

Edited by Denis Hayes



Joyful Teaching and Learning in the Primary School



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Introduction

Denis Hayes

When you decided to become a teacher were you motivated by the thought of becoming a slick, grey-suited government employee or a free-thinking, liberated educator? Did you sign up to be a teacher rather than (say) a civil servant or a lawyer because you wanted to spend hours on paperwork and form-filling or because you wanted to experience the joy of seeing ‘the light come on’ when children understand something and revel in the exhilaration that comes from sharing your time, enthusiasm and energy helping children to make sense of the world and find their place in it? Don’t tell me! I think I know the answer.

The recent past has seen the emergence of an objectives-driven education system, saturated with targets, criteria, tests and league tables. The emphasis on ‘performance’ has threatened to, and sometimes succeeded in, stifling creativity, innovativeness and the elation that should accompany teaching and learning. More recently the government has accepted that too much of the formal curriculum and prescribed teaching methods are ‘joyless’ rather than ‘joyful’ and promoted new initiatives to (in their words) ‘drive up standards’ – but do we *really* want children and school staff to feel ‘driven’ in this way?

These central initiatives to enhance creativity and innovative practice have tended to be in the form of *appendages* to the curriculum, taking the form of (for example) a whole-school arts, science or literature week, rather than necessarily being at the heart of the regular teaching programme. While these additional learning experiences have, for the most part, been appreciated and valued by the children and staff, the underlying challenge is to lift *regular* teaching out of the ‘identify objectives/plan/resource/deliver/assess/adjust your approach’ model – which represents the ‘mechanics’ of teaching but not the artistry of it – and fashion circumstances in which even ordinary lesson content can generate more excited anticipation and enjoyment among teacher and taught. Such a dynamic situation will be characterised by a combination of carefully prepared ideas and spontaneous threads to create a joyful working environment that motivates children, with the inevitable positive impact on formal standards of achievement.

The approach described above is posited on a belief that the process of raising standards is not rooted solely in a desire to gain higher test scores but, crucially, in the enthusiasm for learning it elicits in pupils, coupled with the joy of teaching the subject or subject area experienced by teachers.

Joyful Teaching and Learning in the Primary School will be of greatest interest to trainee teachers and is based, as the title suggests, on a belief that the mechanistic, objectives-driven route to pupil achievement can and should incorporate a more spontaneous, learner-centred element. Teachers and pupils alike need a spring in their step and a belief that learning is not solely about the predictable but the unpredictable, and that the curriculum is less about ‘covering’ than about ‘uncovering’ storehouses full of priceless knowledge.

This book combines, in a readable form, practice and theory about the joys of teaching and learning, offering both a subject-orientated and thematic view of ways in which teaching and learning can be enjoyable and enjoyed. It offers an alternative view of achieving high standards by *inspiration* as much as by *perspiration*! The philosophy of the book is rooted in a comment made by Susan Isaacs more than 75 years ago:

The children themselves are the living aim and end of our teaching. It is their thought, their knowledge, their character and development, which make the purpose of our existence as schools and teachers. And it is the modes of their learning and understanding, their physical growth and social needs, which in the end determine the success or failure of our methods of teaching. (1932, p11)

Joyful Teaching and Learning in the Primary School touches on the interactive relationship between teacher and children. It aims to demonstrate how it is the birthright of all children and the entitlement of every teacher to be empowered to exercise their latent creativity and inventiveness. You will be guided in your thinking and planning by the use of case studies, diagrams, key quotations, issues to think about and reflect upon, and action points relevant to classroom practice.

Every contributor to this book is passionate about the need to rekindle a deep love of and *for* learning in our schools. We feel confident that you will find the book uplifting, useful and – we most sincerely hope – joyful!

Denis Hayes

Reference

Isaacs, S. (1932) *The Children We Teach*. London: University of London Press.

Notes on contributors

All the contributors work for the Faculty of Education, University of Plymouth and share a passion for innovative and joyful teaching and learning.

John Berry spent over forty years as an academic in higher education and since 1991 has been Professor of Mathematics. He is now enjoying a part-time role as a research professor supervising graduate students; leading mathematics workshops for gifted and talented pupils; playing golf; gardening; singing in Wells Cathedral (God songs) and enjoying his first grandson.

John Burnett taught in primary schools before working as a class teacher in a Steiner school, taking classes of children through from the age of six to fourteen years. For the past fifteen years he has been supporting students as they prepare for teaching in Steiner schools. He loves gardening, literature and fell-walking with his two sons. His particular research interest is in spirituality in education.

Suanne Gibson completed her PhD 'middle management and the role of the SENCO' at Oxford Brookes University in 2002. She has publications in the field of special educational needs and currently works as programme director on the BA education studies degree.

Denis Hayes has worked in five schools, including two as deputy head and one as a head teacher. Since moving into Higher Education he has developed a particular interest in the school experiences of trainee teachers and creative teaching strategies. Denis finds joy in singing, walking his dogs and lay preaching, and has published numerous education texts.

Joanna Haynes is a qualified primary teacher, who taught in Glasgow and Bristol before moving to Devon to work in higher education. She has worked with all age groups in different settings: nurseries, schools, community, adult education, teacher training, continuing professional development. Joanna has published articles and books on philosophy with children and has been involved in contributing to conferences and running courses, inset days and thinking events for pupils over the past twelve years.

Rachael Hincks is a former assistant head teacher, with particular interests in science teaching and inclusive education, including working with pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language. In her spare time, Rachael enjoys cookery, relaxing at the beach and spending large amounts of time at the Eden Project.

Peter Kelly is Senior Lecturer on the integrated Masters Degree programme. He was formerly head teacher of two schools in South West England – an inner city middle school and a small primary school. He has published widely on educational issues.

Helen Knowler is an experienced primary practitioner and former advisory teacher supporting pupils who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. She is particularly interested in the professional development of teachers, teaching identity and the use of writing to develop critically reflective practice. Joy is food, books and learning!

Bill Leedham was formerly head of Devon LEA learning resource services, and has been a teacher, governor, parent and lecturer, as well as a provider of in-service training. He is also an educational consultant and illustrator and has a web-site – www.autolykos.co.uk – which provides free access to a range of resources and ideas for the teaching of history.

Jeff Lewis taught in mainstream and special schools before entering higher education. He has written widely in the fields of special needs, behaviour, philosophy and personal, social and health education. Despite recent trends in Education, he remains optimistic.

Margaret Mackintosh is a former primary teacher, who edited the Geographical Association's magazine 'Primary Geographer' for ten years. Wherever she travels, particularly in the Scottish highlands and islands and in developing countries, she takes a sketch book and paint box to record her experiences.

Mike Murphy taught in London schools where he enjoyed promoting history as alive and well. As a SENCO and deputy head teacher he has been involved in writing and publishing curriculum materials for primary and secondary pupils. When not 'undercover' in Cornwall he is a tutor on an integrated Masters Degree programme.

Linda Pagett has worked as a primary school teacher, and is deeply interested in creative approaches to teaching and learning, especially in the field of English. Her work in the field of performance poetry has been a focus for her publications.

Nick Pratt has worked in the mathematics education team since 1994. After a degree in Engineering he has since discovered that maths is more than just a tool to achieve a job. His interest is in how teachers can be helped to see the many fascinating insights it offers and how this affects the teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Tony Rea leads the outdoor education module on the BA degree in education studies and outdoor learning modules on an integrated Masters Degree programme. He has researched many aspects of outdoor learning and has written widely about these. In his spare time he enjoys travel, hill walking and sailing.

Janet Rose is a lecturer on both the Early Childhood Studies route for the BEd and the BA. Prior to this she worked as a teacher and researcher. Her research interests centre around the role of the adult in children's learning. For the rest of the time she is joyfully raising two young children.

Arthur Shenton has worked in primary, middle and secondary schools in England and Wales as a teacher of English, and in a number of senior management roles. He currently is delighted to have the opportunity to indulge his passion for reading and children's literature as the team leader for language and literacy at the University of Plymouth.

Emma Sime originally trained as a primary school teacher with a specialism in physical education and has taught in a number of primary schools throughout Devon. Through her work as team leader for PE at the University of Plymouth she is developing her interest in the impact that trainee teachers' experiences of the subject can have on their future practice. When not working she is extremely busy raising a young family.

Sue Waite enjoys engaging in educational research across a range of issues with affect as an overarching theme. She is particularly interested in the role of emotions and feelings in outdoor learning and pedagogy. A positive approach and the importance of enjoyment underpin all aspects of her life.

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Teaching joyfully

Denis Hayes

Introduction

Some years ago I worked with a colleague who was sceptical about the claim that effective teaching depended in large measure on the level of inspiration and the strength of relationships between teacher and pupils. He argued that parents merely wanted their children to be taught by someone who was well-informed, would get them through their tests and exams as quickly as possible and prepare them for secondary school. Most of us involved in primary education (indeed, *any* form of education) might be uneasy about such a mechanistic view of education:

Get them in → Get them taught → Get them through their exams → Move them on to the next stage

Yet my colleague was only expressing what some politicians and educationists have been claiming for years, namely that the teacher's job is to provide children with subject knowledge and opportunities to master the formal curriculum so that they can be groomed for success in the plethora of national tests they will have to face during the school years. Governments have staked their reputations on improved results and spent considerable amounts of public money to 'drive up standards'. Alongside the euphoria, however, deep concerns have been expressed about the pressure that satisfying these external demands places on teachers and children and the curriculum impoverishment that results. The strength of these counter-arguments is already having a positive effect on government thinking; they have led to much greater attention being paid to the significance of creativity and experiential learning. Good news!

Every survey about primary teachers' motivation concludes that they not only want their pupils to do well academically but also to mature socially, emotionally and spiritually. This desire is reflected in the way that teachers speak of 'my children' rather than 'our pupils' and talk endlessly about children who delight them or cause them concern. If two or more teachers meet they will agree not to talk about school and end up doing precisely that! Being a teacher really is a way of life, as you will quickly discover. But there's much more to being a teacher than 'delivering' a lesson. Read on.

Becoming a qualified teacher

A generation ago the majority of primary school teachers were trained in teacher training colleges that were designed specifically for that purpose. Student teachers spent blocks of time in school (a period referred to as 'teaching practice') supervised by a tutor from the college. The role of the host school was principally to provide placement opportunities for the students to practise and hone their classroom teaching skills.

Over recent years the situation has changed markedly. First, preparation for teaching has shifted from an emphasis on *educating* student teachers (encouraging them to develop their own educational priorities) to one of *training* (inculcating into them centrally

imposed priorities), with strings of national targets attached to classroom practice and school membership (known as 'standards') that have to be met. Second, this change of emphasis has resulted in a change of vocabulary, such that student teachers are more often referred to as 'trainee teachers' or 'trainees', and for simplicity these terms will be employed throughout the remainder of this chapter. Third, the dominance of the old teacher training colleges in preparing new teachers has been replaced by an active partnership with schools. Fourth, time in schools not only offers opportunities for trainees to practise their teaching but also to gain experience of the varied aspects of school life outside the immediacy of the classroom: planning, staff meetings, extra-curricular activities, parent meetings and dealing with external agencies (such as social workers) as part of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda.

Schools involved in preparing new teachers are expected to provide programmes through which trainees are timetabled to meet with key persons in the school (e.g. subject leaders, special educational needs coordinators/SENCOs), to 'shadow' staff undertaking different roles, such as observing an experienced teacher in PE or working alongside a teaching assistant who is supporting an autistic child, and to attend relevant meetings, such as curriculum workshops and discussions about implementing the latest government initiative.

The school-based training programme allows you to learn from and offer ideas during curriculum meetings, share your own expertise with colleagues and contribute to wider school activities, such as sports days, fetes, educational visits and special events (e.g. an arts or science week). It pays to immerse yourself in these experiences as deeply as you can, as once qualified there always seem to be other pressing priorities that require attention.

The role of tutors from the training-providing establishment (commonly a university faculty of education) tends to be as much one of facilitator and guardian of standards as advising trainees about classroom and professional practice, a task increasingly undertaken by the host teachers. A school-based tutor, often known as *the mentor*, liaises with the university tutor, oversees the trainee teacher's progress and makes judgements about the final grades. In addition to the mentor's comments, the class teacher and other host teachers frequently provide verbal or written feedback to trainees about the quality of their classroom work and contribution to school life. You therefore have access to advice and support from at least four sources.

- **the tutor from the training-provider;**
- **the tutor (mentor) in the school;**
- **the class teacher;**
- **other colleagues.**

Most trainees benefit considerably from this reservoir of expertise, though some find mediating the various views and attitudes of the different advisers to be a challenge. Trainee teachers not only have to satisfy the criteria for competence ('fulfilling the standards') but also to convince the different adults involved in the supervision (class teacher, mentor, tutor) that they are taking their advice seriously and acting upon it. Every trainee learns the importance of maintaining an open dialogue with each significant person in school and demonstrating a willingness to implement their suggestions, so it is essential to keep discussing and sharing insights and concerns with your colleagues.

There are also events that impinge upon the regular teaching programme and affect every person in school. These 'intrusions' include the annual national testing, inspections, interviews for staff vacancies, festivals, anniversaries and extended assemblies

that require flexibility and occasionally necessitate a last-minute change of plans. Throughout these occasions, it pays to remain upbeat and take the variations in your stride without complaint.

TO THINK ABOUT

- The reason many people go into teaching is to revisit the joy they experienced when they were learners.
- Aim to become the sort of teacher that you would want for your own children.

Key Quote

Schools should be about providing a sense of hope for all, not achievement for the few. (Anon)

CASE STUDY 1.1

The first week

A trainee teacher, Rachel, wrote in her diary about the first few days on school experience, as follows:

It's the end of the first week of my school placement and I feel quite positive, as actually the week went better than I'd anticipated. I'm doing a lot more teaching than I expected and I have been up quite late planning, sometimes until after midnight. I enjoyed the staff development day about teaching English. I would like to get really organised with the planning so that I'm doing less of it during the working week.

My lessons went fine today. I taught RE which went down surprisingly well and I also told them about the life of children who worked down mines. A lot of the class seemed quite excited about it and generally listened carefully, though there are a few whose attention wandered and I need to work out some way of getting them involved and interested. I must also try to cut down on the content of each lesson because I try to pack too much in, but apart from that things have been going okay. I'm off to write my weekly reflection now and then I must start organising the weekend so that I can get all my planning and preparation fitted into the busy schedule. The teachers in school are warming to me; they seem to be getting much more amenable, if that's the right word, and we're building up a rapport. For the first couple of days I was very anxious about my relationship with the class teacher because she didn't seem to have much time to discuss matters. I appreciate she's got to prepare children for the tests and a lot of things are going on in school but I needed her exclusive attention. Anyway, we seem to be getting much closer now. She's smiling when she talks to me and hopefully everything will be fine. My confidence and enthusiasm are rising fast!

ACTION POINTS ACTION POINTS ACTION POINTS ACTION POINTS ACTION POINTS

- > It takes at least a week for most people to settle into a new school situation, so you must be patient and persevere.
- > Trainee teachers are strongly influenced by the host teacher's attitude towards them, so it is vital for you to facilitate a good rapport by being personable, responsive and supportive of colleagues.

The complex task of teaching

Developing competence

Very few people seem to be completely natural teachers in the sense of knowing instinctively what to do and how and when to do it. All trainees possess attributes that are useful for the job but also have areas of weakness that require development. Whether they are 'naturals' or 'grafters', trainees have to be willing to listen to advice and hone their classroom practice.

Demonstrating your competence is rooted in good *subject knowledge* and its employment in teaching, *skill acquisition* (e.g. giving clear explanations, use of the whiteboard), *demonstrating professional judgement* influenced by careful reflection on practice (characterised by dozens of daily decisions about what to say, how to behave and when to act), willingness to *draw on and respond to advice* from experienced colleagues and an ability to *work as a team member*. No wonder trainees get tired!

The Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA) has analysed teaching by means of an itemised checklist, in a belief that skills and strategies can be identified, mastered and implemented to create a seamless robe of competence. However, judging teaching effectiveness needs to take account of personal intention, pupil disposition, the intelligent application of knowledge and the interrelatedness of dozens of different decisions that impinge on teacher–pupil interactions. Even when set criteria are used, their *interpretation* requires professional judgement with regard to the prevailing school and classroom priorities that have been established by the host teachers.

While there is a need to take close account of externally imposed targets and the need to maintain academic standards, you must resist the temptation to 'teach to the test'. The best teachers learn to strike a balance between following a predetermined lesson plan and responding to spontaneous opportunities. The more confidence you gain as a teacher, the more willing you become to trust your instincts. Making correct judgements about when to be didactic (teach directly with minimal pupil contribution) and when to promote discovery learning (in which you provide an open-ended task for children to investigate with minimal adult intervention) and when to use a mixture of the two demands sensitivity to the curriculum content, insight into the way that children learn best (Harnett, 2007) and an awareness of time constraints. Sometimes you would like children to explore ideas fully when time factors oblige you to employ more direct teaching methods. However, you can still make the lesson 'come alive' by your enthusiasm, attention to detail and responsiveness to the children's ideas. In fact, the more you involve children in their learning and discuss with them how they learn, the more enthusiastic they become.

One of the attractions of being a teacher is the freedom and flexibility attached to the various roles that teachers are called upon to play. At the same time they have to respond rapidly to specific situations that require them to exercise judgement and act decisively. The best practitioners are constantly alert to unanticipated learning opportunities that emerge during a session and 'mining' them fully. The lesson plan then becomes a guide and not a straitjacket. Richards (2006) helpfully comments:

I believe that primary teaching is an extremely complex activity, whether considered in theoretical or practical terms. It's an amalgam of so many elements: interpersonal, intellectual, physical, spiritual, even aesthetic. It changes subtly in form, substance and 'feel' hour to hour, lesson to lesson, class to class, year to year. It involves notions such as 'respect', 'concern', 'care' and 'intellectual integrity' that are impossible to define but which are deeply influential in determining the nature of life in classrooms. (p13)

Making progress as a teacher

All new teachers take time to adjust and settle into the school and find their feet in the classroom. Trainees who start slowly sometimes accelerate and exceed expectations once they gain confidence. Some trainees who initially make strong headway may fail to achieve their potential, either because they become exhausted with the effort they have made early in the placement or because their initial promise owed more to enthusiasm than to ability.

It is unwise to compare yourself with a fellow student who, in your eyes, seems to be making better progress than you are. Every placement situation is different and makes varied demands on the trainee. Concentrate on the task in hand and don't be unduly distracted by praise or by criticism – just keep learning, persevering, contributing and celebrating.

A characteristic of successful teachers is *professional humility* as they strive to improve their practice while acknowledging their limitations and giving credit to the contribution that colleagues make to their development. Naturally, the attitude of the trainee teacher is a crucial factor in this regard. One trainee teacher might be hardworking, diligent, responsive to advice and impressing the teacher with her or his positive attitude. Another trainee may come across as sullen or lazy or unwilling to face his or her limitations. It is obvious that the first trainee will prosper whereas the second will languish. A minority of talented trainee teachers are reluctant to accept advice in the mistaken belief that they do not have anything more to learn, but such an attitude annoys the host teachers and stifles progress. By contrast, a trainee who shows an eagerness to improve and is willing to confront weaker areas will grow as a professional and gain the admiration and approval of colleagues. Making a determined effort to gain a positive reputation will greatly assist you in your quest for success.

While acclimatising to your placement situation it is helpful to remember that the class teacher has to make adjustments in accommodating you in the classroom, not least in relinquishing a degree of control over the class and trusting you to maintain standards in pupil learning. Thankfully, every survey indicates that the large majority of trainee teachers are placed in supportive environments (e.g. Hayes, 2003). It is highly likely that you will find yourself surrounded by sympathetic colleagues and receive clear guidance from the tutor and class teacher, which, together with your own gritty determination, ensures that your time in school is well spent.

In practice the majority of trainees make gradual and cautious progress most of the time, like someone trying to climb carefully up an icy slope. They edge forward, only to slip back due to unexpected problems, inexperience in knowing where to place their efforts and the effects of exertion. However, just as suddenly they make an unexpected breakthrough and teaching seems effortless. Your progress as a teacher also resembles a ride on a fairground roller-coaster as opposed to standing on a gently ascending escalator – and far more exciting! If you sometimes feel that your teaching is becoming worse, do not despair; it is because your expectations of yourself have grown.

TO THINK ABOUT

Your professional learning does not accumulate on top of existing knowledge like bricks in a wall; rather, it is an active, dynamic process in which ideas and understanding criss-cross and amalgamate.