

Warren Kidd & Gerry Czerniawski

Successful Teaching 14-19

Theory, Practice and Reflection



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Gerry dedicates this book to Jen.

Warren dedicates this book to his son Freddie.

CONTENTS

About the authors	ix
Acknowledgements	x
How to use this book	xi
Section 1 Educational Policy	1
1 Why teach?	3
2 Understanding secondary education	14
3 Understanding lifelong learning and post-compulsory education	29
4 Understanding the 14–19 agenda	42
Section 2 Professional Skills	57
5 The habits of a good teacher	59
6 Starting to think about teaching and learning: what makes a good lesson?	70
7 Making a good start: mentoring, teaching placement and first encounters with learners	83
8 How to ‘survive’ teaching practice	97
Section 3 Theory	109
9 Educational theory: useful tools at your disposal	111
10 Understanding the role of assessment in learning	127

11 Behaviour and classroom management in schools and colleges	142
12 Educational achievement and underachievement	160
Section 4 Practice	173
13 Planning and preparation	175
14 How to engage learners	189
15 Classroom ideas that really work	202
16 Ideas for organising learning: group work, revision and homework strategies	221
17 Teaching thinking skills: examination, evaluation and differentiation	240
18 Using technology to teach: e-learning, M-learning and blended learning	255
Section 5 Reflection	267
19 Dealing with M-level credits: academic debates and issues	269
20 Moving on: professional formation and continuing professional development	284
Glossary	295
Index	300

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Undertaking a teacher training course is both challenging and rewarding. It is a fabulous profession to join, and one full of many diverse learning experiences – for yourself and your learners. The teacher education course you are enrolled on is no different. For some, it will be the hardest period of your life. The transition you are about to make is enormous and the skills you are about to develop will fundamentally change both your professional and private personas. This book aims to support those working within the 14–19 age range – covering secondary schools, school sixth forms and further education colleges.

The subtitle for this book is ‘theory, practice and reflection’ and these are the essential elements of any teacher training course and all subsequent professional practice. All three interrelate. As a professional-in-the-making you are required to reflect upon your teaching, adopt theory as a means through which to see and make sense of the world of the classroom around you, and choose between theories at appropriate moments on the basis of the type of practice you are doing.

As a teacher of learners, we recognise that you are also a learner yourself. This is true of all teachers. We see this book as part training manual, part introduction to academic debates around education and teaching and learning, and part teaching techniques, hints and tips. We hope that these elements enable you to complete your teacher training course, while at the same time develop as a practitioner.

We have divided this book into five sections.

Section 1 ‘Educational Policy’ looks at your developing professional role and the background to recent educational change and reform.

Section 2 ‘Professional Skills’ introduces you to the habits of good teachers and good teaching. This section ends with chapters that consider what good teaching is and what your teaching placement and practice will be like.

Section 3 ‘Theory’ looks at academic and research debates, literature and evidence surrounding effective teaching. We also introduce you to aspects of the sociology of education and the literature on teaching and learning styles.

Section 4 ‘Practice’, takes you through the mechanics of your practical placement and classroom-based elements of your training. We look at mentoring; understanding your placement institution; planning and preparation. Chapters in this section of the book also provide ideas for you to try in your classroom. It is important to recognise that good teaching is experimental and reflective – it is about trying new things and seeing what works both for yourself and also for your learners. We will look, in turn, at questioning, skills development, group work, starts and ends of lessons, resource creation and ‘e-learning’.

Section 5 ‘Reflection’, ties the various sections of the book together and presents issues and debates that you might take forward into your first year in the profession. In light of the government’s plans for teaching to become a Master’s (M)-level profession, we also present a chapter on academic debates looking at the M-level issues that many teacher training courses provide.

Features

Good teaching is about good communication. We feel the same could be said for good writing. To enable you to get the most from this book, we have adopted the following features. They are designed to aid your reading of the text and to help you choose more easily which ideas to try and when.



‘Objectives’: each chapter starts with learning objectives. We do this as we are very conscious that a great deal of effective teaching involves clear instruction and communication to the audience so that the learner understands at all times where s/he is.



‘M-level thinking’: from time to time you will see this icon running through the text of the book. This is so that you, the reader, can see the importance of these themes running through the text as a whole. These ideas are then taken up in the final section, in Chapter 19. It is a consideration and awareness of these vital and contemporary debates that will really raise the levels of your critical awareness and evaluative writing.



‘Discussion points’: these enable us, the authors of this book, to really speak directly to you about our own experiences of teaching and learning to teach.



‘Case studies’: we use this feature as a means through which we can allow the story to shine through of various practitioners that we have met in our working lives as practitioners ourselves, managers and teacher educators.



‘Ease of use’: a large part of this book is made up of practical ideas. The majority of these are contained in the chapters in Section 4, ‘Practice’. We recognise that teaching is both academic and practical – it is both informed by wider academic discourse and yet at the same time has a feel of a ‘craft’ about it as practitioners are in their classrooms teaching their learners. We have rated out of five stars each teaching tip and idea for its ‘ease of use’ by the teacher. For each of the ideas and techniques we present in Section 4 of the book, we ask ourselves the question, does the successfulness of the learning being generated outweigh the practical and logistical considerations of planning and preparation? In a sense, this is a ‘cooking book’ approach to lesson preparation – how long does it take and what ingredients are needed? How can you, as the teacher, create something from the elements you draw together?

‘References’: we keep our references and guide to further reading to a minimum, but urge you to invest some time reading around the debates contained within this book. Good teaching is about the interplay and interface between the academic literature and how this impacts upon the classroom experience of the learner. See the suggested further reading for useful next steps in your professional learning.

Entering into teaching – becoming a classroom craftsperson and understanding the theories and research behind your practice – is a demanding and challenging endeavour. It is one that we have really valued and one that has completely changed how we viewed the world of work, young people and our own learning, and we sincerely hope you discover these things too.

We hope you enjoy this book and hope you enjoy your new career and professional role.

*Warren Kidd
Gerry Czerniawski*

SECTION 1

EDUCATIONAL POLICY

CHAPTER 1

WHY TEACH?

Objectives

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

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



Training to be a teacher

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

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

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

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

Breaking through all the misunderstanding

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

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

‘Everyone remembers a good teacher’

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

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

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

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

What is a ‘good teacher’?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Discussion point

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

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

Can teachers 'make a difference'?

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

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

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



M-level thinking: Situatedness

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

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

Who are you? What do you wish to become?

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

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

Reflective practice and reflective practitioners



M-level thinking: The reflective practitioner

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

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

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

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

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



Case study

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

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

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

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

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

Consider this quotation:

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

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

Becoming a 'professional'



M-level thinking: Professionalism

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

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

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

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

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

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

Welcome to the 'rollercoaster'

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

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

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

Chapter links →

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

Suggested further reading

Moore, A. (2004) *The Good Teacher. Dominant Discourses in Teaching and Teacher Education*. Oxford: Routledge.

Schön, D.A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner. How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books.

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CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING SECONDARY EDUCATION

Objectives

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

1. summarise post-war educational policies affecting the secondary and post-compulsory sectors;
2. identify the pattern of secondary educational change since the Second World War;
3. understand the marketisation of education and its effects on becoming a teacher;
4. comprehend the impact of New Labour education policy on teaching;
5. understand the re-occurring themes that are a feature of recent educational reform and policy.



Understanding educational reform

In this book we emphasise the importance for emerging teachers to reflect, and be reflective about, the many processes of becoming a teacher. Understanding the wider context in which 'becoming a teacher' is constructed is particularly important when considering the ever-changing educational landscape that successive governments

introduce to the teaching profession. By understanding the background to and history of recent educational change you will be in a better position to see how your professional work fits into education processes and society as a whole. This 'policy busyness' that emerging teachers are catapulted into, can, to some extent, be clarified by talking to more experienced colleagues. It is a confusing world of governmental decisions, White and Green Papers and political ideology and spin. However in this chapter we provide a framework for understanding some of the more critical reforms in education spanning over half a century. By focusing on educational provision and key educational policies that have shaped the meaning of education, teaching and learning, this chapter paves the way for an examination of the tensions, dilemmas, ambiguities and debates within the education system as well as explaining some of its key features.

Education in Britain continues to be a 'political football' as successive governments struggle to balance the conflicting interests of parents, learners, teachers, religious institutions and the economy. Governments juggle these competing interests in their desire to satisfy the electorate and the expectations of business in an increasingly competitive and globalising economy. Within this, there is much to celebrate, despite what impressions you might obtain from the media:

- Newly qualified British teachers are the most successful generation of teachers to date (Baker, 2007; TDA, 2006).
- Levels of numeracy and literacy are rising, as are the percentages of young people going to university. Tony Blair, during his premiership, promised that over the next few years 50 per cent of all young people will leave school and attend universities – there is little reason to believe that his successors will be any less committed to this goal.
- More young people today pass their public school examinations (GCSEs and A levels) than ever before.

But there is also much to criticise.

- Universities and employers complain that British teenagers are not fully equipped with the skills required to enter both sectors. Just under a quarter of a million 16-year-olds drop out of education and training altogether.
- English teenagers lie third bottom (just above Turkey and Mexico) in a list of the top 30 industrialised countries' participation rates for 15–19-year-olds in further education (Wylie, 2006).



M-level thinking: Crisis of masculinity

Changes in traditional patterns of employment and the continued rise of female educational achievement at primary, secondary and tertiary levels have created, it is argued, conditions in which some male teenagers are alienated by school curricula and that this accounts for their underperformance. To what extent do you agree with these explanations?

- A 'crisis of masculinity' in many British schools refers to the fact that many boys are under-achieving in examinations in relation to their female counterparts in all phases of education.
- Finally, many commentators (for example, David Gillborn) argue that British schools continue to marginalise some members of ethnic minorities, most notably, Afro-Caribbean male learners.

For some, educational reform plays an essential role in developing social order and preparing young people for future employment. For others, the reforms taking place in the UK are both a form of cultural and social engineering and an attempt to re-create a fantasy education based upon the myths of national identity (Ball, 1994).



M-level thinking: The role of education

Academics argue about what purpose education fulfils, although few dispute the relationships between education and the economy. More contentious and therefore fascinating to research are the variety of ways education constructs national identities. In what ways can the formal and 'hidden' curricula artificially construct a national identity?

Greater understanding of educational reform can help emerging teachers reflect on the many changes they will encounter as they progress from fledgling practitioners to experienced colleagues.

Education in post-war Britain

1944 Education Act

Both the 1944 Education Act in England and Wales and the 1947 Act in Northern Ireland came at a time when Europe was suffering from the atrocities of the Second World War. Many Europeans had experienced war at first hand and in many cases were disillusioned with the policies and the politicians that had allowed such a war to take place. The years 1939 to 1945 had witnessed widespread destruction, mass killing and human suffering on an enormous level. Policy-makers and the general public in many Western European societies wanted a new and better society to replace the one that had been partially responsible for the Second World War. Both Labour and Conservative parties were committed to the principles of the welfare state, full employment and a mixed economy. The Education Act needs to be seen in this light because of the powerful role education has within society – particularly in relation to the economy.

Aims:

1. The 1944 Education Act aimed to offer an equal chance to develop the talents and abilities of all learners.
2. The Act created a balance of responsibility (and tension) for the new education system between central government, local government and schools.
3. The free system of compulsory state education was to be completely reorganised into primary education (nursery, infant and junior education) to the age of 11, secondary education from the ages of 11 to 15, and then post-compulsory education, that is, a free choice that could take children into further and/or higher education at university level.

These were exciting and ambitious aims. However, the way in which these aims were to be achieved has been viewed by many educationalists as highly contentious. A psychometric or IQ (intelligence quotient) test was given to children in their last year of primary school. The test would be used to measure 'intelligence' and was commonly known as the '11-plus examination'. It would be used to 'determine' which type of secondary school in the 'tripartite system' these children would attend once they had completed their primary education. The tripartite system of education was set up as a result of the 1944 Education Act. 'Tri' referred to three types of schools that children, at that time, could attend: grammar schools, secondary moderns and the technical schools.

- The grammar school accepted what it considered to be academically bright learners who had done well in the 11-plus examination. Such schools taught a wide range of academic subjects including Latin and, in some cases, Greek. These schools entered their learners for public examinations (O and A levels) which were needed for any learner that wished to attend university. Twenty per cent of the population at that time attended these schools.
- The secondary modern accepted most other learners. Such children would not have performed as well in the 11-plus examination as those who went on to grammar schools and, as a result, they would receive a basic education with a more practical emphasis. Up to the 1960s there was very little opportunity for public examinations to be taken in such schools, meaning that the opportunity to go to university was effectively ruled out if you went to such a school.



Discussion point

As new models for schooling get introduced, it isn't always the case that the old ones completely disappear. Many counties in the UK still have grammar school systems and offer both an 11-plus and a 14-plus. All this diversity reveals a confusing landscape. Some commentators refer to the UK education system as 'postmodern' due to all this diversity, change and local and regional variation. What difficulties can you identify in trying to compare educational systems in Britain?

- Technical schools only accepted about 5 per cent of learners in the country at that time. Such schools were designed for learners that excelled in technical subjects and consequently emphasised vocational skills and knowledge.

Despite its ambitious and exciting aims, there were three significant problems with the tripartite system of education.

1. The problem with IQ tests as a form of assessment is that they can be culturally biased in favour of middle-class learners. This meant that the majority of grammar school learners came from the middle classes. Far from providing an equal education for all, the tripartite system reflected the existing social divisions in society.
2. 'Parity of esteem' (the idea that one school should be considered to have the same 'status' as another) did not exist between these three types of school. Parents, teachers and learners saw the grammar school as superior to the other types of school. This could mean that some parents, some teachers and some learners could see themselves as failures if they were involved in any school that was not a grammar school.
3. Despite the aims of the 1944 Education Act to provide better education for all, the tripartite system did not include those learners whose parents or guardians paid for their education, that is, independent or private school education. At that time, seven per cent of the population of school children attended such schools.

The introduction of comprehensive schools

The conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's famous catchphrase 'You've never had it so good; symbolised the rising standards of the 1960s in comparison to the relative austerity of the 1950s. The demands for greater public expenditure on education, fuelled by sections within the Labour Party, teaching unions and leading academics were informed, in part by emerging educational disciplines and a common desire for a more egalitarian society. In 1965, keen to promote social reform through education the then Labour government, led by Harold Wilson, requested that all local education authorities run secondary education along comprehensive lines. Comprehensive schools were set up to provide one type of school for all types of learner, inclusive of all types of ability regardless of gender, class or ethnicity. This meant that there was also no requirement for an entrance examination, 11-plus result or interview. Learners were placed in streams or sets based on ability.

Evaluating the success of comprehensive schools is difficult for two reasons. First, due to the nature of British politics and what is effectively a two-party system, what one political party works hard to set up, the other party can work equally hard to change, modify or destroy when it gains power. Traditionally the Conservative Party has favoured the tripartite system while the 'old' Labour Party supported the idea of a fully comprehensive system. Until the Blair government came into power in 1997, the Conservative Party largely dominated post-war politics in England and Wales.

Consequently, they worked hard to destroy or attack any idea that comprehensive schools could be a success. Secondly, the idea of any 'comprehensive' system is that it works in the same way for a large group of people. However, in the case of comprehensive schools, they took their learners from what are referred to as catchment areas, that is, learners had to live in the immediate area around the school. That means that it is very difficult to compare, for example, a comprehensive school in an inner-city area to one in the leafy green suburbs.

There are four further difficulties in trying to measure how well comprehensive schools have performed in the past:

1. With a small minority of relatively well-off children attending private schools it is impossible to know how well comprehensive schools might have performed had these children attended them.
2. Measuring how well a school performs depends on what you are actually measuring, for example, examination results, the ability to take children from very low ability to a significantly higher ability, or the creation of an emotionally warm supportive and caring environment.
3. Although comprehensive schools were extremely popular, there were always a significant number of grammar schools around to 'attract' high-achieving learners. Had the grammar schools not been there, these learners would have attended the comprehensive schools and boosted the schools' overall examination pass rates.
4. Some comprehensives broke down many of the barriers between class, gender and race, however, a school's ability to do this is partially dependent on the locality of the school. A comprehensive in a predominantly white, middle-class area, for example, might not include learners from different ethnic backgrounds if they do not live in the catchment area.

The popular complaint, voiced by parents, that comprehensive schools lowered standards for high-achieving learners was used by the Conservative Party as an excuse to attack and restrict the number of comprehensive schools that existed. 'Progressive' and 'child-centred' approaches associated with much educational thinking of the 1960s were seen as partially to blame for growing discipline problems but comprehensive schools took disproportionate blame for the moral panic about education. By the 1970s the focus of blame was to turn to the teaching profession.



Discussion point

Many schools (more so than colleges) continue to stream and set learners. Despite the problems identified above, this is often a clearly thought-through approach to dealing with issues of 'differentiation' – the attempt to meet the different needs of different learners by targeting relevant support. To what extent do you agree with setting and streaming as a differentiation strategy?

'New' vocationalism

Vocational training refers to any type of training that is preparing people for the world of work. In many countries in Europe throughout most of the twentieth century, vocationalism was very much part of the school curriculum. However, in many parts of the UK in the 1960s, vocational training was viewed by governments as something that should be tackled in the workplace rather than in school. 'New vocationalism' referred to the change in the view by the government that vocational training should take place in schools and colleges. This form of vocationalism emerged in Britain in the late 1970s and, amid much debate, is still being developed within schools and colleges across Britain today (see Chapters 3 and 4). During the 1970s the British economy (as well as many other European economies) went into recession. British politicians were concerned about the rising levels of unemployment that this created and, in particular, rising youth unemployment. In 1976, at Ruskin College, Oxford, the then Labour British Prime Minister James Callaghan blamed teachers for the lack of skills that young people possessed. Schools, he argued, should improve vocational training and education to meet the requirements of industry.

Organisations and policies associated with 'new vocationalism'

- The Manpower Services Commission became the main agency in developing youth training in the 1970s.
- In 1978 the Youth Opportunities Programme was introduced to offer young people six months of work experience and 'off the job' training.
- In 1983 the Youth Training Scheme was introduced to offer school leavers a year of training in a variety of different occupations.
- In 1986 the National Council for Vocational Qualifications was set up to offer a nationally recognised system of qualifications.
- General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) were quickly introduced as alternative ways for young people to gain qualifications that were work orientated.
- With Curriculum 2000 (see below) came the introduction of Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education (AVCEs) which were to replace GNVQs and offer a qualification equivalent to two A levels.

The introduction of 'new vocationalism' can be criticised in four ways:

1. It might be argued that it was poor economic management by the British government that was responsible for unemployment rather than the lack of skills of young people.