

TEACHING AND LEARNING

PEDAGOGY, CURRICULUM
AND CULTURE

ALEX MOORE

KEY
ISSUES
in Teaching
and Learning

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Pedagogy, Curriculum and Culture

Alex Moore



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Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Learning: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Culture provides an overview of the key issues and dominant theories of teaching and learning as they impact upon the practice of classroom teachers. Punctuated by questions, points for consideration and ideas for further reading and research, the book's intention is to stimulate discussion and analysis, to support understanding of classroom interactions and to contribute to improved practice.

Topics covered include:

- an assessment of dominant theories of learning and teaching;
- the ways in which public educational policy impinges on local practice;
- the nature and role of language and culture in formal educational settings;
- an assessment of different models of 'good teaching', including the development of whole-school policies;
- alternative models of curriculum and pedagogy

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Key Issues in Teaching and Learning

Series Editor: Alex Moore

Key Issues in Teaching and Learning is aimed at student teachers, teacher trainers and inservice teachers including teachers on MA courses. Each book focusses on the central issues around a particular topic supported by examples of good practice with suggestions for further reading. These accessible books will help students and teachers to explore and understand critical issues in ways that are challenging, that invite reappraisals of current practices and that provide appropriate links between theory and practice.

Teaching and Learning: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Culture

Alex Moore

Reading Educational Research and Policy

David Scott

Understanding Assessment: Purposes, Perceptions, Practice

David Lambert and David Lines

Understanding Schools and Schooling

Clyde Chitty

For Miranda, Jess, Ben and Jack

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Series Editor's Preface

THE KEY ISSUES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING SERIES

Teaching and Learning is one of five titles in the series *Key Issues in Teaching and Learning*, each written by an acknowledged expert or experts in their field. Other volumes explore issues of *Understanding Assessment*, *Understanding Schools and Schooling*, and *Reading Educational Research and Policy*. The books are intended primarily for beginner and newly or recently qualified teachers, but will also be of interest to more experienced teachers attending MA or Professional Development Courses or simply interested in revisiting issues of theory and practice within an ever-changing educational context.

TEACHING AND THEORISING

There is currently no shortage of books about teaching, offering what must sometimes seem a bewildering choice. Many of these books fall into the 'how-to' category, offering practical tips and advice for teachers on a range of matters such as planning for students' learning, managing classroom behaviour, and marking and assessing students' work. Such books have proved very successful over the years, providing beginner-teachers in particular with much of the support and reassurance they need to help them through their early experiences of classroom life, as well as offering useful advice on how to make teaching maximally effective. Increasingly, such books focus on sets of teacher competences – more recently linked to sets of standards – laid down, in the UK, by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (see, for instance, OFSTED and TTA 1996). Other books have focused on the teacher's need to be reflective and reflexive (e.g. Schon 1983; 1987; Valli 1992; Elliott 1993; Loughran 1996). These books may still be described as 'advice books', but the advice is of a different kind, tending to encourage the teacher to think more about human relationships in the teaching-learning situation and on the ways in which teaching styles connect to models of learning and learning development.

More predominantly theoretical books about teaching for teachers are perhaps in shorter supply, and those that do exist often address issues in

decontextualised ways or in very general terms that do not immediately speak to classroom practitioners or take account of their particular academic backgrounds. There is, furthermore, evidence that, partly through time constraints, some of the most profound works on sociological educational theory, by such commentators as Bourdieu, Foucault and Bernstein, are very little read or discussed on teacher training courses (Moore and Edwards 2000), while the work of developmental psychologists such as Piaget and Vygotsky, which used to feature very prominently on PGCE and BAEd courses, has become increasingly marginalised through a growing emphasis on issues of practical discipline, lesson planning, and meeting National Curriculum requirements.

Teaching and Learning: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Culture, like the other books in this series, seeks to address this imbalance by exploring with teachers a wide range of relevant educational *theory*, rooting this in classroom experience in a way that encourages interrogation and debate, and presenting it in a language that is immediately accessible. The book does not ignore or seek to devalue current trends in educational practice and policy, or the current dominant discourses of competence and reflection (indeed, it is constructed very much with the OFSTED/TTA sets of competences and standards in mind). Rather, it aims to provide readers with the knowledge and skills they will need in order to address and respond to these and other educational discourses in critical, well-informed ways that will enhance both their teaching and their job satisfaction.

With this aim in mind, the book does not tell readers how they should teach; nor does it seek to cram prepackaged, ready-made theory down readers' throats. Instead, it seeks to present issues, questions and dilemmas *about* teaching and learning processes – and curriculum practices – to which it invites teachers to formulate their own responses through guided activities, through discussion with colleagues, through further reading, and, most importantly, through refining their own educational theory in terms of what articulates best with or most effectively challenges their existing philosophies and classroom practice. In doing this, the book seeks to provide a philosophical and theoretical *context* for teachers' developing classroom practice, and to help empower teachers to participate fully in local and national debates about the nature, the purposes and the future of compulsory education both in the UK and elsewhere.

Because of its brief, *Teaching and Learning* makes no claim to cover everything that needs to be covered on its given subject. Rather, it is presented as an individual account that makes moderately detailed selections from current theory, basing those selections on what has proved most useful to the author in his own professional practice and what, in his judgement, will provide the most useful *entry-points* to other teachers for practical and theoretical interrogations of their practice. In this respect, the book is intended not as a competitor or as an alternative to 'how-to' books, or indeed to books that explore specific issues in far greater depth (I am thinking, for example, of David Wood's excellent *How Children Think and Learn* [1988], which explores, in far greater depth than I have been able to, a range of different *models of learning*). It is more appropriately viewed, like the other volumes in the series,

as a different – and complementary – *kind* of text: one that takes, as its starting-point, a view that in order to be effective practitioners, and to be able to *continue to develop* as effective practitioners, teachers need a grounding in some of the key theories and issues within which their practice is sited, and need to have a genuine, critical interest in those theories and issues.

Teaching and Learning does not, either, set out to consider *all* aspects of teaching and learning. Because its primary focus is on teaching and learning related to cognitive–linguistic and (to a lesser degree) affective development (what might, taken together, be termed ‘academic development’), it does not have a great deal to say about the teaching and learning of interpersonal skills, or of the development of what is sometimes referred to as ‘social intelligence’, or of the implications for teaching and learning of students’ and teachers’ *feelings* – including their feelings about what is being learned and taught. This is not because I believe these other areas of learning to be unimportant, or to have nothing to do with teachers or schools. (Indeed, a belief that learning has a primarily social *function* as well as a primarily social *nature* [Nixon *et al.* 1996] underpins everything else that is argued within the book.) Nor does it imply that such issues are not relevant to cognitive–linguistic–affective development. The importance of interpersonal relationships is central, for example, to the work of Vygotsky (1962; 1978) and Bruner (1996), explored in some depth in Chapter 1, while the need for teachers to take account of the emotional context of the classroom – and indeed the part played by the emotions in academic learning – is becoming increasingly recognised (e.g. Britton 1969; Appel 1995; Boler 1999). If *Teaching and Learning* has little to say about these important matters, it is hoped that readers will see this as a pragmatic choice, related to what is manageable within the covers of one volume, rather than as a deliberate marginalisation.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE BOOK

Teaching and Learning is presented as six chapters, each of which has a degree of integrity that enables it to be read independently of the other chapters – although deliberate echoes and elaborations of points made in earlier chapters have been included in those that follow. Each chapter starts with a summary, and concludes with suggestions for further reading and areas for thinking and research. While the readings and activities can be undertaken independently, they are designed so that they can also be completed collaboratively, providing the basis for small-group discussions on BAEd, PGCE, MA and Professional Development courses for teachers. As with other volumes in the *Key Issues in Teaching and Learning* series, boxes have been used in the body of the text to highlight particularly important points or useful summaries.

The book begins with a chapter on *Models of Teaching and Learning*, which offers an overview of some of the more influential theories of cognitive–linguistic theory to have emerged this century. The particular focus here is on some of the work of Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner, and includes an assessment

of the similarities and key differences between these thinkers' theories as well as of the implications for teaching.

With reference to historical documents, Chapter 2, *Teaching, Learning and Education*, explores some of the official *purposes* of formal education, and invites readers to consider the extent to which these purposes and associated policies articulate or fail to articulate with the theories of development described in Chapter 1, or indeed with their own favoured models and theories of learning and teaching.

Chapter 3, *Teaching, Learning and Language*, examines the role and significance of teacher and student language in teaching and learning, and in particular the ways in which language can help or hinder learning depending on how it is used.

Chapter 4, *Teaching, Learning and Culture*, develops many of the issues raised in Chapter 3, examining, with the support of classroom-based case-study material, the ways in which cultural bias can operate against the interests of some students and to the benefit of others. It begins to consider some of the approaches teachers might take to counterbalance such systemic cultural bias.

In Chapter 5, *Effective Practice: What makes a Good Teacher?*, the emphasis of the book shifts away from student development and systemic bias towards pedagogy – exploring, and inviting readers to critique, some currently dominant theories and models of 'good teaching' and 'effective practice'. This includes considerations of the ways in which teachers need to be 'competent' as well as being reflective, reflexive, strategic and in possession of good communication skills. The notion of the whole-school policy is also discussed within the context of its ability to support teachers in their pedagogic development and to provide an 'action space' within which teachers can continue to reflect on and debate their own and their school's classroom practice.

The book's final chapter, *Working With and Against Official Policy*, revisits some of the issues raised in Chapter 2: How do teachers handle discrepancies between their own teaching philosophies and practice and those promoted by Government policy? To what extent and in what fashion do pedagogical compromises have to be made because of characteristics of the larger social and educational systems, or because the 'reality' of the classroom militates against the pursuit of preferred practices and goals? What 'action' spaces can teachers find within current bureaucratic and curricular arrangements to promote forms of practice and curriculum content that they feel are under threat? These issues are explored within the context of 'alternative' models of curriculum and pedagogy – including notions of 'accelerated learning' and 'multiple intelligences' – currently being promoted by a range of experts in a variety of fields. Readers are encouraged to consider the ways in which not only curriculum content and style but also their own practice as teachers might usefully develop in the changing social and natural world in which they live. Whereas Chapter 2 principally looked *back*, to the policies and decisions that have shaped and that continue to constrain curriculum and classroom practice, Chapter 6 looks *forward*, to more recent ideas about teaching and learning that may have greater relevance to students and societies in the twenty-first century.

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1 Models of Teaching and Learning

This chapter introduces some of the most influential theories of learning and development of recent years. These theories have been used both to support early models of school instruction and to initiate and develop new ones, including models that have come to be labelled 'progressive', 'constructivist' and 'child-centred'. With an initial emphasis on learning rather than teaching, the chapter gives particular emphasis to the complementary developmental theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, foregrounding Vygotsky's sustained argument that all learning is essentially social in nature. Detailed reference is also made to the work of Skinner and Bruner and to the implications of their theories for classroom practice and experience. As the classroom implications of Piaget's and Vygotsky's work are explored, the emphasis of the chapter shifts from learning to teaching. The work of both theorists is considered within the context of National Curricula and current debates about educational priorities and styles of teaching and learning.

THEORIES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Every schoolteacher operates according to a theory or theories of learning and within the context of a philosophy of what education should be fundamentally about. The only difference is that sometimes these theories are very consciously held and operated upon by the teacher, perhaps carefully referenced to published theory in the field, while others are held and operated upon rather less consciously, with perhaps little or no reference to published theory.

The central purpose in this first chapter is to consider some of the major published theories of learning and teaching practice that have emerged over the last seventy years or so, and to assess the extent to which these are supported by – or lend support to – (a) central government policy (as manifested, for example, in the National Curriculum), (b) teachers themselves, operating within the terms of their own privately and professionally held views and beliefs as to what constitutes a good education and what effective teaching and learning look like. Of particular interest will be the extent to which the

favoured models of teaching and learning espoused by teachers chime or fail to chime with the models advocated explicitly or implicitly in government policy. This theme will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter, when we consider the extent to which favoured models of teaching and learning (both teachers' and governments') articulate with 'official' and 'unofficial' notions of what formal education itself is fundamentally there for. It is hoped that the revisiting of published theory will support teachers in articulating and interrogating their own theory and practice in the social and educational contexts within which they currently operate.

To do full justice to the range of learning theories at teachers' disposal and to the similarities and differences between them is an undertaking immense in its scope. To illustrate this point, we need only allude to the numerous books that have been written by and about one of the major educational theorists of the present century, Jean Piaget. What I shall seek to accomplish in this chapter is not to attempt to provide the reader with a comprehensive tour of current and past educational thinking, but to select a number of relatively recent theorists whose work I consider to be of particular importance or relevance. I shall provide no more than an outline of what I take to be some of the key ideas of these theorists, inviting the reader to explore their work in more detail in whatever way seems most appropriate. In this respect, readers are strongly recommended to go back to original sources: in the end, difficult though some of this reading is, there is no substitute for gaining *first-hand* experience of the work of such writers as Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner, and of making personal sense of that work in the context of one's own classroom experience. Readers are also recommended to explore texts which deal with aspects of teaching and learning that are specifically *not* included in this chapter – not because I consider them unimportant, but because the breadth of scope of the book has demanded a high degree of selectivity. Jessel, for example (1999), provides a particularly useful and cogent account of the relationship between learning and *study*, referencing this to much of the cognitive theory drawn upon in this chapter.

WHICH THEORIES?

In deciding what makes a theorist 'particularly important or relevant', I had initially intended to select those writers whose work appeared to have been most influential in contributing to, supporting or even determining *public policy* on education. This has remained a central criterion. However, as we shall see in Chapter 2, the presence of *explicit* theory related to the processes of teaching and learning in public policy documents has been generally conspicuous by its absence. Consequently, I have had to make my own judgements as to what elements of whose theories appear to sit most comfortably with official government policy. I am also aware that recent research (e.g. Halpin, Moore *et al.* 1999–2001) suggests that teachers themselves often have surprisingly little explicit knowledge of the ideas of theorists of teaching and learning, being

much more concerned with ‘the realities and actualities of classroom experience’. With these reservations in mind, I have used my own judgement and experience to select those theorists whose work seems to:

- be most obviously embedded in teachers’ everyday classroom practice and teaching philosophy (even though it may not be identified and articulated by teachers);
- support or be supported by the various dominant discourses in teaching and learning (for example, the ‘levels’ approach of the National Curriculum in the UK, or the group-work approach still favoured by many classroom teachers);
- offer the best routes into the exploration of a range of key issues and debates in the field (for instance, the ‘student-centred’/‘teacher-led’ debate).

I have avoided theories and theorists – often more recent – where I have judged that there is insufficient evidence on which to base realistic evaluations of them. These include recent work on accelerated learning and multiple intelligences – although I shall return to each of these in the final chapter, when we consider ‘alternative’ pedagogies and curricula.

While reference to key educational theorists may be absent from much official documentation, there is no doubt that their work has contributed – selectively and even locally, perhaps – to the educational *zeitgeist*, and that, although their work cannot claim to predate the teaching philosophies and classroom practice with which it is typically associated (Piaget’s work with ‘child-centredness’, for example, or Vygotsky’s with dialogic teacher–student relationships) it has often lent credence and implicit support to official policy, to government-commissioned reports and surveys, and to teachers’ own philosophies and practice. It has also informed – and continues to inform – courses of and textbooks for initial and continuing teacher *education* (see, for example, Scott Baumann *et al.* 1997).

THEORY AND THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Most of the theories of language and learning that we shall be considering in this chapter can be described as essentially *psychological* in character: that is to say, they focus on the nature and development of the ‘individual mind’ in so far as it may conform to or deviate from certain identifiable and recognisable ‘universal patterns’ of development. Partly because of this, much of it has arisen from experimental research carried out with children (typically, with very young children rather than, say, adolescents) removed from the familiar social contexts within which they would normally be operating. One consequence of this is that much of the theory tends to overlook what we might call the *contingent* and *idiosyncratic* aspects of teaching and learning: that is to say, aspects related to particular school or individual circumstances, to cultural