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Professional Studies in Primary Education

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CHAPTER 13

'LEARNING TEACHING' IN SCHOOL

Pete Boyd

By the end of this chapter, you should understand:

- that continued teacher learning is needed to maximise pupil learning
- that you need to be proactive in managing your work and workplace learning
- the importance of developing your professional identity as a teacher
- that you need to critically question both public (published) knowledge and practice
- that metaphors for learning are useful tools.

Introduction

Many practitioners working in the early years and primary age ranges may be heard to argue that 'you learn to teach by teaching'. This chapter broadly agrees with this view but argues that professional learning is most effective when the

practitioner critically questions both public (published) knowledge and the practical wisdom of teachers within a particular setting. The chapter shows you how to maximise your professional learning while teaching in schools. It introduces seven workplace learning 'tools', which will enable you to plan, analyse and develop your practice, now and throughout your career. Each of the workplace learning 'tools' is a concise introduction to selected key ideas from workplace learning theory. Working through tools one to six will help you to understand the final, seventh tool which offers a metaphor for professional learning as 'interplay' between teachers' practical wisdom (what works in this school) and public knowledge (in the form of published theory, professional guidance and policy). However, each workplace learning tool can be selected and applied independently to a critical incident or issue that you have experienced. The final section of the chapter summarises the characteristics of effective professional development for teachers and challenges you to be proactive in making the most of your workplace learning opportunities.

Seven workplace learning tools

In proactively managing your professional development, it is important that you understand some key ideas about how teachers learn through their work. Teaching is a complex and challenging activity that requires a professional commitment to lifelong professional learning. In the short term the busy classroom teacher may claim to be prioritising the needs of the learners, but in the medium term the learners will benefit from the continued professional learning of their teacher. It is important to find time and space for your own professional development because your learning will enhance the learning of the children you teach. As proposed by John Hattie (2012) you need to continually ask the question 'what is my impact?', meaning what effect are you having on pupil learning? This teacher enquiry approach is the key to becoming and being an effective practitioner.

The seven teacher workplace learning tools proposed here for your practical use are:

- 1 Conceptions of an 'outstanding teacher'
- 2 Teacher enquiry
- 3 Pedagogical content knowledge
- 4 Teacher identities
- 5 Learning communities
- 6 Expansive workplace learning environments
- 7 A situated metaphor for teacher learning.

Workplace learning tool 1: Personal conceptions of an 'outstanding teacher'

One of the initial problems with becoming a teacher is that all of us have experienced a mix of school, college and university as learners. That adds up to thousands of hours of observing teachers at work. Many of us will have at least one lasting memory of a really outstanding and inspirational teacher. Of course, this experience is of value as we seek to become great teachers ourselves, but we are likely to have built up conceptions of an 'outstanding teacher' based on fragile assumptions and with ourselves positioned as 'the learner'. These personalised conceptions of teaching and learning are 'folk pedagogies' and need to be questioned (Bruner 1996). Learning to teach also means that we need to shift attention away from our 'performance' as a teacher onto the experience of our learners. As a beginning teacher you will have opportunities to observe teaching and learning in classrooms. It is important that you focus on the learning outcomes of the learners and that you are prepared to question the underlying assumptions you may have about what makes a good teacher. This kind of 'unfreezing' of existing ideas is very challenging and may lead to a period of uncertainty for you, but it is essential if you are to develop as a teacher.

Even when you have gained experience as a teacher in one or more schools, your own practice history will be both a support but also a potential limitation when you attempt to improve practice or when you move to a new school workplace. Awareness of your history, your identity as a teacher and your current repertoire of teaching and learning strategies, will help you to be a critically aware practitioner who is able to keep on learning.

To become a great teacher it is not sufficient to merely mimic the approach of other teachers. You need to gain some insight into what they are doing and why. This is because classrooms are varied, complex and dynamic workplaces involving relationships, and you will need to respond to your own classroom and develop your own personal approach to working with learners and other adults (Baum 2009). The effective teachers that you observe may find it difficult to explain what they are doing; much of their practical wisdom is held as tacit, instinctive and hard to explain to others. Teachers' professional learning may be understood as a social 'interplay' that involves identity, relationships and emotions, as well as knowledge of subject content and pedagogy. It is a personal and career-long rewarding and challenging journey, through which you will be continually *becoming* a teacher.

Being prepared to continue your professional learning requires resilience and this is all about your emotional experience of teaching. Teacher 'resilience' means the ability to bounce back and may be defined as the ability to 'recover strengths

of spirit quickly in the face of adversity' (Gu and Day 2007: 1302). Based on their large study of over 300 teachers, Gu and Day argue that resilience is closely connected to your sense of vocation as a teacher and to your self-efficacy. In relation to vocation they mean your sense of commitment to improving children's learning and lives and by self-efficacy they mean your belief that you can continue to improve as a teacher and make a positive contribution. Early in your career you will need to respond to both positive and negative experiences within your school workplace. Based on your own educational experiences you may have an idealised view of what kind of teacher you wish to be and you may need to make compromises in the face of the reality of your school workplace and the wider educational policy framework.



Reflective task

What kind of teacher do I want to be? What kind of teacher do my learners need? What kind of teaching maximises their learning? How are my conceptions of good teaching shaped by my prior experience and my current workplace context? What kind of teacher could I become? How do my personal ambitions as a teacher fit into my current school workplace and the wider educational policy framework?

Workplace learning tool 2: Teacher enquiry

Teacher enquiry is a broad term covering critical questioning of practice at different levels, from everyday evaluation of lessons through to a full practitioner research project. Enquiry-based teacher learning will involve some level of data collection and analysis, including observation, gathering and analysing pupils' voices or pupils' work, and analysing data on pupil progress. It may also involve engagement with different perspectives such as sharing practice with other teachers or with published texts and research journal papers. Through your initial teacher training and continuing professional development, you will come across a range of different enquiry-based activities, including some of the following:

- Evaluation of teaching; based on assessment of children's work and/or test scores
- Observation of teaching: followed by professional conversation
- Student voice: gathering and analysing the views of children
- Action learning: a group of teachers sharing issues and supporting each other
- Lesson study: collaboratively plan, teach, evaluate and re-teach a specific lesson

- Achievement data analysis: using grades or other measures of student progress
- Practitioner research: systematic collaborative research projects.

The most ambitious activity proposed, a systematic collaborative practitioner research project, is a powerful way to lead change in practice and drive school improvement (Lankshear and Knobel 2004). Most initial teacher education programmes will include an introduction to practitioner research. In order to become a confident and skilful practitioner researcher, for example capable of leading a challenging whole-school project, many teachers will initially take part in a collaborative research project or will complete a practitioner research focused Masters in Education award. Many qualified teachers choose to study towards a Masters award after gaining some experience in the classroom. A suitable programme will help you to develop research and leadership skills in addition to building an in-depth understanding of educational issues in your chosen area of specialism.

For teacher enquiry to reach the highest level of 'practitioner research', a key requirement is that the investigation is 'systematic' (Lankshear and Knobel 2004 p. 20). Characteristics of teacher 'research' identified by Lankshear and Knobel are:

- a carefully framed research question or issue that is manageable
- a research design that matches your research question
- an analytical framework ... a concept or theory used as a lens to study the problem
- a feasible and ethical approach to gathering data
- systematic analysis and interpretation of the data
- a research report or presentation that draws conclusions, identifies implications for practice and is subject to peer review.

The level of teacher enquiry you are able to pursue will depend on your work situation and the support available.



Reflective task

To what extent are you regularly adopting a teacher enquiry approach in your work? Which enquiry activities might be of use to you in handling current issues in your practice? How might you strengthen your approach to enquiry by collecting and analysing data, sharing practice with other teachers or engaging with relevant published guidance texts and research papers?

Workplace learning tool 3: Developing pedagogical content knowledge

There are conflicting views about what is meant by the professional knowledge of a teacher and it is a contested area of theory. However, one well-established idea is that the teacher brings at least two kinds of knowledge together. These are 'content knowledge' and 'pedagogical knowledge'. The 'content knowledge' means the curriculum subject being taught, for example geography or mathematics, and the 'pedagogical knowledge' means how to teach. The overlap of these two areas of teacher knowledge are sometimes referred to as pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and this means the teacher's grasp of key concepts in the subject and how to teach them effectively, including knowing the most powerful explanations, metaphors, demonstrations and practical examples to make the subject comprehensible to learners (Shulman 1986; Banks et al. 2005). This relationship is shown in Figure 13.1.

It is possible to introduce new content or pedagogical ideas in a lecture or seminar but really developing 'professional content knowledge' requires work-based learning through being a teacher in your own classroom. Your teaching and professional learning will be shaped by ideas, rules and objects that seem commonplace and taken for granted in your workplace, for example a 'scheme of work' or the school's idea of 'excellent work' will affect your decisions and approaches. Your understanding of a key concept within a curriculum subject will shape your approach to teaching the lesson, but so will the view of how to teach that concept held by your teaching team or mentor teacher. However, do not forget that as a recent graduate you will have new knowledge to bring to the school. A useful way to focus on pedagogical content knowledge is to step back from the planning or evaluation of a lesson and ask 'what are the big ideas or key concepts, within the subject, underpinning the purpose of this lesson?'

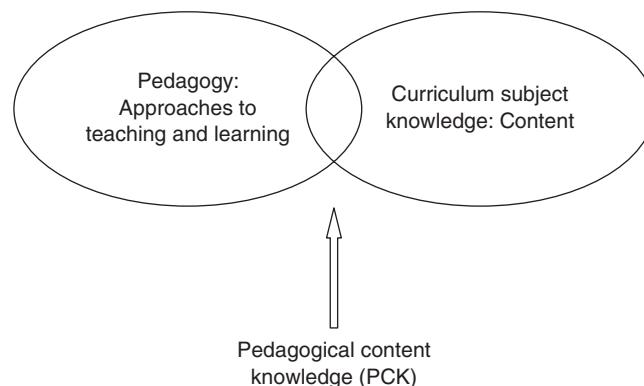


Figure 13.1 Illustrating the concept of pedagogical content knowledge



Reflective task

How well do I understand approaches to teaching and learning? How well do I really identify and understand the key concepts that form the content of my lessons? How are resources in the school or the views of other teachers influencing my teaching?

Workplace learning tool 4: Professional identity

It is necessary to 'become a teacher' through gaining teaching experience and critically reflective learning on that experience. It is not effective to simply 'tell' someone how to teach. Becoming a teacher means building a professional identity, a developing story that you tell about yourself, concerning the kind of teacher you are. As an individual you will have multiple identities, interweaving professional identity with other aspects of your life, and these develop over time to form trajectories of identity, as illustrated in Figure 13.2.

Your identity as a teacher may have different strands within it, for example from your first degree you may have an identity associated with a subject discipline, such as 'historian' or 'physicist'. You may be an enthusiast in a hobby or leisure activity that helps to define you and influences your practice as a teacher, such as 'movie critic' or 'mountaineer'. Within your workplace you should try to identify one or two identity role models – these will be teachers who you might model yourself on. It may just be a particular characteristic of a teacher that you admire and seek to develop. It is also worth considering what teacher identities are highly valued within your workplace and how closely they align to the kind of teacher you want to be. Your professional identities will develop in negotiation with your practice, meaning

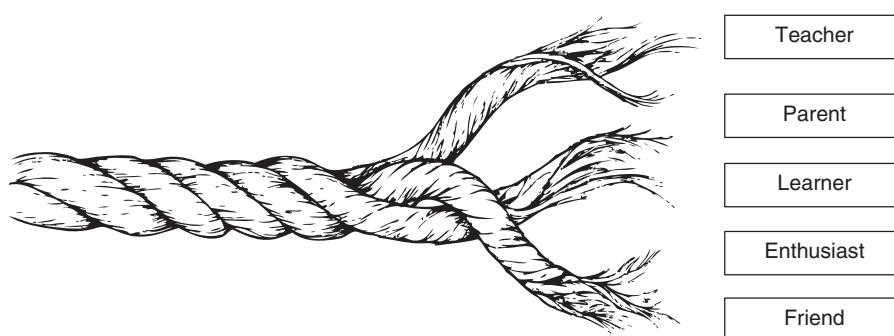


Figure 13.2 Showing trajectories of identity: multiple interwoven stories about self developing over time

that the story you tell about yourself as a teacher is related to your approach to classroom teaching (Wenger 1998). This means that ‘practice and identity’ can be added to the teacher knowledge diagram, as in Figure 13.3.

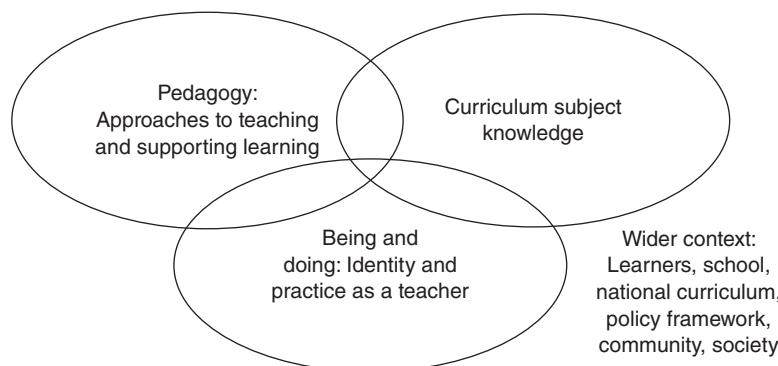


Figure 13.3 Illustrating how your teacher knowledge, identity and practice are related

This more complex diagram suggests that your practice and identity are overlaid with content and pedagogical knowledge to make your professional knowledge more personal and more grounded. The surrounding rectangle represents the wider context of your teacher knowledge, including the school in its community and wider society, within an often rapidly changing educational policy framework. This diagram emphasises the interrelationship between the cognitive, emotional and social aspects of being a teacher. The central overlapping area represents great lessons when everything comes together to promote effective learning. It is important for teachers to do ‘identity work’ as part of their ongoing professional learning. This means reflecting on your development as a teacher, using one or more collaborative activities with other new teachers, such as writing and sharing narratives, using short talking head video clips and using metaphors.



Reflective task

What are the strands that I bring together to form my identity as a teacher? What kind of teacher am I? What teachers or combination of teacher characteristics provide a role model for development for me as a teacher? How effectively do my lessons reflect the teacher identity that I wish to develop?

Workplace learning tool 5: Professional knowing in learning communities

From a situated learning perspective, teachers working within a school may develop a shared sense of purpose and form a 'community of practice', by developing a collaborative repertoire, for example, of teaching strategies and ways of working. A student or beginning teacher will hopefully be welcomed as a newcomer and through negotiation will gradually build a sense of belonging and eventually become a full member of the group (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Teacher expertise from this perspective becomes more about professional *knowing* than knowledge (Blackler 1995). This teacher 'knowing' is dynamic, situated, social, contested and shaped by the tools, rules (sometimes unwritten rules), values and key ideas within the school as a workplace.

As a newcomer teacher it is important to understand the history of the group of teachers you are joining, to acknowledge the unwritten rules in force, to recognise that you bring something new and can aim to participate and also to contribute. You will need to appreciate the power involved in any community of practice, with some teachers in the group claiming status, for example by long membership or by holding a promoted post. The newcomer will need to be resilient and determined to learn from setbacks as well as successes, and to handle disappointing learner behaviour, challenging feedback, and even occasional knock-backs from more established teachers in the school. This is close to the kind of resilience we would hope to develop in our learners.

The concept of 'communities of practice' has been developed through the study of apprentices (Wenger 1998). Arguably the teachers' workplace is more complex and the practice of teaching is more contested than many apprentice crafts (Fuller et al. 2005). The concept of a 'learning community' combining elements of situated learning with organisational and change literature has underpinned school improvement efforts internationally. More recent thinking on communities of practice (Wenger 1998) takes account of modern, complex professional workplaces by considering a workplace as a 'constellation' of overlapping communities of practice. The overlapping communities or networks that you might experience or seek to develop include: a formal teaching team or department in your school; a less formal group of colleagues in school that you find you can relate to and tend to share and collaborate with; some teachers in a partnership school; a subject specialist network of teachers (for example, the Geography Association or the Association for Science Education); one or two colleagues that you trained with and keep in touch with; an informal mentor teacher you use occasionally for informal support; a group of teachers that are completing a part-time Masters programme with you ... and so on. These examples range from networks both within and external to your school and from more formal professional arrangements to more informal social contacts. Some

networks will be face to face and others will be blended or fully online. You will need to be personally proactive in developing such networks as they will support your professional learning and career development. If you fail to get promotion or a particular post in the future, it is no good reflecting back and blaming the head teacher or the school for not providing sufficient opportunities or training. Much professional learning is informal and can be pursued whatever your work situation; even formal professional development programmes requiring fees will mainly provide a framework to provoke or support your workplace learning.



Reflective task

Is there a shared purpose and repertoire within my school workplace? What are the unwritten rules and who holds different kinds of power within the team, department or school? How am I gaining membership of the community and what might I contribute? Who are my current mentors and am I managing those relationships and making the most of their support? What other communities or networks do I belong to and how might I strengthen and develop my professional networks?

Workplace learning tool 6: Expansive workplace learning environments

The concept of an expansive workplace learning environment was applied in a study of secondary school teachers and developed a continuum of expansive to restrictive workplace environments, shown in Table 13.1.

Even if you are fortunate to work in a school with a more expansive workplace learning environment, you will require resilience – an ability to sustain your commitment and manage tensions between your personal and professional identities (Gu and Day 2007). In considering your workplace learning environment it is important to bear in mind that we all have agency; we are able to shape our workplaces as well as experience them. By acting with integrity, being willing to openly share our practice with trusted colleagues, and by maintaining an ethical code, we can help to influence our workplace learning environment. Even in a restrictive workplace environment, it will be possible to form a community of practice with like-minded colleagues in or beyond the school. This is a key point of this chapter; the onus is on you, as a learning professional, to be proactive in pursuing your professional learning and career development. Some teachers claim that they are too busy to pursue their own learning and that they prefer to focus on the needs of their learners. But you need to prioritise your professional learning for the benefit of your pupils because you will soon be of little use to

Table 13.1 Illustrating the workplace learning environment expansive–restrictive continuum for teachers (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2005)

<<<EXPANSIVE	RESTRICTIVE>>>
Close collaborative working	Isolated, individualist working
Colleagues mutually supportive in enhancing teacher learning	Colleagues obstruct or do not support each other's learning
An explicit focus on teacher learning, as a dimension of normal working practices	No explicit focus on teacher learning, except to meet crises or imposed initiatives
Supported opportunities for personal development that go beyond school or government priorities	Teacher learning mainly strategic compliance with government or school agendas
Out-of-school educational opportunities, including time to stand back, reflect and think differently	Few out-of-school educational opportunities, only narrow, short training programmes
Opportunities to integrate off-the-job learning into everyday practice	No opportunity to integrate off-the-job learning
Opportunities to participate in more than one working group	Work restricted to home departmental teams within one school
Opportunity to extend professional identity through boundary crossing into other departments, school activities, schools and beyond	Opportunities for boundary crossing only come with a job change
Support for local variation in ways of working and learning for teachers and work groups	Standardised approaches to teacher learning are prescribed and imposed
Teachers use a wide range of learning opportunities	Teachers use a narrow range of learning approaches

pupils if you do not continue to learn. You may one day be an expert teacher with 10 years of experience *or* a beginner teacher with one year of experience repeated 10 times.

A particular issue in schools is the often very high levels of accountability (for example, pressure for high test or exam results) and the high-risk quality review process (in the UK that means Ofsted inspection). At least three of the 'restrictive' characteristics in the continuum seem relevant to those schools where responding to review body expectations, post-inspection action plans, and review body criteria seem to dominate professional development activity. It is an important element of professional integrity that the learners' needs, in their broadest sense, are the number one priority for all teachers and schools. This is a dilemma that you will come across and need to handle carefully, understanding the pragmatic priorities of school leaders in response to review bodies but also working to go beyond those requirements to achieve excellence in terms of outcomes for learners.

The continuum in Table 13.1 helps to show how professional learning is situated and social, and the issue around review bodies and school inspection highlights the contested nature of teachers' professional knowing.



Reflective task

How does your current school workplace learning environment seem to fit into the expansive–restrictive continuum? How are you contributing to your workplace learning environment? How are you proactively seeking learning opportunities within your workplace? To what extent does your workplace environment encourage teachers to move beyond review body requirements and strive for excellence in responding to learner needs and maximising their potential?

Workplace learning tool 7: A metaphor for professional learning

In our everyday talk as teachers we use metaphors, linguistic representations, as a powerful method of capturing the experience of learning (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). For example, two important metaphors for student learning have been proposed as ‘acquisition’ and ‘participation’, reflecting in turn transmissive and social constructionist theories of learning (Sfard 1998). As an example, language used by a teacher such as ‘I delivered the topic’ may reveal the underlying use of the acquisition metaphor for learning.

Despite their apparent usefulness, some popular metaphors may be misleading and we would argue that an example of this is the flawed metaphor of a ‘gap between theory and practice’. The theory–practice gap metaphor is very widely used in teacher education and development. It is often used subconsciously and underpins statements such as ‘we need to apply that theory to practice’ or ‘all that theory is irrelevant because we know in practice what works in our school’. The theory–practice gap presents professional knowledge or knowing as either one or the other, either abstract theory or what works here, whereas these kinds of knowledge are interwoven within the complexity of the successful classroom teacher’s approach.

An alternative metaphor is that teachers’ professional learning is an ‘interplay’ between vertical public (published) knowledge and the horizontal practical wisdom of teachers (Boyd and Bloxham 2013) illustrated by Figure 13.4.

In this metaphorical framework public knowledge is seen as foregrounding published work, including theory texts, research papers, professional guidance books or other resources and also policy documents. This public knowledge is seen as a vertical knowledge domain because of the way it is hierarchically structured and holds power because of its published status. The horizontal domain of practical wisdom of teachers foregrounds ‘ways of working’ in particular classrooms and educational workplaces. This knowledge is situated and socially held by teaching

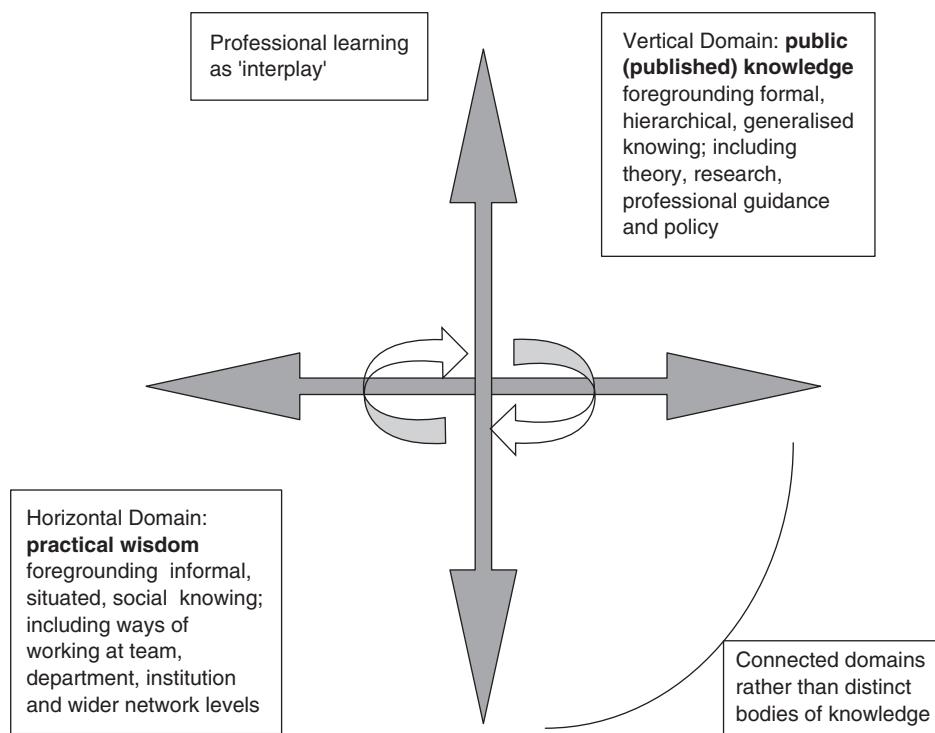


Figure 13.4 A situative metaphor for teacher learning (Boyd and Bloxham 2013)

teams and includes tacit knowledge and unwritten rules, although it is also likely to include elements whose origins could be traced back to forms of public knowledge.

Professional learning may be considered as an 'interplay' between these two domains. The metaphorical term 'interplay' helps to capture the complexity, dynamism and element of power involved in this learning. It is important for teachers to critically consider the metaphors they hold and use, for their own professional learning and for the learning of their students (Martinez et al. 2001).

The metaphors we hold for our own professional learning and for children's learning are important because they shape our practice. In this case we propose that you consider your professional learning as a teacher to be an interplay between the vertical public knowledge domain and the horizontal practical wisdom domain. When considering critical incidents or your general progress as a teacher, this metaphor recognises the high value of local, socially held ways of working but challenges you to also critically question and engage with relevant public knowledge, policy, professional guidance and learning theory. Teachers are busy professionals and are usually embedded in their particular school. Clearly they will place high

value on the practical wisdom held by the teachers and other staff in their workplace. However, this may make it too easy for teachers to limit their repertoire of teaching strategies and adopt locally held assumptions and expectations about the children in their school. Engaging critically with public knowledge adds an element of externality to your professional learning and helps to avoid circular thinking and conservatism in your school improvement efforts.



Reflective task

What metaphors do I hold for the learning of my students and how do they shape my approach? How might the interplay metaphor help me to understand and plan my professional learning when working as a teacher? How will I maintain critical engagement with public knowledge as part of my ongoing professional learning?

Using the seven workplace learning tools

As an alternative to considering one tool at a time to review a critical incident or issue that you are handling in your work, you might prefer to reflect on the incident or issue using all of the tools. Table 13.2 provides a framework for this approach.

Table 13.2 Showing how the seven workplace learning tools may be applied to a particular critical incident in your work

Workplace learning tool	Key idea	Key question
1 Conceptions of an 'outstanding teacher'	We all hold conceptions of a good teacher and good teaching based on our personal experiences.	What beliefs have I brought to this incident or issue from my personal history?
2 Teacher enquiry	Teacher enquiry is a necessary process in order to interpret and use policy, guidance, research evidence and theory in our classrooms.	What data have I collected and analysed and how do my findings relate to policy, guidance, research evidence and theory?
3 Pedagogical content knowledge	Curriculum subject knowledge must be combined with knowledge of teaching, learning and assessment.	In this topic what are the key curriculum subject concepts and what teaching strategy am I using to engage students with them?
4 Teacher identities	Teachers develop multiple trajectories of identity—beliefs about themselves as a teacher which are in negotiation with their classroom practice.	What kind of teacher do I want to be and what are the implications for my response to this incident or issue?

Workplace learning tool	Key idea	Key question
5 Learning communities	Collaboration with other teachers, staff, parents and wider networks is an essential element of a teacher's workplace.	How is collaboration with colleagues helping me to resolve this incident or issue?
6 Expansive workplace learning environments	Expansive workplace learning environments encourage teacher learning, collaboration, experimentation and boundary crossing.	How does my workplace environment support or restrict my response to this incident or issue?
7 A metaphor for teacher learning	My learning as a teacher is an interplay between the vertical public knowledge domain and the horizontal practical wisdom of teachers in my workplace.	How am I engaging with relevant knowledge from vertical and horizontal domains to inform my response to this incident or issue?

The following scenario illustrates how the seven workplace learning tools might apply to one scenario involving a student teacher, Phil, following a visit from his university tutor.



Work in school

Phil :

I was really pleased with the way my teaching placement was going. I have good control of my Year 5 class and I have taken care to implement the class teacher's schemes and routines. She's so pleased with me that she has given me a considerable level of independence. So I was surprised and disappointed when my school-based mentor observed my literacy lesson and was very critical of a lack of challenge and of assessment.

University tutor :

Perhaps my feedback has challenged your conceptions about what good teaching looks like (Tool 1). You need to gather evidence of children's learning through formative assessment strategies and analyse the level of challenge in your lessons (Tool 2). Identify the key concepts that the lesson is focused on and consider how they are best taught and assessed (Tool 3). Perhaps you should reflect on the value you place on achieving a quietly busy classroom through good behaviour management? You seem to admire the 'strict' teachers in the school but need to decide if you want to be the kind of teacher that manages behaviour or that nurtures learning (Tool 4).

Phil :

I do agree that in this school there is a big emphasis on behaviour management. However, the other Year 5 teacher seems very interested in

(Continued)

(Continued)

experimenting with innovative learning activities so maybe I should ask to observe some of her teaching (Tool 5)? I am not sure if that is what student teachers in this school normally do, but I guess it will not hurt to ask (Tool 6).

University tutor: I also think that you might go back to read again about some of the principles of assessment for learning with its emphasis on creating opportunities for formative assessment and the development of a positive classroom learning climate where it is OK to make mistakes and to struggle with challenging tasks (Clarke 2008). You might experiment with some challenging learning activities and consider how your children respond (Tool 7).

Phil : I agree that seems to be a good next step but I must admit it might be a bit awkward if I start to change some of the classroom routines that the class teacher has in place. I guess I need to go one step at a time, negotiate with the class teacher, and see if I can involve her in my enquiry by observing or helping to assess the children's work.

Analysis

This final modest action plan by Phil reflects the influence of several of the tools introduced in this section but above all it shows that he is willing to be proactive in terms of his professional learning and in terms of influencing his workplace. Making a contribution to the development of children's learning, appropriate to his current situation, is part of being a professional teacher and of becoming a member of a learning community. It is also important to recognise that each of us is able to shape our workplace and help to make it more expansive.



Reflective task

Select a critical incident or issue that you are currently dealing with in your classroom teaching and use one or more of the workplace learning tools to help to critically reflect on what happened and what action you will take in response.

Effective professional development for teachers

Extensive review of research has identified the key characteristics of effective continuing professional development for teachers (Cordingley et al. 2003). Effective continuing development involves:

- sustained engagement by the teachers with an issue or new approach
- collaboration and good levels of trust between the teachers involved
- external input and challenge from engagement with new information or evidence
- an element of classroom coaching, putting ideas into action with peer feedback
- perseverance because change in classrooms takes time to become embedded.

Within these characteristics the requirement for some 'external input and challenge' might come from an online resource, a professional guidance or research text, and/or an external consultant or programme. This externality means that your professional learning does not simply consist of copying the practice you find in your current school. Teaching is a dynamic and contested practice and your professional learning must engage you in questioning the evidence base beyond your workplace boundaries.

Managing workload and priorities

Teachers work hard – in the UK primary teachers work on average around 50 hours per week during term time (OME 2008). To remain effective and healthy it is important that you manage your workload and maintain a sense of control and of confidence in your impact as a teacher.

Teachers have experienced intensification of their work over the last 20 years; they are handling increasing pressures from the external policy framework, from parents and from school leaders (Apple 1986). A useful study of Belgian primary teachers found that when they experience 'calls for change', they are motivated by their commitment to children's learning to filter these demands and use professional judgement in implementing new top-down initiatives (Ballet and Kelchtermans 2009). The study showed that the mediating effect of school leaders, the quality of the collaborative workplace environment and the strength of individual teachers' professional identity were all important factors in controlling intensification. A study in Canada highlighted the importance to new teachers of social support from colleagues to create a feeling of all 'being in this together' (Pomaki et al. 2010). This

study suggests that it is important for new teachers to find ways to interact with colleagues and build informal alliances, as well as using the more formal support offered such as a formal mentor and your programme teaching team.

Much of the general guidance on time management for busy professionals focuses on prioritising tasks and making lists. However, it is important to clarify your personal mission before time management is likely to become effective (Covey 2004). You need to be clear on what kind of teacher you want to be and what your career ambitions are. Once these are identified then they form a basis for planning work effort. It is all too easy to become distracted by seemingly urgent but actually unimportant tasks and to ignore important non-urgent longer-term goals. Long- or medium-term planning, building long-term relationships with colleagues, and making steps towards being the kind of teacher you want to be are the kind of mission-critical activities that you need to prioritise (Covey 2004). By planning your work on a weekly basis, including personal, family and social priorities, you should be able to plan some time to devote to your strategic priorities, including your continued professional learning.

Children are entitled to support from teachers who maintain their continuing professional development, who experience a reasonable work-life balance and who have collaborative support from their colleagues. Despite the undoubtedly constraints in some schools, teachers have some autonomy and ability to influence workplace culture and to prioritise their own work effort.

Managing your mentors

Some kind of formal mentoring is likely to be part of the support provided for you as a new teacher. If the formal arrangements are not in place then you should do your best to find an informal mentor yourself. Identify a colleague that you respect and trust – usually they will be within your school but that may not always be possible. Having a mentor is potentially a very positive and useful resource but in itself it does not represent an enquiry-based strategy. You should aim to use the workplace learning tools proposed in this chapter in collaboration with your mentor so that you have a useful framework and data to consider. It is very important that you are proactive in managing your relationship with your mentor in order to make the best use of the opportunity. If you are wary of your formally appointed mentor then work to build trust but also draw your own boundaries concerning what you are willing to share with them and seek another informal mentor with whom you feel able to share practice honestly. This issue of being proactive in managing your own professional learning is an important message on which we can close this chapter. School workplaces vary enormously as learning environments. Rather than relying on the school or blaming colleagues, it is for you to take charge. Decide what kind

of teacher you wish to become and then start the work of achieving that goal. Many experienced teachers will claim that being a great teacher is a natural gift. Some of them are in senior positions and really should know better. There are many very effective teachers with a wide range of styles and you will need to work hard and with a proactive approach to your own learning to develop your own style and become the teacher you want to be.

Summary

This chapter emphasises the importance of teachers planning proactively for their professional learning while teaching in schools, in order to develop their teacher identity and their capacity to make decisions about their practice, rather than being clones of a particular policy or context. In order to do this the notion of seven 'workplace learning tools' was introduced and you were encouraged to use these to analyse critical incidents in school. This chapter argues that the seventh workplace learning tool, the metaphor for professional learning as the interplay between public knowledge and the practical wisdom of teachers, is the key to your continued professional development.

Questions for discussion

- To what extent do working conditions, resources and the culture of schools support teacher enquiry with critical questioning of both the practical wisdom of teachers and public knowledge?
- How proactive are you being in planning for your professional development? What are your next steps in prioritising your workplace learning?

Further reading

Eaude, T. (2012) *How Do Expert Primary Class Teachers Really Work? A Critical Guide for Teachers, Headteachers and Teacher Educators*. St Albans: Critical Publishing.

If you are interested in workplace learning theory then this concise and accessible guide will be of interest. It introduces key ideas around the nature of expertise and then discusses how some primary teachers use their expertise to maximise children's learning.

Hodkinson, H. and Hodkinson, P. (2005) 'Improving Schoolteachers' Workplace Learning', *Research Papers in Education* 20(2): 109–31.

This is a useful study that used the expansive–restrictive workplace learning environment framework to investigate the workplaces of school teachers. The paper will help you to consider what kind of school workplace you currently work in, how you might be proactive in enhancing that environment, and what kind of school you would like to work in.

Lankshear, C. and Knobel, M. (2004) *A Handbook for Teacher Research: From Design to Implementation*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Teacher practitioner research is a powerful approach to enhancement of your practice and of your children's learning. This text provides a thorough overview of research design, ethics, data collection and analysis. It will help you to complete formal research assignments as part of your initial teacher education and Masters programmes and to use a collaborative practitioner research project as a driver for change in your school.

Twiselton, S. (2004) 'The Role of Teacher Identities in Learning to Teach Primary Literacy', *Educational Review* 56(2): 157–64.

This is a very useful paper for new teachers. It focuses on the professional learning of student teachers as they develop from holding identities as 'classroom managers', through to 'curriculum deliverers' and in some cases to 'concept builders'. You might consider which of these apply to your own practice and how you are progressing. You might also consider to what extent we perhaps all revert to classroom manager approaches on a wet and windy Thursday afternoon in November!

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