we believe are required are related to the structural elements of the job. Teachers need to be on the inside of professional concerns and issues related to their salary, pay structure and conditions of service as well as issues of professionalism (see Furlong et al. 2000).

Another important dimension to all this is the capacity to relate with colleagues and to work collaboratively. Teachers need the confidence to challenge assumptions about their work and the way in which it proceeds.
Developing as a student teacher

They need to be in a position where not only can they work with colleagues but they are able collectively as a staff as well as individuals to ask fundamental questions about what they are doing. Is it worthwhile? It is this capacity that is characteristic of a professional teacher as opposed to a ‘deliverer’ of a curriculum devised elsewhere.

Personal qualities

Typically, new teachers experienced their school days as well-behaved and well-motivated students. Their role model of what it is to be a teacher may well have been constructed from this experience. For intending teachers who may have experienced selective schooling and may have been in top sets, the challenges of working with different types of students may be initially daunting. Children who have come to a recognition that school has little to offer them, that school only confirms in them a sense of failure and of ‘being stupid’ are going to be harder to reach and harder to teach (Hargreaves 1982). In some of our schools, beginning teachers may well meet many different types of children from the sort of children that they were - restless, unable to concentrate, demotivated or perhaps with some particular learning difficulty. They will also meet students who are assertive, who demand respect and who will not be passive recipients of teachers’ knowledge. Students will challenge what they perceive to be unfair or unjust in a way that might sometimes be constructed as provocative.

Beginning teachers will discover that they need lots of different responses - different ways of being with children in the school setting. They will need to experiment with different strategies. They will need to develop a flexible and adaptive repertoire of teaching. They will need to see themselves as learners throughout their lives and see this as a challenge and an opportunity, not a threat. At the heart of these personal qualities for teachers and student teachers must be the capacity to see their professional life as one of continual growth and development. For new teachers what is required is a state of adaptability, an experimental attitude, a capacity to recognize that they are going through a period of ‘transitional incompetence’, perhaps learning to tolerate their own fallibility and accepting that they can make mistakes as part of this process of becoming a teacher.

Concluding comments

The teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement. The restructuring of schools, the composition of national and provincial curricula, the development of benchmark assessments - all these things are of little value if they do not take the teacher into account. Teachers do not merely deliver the curriculum. They develop, define it and reinterpret it too. It is what teachers think, what teachers believe and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people experience.
For some reformers, improving teaching is mainly a matter of developing better teaching methods or of improving instruction. For them, training teachers in new classroom management skills, in active learning, cooperative learning, one-to-one counselling and the like are the main priorities. These things are important, but we are also increasingly coming to understand that developing teachers and improving their teaching involves more than giving them new tricks. Teachers need to be creative and imaginative in their work; they need to be able to use ‘intuitive, rational and reflective thinking’ as well as having the ‘confidence to take risks in learning and a sense of cognitive self-efficacy in a range of learning contexts’ (Eraut 2000: 267).

Teachers teach the way they do not just because of the skills they have or have not learned. The ways they teach are also grounded in their backgrounds, their biographies, in the kind of teachers they have become. Their careers – their hopes and dreams, their opportunities and aspirations, or the frustration of these things – are also important for teachers’ commitment, enthusiasm and morale. So too are relationships with their colleagues, either in supportive communities, or as individuals working in isolation, with the insecurities that this sometimes brings.

As we are coming to understand these wider aspects of teaching and teacher development we are also beginning to understand that much more than pedagogy, instruction or teaching method is at stake. Teacher development, teachers’ careers, teachers’ relations with their colleagues, the conditions of status, reward and leadership under which they work – all these affect the quality of what they do in the classroom. (Hargreaves and Fullan 1992: ix)

For those of you who are reading this and who are in the process of becoming a teacher there is one more fundamental issue which has to be addressed. There is a distinction between being a good teacher and someone who helps school students become good learners: those whom Claxton (1990) calls mentors. Claxton has set up a simple model to illustrate his point. He talks about the traditional ‘good teacher’ as someone who tells things clearly, points out the key features, and maximizes the training procedures through which pupils ‘perform smoothly and successfully in situations – like most exams – that ask them to apply familiar operations to familiar content’ (Claxton 1990: 154). One consequence can be the development of an unimaginative and inflexible learner.

Good pupils often perform well and look good but at the expense of precisely those qualities that distinguish good learners: resourcefulness, persistence and creativity. And it is just this kind of quality that mentors care about. Their main concern is to equip their pupils with the ability to be intelligent in the face of change. (Claxton 1990: 154)

Becoming a teacher is not just a matter of training in basic skills and classroom procedures, essential as these all are as a starting place. It is also a matter of choice and of various personal and professional decisions, judgement and even intuitions (Atkinson and Claxton 2000). That is why teaching is such a tantalizing, challenging and rewarding occupation.
Developing as a student teacher

References


Further reading