

INTRODUCTION

About this book

Teaching is an extraordinarily difficult job that looks easy.

(Labaree, 2008, pp 298–9)

Who is it for?

This book is intended for all those involved in preparing teachers for the primary and secondary classroom, but I hope that it will be useful both to anyone who is interested in developing their educational practice and to those who would like to share in some of the ideas that have emerged from Keele University's 60 years of experience of teacher development.

Context and approach

We have found that the most successful and enduring approach is one with a coherent underlying ethos (Cruikshank, 1981; Connell and Edwards, 2014). The ideas laid out in this book have been generated at Keele over many years of involvement in teacher preparation, research and professional dialogue within and beyond our current teacher education partnership.

Our ethos is one which emphasises an understanding of what lies behind our pedagogy; that is, the personal, interpersonal, political and cultural context in which we work. We are trying to understand two main things:

1. what it means to be '*more fully human*' (Freire, 1971, p 28) and
2. '*how human beings achieve a meeting of minds, expressed by teachers usually as "how do I reach the children?" or by children as "what's she trying to get at?"*' (Bruner, in Leach and Moon, 2007, p 5).

Teachers and pupils are conceptualised as human beings first, rather than as '*a regime of numbers*' (Ball, 2013, p 103); that is, a source of data used to tell a story of government efficiency and teacher failings (Ozga, 2008). Further, using Bruner's words again, in this ethos pupil and teacher are seen in relation to subject knowledge as '*active, intentional being(s), with knowledge as "man-made" rather than simply there*' (p 19).

As a team of teacher educators, we try to support teachers to base their educational practice on developing a particular '*pedagogical disposition*' (Kruger and Tomasello, in Leach and Moon, 2007, p 6). We have adapted Kruger and Tomasello's idea that humans have a seemingly innate tendency to '*demonstrate correct performance for the benefit*

of the learner' (ibid). Our interpretation of the idea is that the fundamental pedagogical disposition can take different forms which connect to our personal and professional beliefs about education.

The aim is not to impose an ethical straightjacket, as that would be contrary to the idea of criticality and creativity. Instead, we try to open up ways of thinking which allow student teachers themselves to develop in relation to primary or secondary pedagogy in a way that takes them far beyond national teacher standards.

Teacher dispositions

The ethos for the dispositions can be distilled into the phrase '*developing practitioners who are reflexive, critical and creative and want their practice to flourish in an on-going way*'. The three basic dispositions are outlined below and developed in the main chapters of the book.

1. A reflexive disposition

Practitioners cultivate awareness of their own pedagogy and a desire to go on developing it. They seek out the means to create and sustain an inclusive learning environment for their pupils, which is engaging, exciting and empowering, so that understanding, knowledge and skills are strengthened and advanced in a way that leads pupils to see that learning really is for life. In creating such a learning environment, teachers practice sensitivity to their own cognitive and emotional needs and to the needs of others. They are able to reflect on their own experiences and values, and respect those of others. At the same time, they want to expand their own and others' cultural and cognitive horizons. They consider what it means to be human.

2. Disposed towards being critical

They take issues of equity and social justice for all seriously. They think in a disciplined way and empower themselves with rigorous subject knowledge. They seek meaning informed by evidence, but do not accept evidence passively, choosing instead to question it actively, seeing it in context. They use all this to exercise good judgements on pedagogy and curriculum which are always taken in the light of '*what it would mean truly to flourish as a human being*' (Higgins, 2010, p 213).

3. Disposed towards being creative

Practitioners use experience, knowledge and sensitivity to think through teaching, learning and curriculum in new ways, allowing scope for informed alternative explanations and conceptions. They practice '*a pedagogy of hope*' (Freire, 2006, p 1) rather than of despondency. They consider it necessary to cultivate their practice and their own development, so that they have a wide and considered perspective to offer to their pupils.

Although pupils are at the centre of what they do, creative practitioners realise they have to nurture their own creativity in order to renew and sustain themselves (Higgins, 2010).

These three dispositions taken together describe what we consider to be the basis of a flourishing educational practice. They could be seen as somewhat rhetorical, but if we take Higgins' argument seriously, that teachers need to cultivate themselves in order to provide the conditions for pupils to flourish, then we can use the 2012 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report to make an economic, as well as a humanist case for the dispositions.

In order to effectively meet the economic, political and social demands for competencies much more is required of students and adults than just cognitive proficiency (Levin, 2012). Consequently, education systems should be evaluated in terms of their capacity to develop all aspects of human potential, ranging from subject-specific achievement to socio-emotional, psychological, ethical and behavioural aspects.

(OECD, 2013, p 21)

Content

In order to avoid writing a book that is largely rhetorical in nature, all the statements regarding the dispositions are based very firmly in the reality of the practice of the Keele-school partnership, consisting of the university and up to 60 secondary schools. All chapters contain practical ideas on how to put this particular professional ethos into practice. But without some link to theory, practical ideas can be simply tips for teachers and lose any connection with a coherent principle. So the ideas put forward do have a theoretical and ethical basis, and have proved fruitful in the reality of our own context of teacher preparation in a British university-school partnership.

Throughout, this book draws on ideas from a range of writers to give a sense of the richness of theory in educational practice. In Chapters 2, 3 and 4, however, the number of thinkers is deliberately restricted to show how specific theories can be used to relate directly to practice. There is some recommended reading at the end of each chapter, which contains publications having particular significance for the topic. The references section at the end of the book contains the authors, dates, titles and publisher of any writing referred to.

CRITICAL ISSUES

- *Why call it teacher education?*
- *What is a disposition and why does it matter?*
- *Why do teachers need to go on developing?*
- *Why does development need to start early?*
- *Why is it not selfish to want a flourishing practice?*

Education, not training: what's in a word?

Case study: Joe's lesson

Although it was a cold afternoon, the south-facing classroom was hot and stuffy. Eight Year-10 pupils were spread out amongst the tables for their Spanish lesson; two girls both called Sarah sat with the only two boys of the group, three girls sat at the table next to them and Clara sat at the furthest corner of the furthest table, with her head on her arms and her eyes closed. The student teacher had prepared a model lesson, full of good practice, moving from group activity to a series of competitive games using mini whiteboards, to the core of the lesson, which was 'improving written course-work'. But the pace of the lesson gradually slowed. The two Sarahs had ceased to bother, the boys had worked on a couple of their sentences, nobody seemed quite sure what the three invisible girls at the middle table had done, and Clara was sitting glaring at the two Sarahs. Joe, the student teacher, moved from pupil to pupil, encouraging, asking questions, showing, suggesting ideas, but the pace slowed even more and everybody seemed glad when the bell rang. When the pupils had left, Joe sat despondently on one of the tables. Before the lesson, Joe's school mentor Clare, Joe and myself, as Joe's university tutor, had had a conversation about the relative merits of the term 'teacher training' and 'teacher education'.

Clare: You have an idea of what teaching is about before you go into it, so it's not a case of being educated like a pupil ... You are trained, but your training would differ from school to school ... but I suppose the basics of teaching are the same ... What's expected is the progress in your class. Making progress, here anyway, is the cornerstone of every lesson. You train someone to do that. How are you going to do that?