

# Section 1

## THE LEARNING TEACHER

In this first section we introduce our overarching theme of the learning teacher.

The opening chapter sets out how we regard you the reader as a fellow traveller on the learning and development journey explored in this book. To be an effective teacher means becoming an equally effective learner, not just as you prepare for your first post but also throughout a career of professional development. We explain how this outlook has guided the style adopted of addressing you directly as a fellow professional in the second person. Other chapters explore the importance of collaboration with your colleagues within and beyond the school, and how you consider learning and teaching from a range of perspectives. We give guidance on how to develop as an enquiring teacher, always aiming to reflect and improve upon your classroom practice. Above all we emphasise the pivotal nature of the relationship you will forge with children and how to foster pupil voice as a key feature of the collaborative, learning culture of your school.



# CHAPTER 1

## SETTING OUT

Graham Handscomb and Anne Cockburn

Teaching is a great paradox. On the one hand it can be one of the most rewarding and even life-enhancing experiences. On the other, teaching can be extremely demanding and challenging. In 'Setting out' Graham Handscomb and Anne Cockburn explain how reading this book will provide an overview of what a career in teaching might have to offer you. They stress, however, that it is essential to obtain practical primary classroom experience before embarking on any form of teacher training.



### Introduction

Teaching can be unremittingly dull, repetitive and stressful. We know: we have been there. It can also be one of the most stimulating, enjoyable and rewarding jobs in the world. We know: we have been there too. This book is about how to make the difference.

It does not claim to have all the answers but it will certainly present enough material and thought-provoking ideas for you to see the tremendous possibilities which lie ahead. You may think that this is slightly over the top but, as you may already have discovered, very few people feel neutral about teachers and teaching! In this chapter we will very briefly describe the intended readership, authors, origins and uses of this book. We will then outline some of the most important issues you would be wise to consider before embarking on a course, let alone a career, in teaching.

## So who are you?

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We, the authors, envisage you, the readers, as:

- someone who might be contemplating primary teaching as a career
- someone who is about to embark on a 3–11 training course or one of the variations
- someone who has been accepted on a training programme (for example, 3–8, 7–11) and about to embark on it
- a trainee already part way through a teacher education qualification
- a tutor receiving books with a view to recommending them – or not as the case may be – to any of the above audience.

We also see you as someone who, although generally enthusiastic about the idea of teaching, sometimes becomes anxious and demoralised by the struggle. There is no doubt about it – learning to teach is hard work. It is not easy being an experienced learner one minute and a relatively inexperienced teacher the next. You are, however, undoubtedly intelligent and our intention is to demonstrate how, by making the most of your experiences, skills and intellectual capacity, you can gain the most from your training and chosen career. Even so, you will, inevitably, sometimes feel like packing the whole lot in. Obviously, if this feeling becomes all-consuming you should look for a career elsewhere: teaching – just like dentistry, social work and plumbing – is not for everyone and there is no reason to suppose that it should be. If, however, you just occasionally feel dispirited, overworked and under-appreciated, hang in there: it will be worth it!

## So who are we?

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This is not a profound philosophical question but rather a practical one about the nature of the contributors to this book. We feel it would be helpful for you to know something of the ‘voices’ that will be speaking to you through its pages.

When writing the first edition we were the nine members of the Primary PGCE Team at the University of East Anglia (UEA). Between us we had about 120 years’ experience

as school teachers and over 100 years in teacher education which, coupled with very high grades in HMI inspections, suggest that we had at least an idea of what we were talking about! The second edition saw the start of our fruitful collaboration with colleagues from Essex local authority. In particular, Graham Handscomb, Senior Manager in Essex School Improvement and Early Years Services, joined Anne Cockburn to become joint editor. Graham has a national reputation for his work on continuous professional development and brings a great deal of experience from how local authorities support training and development, including the wide-ranging initial teacher training group of programmes which have been judged as outstanding by Ofsted. These have incorporated the Graduate Training and School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) schemes. For this third edition we have an even greater collaborative mix between the UEA team and Essex colleagues. We are delighted to welcome new contributors Fiona Dorey, Melanie Foster, Jo Lang, Lorraine Laudrum, Elizabeth Cornish and Abigail Williams who have been involved in primary innovation and the new *Schools of the Future* development in Essex. Stephen Chynoweth, who contributed to the second edition, has moved from his headship in Essex to a headship in Dubai but we are pleased that he is still contributing to this issue, drawing on his varied experience. A number of the UEA contributors have retired since the second edition but their places have been very ably taken over by Ralph Manning, Eleanor Cockerton, Paul Parslow-Williams, Michele Otway, Helena Gillespie, Alan Pagden and Mike Pond who, between them, have stacked up over 100 years of recent and relevant classroom experience. So, in all, we represent a range of skills and understanding, combining considerable insight and expertise in teacher education, as well as continuing engagement with the classroom practicalities of teaching and learning. We might not always agree. It would be odd – and, indeed, rather disturbing – if we did. It is always healthy to have a good debate! Nevertheless, we all share the same underlying philosophy that reflection is a crucial aspect of professional development. Throughout the book therefore – and particularly at the end of every chapter – we will invite you to reflect on various issues in order to extend your own learning. We believe this to be an important feature of the book. The business of teaching is learning. Obviously, this particularly means promoting the learning of the children we teach. However, if we are to be effective teachers, and remain so throughout our careers, we also need to be accomplished learners who continue to reflect upon practice. So this book is designed to encourage you to connect with a range of issues and guidance within the body of each chapter, and then to actively reflect upon what this might mean for you in the context of your own particular outlook and experience.

### **Why did we write the book?**

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A simple serious answer would be because Marianne Lagrange of Sage Publications asked Anne to compile the first edition and Sage invited us to produce a second and then a third one! Flattered though we were, even that alone would have been insufficient to

get our pencils and word processors going. Rather we wrote this book because – at the risk of sounding corny – we want to share our belief that education should be an enjoyable, challenging and valuable experience for teachers and learners alike. What also unites us is a conviction that you are the future of the teaching profession and our strong desire to make some contribution that you will find helpful at this early stage in your career. Given the media, some of your experiences and some of today's teaching materials, you might be forgiven for thinking that teaching is all about finding something to teach, teaching it and then testing your pupils to ensure that they have mastered the topic to a sufficiently high standard. Teaching can be about that but education cannot. Education is about engaging the mind and helping learners realise their full potential. It is also about a sense of worthwhileness, where those involved – teachers, pupils and others – share a belief in the fundamental value of the enterprise:

Education is for individuality. We all think, feel and learn in distinctive ways. Good education works with the unique grain of our personal capacities to help each of us become a better version of ourselves – and with luck and determination, to make a living at it too. (Robinson, 2005, p. 6)

The best educators are those who inspire their pupils and enable them to continue learning long after they have left the confines of the classroom.

It would be ridiculous – not to say arrogant – to claim that this book covered everything you needed to know to become a successful primary school teacher. We recognise, however, that you are likely to be short of reading time. We have therefore endeavoured to focus on the issues we consider to be particularly important in the hope that we will complement your course and prompt you into continuing your own professional development. Should you find yourself becoming particularly intrigued by specific topics, we have listed and commented on books for further reading at the end of each chapter.

## Changing times – lasting principles

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Since the last edition of this book there have been many changes. Among these have been a number of attempts to review and redefine the primary curriculum, changing views about how schools should be established and organised, and a change of government. All these things, of course, affect the context in which we all work in school and there is often heated exchange about, for instance, the styles of teaching and how best to increase standards in our schools. A good example is the renewed debate about teachers focusing on helping pupils to acquire learning skills. Some are passionately clear about the importance of this: 'I can hardly think of anything more worthwhile than learning to learn. It's like money in the bank at compound interest' (Perkins, 2009, quoted in Watkins, 2010, p. 7). By contrast a new Schools Minister, Nick Gibb (2010, p. 4), challenges

that children should be taught how to learn, saying instead: 'I believe very strongly that education is about the transfer of knowledge from one generation to another.'

Well, in the course of your teaching career, you will live through many changes in the educational landscape and shifts in thinking about educational practice. Part of your professionalism will include the need to be aware of this and indeed to actively engage in such dialogue and thinking yourself. The contributors of this book also have their clear views on education and although these may vary among the different contributors, when you read this book we think you will find that there are certain principles that they all share, and which we believe transcend changes in particular public attitudes to education, which tend to come and go. Such principles include the vital importance of the teacher–learner relationship, keeping the focus on classroom practice and creating a positive learning ethos. As Watkins (2010, p. 6) reflects: 'Classrooms are the influential site in creating achievement at school. They have their impact not through particular practices but through the learning climate they create. When classrooms create a thoughtful and learner-centred climate, achievement is high.' One of the key messages we hope to convey in this book is that as a fellow professional you, the reader, should develop and clarify your own principles that underpin your approach to teaching.

## How might you use this book?

This book does not need to be read in any particular order. Indeed, you may find that there are some chapters you wish to refer to immediately, others you will want to consult later and still others you would prefer to just dip into. We hope you find the chapter titles give a clear indication of their content but will briefly comment here on some of the key features that you will discover.

Each chapter begins with a small boxed 'banner' statement designed to give you a flavour of what follows. We hope you find that the content of each chapter is written in helpful accessible language, divided into useful sections indicated by subheadings. To help you engage and reflect on the content of this book we provide towards the end of each chapter a summary box and a general *Issues for Reflection* box. In this edition we also introduce within the body of each chapter *Critical Issues* inserts. These aim to prompt your engagement and thinking at a higher level by delving deeper into the subject of the chapter, exploring the issues more critically, and examining different and perhaps controversial perspectives. We hope you find this helpful.

You will find each of the chapters distinctive, reflecting the variety of contributors. However, what they all have in common is their approach to you, the reader. All the authors address the reader as a fellow professional, albeit a less experienced one. In a sense they adopt the stance of sitting alongside the reader, taking them through the issues and the learning journey of the book. Often this will mean addressing you in the first person, exploring and debating issues rather than just conveying information. This reflects the fundamental outlook of this book which is to see the teacher as a learner

who is constantly honing and improving his/her craft and in this context to regard the reader as a professional enquirer and questioner.

This philosophy is very much reflected in the way we have reorganised the chapters in this third edition under five sections. The first, *The Learning Teacher*, sets the tone of the book, with its emphasis on you being a fellow professional with whom the authors are engaging. Section 2, *Skills in Teaching and Learning*, takes the reader straight to the business of developing the skills needed within the classroom. In Section 3, *Managing the Curriculum*, we look at the range of issues related to managing a curriculum that is dynamic and constantly changing to meet the needs of the child and of society. Section 4, *The Child and the Community*, looks at the important relationship between the school and the community and how we can ensure this contributes to the child's development. Finally the last section, *Developing the Teacher You Want to Be*, is focused on helping you to take stock of how you are developing as a teacher and to consider the kind of professional you want to be, as well as giving practical guidance on job applications and interviews.

In terms of the scope of the book, in Chapter 15 '*Continuity and progression from 3 to 11*' Alan Pagden discusses the similarities and differences between the phases currently used to describe children between 3 and 11 years of age – the Foundation Stage (3–5), Key Stage 1 (5–7) and Key Stage 2 (7–11). Unless otherwise stated, the principles considered in the book refer to all three of these phases. The chapter emphasises that whatever you teach, it is important for teachers to be aware of each phase and to help ensure children's educational journey is a joined-up and meaningful experience.

## Preparing for your training

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To make the most of this book and, more importantly your training, you would be wise to do some preparation.

### School experience

Very occasionally we interview people with little school experience. Sometimes we accept them for teacher education programmes. Often all is well, but not always. Despite our detailed interviewing, two difficulties can arise. The first is when someone realises that they have opted for the wrong age group. Unfortunately this usually strikes them when they are several weeks into their training, when it may be difficult to change from a primary to a secondary course, for example.

The second problem is that a few people embark on their training with an insufficient appreciation of the demands and challenges of the teaching profession. We do our best to warn everyone at interview but, unless you have had first-hand experience of working closely with a teacher, you may not realise what you are undertaking.



In brief it is *essential* that you gain experience working in a school with a range of children from different age groups *before* submitting your application form. If you can, try for half a day a week in a school for a term. Even better is to gain experience in two or three schools, but this is not always possible if you are working or in full-time study. The chapters on the three related processes of observation (Chapter 5), learning and classroom skills (Chapter 6) and reflection (Chapter 9) will be particularly useful in helping you make full use of this opportunity. There are a number of ways to arrange work experience in a local school. You can simply telephone them and ask to make an appointment to discuss the possibility with the head teacher. You can make contact through your local careers centre. You can speak to someone in your local authority or you can ask advice from the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) or the Department for Education (DfE). Schools will generally be positive about such requests, though occasionally – perhaps because of timing or particular school pressures – you may receive a negative response.

### Pre-course reading

Some of you will be completing your degree when you read this. Others may not have done any studying for more years than you might care to remember. In both cases some pre-course – and, indeed, pre-interview – reading is strongly recommended. Not only will this prepare you for what is to come but it may also give you the opportunity to do some reading at a relatively leisurely pace: you'll soon discover that you'll have little time for it once you have started your teacher education course.

What you read is largely down to you, although it is likely that your intended teacher education provider will give you some suggestions. If you know you are weak in specific subjects, it is a good idea to do some work on them. At the end of this chapter are listed some books our students have found helpful in this respect. It is important to remember that you will be given up-to-date subject knowledge on your course but, with often only about 38 weeks, it is valuable to have a head start.

It is also useful to read general books about schools and schooling and some suggestions are given at the end of this chapter. Reading such books can help develop your insight into your chosen profession. The more you know about it the better prepared you'll be for your interview and, with luck, your training. If you have not done any studying for a while or, if you are lacking in confidence in your ability to work effectively, you would be wise to read a book on study skills. There are likely to be several examples in any good bookshop. Choose one that appeals to you and see if it does the trick. If, however, you find yourself struggling several weeks into the course, speak to your tutor who may be able to help directly or who might advise you to contact a study skills centre at, for example, your institution. Declaring such a difficulty is not a problem. Training institutions will be aware that many people entering the profession may not have had recent experience of study. Rather than feeling at all awkward about such a need, you may find that this helps you empathise with difficulties that children have with their learning and study.

## Being organised

There is no doubt whatsoever that teacher training is highly demanding both intellectually and organisationally. If you secure a place on a course – given that you already have a degree, are well prepared and have succeeded on interview – you are likely to take the intellectual challenge in your stride. You may not, however, be so well prepared to meet the organisational challenges your teacher preparation presents. We suspect you will never have been so busy. For example, you will be expected in school no later than 8.30 a.m. – some schools say 8.00 a.m. – and questions will be asked if you leave before 4.30 p.m. There may well be staff meetings to attend and after-school clubs, reflections on your teaching and observations, the next day's marking and preparation. As will be discussed below, it *is* important that you have a life beyond teaching but, before embarking on a course, you must ensure that you are as well organised as you can possibly be. This might mean reducing your shopping from every two to three days to once a week, arranging for dependants to be cared for in your absence, ensuring that your car is in good working order, and so on.

Finally, before accepting an offer for a training place, talk it over with your family and friends. Ultimately it has to be your decision, but it is important that you have their confidence and support. You will find, for example, that your training will be a time of great personal discovery: this can be extremely exciting and liberating but it can also be a little daunting at times.

## Your colleagues

Everything is in place and you are about to start your training. Who will your colleagues be? What will they be like?

In all probability there will be more females than males. This is particularly true if you have opted for early years or lower primary training. There will be a wide age range and we think you may well be surprised by the number of more mature people. Every year at the University of East Anglia, for example, we take students in their early twenties, some in their late forties and early fifties, and many in between. The average age is generally around 30 so you can be sure that many of your colleagues will have worked and had a range of life experiences prior to embarking on the course.

## Attendance

Becoming a teacher is a full-time commitment. Before enlisting on a course or embarking on any training therefore it is *vital* that you recognise that you will be

extremely busy and that you appreciate that – except in cases of illness or serious domestic need – missing sessions simply is not an option. Indeed, the Department for Education insists that everyone attends all timetabled sessions otherwise they will not issue you with a certificate.

## Theory and practice

Sometimes when people come to interview for training they tend to think that this involves a programme of tips for teachers. Fortunately, teacher education is not like that. We are all individuals, we work in different situations with different people and we do not know what the curriculum of the future holds.

Accordingly, although we may suggest some handy hints and useful approaches from time to time, we strive to provide a dynamic mix of theory and practice. There are some in the profession – experienced as well as beginning teachers – who have a rather negative view of ‘theory’. They tend to see it as an intellectual indulgence, at the expense of concentrating on the important matter of classroom practice. Theory has certainly got a bad name! However, this is rather a simplistic view as there is a crucial relationship between theory and practice: ‘No action, unless it is the action of an irrational being, is devoid of theory, for theory involves beliefs, ideas, assumptions, values, and everything we do is influenced by theory’ (Fish, 1995a, p. 57). Also, this is not just a ‘one-way street’ relationship – that is, that you learn some theory and then apply it in practice. The relationship is much more fundamental than that. It is about how you use theory to make sense of your practice and, indeed, as Fish powerfully explains, how as an individual you develop your own theory from your practice. ‘At best in teacher education programmes, there exists a constant interplay between the taught course and the school experience through which students are encouraged to draw out personal theories from practice’ (Fish, 1995b, p. 55).

You will find Chapter 2 by Graham Handscomb, ‘*Working together and enquiring within*’, and Chapter 9 by Jenifer Smith, ‘*Reflective practice*’, explore the need for teachers to reflect upon and critique their work. In Chapter 3, ‘*Approaches to learning and teaching*’, Sue Cox demonstrates that the kind of teacher you become will depend on the personal qualities and values that you bring to your teaching. So, developing as an effective teacher entails emerging as a reflective practitioner where you ask searching questions of your teaching, and by striving to increase understanding of your practice are able to feed this into further improvement. In this way we produce flexible teachers fit for the demands of the twenty-first century curriculum and the adults of the future: in other words, people with a real understanding of teaching and learning, classrooms and schools, pupils and colleagues, and themselves as educators.

### CRITICAL ISSUE

Jerome Bruner (1960) proposed that:

We begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development. (p. 33)

Can you think of arguments for and against this hypothesis? How would you set about gathering evidence to support these arguments? Having reflected on this through this activity, try to say what is your view/position and why.

## Maintaining perspective

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As we mentioned earlier, teaching is not an easy option. It is important, however, that you do not let it consume your life. If you do, you will cease to be a first-rate practitioner. It is undoubtedly true that you must be prepared to work hard, but you must also be prepared to play hard. Too many teachers suffer from stress having succumbed to the pressures of the job. Added to which, your hobbies can provide an interesting and important dimension to your teaching: your musical or sporting talents, for example, will almost certainly enhance your own and your pupils' experience in the classroom. While you may find teaching satisfyingly challenging and enjoyable, make sure that there are other dimensions to your life which are equally fulfilling.

## Concluding remarks

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Some might feel that we have painted a slightly negative picture of teaching in this chapter. This has not been our intention: far from it. We both find teaching – whether it be at school, college or university level – to be an immensely satisfying career. It is also important that you see the stresses as well as the triumphs, the challenges as well as the rewards. It is not, however, the job for everyone and you would be doing both yourself and numerous children a disservice if you entered the profession unknowingly.

In brief, primary teaching is hard work but, ultimately for many, worthwhile and personally satisfying. We hope that this book will help you as you move towards your goal.



## Summary

Successful primary teaching is:

- a highly satisfying career
- hard work and demanding
- not for everyone.

It is, however, ultimately a vocation in which you can make a real difference for children and their lives.

The authors of this book are:

- successful teachers and teacher educators
- people who enjoy teaching
- educators who consider reflective practice to be of fundamental importance.

Make sure that you are well prepared for your training by:

- gaining experience in schools
- doing some pre-course reading
- addressing the need to develop organised behaviours
- remembering that commitment to training and 'follow-through' is important
- recognising the value of theory and practice, and their interrelationship
- ensuring you care for yourself and have a life beyond teaching.



## Issues for reflection

- What do you think a career in teaching has to offer you?
- What do you consider to be the main aims of primary education? Why?
- Think about the most inspiring teachers in your life. What made them such successful educators?

## Further reading



Haylock, D. (2010) *Mathematics Explained for Primary Teachers*. 4th edition. London: Sage. If you are worried about teaching mathematics this may well be the book for you as it covers the subject in a very detailed and sympathetic manner.

Pollard, A. (2010) *Professionalism and Pedagogy: A Contemporary Opportunity*, A Commentary by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme and the General Teaching Council. This is a 30-page publication which gives teachers and others a comprehensive guide to how teaching and learning can be at the heart of your professionalism.

Watkins, C. (2010) 'Learning, performance and improvement', *Research Matters* (Research Publication of the International Network for School Improvement), Summer, Issue 34. This is a short 12-page paper which looks at the tension between promoting learning and increasing the performance of pupils. You should find this a stimulating read which will help you reflect on the principles that are to be at the heart of your teaching.