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# 'Learning Teaching' in School

Pete Boyd

By the end of this chapter, you should understand:

- that your continued professional learning is essential to maximise pupil learning
- that you need to be proactive in managing your work and workplace learning
- that you should work on the development of your professional identity as a teacher
- that you should question public (published) knowledge and the practical wisdom of teachers
- that metaphors for learning are useful tools.

## Learning to teach

Many teachers and trainees will insist that 'you mostly learn to teach by teaching'. But inspirational teaching is an extremely complex activity that, to the untrained eye of those who have never had to do the job, looks easy (Labaree, 2000). This chapter presents seven workplace learning tools so that you do not end up, having established yourself as a professional teacher, claiming for example to have '10 years of classroom experience' when in fact you merely have '1 year of classroom experience, ten times'. The seven workplace learning tools provided here will help you to develop throughout your career by becoming an enquiry-based teacher who

continually gains professional learning from classroom and school experiences. These tools are developed from workplace learning theory, but as Kurt Lewin, the inventor of action research, famously claimed (1951), ‘there is nothing so practical as a good theory’. Ironically, if you are to add these tools to your professional toolkit, then you will need to try them out for real, not just read about them. So take your time in reading this chapter, or read it more than once. You need to take ownership of the tools by using them in practical ways to shape your professional learning from classroom and school experiences.

## Seven workplace learning tools

Great teaching is a complex, challenging and relational 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 their learners, but in the medium term those 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? It is possible to aim beyond merely raising attainment by asking the question ‘what is my impact on learning and on learners?’ (Boyd et al. 2015). Asking this daily question is a first step to becoming an enquiry-based teacher, a powerful professional who is able to contribute fully to curriculum development and school leadership.

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, including even newly appointed ministers for education, 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, all this experience is of value if 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 for the learners and how the lesson might influence their dispositions or 'habits of mind' (Costa and Kallick, 2014). You must question the underlying assumptions you 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. Chapter 2, p. ?? began this process by asking you what you thought primary education is for and to define your philosophy of education. It may be that you have already started to develop or modify these ideas.

Even when you have gained experience as a teacher in one or more schools, your own practice history will be both a support and a potential limitation when you attempt to improve practice or when you move to a new school workplace. Awareness of your history, your developing 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 and able to adapt to different educational workplace contexts.

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 (Bauml, 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. That teaching is complex creates a challenge for sure, but it also makes becoming a teacher enjoyable and continually satisfying.

Being prepared to continue your professional learning requires resilience and this is all about your emotional experience of everyday 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, p. 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. Resilience is not simply a personal trait of ‘bouncebackability’; rather it is relational and can be nurtured in both teachers and pupils through developing supportive learning environments (Day and Gu, 2007). Early in your career you will need to respond to both positive and negative experiences within your school workplace learning environment. 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. A first step is always to find a friend, collaborate with a colleague!

### Reflective task

Start to create a written mission statement about the kind of teacher you want to be. Reflect on how your conceptions of good teaching have been shaped by your own educational experiences as a learner. What kind of teacher do your current learners need? What kind of teaching maximises their learning? How do your personal ambitions as a developing teacher fit into your current school workplace and the wider educational policy framework? Whom might you work with to help build trust and resilience and support for your continued professional learning?

### 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 basic statistical data on pupil progress. It may also involve engagement with different perspectives such as sharing practice with other teachers and critical engagement with published professional guidance and educational research.

Through your initial teacher education programme 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; Baumfield et al., 2014). 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 Master's level practitioner research focused course. Many qualified teachers choose to study towards a Master's 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 or generating 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, the support available and your access to public (published) knowledge including theory and research evidence. You need to develop some degree of

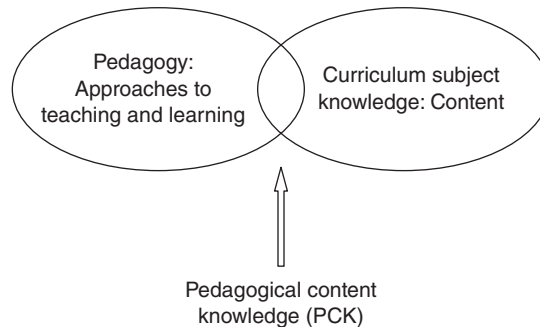
research literacy so that you are able to adopt a critical stance towards different forms of research evidence and understand both its value and its limitations. For example, the online research meta-review Teaching and Learning Toolkit from the Educational Endowment Fund (EEF, 2015) is a powerful and accessible source of research evidence but is limited by the narrow scope of selected research on which it is based (randomised control trial intervention studies), and by the contested approach to measuring and summarising the impact of classroom interventions on learning. It is important that you adopt a critical questioning stance to research evidence in all its forms. Increasingly research is becoming open access but it is important to be able to identify and give priority to more reliable peer reviewed research journal papers.

### Reflective task

Identify a key issue that you are currently dealing with in your development of classroom practice. Are you able to refine a clear enquiry question? What theory, research evidence and professional guidance materials seem relevant to your question and how are you engaging with these forms of public knowledge? To what extent are you experimenting by making (small) changes in practice within your classroom and then evaluating them? How are you gathering and analysing data (evidence of learning) and sharing your findings with other teachers?

### 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 is sometimes referred to as pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). PCK 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 16.1.



**Figure 16.1** Illustrating the concept of pedagogical content knowledge

Primary teachers in the UK generally teach across the curriculum and so have the considerable challenge of developing curriculum subject knowledge in a wide range of subject disciplines. It may be feasible for you to learn new curriculum content knowledge from colleagues, a suitable text, online resources or a taught course, but the development of PCK requires work-based learning through enquiry-based experimentation in your own classroom.

Planning, both short-term for lessons and medium-term for topics or units of work, is often focused on the identification of tightly defined learning outcomes. Although they are useful planning tools, it is important to be aware that learning outcomes might be viewed as forming the cutting edge of high accountability educational systems such as in England. School inspectors in such a system may be seeking evidence of measurable progress and this may distort the purpose of learning outcomes. The purposes of education are about more than raising attainment in standardised tests (see Chapter 2). Lessons and units of work should include some degree of open enquiry so that children might learn to take their place as global citizens and have space to develop as unique individuals (Biesta, 2010). A useful way to focus on PCK is to step back from the planning or evaluation of a lesson and ask 'what is the big idea or key concept, within the subject discipline, that underpins the purpose of this lesson?' This approach may also have a social justice element because *all* children should develop knowledge and enthusiasm for learning by tasting rich cultural knowledge at school and it is not sufficient or equitable for some to be served with the thin gruel of 'teaching to the test' (see Chapter 3).



## Reflective task

Evaluating a lesson or sequence of lessons consider the following prompt questions and discuss your reflections with a trusted colleague. What were the intended learning outcomes and did they include some space for children to respond creatively and individually to the lesson(s)? What teaching and learning activities did I use and to what extent do they extend my repertoire of pedagogical strategies? What key concepts within the subject discipline were pupils engaging with? How did the lesson(s) help children to build rich cultural knowledge and develop as citizens and as individuals, as well as preparing them for their next test?

## 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. Teaching is emotional and relational work, it involves you in building relations with children and with colleagues. Therefore, 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 16.2.

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



**Figure 16.2** Showing trajectories of identity: multiple interwoven stories about self developing over time

helps to define you and influences your practice as a teacher, such as 'movie critic' or 'mountaineer'. You will also have distinctive cultural characteristics that shape your identity. Within your workplace you should try to identify one or two identity role models – these will be teachers whom 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 that the story you tell about yourself as a teacher is related to your approach to classroom teaching (Wenger, 1998). This means that it is helpful to add 'practice and identity' to the teacher knowledge diagram, as in Figure 16.3.

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 area surrounding the three overlapping circles 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 ongoing professional learning. This means reflecting explicitly on your development of identity as a teacher, using one or more collaborative activities with other new teachers, such as writing and sharing narratives. But it is important to realise that your identity as a teacher is likely to be developing whenever you reflect on your work, particularly where you are collaborating with peers, for example, in analysing classroom video or the work your children have produced.

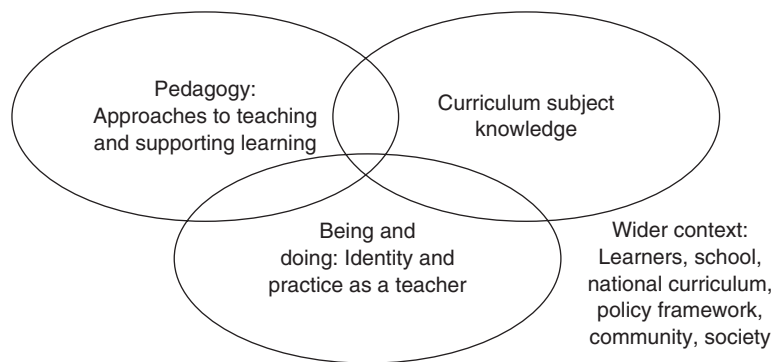


Figure 16.3 Illustrating how your teacher knowledge, identity and practice are related

### Reflective task


Do some thinking around your developing identity as a teacher and develop it within a written mission statement. What are the strands that I bring together to form my identity as a teacher? What kind of teacher am I and what kind do I want to be? What teachers or combination of teacher characteristics have I seen that provide an identity role model for my development as a teacher? How effectively do my lessons, and my relationships with children and colleagues, reflect the teacher identity that I wish to develop? What are my medium- and long-term goals in terms of making a strong professional contribution as a teacher?

### 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 trust and purpose and so form a 'community of practice', by developing a collaborative repertoire, for example, of teaching strategies and ways of working. Membership of such a collaboration is voluntary, although sometimes formal groupings, such as a teaching team, may develop into a community of practice. A student or beginning teacher interested to join such a group 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). The formation of professional learning communities of teachers has been widely introduced as part of school improvement efforts (Bolam et al., 2005) but these formal groupings may not always manage to develop open dialogue; for example, they may be too dominated by managers and thus fail to support enquiry that challenges established ways of working (Fenwick, 2001; Watson, 2014).

Teacher expertise from the sociocultural perspective of communities of practice becomes more about professional *knowing* than knowledge (Blackler, 1995). This teacher 'knowing' is dynamic, situated, social, contested and shaped by the tools, rules (including 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 are able to bring new knowledge and can aim to participate and also 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). 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 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; a group of teachers in partnership schools with a shared interest; a subject specialist national network of teachers, for example, the Geography Association or the Association for Science Education (see Chapter 20, p. ). The group may be 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 Master's 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

Identify relevant professional learning communities and action plan to strengthen your membership and contribution. Is there a community of practice, a group of teachers with shared purpose and repertoire, that I might join within my school workplace? What are the unwritten rules and who holds different kinds of power

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within the community? In what ways am I gaining membership of the community and how might I contribute? Who are my current mentors and am I proactive in managing those relationships and making the most of their support? If there does not seem to be a community of practice within my current workplace, then is it possible to start one collaborating with a colleague? What wider teacher networks might I join to support my professional learning?

### Workplace learning tool 6: expansive workplace learning environments

The concept of an expansive workplace learning environment, originally developed in a wide range of workplaces, was applied in a study of secondary school teachers and the researchers developed a continuum of expansive to restrictive workplace environments, shown in Table 16.1. You should evaluate your current workplace against the continuum in Table 16.1 and consider how expansive or restrictive your workplace seems to be.

**Table 16.1** Illustrating the workplace learning environment expansive–restrictive continuum for teachers (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2005)

<<<Expansive	Restrictive>>>
Close collaborative working Colleagues mutually supportive in enhancing teacher learning	Isolated, individualist working Colleagues obstruct or do not support each other's learning
An explicit focus on teacher learning, as a dimension of normal working practices Supported opportunities for personal development that go beyond school or government priorities	No explicit focus on teacher learning, except to meet crises or imposed initiatives 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 Opportunity to extend professional identity through boundary crossing into other departments, school activities, schools and beyond	Work restricted to teaching teams within one school 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

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: although school managers have a responsibility to develop an expansive workplace learning environment, you have also have a responsibility 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 pupils if you do not continue to learn.

A particular issue in schools is that teachers and other school leaders are often operating within very high levels of accountability, including measurement of school performance by test or exam results, high-stakes school inspection systems and school league tables. At least three of the 'restrictive' characteristics in the continuum in Table 16.1 seem relevant to those schools where responding to school inspector expectations, post-inspection action plans and inspection system 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 managers in response to inspectors but also working to go beyond those requirements to achieve excellence in terms of wider educational outcomes for learners.

The continuum in Table 16.1 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

Develop an action plan for your professional learning so that you are making the most of the learning environment in your current workplace. How does your current school workplace learning environment seem to fit into the

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

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 school inspector requirements and strive for excellence in responding to learner needs?

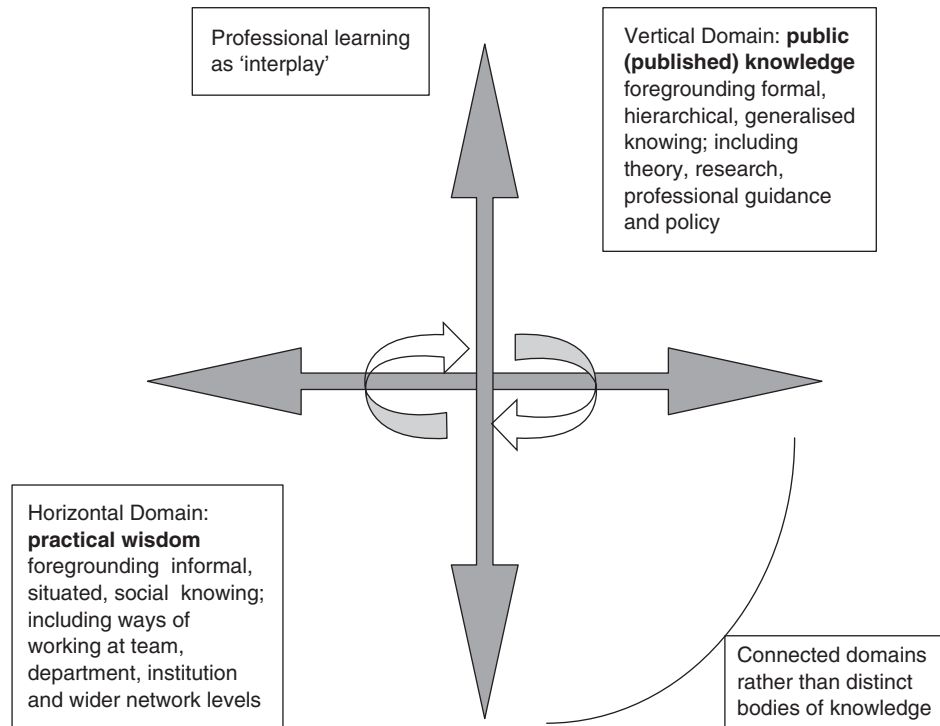
### Workplace learning tool 7: a metaphor for professional learning

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 in higher education have been proposed as ‘acquisition’ and ‘participation’, reflecting in turn transmissive (learning as being told) and Social Constructionist (learning through dialogue) theories of learning (Sfard, 1998) (Social Constructivist Theory is explained in Chapter 1). 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. 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 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 the vertical public (published) knowledge domain and the horizontal practical wisdom of teachers knowledge domain (Boyd and Bloxham, 2014; Boyd et al., 2015) as illustrated by Figure 16.4.

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 the way that it holds power because of its published and peer reviewed status. The horizontal domain of practical wisdom of teachers foregrounds ‘ways of working’ in particular



**Figure 16.4** A situative metaphor for teacher learning (Boyd, Hymer & Lockney 2015).

classrooms and educational workplaces. This knowledge is situated and socially held by teaching teams and foregrounds tacit knowledge and unwritten rules, although it is also likely to include elements whose origins could be traced back to forms of public knowledge. This horizontal knowledge domain holds power because of its practical credibility, because the teachers are the ones doing the actual job and they know 'what works here'.

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 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. The metaphor of interplay helps to capture the power play and complexity involved in developing research-informed practice as a teacher. Classrooms are complex and education as a field is multi-paradigm, meaning there are different theoretical perspectives available by which to understand a single practical problem. This complexity makes education interesting and challenging, it is all part of the fun and satisfaction of being an educator.

### Reflective task

Adopt the teacher professional learning as ‘interplay’ metaphor. Use this metaphor to check that your approach to evaluation includes critical consideration both of accepted ways of working within your school and of relevant external public knowledge. Consider how you are maintaining critical engagement with public (published) knowledge as part of your ongoing professional learning. Be aware that some theory is seductive, it seems like common sense and appears to be clear cut, and so it is important to adopt a questioning stance of critical engagement that asks ‘how reliable is this information and what does it mean for my teaching and my children’s 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 16.2 provides a framework for this approach (also see Chapter 19).

**Table 16.2** 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 that 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?
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

A student teacher, Phil, is considering feedback from his mentor, who is a class teacher in the school. He discusses this with his visiting university tutor:

*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 imple-

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

ment 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.

*Tutor:* Perhaps her 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 who manages behaviour or who 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 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).

*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 okay 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.

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.

### 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. You may feel that this chapter is giving you yet another task to fit into your busy week as a teacher. And you would be right about that! But by adopting 'enquiry as stance' (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009), equipped with the seven workplace learning tools, you will be more resilient and more effective.

Teachers have experienced intensification of their work over the past 20 years; they are handling increasing pressures from the external policy framework, from parents and from school leaders. 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, 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 undoubted constraints in some schools, teachers have some autonomy and ability to influence workplace culture and to prioritise their own work effort.

### Formal professional development opportunities

This chapter has emphasised how you should make the most of informal workplace professional learning, but this is not intended to diminish the possibilities of powerful learning from more formal professional development programmes and projects. Gaining a Master's level award will establish you as a practitioner researcher and prepare you to lead curriculum development through enquiry. Joining a collaborative research project should support your development of researcher knowledge and skills. A research review entitled *Developing Great Teaching* is available online and provides a useful checklist of the characteristics of effective professional development for teachers (Higgins et al., 2015). Some of the characteristics of effective professional learning for teachers identified in the report have been summarised here:

- The provision provides time but also has a rhythm that enables teachers to engage with new ideas and follow up the activity, for example, through classroom experimentation and further consideration.
- The content is able to capture the attention of teachers because of its relevance for pupil learning and their day-to-day work in the classroom.

- The provision builds a shared sense of purpose among the teachers and being voluntary or compulsory is less important than this.
- The 'activities for teachers' has some alignment to the principles of student learning being promoted.
- The provision focuses on pedagogy but is embedded in a particular curriculum subject.
- There is a focus on translating the content of the professional development into the classroom, for example, by experimentation and evaluation, including analysis of evidence of learning.
- An external facilitator may be associated with the provision, acting as a coach or mentor and often in tandem with school-based colleagues, introducing new knowledge and building the leadership capacity of participating teachers.
- There is a good level of trust and collaboration.
- The professional development activity is supported by proactive school leadership so that it is part of a strategic vision and development plan.

You might use this list of characteristics as a check list, when deciding on which formal professional development opportunities you wish to engage in.

### 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, particularly in a small primary school. 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. The seven 'workplace learning tools' are presented for your practical use in answering the everyday question of an enquiry-based teacher: what is my impact on learning and on learners? Above all this chapter argues that the seventh workplace learning tool, the metaphor for professional learning as the interplay between public published knowledge and the practical wisdom of teachers, is the key to your continued professional learning.

### 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

Boyd, P., Hymer, B. and Lockney, K. (2015) *Learning Teaching: Becoming an Inspirational Teacher*. St Albans: Critical Publishing.

This compact book focuses on learning power and is designed around five of the most critical dilemmas that teachers face in their everyday work: belief vs. ability; autonomy vs. compliance; abstract vs. concrete; feedback vs. praise; and collaboration vs. competition.

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 want to learn more about 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.

Baumfield, V., Hall, E. and Wall, K. (2013) *Action Research in Education*. London: Sage. 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 Master's programmes, and to use a collaborative practitioner research project as a driver for change in your school.

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