A Guide to EARLY YEARS & PRIMARY TEACHING

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BECOMING A TEACHER

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LEARNING AIMS

This chapter will enable you to:

- reflect on your own and other people's expectations of a beginning teacher
- consider different views about what makes for a 'good' teacher
- develop an understanding of the influence of those who support you in school, particularly your mentor.
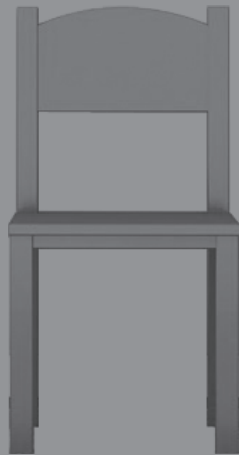
In the countries of the UK and beyond, there is a variety of routes into becoming a teacher, including university-led, school-led and a combination of school and university or other providers working in partnership or consortia arrangements. Different routes into becoming a teacher mean that the experiences for individuals differ, and diverse institutional and provider arrangements mean that within the main pathways into teaching there are also differences. In addition, teachers have their own personal and professional identities, and between schools and within schools their work is highly differentiated. However, results from the *Becoming a Teacher Project* conducted in England (Hobson et al., 2009) indicate that whilst statistically there are significant variations in beginning teachers' experiences of initial teacher education, these variations are largely 'washed out' by subsequent experiences of teaching in school. This does not imply that all teachers have the same experiences once they are in school but no matter their route into teaching they teach within the realities of school, and many teachers' experiences are influenced by similar factors – for example, relationships with pupils, parents and colleagues in school; curriculum and assessment policies; and quality assurance and accountability measures including teaching 'standards'.

The different pathways into teaching mean that for some beginning teachers their teacher training is mainly school-based whilst for others (who follow the university-led route) their first experiences in school as a teacher will be on a practice placement. Consequently, some beginning teachers may be more acutely aware of the differences in people's expectations and views when they are a student teacher, whilst for others it may not be until they are in their first year of teaching. The early phase of becoming a teacher considered in this chapter includes student teachers and those in their first year of teaching who are working towards qualified teacher status.

As a beginning teacher, you have to relate to and interact with others in your context on a daily basis. In the first section of the chapter, beginning teachers' own expectations and those of others in school are explored. The implications of contrasting views about models of teacher education, professional knowledge, values and learning and teaching are discussed. The impact of different expectations and views on the formation and re-formation of beginning teachers' identities will be considered. In the final section, those who support beginning teachers' professional development in school are discussed, particularly mentors.

DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS OF A BEGINNING TEACHER

Beginning teachers generally look forward to taking up their first school placement with excitement and anxiety in equal measure. In a study with student teachers, Anspal et al. (2012) highlighted their mixed feelings of anxiety, joy, concern and doubts about becoming a teacher. There are many reasons why people decide to become a teacher but often a beginning teacher's decision stems from a belief that teaching provides opportunities to make a difference to children's lives, to inspire them and help them to grow and develop. This belief may underpin feelings of excitement you have when you meet and work with your first class. At the same time, feelings of anxiety may stem from realising the responsibility for children's learning, and for establishing, developing and maintaining the learning environment and culture in your classroom, including the norms for behaviour, relationships, communication and classroom organisation.

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reflection point

What were your reasons for wanting to become a teacher?

What are your feelings about becoming a teacher?

The amount of autonomy you have for the decisions you take, and your learning and teaching choices in the classroom as a beginning teacher, are very context-specific depending on local and national circumstances. Schools, local authorities and/or national guidelines or prescribed policies will to a greater or lesser extent shape your and other's views about your role as a beginning teacher and your relationship with your teacher education provider. Schools and their policies sit within larger contexts and they are shaped by different purposes and values. As Conway et al. (2009) point out, as with all teachers, your work is embedded in historical, cultural and political contexts. Whilst you have expectations about your role and responsibilities in becoming a teacher, others also have expectations of you. People's expectations about what beginning teachers should know, care about and be able to do may align or contrast with your own. In a series of studies of mentors working with beginning teachers, Livingston and Shiach (2013, 2014) consistently found that the mentors reported differences in people's expectations about beginning teachers, their roles and responsibilities and how they should act in the classroom and school. These differences served as a source of learning and development and/or as a source of emotional angst for the beginning teachers (examples of some of the different expectations are explored below).

spotlight on practice

Different expectations of a beginning teacher

Sam has just begun a placement in a primary 3 class but she will also have opportunities to observe classes in other stages of the school. Different people in school have expressed their views about the expectations they have of Sam as a beginning teacher.

The school leader's expectations

As children, our pupils are our most precious members of society. It should therefore be considered a privilege to teach them and to support parents/carers with the nurturing and educational development of their children in the early years and primary school stages. The role of the teacher requires a proactive mindset, regardless of the stage being taught. I expect Sam to evaluate herself, her learning about the context of the school, the primary stage and, most importantly, the pupils she is working with. I expect that the learning experiences of her class

(Continued)

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(Continued)

are appropriately paced and delivered. It is important that she makes effective use of class plan-ning to support her with the organisation and management of classroom learning and teaching. It is also essential that her daily preparation and organisation support effective learning and teaching and promote pupil independence. In the early years and primary school stages, it is particularly important that she demonstrates that she is able to work in partnership with the parents/carers to get it right for each child and ensure that responsive and appropriate teaching and learning are taking place. I am also expecting her to develop links with colleagues across the school and learn about the policies and procedures within the school.

The expectations of Sam's mentor

I still remember the feelings I had as a beginning teacher: looking forward on the one hand to having a class to teach but on the other hand wanting to make sure that I understood what the school and the parents expected of me. It is a bit of a balancing act. Beginning teachers have to demonstrate that they are capable teachers and understand what being a professional means but they also need to show they are open to learning from others' experiences. I expect Sam to have her own views and ideas about what she is doing but, at the same time, be willing to find out how we function as a school and learn from working with colleagues. I have high expecta-tions but these are all about caring for the pupils and ensuring they have the best possible start in their learning journey in the best possible learning environment.

The expectations of a parent of a primary 3 pupil

I have some concerns about a beginning teacher taking the class that my child is in. The early years are so important for my child to feel safe and enjoy going to school. It is important that my daughter has strong foundations for her learning. I want her to be happy but I don't want her to fall behind in her work. I am sure the head teacher will keep an eye on what is happening.

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reflection point

The case study indicates that different people have different expectations of Sam as a beginning teacher. What expectations do you have of yourself as a beginning teacher?

Reflecting on why others have different expectations is an important step in developing as a reflective practitioner, and in beginning to understand why views differ and conflicts can arise in relationships. There are many possible reasons for differences in people's expectations but they often cluster around different views about:

- what makes for good teaching and learning
- what knowledge matters most

- models of teacher education, and the nature and level of support that beginning teachers should receive

- how ready beginning teachers are to teach when they arrive in school and what they are expected to do at the start of their placement or career.

How aware you are of your own expectations and how much you understand about the expectations others have of your role as a beginning teacher will depend to some extent on your own personal experiences and the support you have to reflect on different expectations in an open and explicit way. Developing an awareness of the expectations and assumptions we have of ourselves as teachers is not an easy task. Brookfield (1995, p. 2) says: 'Becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how we think and act is one of the most challenging intellectual puzzles we face in our lives.'

Contrasting views about what makes for a good teacher

Feiman-Nemser (2001) believes that student-teachers enter teacher education with beliefs that have been shaped by many years of exposure to educational practices as pupils in school and through experiences within families or youth groups in the community. This follows Lortie's (1975) views about a long 'apprenticeship of observation' which creates deeply held images of teachers and teaching. This suggests that, as a beginning teacher, you will have some pre-formed expectations about what makes for a 'good teacher'. However, the spotlight on Sam's placement in school illustrates that your views are likely to interact with a web of other people's views and assumptions about what it means to be a 'good' teacher. For example, individuals have their own beliefs and values about the purpose of education, what knowledge is worthwhile, how children learn and develop and what are the most appropriate or effective learning and teaching approaches. Korthagen (2004) highlights the difficulty of answering the question, 'What makes for a good teacher?' He says it is 'too ambitious to try to introduce any norm describing what a good teacher should look like' (p. 78) because the answer depends on a range of interacting factors. He proposes a model, which he calls the 'onion model', to assist thinking about the various layers of factors influencing what makes for a good teacher – mission, identity, beliefs, competences, behaviour and environment (Korthagen, 2004). Differences in answering the question arise because of the unique nature of teachers' personal biographies and professional identities, and because the multiple social interactions involved mean learning and teaching are complex and unpredictable processes. Knowledge about what and how people learn is continually developing, and more diverse populations of learners with individual personalities and changing learning needs add new challenges for teachers. Teachers are expected to respond to individual learners and take account of their learning in and outside the school – in the family and out in the community. They are also expected to embrace and respond to the social context of the individual school and community in which they work in order to engage effectively and meaningfully with pupils and their parents. In addition, greater emphasis on inter-connected learning communities means that teachers work with a wider number of professionals in their own classrooms and in the education system generally (Livingston and Shiach, 2010).

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These complex challenges can bring significant fulfilment to teachers in the early years and primary stages as they see children's learning developing. However, the challenges also mean there is a continuing need for teachers to adapt and develop their knowledge, skills and values about what is to be taught and why as well as how, where and when. There are many decisions to be taken in planning for learning and teaching and whilst in action in the classroom:

> The reality of professional practice is complex and changeable ... practitioners constantly have to face the question: What in the given circumstances is the best way to act, in order to achieve what is important at this moment? (Ponte and Ax, 2009: 325)

The development of an understanding of the complexity of teachers' work and the many influences that shape people's expectations of a teacher require an understanding of the multiple interactions between people, policies and context. The knowledge, skills and dispositions a teacher needs are increasingly being set out in lists of competences or professional standards by a growing number of governments/national agencies. Beginning teachers have to demonstrate their competence in relation to these requirements before they are recognised as qualified teachers. The standards or competences could have a significant influence on shaping their understanding of becoming a teacher and influence those who support them in the early phase of their career. In general, the documents include competences concerning professional knowledge, skills, values and dispositions. For example, the Standard for Registration as a Teacher in Scotland (GTCS, 2012) includes:

- values (for example, integrity, trust, respect, social justice)
- professional knowledge and understanding (including knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, education systems and professional responsibilities)
- professional skills and abilities (including planning coherent, progressive and stimulating teaching and assessment programmes which match learners' needs and abilities, communicating effectively, organising and managing the classroom, employing a range of teaching strategies and resources to meet the needs and abilities of learners, building relationships with colleagues and other professionals, pupils, their parents and members of the wider school community)
- self-evaluation, self-reflection and continuous professional development.

The Teachers' Standards for use in schools in England (DfE, 2011) include a brief preamble which summarises the values and behaviours that are expected of teachers, a set of standards which concern teaching and a set of standards which concern personal and professional conduct. All accredited Initial Teacher Training providers in England must ensure that the content, structure, delivery and assessment of their programmes are designed to enable trainee teachers to meet all the standards for qualified teacher status (QTS) across the age range of training (ages 5–11 in the case of primary teachers), and ensure that trainee teachers are not recommended for the award of QTS until they have met all of the required standards.

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reflection point

Explore some of the differences in the standards for teachers in at least two different countries:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/301107/Teachers_Standards.pdf (Teachers' Standards in England, Guidance for school leaders, school staff and governing bodies, updated 2013)

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283567/Teachers_standards_how_should_they_be_used.pdf (Teachers' Standards (England) How they should be used, updated 2014)

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283566/Teachers_standard_information.pdf (one-page summary of Teachers' Standards in England)

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211646/Early_Years_Teachers_Standards.pdf (Early Years Teachers' Standards in England, 2013)

www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/the-standards/standards-for-registration-1212.pdf (The Standards for Registration: Mandatory Requirements for Registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2012)

www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/content/graduating-teacher-standards-english-rtf-38kb (Graduating Teacher Standards, Aotearoa, New Zealand)

Standard documents can be helpful if they are recognised as a framework to stimulate discussion with others in your school about expectations of beginning teachers' roles and responsibilities and how you are progressing in your development as a teacher. They can assist your own reflection and the identification of your personal strengths and next steps in professional development. However, not everyone agrees about the helpfulness of standards in describing what makes for a good teacher. Doubts have been raised not only about the validity and reliability of lists of competences as indicators of what makes for a competent teacher but also about whether 'good' teaching can be reduced to a number of discrete standards. The imposition of teacher standards may have a positive or negative effect on shaping teachers' professionalism. Sachs (2012) suggests that the different ways that the standards are interpreted and understood depends on the values, principles and assumptions that underpin them. Differences in values and assumptions have the potential to result in divergent interpretations and differences in the values that are attached to standards nationally and between teachers in schools. The guidance for school leaders, school staff and governing bodies in England states: 'The standards need to be applied as appropriate to the role and context within which the trainee or teacher is practising' (DfE, 2011: 6). However, interpretations of what is appropriate to the role and context of the trainee or teacher vary. For example, the mentors in Livingston and Shiach's (2013) study in Scotland reported that they found differences

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in opinion arose concerning interpretations of what specific standards mean in practice and how well beginning teachers should be able to meet them.

Whilst some people see the standards as an attempt to provide a framework that describes the requirements of a competent teacher, others view the standards as an attempt to increase teacher accountability. The extent to which people agree that the standards are open to discussion and negotiation could depend on whether they view standards as regulatory and fixed or as developmental and serving as a framework for self-evaluation and professional learning. The way they are interpreted and the value attached to them also depend on the context in which they are implemented and the opportunities for dialogue and negotiation of what they mean in practice. Rather than being accepted as static, standards should be recognised as an opportunity for beginning teachers and their mentors to discuss and develop a shared understanding of their views about what makes for a good teacher through peer dialogue.

reflection point

Reflect on your own experiences of learning and teaching and write down what you believe makes for a 'good teacher'.

Reflect on whether you think professional standards for teachers help or hinder you in describing a good teacher.

List the values you think are essential for a teacher to have.

putting it into practice

Evaluate and reflect on teachers' values

The Preamble of the Teachers' Standards in England (DfE, 2011: 10) summarises the values and behaviours that all teachers must demonstrate throughout their career. For example, it emphasises that teachers act with honesty and integrity and forge professional relationships.

Write down examples of a teacher acting:

* with honesty and integrity
* in a professional way.

Discuss the examples with your mentor, a stage partner or another student teacher or trainee. Consider together how your views are similar or different and why.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) website has a helpful Values Wheel to assist your self-evaluation and reflection on how to put values into action and to help you consider who you are as a professional: www.gtcs.org.uk/standards/Self-evaluation/self-evaluation-values.aspx

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Contrasting views about teacher education and about learning and teaching

It is important to be aware of your views and assumptions about pupils' ability to learn, what knowledge is important and what it means to be a teacher. Taking time to reflect on your views and assumptions will help you acknowledge how your values and beliefs impact on your behaviour and attitudes to teaching and to new experiences whilst working with other colleagues in school. Hargreaves (1998, cited in Pollard, 2014: 10) 'reminds us that it is not only the values we go into teaching with that matter but how we feel able to put these into practice'. Your values may align with those prevailing in school but this may not always be the case. Some staff members may have differing views from you based on their own personal values. Understanding some of the possible reasons for differences in views and recognising them as opportunities to reflect on different interpretations may reduce the tensions that can arise when you or they do something that seems different from what is expected.

The different routes into teaching are underpinned by differences in views about how best to 'train' or 'educate' teachers and definitions of good teaching and learning. Conflicting views can arise concerning whether greater emphasis should be placed on the craft of teaching and the development of skills through observation and advice from an experienced teacher or on the development of reflective, enquiring professionals. Views of teachers as technicians (who acquire a set of competences to deliver the curriculum and implement local and national policies) contrast sharply with views of adaptive responsive teachers (who understand the complexity of learning and teaching and develop professional knowledge and values which enable them to question policies and their own practice through ongoing reflection and enquiry). The current debate concerning models of teacher education often focuses on conflicting theories of learning, different approaches to supporting and challenging the development of teachers' professional learning, and different views concerning what professional knowledge is and what knowledge is important for effective learning and teaching. For example, beliefs about the relative importance of formal and practical knowledge can underpin differences in views about the role of teachers and approaches to teacher education. Fenstermacher (1994) describes formal knowledge as a type of knowledge developed through conventional research, and practical knowledge as that developed by teachers based on their experiences of classroom teaching.

Behaviourist or social-constructivist theories often underpin contrasting conceptions of learning and teaching. Teachers whose main focus is the delivery of subject knowledge to their pupils may hold beliefs about learning and teaching associated with behaviourist theories (for example, as proposed by Skinner). They may believe that engaging in knowledge transmission is the most effective way to teach – the teacher as the knowledgeable expert delivers the curriculum content that has to be covered to the pupils, correcting their mistakes and reinforcing positive learning outcomes. In contrast, teachers whose views align more closely to social-constructivist theory (for example, as proposed by Vygotsky) may believe that knowledge is created from and by social interaction between pupils, or between pupils and the teacher. These views may underpin beliefs about a teacher's role in addressing the individual learning needs of the pupils, supporting them to engage in their own learning and construct meaning of the curriculum for themselves. From both these perspectives, learning and teaching decisions may also be influenced differently according to

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what a teacher thinks the expectations and requirements of policy makers, school leaders, parents and/or pupils are, or they may be influenced by beliefs about pupils' ability to learn, how they learn and/or what makes for effective teaching (Livingston, 2015).

Contrasting views can be confusing and unsettling for beginning teachers striving to develop their professional identity. The results of the *Becoming a Teacher Project* (Hobson et al., 2009) demonstrate that becoming a teacher can be an 'affectively charged experience'. It is therefore important to learn from some of the challenging experiences that some beginning teachers have had and reflect on how differences in views and misinterpretations of actions can be avoided or recognised as opportunities to learn.

spotlight on practice

Dealing with different expectations and values

Matt is a student teacher in a primary school working with pupils aged 11 years. Before he began his placement, he had a clear image of the kind of teacher he wanted to be. He wanted to understand his pupils as individual learners and create interesting and exciting learning environments where all his pupils could succeed. He wanted them to be able to learn from one another as well as from him and from other people in the local community and beyond. He also wanted to explore opportunities where he and his pupils could learn new things together. He had learned about social-constructivist approaches on his teacher education course and felt his views about learning and teaching aligned with learning through social interaction, collaborative approaches and ongoing reflection and enquiry. However, on his first meeting with his mentor in school (an experienced primary teacher, who had been teaching for 19 years), he immediately felt uneasy. Her expectations were that he would observe her in order to understand the learning and teaching approaches already in place in the school and adopt the practices already established in the classroom. Matt felt constrained and distressed by these expectations because in his view there were limited opportunities for him to experiment and try out his own ideas. He found it difficult to conform to his mentor's expectations because he felt uncomfortable with her very structured approaches and routines in the classroom and didn't fully understand how to go about putting them into practice. It seemed to him that it wasn't possible to develop his own professional identity in a context which appeared to collide with his values and beliefs about learning and teaching. He felt anxious and upset because he was caught between wanting to hold firm to his own beliefs and values and his desire to feel a sense of belonging to the school culture.

Sinner (2012) narrates a similar story of a student teacher who experiences tensions and strong emotions during her school placement when beliefs and values differ about the most effective approaches for learning and teaching, the level of involvement of the pupils in developing their own learning, and the best way to support beginning teachers' development. According to Sinner, the student teacher believed that the tensions around differences in her and her mentor's views were underpinned by conflicting beliefs about the apprenticeship model and the enquiry model of teacher education. Similar to Matt, she was distressed by the tensions that arose and found it difficult to negotiate her roles as a learner and a teacher.

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FORMING AND RE-FORMING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Undoubtedly, it is challenging to learn *about* teaching and learn *to* teach, whilst trying to make sense of your identities as a learner and a teacher. It is important to recognise that as teachers we are learners ourselves and that in becoming a teacher there are multiple opportunities to embrace learning 'in the role' of a teacher whilst supporting the learning of others. This means acknowledging that being a learner is part of and not separate from your identity as a teacher. This is not easy when, as a beginning teacher, you may feel caught between trying to demonstrate your teaching competence and credibility to pupils, colleagues and parents and wanting to seek support for your own learning and development. This situation can be exacerbated when some school leaders and colleagues expect you to take on responsibilities similar to experienced teachers from the outset of your school placement.

Describing what 'professional identity' means is difficult, and, as with other concepts discussed in this chapter, people have different views. Contested views are evident in the research literature with differing definitions offered from psychological, sociological and philosophical perspectives (see Day et al., 2006). However, Pillen and colleagues (2013) suggest that researchers who study teachers' professional identity generally agree that professional identity is not a stable entity, rather it is dynamic and continually changing and developing over time. This means that whilst your professional identity will be shaped by your unique characteristics, you should also be open to potential changes over time as your identity is influenced by different contexts, people and experiences. Pollard (2014) reminds us that in school settings, the influence of other colleagues on the school staff is often considerable. They represent 'significant others' providing feedback in relation to your professional identity. Part of the process of becoming a teacher is being aware of and reflecting on the way your professional identity is formed and re-formed through your interactions with others and a variety of experiences. As in Matt's case, this can be emotionally challenging. How you manage conflicting emotions depends, in part, on the context and culture of your learning and working environment, the support you receive to reflect on and manage your own and other's emotional responses and your ability to develop your personal resilience. Pillen et al. (2013) argue that if the personal and the professional aspects of becoming a teacher are not in balance, what is found relevant to the profession may conflict with a teacher's personal beliefs and expectations. They remind us that becoming a teacher means, among other things, deciding how to express yourself in the classroom and learning when and how to adapt your personal understandings and ideals to institutional demands without compromising your core values and beliefs:

> Professional identity development is seen as the process of integrating one's personal knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms and values, on the one hand, and professional demands from teacher education institutes and schools, including broadly accepted values and standards about teaching, on the other. (Pillen et al., 2013: 243)

In many schools, statements of the school aims and their values are displayed in prominent places and/or in the school handbook and/or website. These statements offer a good starting point for a discussion about professional knowledge and values with your mentor. A thoughtful balance is required between establishing your own ways of working with your class according to your own values and beliefs, and meeting your pupils' specific learning needs within the context of the school

and the routines that are already established. Without discussion and transparency of views, beginning teachers' struggles to make sense of conflicting values and beliefs can remain invisible to teacher educators and to their mentor in school. Livingston and Shiach's (2013) research suggests that mentors can misinterpret beginning teachers' actions. For example, beginning teachers' reticence to ask questions for fear of appearing to lack competence can be misinterpreted by their mentor as an inability to self-evaluate or a disinterest in learning to develop as a teacher. Ongoing communication and the development of trusting relationships are necessary to avoid these misconceptions. The roles and responsibilities of those who support you, as a beginning teacher, in establishing trust and enabling discussion of views and expectations are explored in the final section of this chapter but as a developing professional you also share responsibility. Actively seeking multiple contexts for your own learning provides you with opportunities to reflect critically on different views of learning and teaching and assists you in making sense of your own learning and your contribution not just to your own pupils' learning but also to the learning culture of the whole school.

Studies by McNally and Blake (2010) and Hobson et al. (2009) indicate that for beginning teachers establishing good relationships often assumes huge importance. For example, Hobson et al. reported that the beginning teachers in their study consistently mentioned colleagues as a factor in helping them to develop as teachers. This means you should be open to learning opportunities that enable you to reflect on different ways of doing things and different ways of being a teacher.

putting it into practice

Discussing values and expectations with others

Make a list of opportunities you could create to discuss expectations that other people have of you as a beginning teacher, find out about what they value in teaching and learning and their expectations about 'good' teaching. Be ready to share your values about learning and teaching and your expectations.

Thinking about *how* you discuss your and others' expectations is just as important as thinking about *when* to ask them. Think about the messages you convey by choice of language, tone of voice and body language.

Whilst your focus is on your own development as a teacher and the development of the pupils you are working with, other people will have a broader picture of the school as a whole. Some of the contrasting views may arise from school leaders', mentor teachers' and parents' views about not wanting to take risks with children's learning and the practical realities of delivering the curriculum within contextual restrictions that are not immediately apparent to you as a beginning teacher.

School leaders have responsibility for the quality of learning and teaching throughout the whole school. Reading school handbooks, school plans, policies and reports and information for parents will give you an insight into the expectations that are held for learning across the school. You may be able to access this information from the school website before you arrive at the school. Throughout your experience in school as a student teacher or as a newly qualified teacher, you should continue to look for opportunities to talk to other teachers, as well as your own mentor or supporter, and to the school leader, at appropriate times, to find out what is expected of all pupils and teachers in the school and what is expected of you as a beginning teacher.

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Parents want the best start for their children. Conway et al. (2009: 44) emphasise that one of the distinctive features of contemporary teaching is the increase in interaction with parents/carers required of teachers. They highlight the way that relationships with parents have changed significantly over the last two decades. According to them, this is due first to a new appreciation of the role of parents and the home in enhancing children's learning, and second, to new reporting and communication practices between home and school, driven by increasing attention to issues of accountability. Seeking opportunities, as appropriate, to develop strong and trusting relationships with parents/carers and to demonstrate your ability through the learning experiences that their children receive in your class are important aspects of becoming a teacher. Find out how other teachers build relationships with parents and discuss the different opportunities that are open to you to talk to parents.

INFLUENCES AND CHALLENGES OF THOSE WHO SUPPORT YOU AS A BEGINNING TEACHER

Fewer teachers today find themselves working in isolation. For many teachers, team or stage planning is now the norm. As more schools seek to include all children with diverse learning needs, more staff members (for example, teachers and additional support assistants) work together in one classroom. In early years settings and primary schools, there are often greater expectations that teachers will plan and work together. This can generate rich collaborative learning experiences for those working as part of a team. However, teachers working together in enquiry and reflection need to be nurtured and supported. School leaders have a key role in developing supportive collegiate cultures and enabling ongoing opportunities to share views, including views about beginning teachers' roles and responsibilities, professional knowledge and values, and learning and teaching approaches. Effective mentoring is also being advocated in more countries. The importance of supporting and challenging beginning teachers is widely recognised but the roles that a mentor has and what they do in practice differ greatly depending on the country context, teacher education provider regulations, partnership agreements with schools and the mentor's own characteristics and understanding of mentoring. In some countries, the allocation of mentors to beginning teachers is mandatory whilst in other countries informal mentoring from experienced colleagues is still the norm. The ethos in the school for collaboration and the value and time school leaders attach to mentoring can impact significantly on the quality of mentoring, no matter whether it is mandatory or informal. In Matt's case, his relationship was poor but many beginning teachers have a good relationship with their mentor. In Hobson et al.'s study (2009), 65% of the beginning teachers rated their relationship with their mentor as 'very good' and 29% said it was 'good'. However, there are different understandings of what it means to be a 'good mentor'.

Being a mentor is an important and challenging responsibility and it needs to be recognised that teachers in schools who work with beginning teachers are being asked to take up the role of a 'teacher educator'. It cannot be assumed that the knowledge and skills teachers have, which enable them to work effectively with young learners, are the same as the knowledge and skills required when working with beginning teachers, who are adult learners. Many teachers in the education system today have not had a mentor themselves. They may have been in the position of having to

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'sink or swim' at the start of their career and may not think deeply enough or be sufficiently prepared for a mentoring role. Some mentors, often in an effort to give what they perceive as the best support for beginning teachers, focus on providing advice drawn from what they do themselves in the classroom and share resources that work for them. This puts the emphasis on socialising beginning teachers into existing cultures and ways of working in the mentor's classroom or in the school (usually with insufficient explanation of how they developed the expertise and the underpinning relationships and classroom cultures required). In Matt's experience, his mentor expected him to adjust and conform to existing practice but she may have believed that this was the best way to support him because of her different beliefs about what makes for a good teacher or because of her concern not to interrupt the pupils' learning and the plan of work that was expected of them. Other mentors, again often with good intentions, put the emphasis on providing social and emotional support. They are ready with words of comfort when things go wrong or a pat on the back when things go well, but words of comfort are not enough to support the development of reflection on and understanding of how to avoid or build on experiences for the future. Given the traditional definition of a mentor as someone who educates, supports and guides a novice, it is not surprising that many teachers' understanding of the role is as described above. However, the complexity of learning to teach is increasingly recognised as an enquiry process and beginning teachers are expected to engage in ongoing reflection and self-evaluation to identify pupil learning needs, the strengths of their own practice and further development needs for learning and teaching. In this context, beginning teachers require more from their mentors than advice and emotional support.

Mentors need a complex range of knowledge, skills and dispositions to support and critique the development of reflective and enquiring teachers. Yet, many mentors have little or no training to support them in understanding the conditions required for effective mentoring. This may be because many school leaders and teachers themselves assume that teachers already have sufficient skills to support beginning teachers in learning to teach. Undoubtedly, there are significant differences in the nature and amount of mentoring support that is provided for beginning teachers and in the quality and amount of training available to mentors. Some specific requirements for mentoring may be set out by national policies and/or the provider of your beginning teacher training, which state you must have a mentor, but there is less clarity about *how* the mentor engages with you in the mentoring role or about how they, as learners themselves, are supported in the role.

Effective mentoring, in an environment of collegiate support, should start with recognition of you as an individual learner, supporting you to uncover and explore the impact of your prior experiences, beliefs and values on the development of your own professional identity. This process should enable you and your mentor to share your views about learners and learning and the relationship with curriculum and teaching approaches. At this stage, you are both learners trying to understand each other's views and experiences and build a trusting relationship. A planned mentoring programme should be agreed including: observation of your practice; pre- and post-focused mentoring conversations involving carefully structured dialogue which supports and challenges your analysis of your pupils' learning, identifies strengths in your practice, as well as the challenges to be addressed and the next steps in your teaching to improve your pupils' learning; opportunities

for your mentor to model practice through collaboration, joint planning and teaching; and regular professional reviews of your progress as a teacher (against the standards where relevant). For many school leaders and teachers, this will require a re-conceptualisation of the role of a mentor to take account of the more complex contexts, demands and expectations of beginning teachers as reflective, enquiring professionals.

reflection point

Make a list of your expectations of the amount and type of support you will receive from your mentor. Reflect on the amount of time a mentor has available to support you. Identify opportunities to discuss the expectations that you and your mentor have about support for you as a beginning teacher.

SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter was to stimulate your thinking about your own and other people's expectations of beginning teachers. In particular, you have had the opportunity to develop your awareness of other people's different expectations of your role as a beginning teacher and different opinions about what being a good teacher means. Standard documents have the potential to serve as frameworks to stimulate discussion with your mentor and colleagues about what good teaching means. In interpreting the standards, it is important to be aware of the values and beliefs that underpin people's views. Knowing that people may interpret what you do in very different ways will help you to feel more prepared if tensions arise and encourage you to seek opportunities to discuss and learn from different approaches. Thinking more deeply about the values, beliefs and assumptions you hold is challenging but it will help you to reflect on how your pre-conceived images and beliefs influence what you do and your openness and willingness to learn from alternative approaches.

As a beginning teacher, you may have a sense of who you want to be as a teacher. However, your professional identity will be formed and re-formed as you develop as a teacher. For many beginning teachers, this is emotionally challenging. Being aware of the complexity of the development of your own identity and being prepared to see challenges as opportunities to reflect critically and learn contributes to your development as a resilient and reflective teacher. It is not easy to do this alone. School leaders and your mentor have a key role in supporting your development. However, the support provided for them in developing the necessary knowledge and skills in mentoring is variable. A better understanding of the value of mentoring processes is needed and of the importance of quality training as the role of mentor expands from giving advice and emotional support to scaffolding, supporting and critiquing your development as a reflective enquiring professional who is equipped to adapt and respond to the complex and changing learning and teaching contexts of the 21st century.

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Here you will find an activity for new teachers, author podcasts including Kay Livingston's top tips for employability, free access to SAGE journal articles and links to external sources.

further reading

Avraamidou, L. (2014) 'Tracing a Beginning Elementary Teacher's Development of Identity for Science Teaching', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 65(3), 223–40. This article explores the development of a primary teacher's identity from a number of different perspectives. For the purpose of the article, the context is science teaching but the discussion of identity development is relevant to all areas of the curriculum.

Warren, A. (2014) 'Relationships for Me are the Key for Everything: Early Childhood Teachers' Subjectivities as Relational Professionals', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 15(3), 262–71. This article provides a further example of two becoming teachers who experience conflicting beliefs and values about learning and teaching and tensions in relations with colleagues in school. It explores how the differences impacted on their development as teachers.

www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20for%20Induction%20and%20 Mentoring%20and%20Mentor%20Teachers%202011%20english.pdf – the Learning to Teach (2007–08) research project in New Zealand identifies the distinction between limited mentoring, geared around advice and emotional support, and intensive, pedagogically oriented mentoring, often referred to as 'educative mentoring'.

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