

INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATION

THE
CHALLENGE
FOR
TEACHERS

John Eggleston

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INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATION

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THE CHALLENGE FOR TEACHERS

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FOREWORD

The 1980s and 1990s have witnessed unprecedented changes to the education system. These have had a dramatic impact, particularly in relation to:

- schools' relationships with parents and the community;
- the funding and management of schools;
- the curriculum;
- the assessment of children's learning.

It can be an extremely daunting task for student teachers to unravel the details and implications of these initiatives. This Introduction to Education series therefore offers a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of educational theory and practice in the light of recent developments.

The series examines topics and issues of concern to those entering the teaching profession. Major themes representing a spectrum of educational opinion are presented in a clear, balanced and analytic manner.

The authors in the series are authorities in their field. They emphasize the need to have a well-informed and critical teaching profession and present a positive and optimistic view of the teacher's role. They endorse the view that teachers have a significant influence over the extent to which any legislation or ideology is translated into effective classroom practice.

Each author addresses similar issues, which can be summarized as:

- presenting and debating theoretical perspectives within appropriate social, political, and educational contexts
- identifying key arguments
- identifying individuals who have made significant contributions to the field under review
- discussing and evaluating key legislation
- critically evaluating research and highlighting implications for classroom practice
- providing an overview of the current state of debate within each field
- describing the features of good practice

The books are written primarily for student teachers. However, they will be of interest and value to all those involved in education.

Jonathan Solity
Series Editor

PREFACE

In this book I have tried to relate the momentous events in education in recent years to the fundamental issues that underlie them. The challenge of doing this in a way that will be accessible and immediately helpful is welcome – you, the reader, will judge how successful I have been. I am grateful to the publishers and the series editor, Jonathan Solity, for the stimulus to undertake this task. They have been helpful throughout, as have my other colleagues at the University of Warwick. Margaret Handy has kindly prepared the manuscript through several drafts. I am grateful to them all – but I accept total responsibility for all the faults of the final product. Naomi Roth and Fiona McKenzie at Cassell have been outstandingly helpful: I owe them a considerable debt!

John Eggleston

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CHAPTER 1

Being a teacher

OVERVIEW

This chapter considers what it is to be a teacher in modern society and reviews the professionalism and status of teachers.

Key teacher tasks

- Earning and keeping professional status.
- Learning the context in which one works and being sensitive to it.
- Achieving 'inner directedness' rather than 'other-directedness'.
- Becoming not only a competent teacher but also a curriculum expert, manager, assessor and guardian of opportunity.

To be a teacher is like living a life dedicated to mission impossible. To begin to satisfy the complex demands loaded on to teachers by governments, parents, employers, children and society at large is unthinkable. Even if the demands were compatible and feasible it would take several lifetimes of schooling to achieve them – and social change would make some aspects of the task obsolete even before they were attempted. Yet despite this, the satisfactions of teaching can be immense: no other profession can experience the immediate joy of children's new learning, understanding and fulfilment or see the long-term results of the commitments, enthusiasm and careers that are formed in the school.

PROFESSIONALISM

Even in the first paragraph teaching has been labelled a profession. It

has most of the necessary characteristics, such as a high level of responsibility for the lives of others, duties governed by agreed rules of conduct, restriction of entry to those who are recognized as trained, qualified and experienced and a social status that is determined by the nature of the employment rather than by the individual as a person. Yet there are problems with the professional status of teachers that are not experienced by most other professional groups. Teachers lack the social distance enjoyed by doctors and lawyers. Every citizen has spent at least ten years in close encounters with teachers. Doctors and lawyers can use knowledge inaccessible to the public and work on a specialized 'stage set' such as the surgery, the court room or the consulting room to command instant respect and status. In schools teachers have to – and wish to – establish close relationships with their pupils; they share their expertise with them and work in an environment that very soon becomes wholly familiar and unawesome.

There are other differences too. Teachers are by far the most numerous profession; most communities have teachers in residence. Unlike any other professionals, teachers are always outnumbered by their clients, usually by thirty or more to one. The task of maintaining the authority necessary to control the behaviour of pupils in order to achieve conditions for effective learning makes the work of a teacher immensely more difficult than that of any other professional person. Yet a further difficulty is that teachers do not have the set of rewards and penalties with which other professions can influence their relationships with clients. Teachers cannot offer their pupils the prospect of life instead of death, freedom instead of imprisonment, welfare instead of destitution. Teachers' 'clients' do not always feel that they are benefiting by their treatment – often quite the reverse!

THE STATUS OF TEACHERS

In modern society, teachers have a problem of status. Because everybody has at one time been at school, most people believe that they themselves have at least some or even most of a teacher's expertise and capability: 'anybody could teach those children'. Because they are so familiar, teachers lack the mystique that normally enhances professional status and power, and are subject to public attempts to control and constrain them: by legislation, public opinion and even, occasionally, by media ridicule and prejudice.

An immediate consequence of all this is to be seen in the pay of teachers. Because of the public evaluation of their work, teachers in most Western countries cannot achieve the generally high salaries of other professionals. And because teachers are so numerous and so familiar, the organizations representing them on both sides of the Atlantic are increasingly driven to techniques used by organized labour

unions, such as mass or selective strike action. Not only does this entail hardship for their clients (the very antithesis of professional conduct) but it also links teachers to the image of workers' unions. This contrasts with the situation of medical and legal professionals, whose associations win public support through manipulative public relations campaigns reinforcing the notion that the public need their specialist expertise. In contrast, teachers' pay negotiations have often diminished their status relative to the other professions. Recent attempts to 'privatize' teaching by separating education into school units rather than local authority or school board groupings may have important consequences upon pay bargaining and may reverse the trend to teacher unionization. Some politicians envisage giving all schools the right to negotiate the salaries of all their teachers, as most 'public' and private schools do already.

The consequences of teachers' marginal professional status are familiar. Politicians, journalists and letter writers unhesitatingly attribute many of the problems of society to the work of teachers. Public debates on, say, abortion law commonly have approximately equal members of both sides complaining of too much sex education in the schools, or too little. Major employers, often in a single speech, complain of too little attention to the basic skills – and also of teachers' failure to make children aware of electronic calculators and word processors. A correspondent in a British national newspaper in 1990 held teachers responsible for an alleged increase in 'motiveless murders'. He commented, 'schools have long failed to teach the values of restraint and concern for others'. The list is endless; teachers can be blamed for vandalism, industrial strikes, impoliteness, litter on the streets and almost any other social behaviour that can be objected to.

THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING

How can any teacher, faced with such a barrage of advice, exhortation and criticism, continue with 'mission impossible' and reach the real achievements and results of teaching? This book attempts to show the way. It will look at the social context of teaching and show how the teacher can understand the social forces that surround the classroom and seek to use them rather than to be used, or even abused, by them. It will look at the role of the teacher and contrast the conventional model of the 'good' teacher and the 'good' pupil with the reality of what is possible and worthwhile. It will look at the ways in which the expectations and requirements of employers, government and communities are formed and imposed and how teachers may seek to interpret or even exploit these requirements to enhance rather than hinder their work.

It will look at the social backgrounds of pupils and discuss how

their class, gender and racial background may already have brought about differences in their achievements, aspirations and 'self images'. Teachers have the opportunity to build on children's pre-school and home background experience in different ways. They may do so negatively, and so reinforce divisions and disadvantages that come about through thoughtlessness or prejudice, or do so positively by maximizing children's capabilities and achieving fuller equality of opportunity in schooling.

The book will also look at what is taught in the classroom, what determines the formal curriculum and to whom it is made available, and how it is used to determine the life chances of the children who receive it. The introduction of national curricula in England and Wales and elsewhere will be viewed in this context. The operation of the 'hidden curriculum' (the understandings that underlie classroom life and perhaps offer the most permanent learning of all) will also be considered.

ASSESSING THE WORK OF CHILDREN

The book also considers assessment and suggests some ways of improving matters in this connection. Parents and employers have a right to know what children are achieving and how they are being taught. Teachers can also benefit by keeping parents and others beyond the school better informed, if only to refute the unsubstantiated assumptions that have already been mentioned. Sadly teachers have often been unsuccessful in this respect. The writer, a parent of four children in the state system, has frequently attended parents' evenings. Often, after a long wait to see the relevant teacher, he has been shown his child's mark record and told that the child was 'doing well, average marks seven out of ten'. But this is meaningless information unless it is accompanied by information about the task: its nature and level, the teacher's marking standards, the norm for the class, and much else.

In Britain and most other Western countries new legislation now imposes complex assessment procedures upon schools and teachers; such procedures are essential if national curricula are to be imposed effectively by national governments. This book considers how teachers may turn these complex, time-consuming requirements into activities that may enhance their work and their recognition. But above all, the discussion on assessment, in Chapter 8 and elsewhere, will consider how teachers can achieve self-assessment, because only in this way can they break out from 'other-directedness' and achieve 'inner-directedness' that allows them to achieve true professionalism and to claim the status and power they need to tackle the work expected of them.

The book will also look at the ways in which teachers, right from the earliest years of schooling, prepare young people for work and adult life, helping them to turn their accrued learning and understanding into adult roles and status in ways that are fulfilling, realistic and satisfying. Even the most effective schooling is of little value if it cannot be converted into a successful, worthwhile adult lifestyle.

A final chapter will explore the teacher's role as a manager – a member of the school management team and largely in control of classroom management: curriculum, teaching style, resources and the creation of an optimal learning environment for all the children.

In these considerations of the nature of teaching, of the teacher's multiple role as curriculum expert, classroom manager, guardian of opportunity and assessor, the book forms an accompaniment to the other volumes in the series, which each deal in detail with specific activities or responsibilities of teachers. Not only will it examine modern teachers' roles and the social stage on which they are played but it will also analyse how they may be played in a way that is effective and satisfying for teachers and learners. Attention will also be given to the negative analyses of teaching (some of them springing from teachers themselves) that have done much to inhibit recruitment and retention of teachers. In short, the book will offer a realistic appraisal of the oldest profession, which, despite popular mythology, is not prostitution but teaching.

RECOMMENDED READING

The New Teacher in School (HMI, 1988), though an official report and as such somewhat austere and official, contains a good deal of useful information.

Martin Powell and Jonathan Solity, *Teachers in Control* (London: Routledge, 1990) goes into useful detail about the pressures under which teachers operate and suggests ways in which they can 'recover the freedom to make their own decisions'.

Les Bell, *Appraising Teachers in Schools* (London: Routledge, 1988) has some very good sections on self-appraisal and team appraisal and also alerts teachers to what others expect of them. Parts make formidable reading – but don't be put off!

Robin Richardson, *Daring to Be a Teacher* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1990) is an inspiring, sensitive book on being a teacher. It contains many 'parables' – including Richardson's well-known 'elephant' story.

CHAPTER 2

Issues of social class, gender and race

OVERVIEW

This chapter reviews the ways in which differences in social class, gender and race can influence children's achievement. It reviews key concepts of socialization, inner- and other-directedness, restricted and elaborated language codes and social and cultural reproduction. In particular it outlines how positive rather than passive teacher roles may be achieved.

Key teacher tasks

- Trying to ensure that one discovers the capabilities of all children.
- Taking care that one's judgements are not influenced by negative expectations about social class, gender or race.
- Building upon what capabilities the children already have, never suggesting that what they bring (especially in the way of language) is valueless.
- Remembering that differences established or reinforced in school may determine almost all aspects of a child's future and, collectively, play a large part in determining future social structure.

Children come to school with different physical, mental and emotional capabilities. They also come with a bewildering variety of expectations and attitudes that may enhance or diminish the full realization of their capability. These expectations and attitudes are largely a product of their social background and spring from the value systems of their parents, their extended families and the adults and other children in their communities. They are important not only because they have a formative effect on the children but also because

they interact with the expectations and attitudes of teachers. Often teachers, despite much effort to the contrary, end up by reinforcing the differentiating consequences of these underlying values, not infrequently to the disadvantage of children.

There are three main categories into which these underlying value systems, with their representative attitudes and expectations, may be placed: social class, gender, and race. Each of these areas is considered in detail in other volumes in this series. Here their effect on work in the classroom and hence their crucial importance in the work of the teacher is examined.

SOCIAL CLASS

A clear example is provided at the outset of schooling. Let us imagine two children entering school from different ends of the social class structure. They are coming into the reception class of a first school serving a catchment area that spans the social spectrum.

On the first morning Kate, from an affluent suburban home, arrives with Kylie, from a much less affluent inner-city family. They enter a well-equipped modern classroom supervised by a teacher who is enthusiastic to help all the children in her class to maximize their capability. Yet Kate will start with many advantages. She will be familiar with the equipment, having almost certainly met it in her home and pre-school playgroup. She will be relaxed with teachers, as she and her parents are likely to know teachers socially and to 'speak the same language'. So she is likely to use her new environment effectively and immediately and to be posting the bricks in the correct slots in the postbox without waiting to be asked. Meanwhile, Kylie has probably been sent to school with the injunction 'Make sure you do what the teacher tells you', and is waiting patiently for the teacher to tell her when to use the unfamiliar equipment for the first time. It is very difficult for the teacher, armed with her developmental checklist, to resist evaluating Kate as 'bright and quick' and Kylie as 'dull and slow' in the first few hours, when the crucial early (and often persistent) diagnoses are made. The diagnosis is very likely to be reinforced by Kate's greater familiarity with books in the home and the strong probability that her parents have already taught her to read.

GENDER

Similar pre-judgements are all too easy to make on gender issues. Boys, encouraged in home and community to be more dominant,

assertive and adventurous and to enjoy approval for such behaviour, will behave differently in the classroom from girls, who have often received a very different early encouragement. In particular, as most teachers acknowledge, boys tend to be much more effective in claiming teachers' attention, with predictable consequences for teachers' evaluation.

RACE

Much the same can happen when children from different ethnic backgrounds enter the classroom: their different languages and cultural backgrounds may make it less easy for them to relate to the 'mainstream' knowledge and understanding they are offered. In consequence their achievement may be seen to be lower and their capabilities in their own home language and culture may go unrecognized. The point is well made by Francis O'Reilly, writing in *The Independent* on 13 September 1990:

The Maths teacher introduces the student teacher to the class and briefs her. Before leaving, she points out a girl sitting on the back row and says, 'Oh, by the way, Jhamari won't understand anything. Give her some additions to do.'

In French, where they have to label parts of the body, Jhamari steals a glance at her neighbour's book and earns the snarling response, 'Buzz off, stop copying!' In Humanities they are discussing the Reformation and Jhamari is asked to draw a picture of Henry VIII. In science 'sir' need not keep a wary eye on her as she sits, mute, devoid of mischief and curiosity. She goes from class to class in a dream – eyes not fearful or expectant, but dead.

Jhamari is not handicapped or mentally disturbed. She is simply Bengali. She and many like her go through the school day and the school year as through a great sterile desert, uncomprehending, shut off, neither gaining nor giving. What potential they have is never realized, because it goes unrecognized . . .

The presence of silent passengers in the classroom means a failure of education, wasted childhoods and demoralized or desensitized teachers. It should at very least become an immediate focus of research, debate and policy.

The crucial point in these three simplified examples of class, gender and race is that whilst the capability and potential of the children may be similar, the teacher's evaluation is likely to be different and to have crucial consequences in subsequent actual achievement. This is because of the formative nature both of children's self-image and of teachers' expectations. In addition, other children in the classroom are quick to reinforce the teacher's expectations. These self-fulfilling prophecies form a central theme of subsequent chapters.

We must emphasize very strongly, however, that this is not an argument for 'putting down' middle-class children, boys or white