1
Developing Teaching Skills in the Primary School

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Introduction

Teaching is a skill that is best developed over time. Like all skills, teaching should be developed through practice underpinned by theory, research and reflection, which is why teacher training (or ‘education’ as I prefer), is very specific about the need for both trainees and practising teachers to reflect on and practise their developing skills. There are three components to teaching, identified in the skills tests for qualified teacher status (QTS) and professional standards:

- Content knowledge, or the knowledge of different subjects taught in primary school, both the core and foundation subjects and other subjects and issues, such as religious education (RE) and citizenship (see Johnston et al. 2002).
- Pedagogical knowledge or the knowledge and skills about teaching.
- Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Shulman 1987) or the knowledge and skills of teaching specific to a subject such as knowledge of strategies, ways of representing the subject, common pupil conceptions and learning difficulties.

Pedagogical knowledge and skills

This book is concerned with the second of these, pedagogical knowledge and skills, although examples in the chapters aim to highlight commonalities, such as differentiation, planning and assessment as well as PCK differences within subjects, such as different questioning or assessment techniques and the development of investigative and thinking skills. Teaching is a complex process which involves the development and utilization of knowledge, skills and attitudes. There has been much emphasis in recent years on developing teachers’ knowledge and skills, particularly through the development of national standards (DfEE 1998; TTA 2002; TDA 2007), although the description of these and how they can be developed is vague, and how they can impact on the learning of pupils is not clearly identified. Further, the subtle differences in pedagogy in different subject areas is not well documented, thus
causing confusion for primary student teachers and teachers who are attempting to support learning in a number of subject areas. However, all subjects and phases require teachers who are reflective practitioners (see Chapter 14, Developing as a Reflective Practitioner), and who operate in a professional manner, communicating and working together in a reflective way (see Chapter 13, Professional Communication). Reflective practitioners plan creative activities for individual learners (see particularly Chapter 2, Planning for Creative Teaching), teach to support individual learning (see particularly Chapter 7, Differentiation) and review both teaching and learning to enable them to plan the next stage of learning for the children in their care (see particularly Chapter 11, Assessment for Learning). This plan–do–review format is reflected in the structure of the book, which is divided into three parts:

- **Part 1**, Planning, contains chapters on creative planning skills, such as planning for organization, citizenship and behaviour management.
- **Part 2**, Doing, contains chapters on the practical skills of teaching, such as questioning, differentiating, using ICT in teaching, recording children’s work and supporting investigations.
- **Part 3**, Reviewing, contains support for the reflective practitioner on assessment for learning, target setting, professional communication and how reflective practice develops.

**Contemporary issues in primary education**

There are a number of contemporary issues or new ideas and initiatives to support teaching and learning, and reflective practitioners take these into consideration when teaching. For example, over the past 20 years there has been research into constructivist learning, where children develop understandings and thinking skills through social interaction and experience, constructing their own meaning, including alternative conceptions, from experiences and learning. Learning is viewed as an active and continuous process whereby children construct links with their prior knowledge, generating new ideas, checking and restructuring old ideas or hypotheses. As a result, teaching is more about facilitating this learning through the skills of planning, questioning, differentiating, assessing and all the pedagogical skills this book explores. Constructivist teaching builds on the work of Piaget (1929) and Vygotsky (1978) and underpins cognitive acceleration (Shayer and Adey 2002). There is no common agreement about what cognitive acceleration is, with some believing it is about:

- supporting cognition by removing artificial obstacles in the development of gifted and talented children;
- advancing cognition through practices, such as meditation and brain gym (Dennison and Dennison 1994);
- accelerating and supporting the cognition of all.
What we do know is that cognitive acceleration does seem to support teaching and learning probably because children are being stimulated and involved in their own learning and developing their thinking skills (see Chapter 10, Developing Investigative Work/Enquiry).

Recently, creativity has been another theme in primary education and it is advocated by both government (DfES 2003a; QCA 2003) and educators (Beetlestone 1998; Craft 2002; Wilson 2005). Like cognitive acceleration the definition of creativity is vague, has different meaning to different groups or individuals and means different things in different subjects. In Chapter 2, Planning for Creative Teaching, we propose a definition of creativity (Compton 2005), which is all-encompassing (see Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2, Compton’s continuum of creativity) and aims to support teachers in becoming creative. After all, creativity is an essential element of a developing society, and creative adults develop from creative children and creative children require creative teachers. One aspect of creative teaching is the popular idea of differentiating teaching to accommodate different learners and their different styles of learning (see Chapter 7, Differentiation). Differentiated learning requires child-centred teaching (see Chapter 12, Target Setting) and assessing (see Chapter 11, Assessment for Learning). Both learning theories and assessment for learning are popular themes in education and form the basis of much discussion. Learning theories often divide learners into three groups (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning; Dryden and Vos 1999), although some (Johnston 1996) identify four ways in which learners process information, and others multiple abilities or intelligences (Gardner 1983). Again there is no common agreement about what learning styles are and little research evidence of their impact on learning (Coffield et al. 2004). In particular we know that primary children learn best through enquiry (see Chapter 10, Developing Investigative Work/Enquiry), but there is little understanding of what kinaesthetic learning is and how we should use it (see Chapter 7, Differentiation).

Child-centred education is once again facing a re-emergence, with the publication of Every Child Matters (DfES 2003b) which identifies five outcomes for every child:

- to be healthy
- to stay safe
- to enjoy and achieve
- to make a positive contribution
- to achieve economic well-being.

This balances the focus of education, which for many years has been on the cognitive but now recognizes the importance of social and emotional development and the health of children. Children’s cognitive development is affected by their physical, social and emotional development, and this fact is recognized by the introduction of Sure Start, early excellence centres, extended school, wrap-around care, healthy school meals and physical exercise. Multi-agency settings are providing breakfast, after-school care, and educational (nurseries, speech therapy), social services (social workers, behaviour therapists) and health facilities (doctors, dentists,
physiotherapy). Generally these initiatives are welcomed, but there is a tension between teachers who have educational targets to meet and do not understand how to implement the initiatives and the government, which advocates the underpinning philosophy but has no evidence that the initiatives will work.

**The book and how to use it**

The book has been designed to support those teaching from their initial teacher training through to their leadership and support teachers in their schools and settings. It does this by:

- developing deeper understanding of the entire range of skills of teaching;
- supporting the analysis of pedagogical skills in primary education, focusing particularly on generic teaching skills;
- supporting the development of pedagogical skills and professional reflectiveness in teachers;
- supporting teachers in the effective delivery of the curriculum.

The book contains easily accessible yet rigorous support for the development of pedagogical knowledge and skills, through critical analysis of issues, practice and problems. Most importantly, it emphasizes the child as a partner in the learning process and the importance of teaching for child-centred learning which gives ownership and responsibility for learning with the child.

The authors and contributors to the book come from a range of educational backgrounds (schools, consultancies and higher education) and are at different stages of their careers (students, teachers, headteachers, consultants and educationists). As such, the book is a collaboration between educators and practitioners with a wealth of experience and expertise in teaching, and builds upon the strengths of all. The chapters identify what are the skills of teaching and how they can be developed. Research, cameos and case study examples are provided which show how teaching skills can be utilized in practice and how they can be modified for different contexts and subjects. In each chapter there are also reflective and practical tasks which aim to support training and practising teachers as well as teacher-researchers looking more deeply into teaching and learning. Each task is at three levels. Level 1 is for the student teacher or beginner practitioner; Level 2 is aimed at the classroom teacher; and Level 3 at experienced or lead practitioners. When undertaking these tasks, readers should choose a level that is appropriate to their stage of development and experience. In this way the book will, it is hoped, support analysis of pedagogical practice in schools through the reflective and analytical tasks and through examples of practice/cameos which link theory and practice.
References


