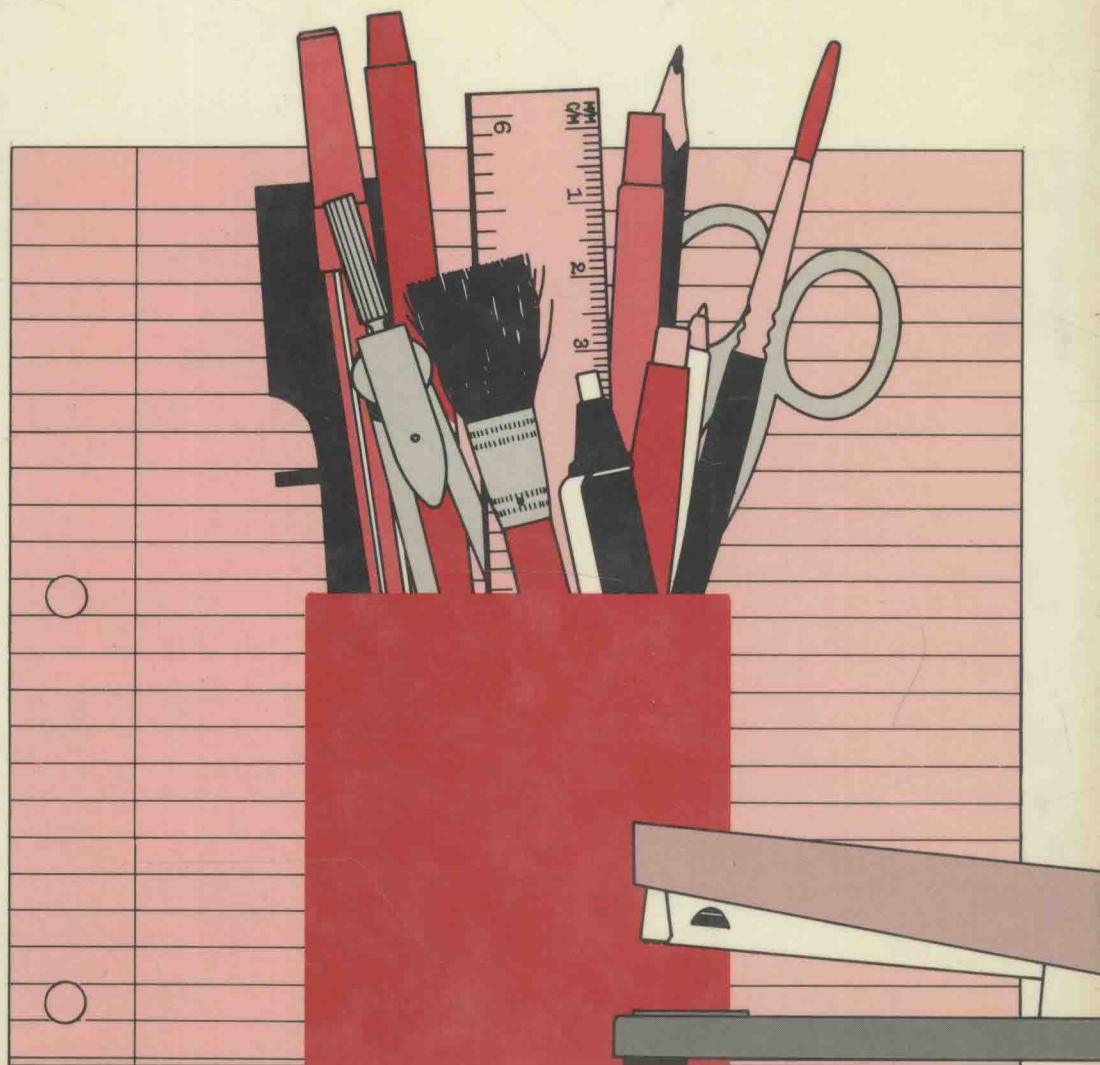


PSYCHOLOGY FOR PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

**DAVID FONTANA**

# **PSYCHOLOGY FOR TEACHERS**



**SECOND EDITION  
REVISED AND UPDATED**

**SERIES EDITORS: ANTONY CHAPMAN AND ANTHONY GALE**

Psychology for Professional Groups

# PSYCHOLOGY FOR TEACHERS

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Second Edition

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David Fontana

*Reader in Educational Psychology  
University College Cardiff*



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Psychology for Professional Groups

**PSYCHOLOGY FOR TEACHERS**

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# Introduction to First Edition

The purpose of this book is to acquaint the reader with those areas of psychology of most practical value to the teacher. It deals, therefore, not only with matters relating directly to the classroom, but with matters pertaining to the child's background outside school and to his or her own self-perceptions and self-concepts. The teacher's task can only be clarified if he or she has a knowledge of children as complete persons rather than simply as individuals who spend the hours from nine o'clock until four sitting in classrooms. The child's personality, ability to learn, motivation, social behaviour, and attitudes towards school are all formed as a consequence of a complex set of interrelated factors which begin at birth (and even before) and extend throughout each moment of waking life. By the time you have finished this book you should have a clear idea of what these factors are, and of how they influence child behaviour. You should also have a clear idea of the part you as teacher can play in the determination of this behaviour, and of how you can best help children to benefit from the learning opportunities that school has to offer.

The application of psychology to education has a long and honoured history, and stretches back to the first occasion when adults tried to influence the behaviour of the young. But it is only in comparatively recent years that the association between the two subjects has been given a firmly scientific basis. By this I mean that it is only during the last 60 years or so that psychology has developed the precision and methodology that allow it to make accurate generalizations about child behaviour, and to provide the teacher with the kind of information necessary if he or she is to make objective professional decisions and judgements. Without such information, the teacher can only fall back upon the sort of anecdotal evidence that we often hear when people are discussing children. We hear, for example, that children are supposed to be basically honest (or dishonest), that they like (or do not like) firm discipline, that they have (or have not) a sense of fair play, that they learn best in informal (or in formal) teaching environments, that they are influenced (or not influenced) by

what they see on television and so on. One school of thought has it that children's behaviour is the result of conditioning, another that they have the freedom to decide for themselves. We are told on the one hand that abilities such as intelligence are largely inherited, and on the other that they are largely the result of environmental influences. Small wonder that faced with such conflicting statements inexperienced teachers often feel confused, and decide in the end that they must make up their own minds on these and other important matters.

It would be wrong to suggest that modern psychology has final answers to all the questions that face us in education. Children (and teachers) are individuals, and often must be studied as individuals before detailed guidance on particular problems can be given. And, in any case, there are still large gaps in our knowledge that remain to be filled. Human behaviour is very complex and its measurement and assessment fraught with many difficulties. It is in fact this very complexity that gives the study of psychology much of its fascination. But psychology helps teachers recognize the factors that influence child behaviour and learning, and assists them in developing strategies to cope with the tasks that must be faced in the classroom. Furthermore, it helps the teacher to examine his or her own general professional behaviour, and to identify areas where this behaviour may itself have contributed towards particular problems that may have arisen. As is stressed repeatedly throughout the book, psychology shows us that no child's behaviour can be fully understood unless we study also the behaviour of others – teachers, parents, school friends – towards that child. Each individual stands at the centre of a complex matrix of interrelated influences, each of which must be taken into account if we are to comprehend the way in which the individual lives his or her life. In the case of the child this matrix is of particular importance. Still at an early formative stage in development, the child is very much dependent upon other people's behaviour. When the teacher, for example, speaks critically of the child's performance in a particular subject, the child may get the impression that this indicates he or she lacks ability in it, and that future performance may deteriorate even further. If we are to help that child improve his or her standards we must look therefore not only at the gaps in their knowledge but at the way in which the teacher, albeit unwittingly, has been undermining the child's confidence in his or her own potential.

Psychology also helps us answer some of the questions on the origins of individual differences. Are we born different, or do we simply become different as the result of experience? Put another way, are individual differences genetically or environmentally determined? By individual differences we mean not only intelligence but also such things as personality, creativity and motor skills. As we shall see, these answers are of critical

importance for the teacher since they indicate some of the limits to the influence which education can have upon our lives. If individual differences are largely inherited then there is little that education can do beyond developing what is already there. If, on the other hand, these differences are mainly the result of environment, then education has an enormous potential to redress and alter the consequences of early disadvantage and to help all children achieve the same high standards.

The book deals with children from an early age through into adolescence and the end of compulsory schooling, but this does not mean that you should pick out only those sections that apply to the ages you plan to teach or are actually teaching. For a full understanding of older children the secondary school teacher needs to know something of the formative influences that have been at work during the early part of their lives, while the primary school teacher needs to know something of the problems that may lie ahead of children in their care in order to play a full part in helping them develop the skills and strategies necessary to cope with such problems. The book is designed for both serving teachers and students in training, and the emphasis throughout is upon the practicalities of the teacher's task. Thus theoretical areas of psychology that may be of interest in themselves but that have little real application for what the teacher actually does with children are avoided. A high premium is also placed upon clarity, so that the non-specialist should be able to read the book without experiencing undue difficulties in understanding any of the points raised. Finally, the book can be read as a whole or dipped into, depending upon the needs of the reader. The important thing is that it should be of some use.

### The plan of the book

The plan of the book is simple. In Part I we look at early influences upon the child such as parent-child relationships, family size, and social class. Part II then examines cognitive factors (i.e. mental factors to do with thinking, intelligence and learning) while Part III looks at affective factors (i.e. emotional factors to do with personality, attitudes and values). Part IV looks at social factors: that is, at the factors involved in the child's relationships with the teacher and with the classroom group, and at the teacher him or herself, at what is known about the qualities that make the successful teacher and at the ways in which we study interaction between the teacher and the class.

Each chapter outlines current knowledge in the areas concerned and discusses practical implications for the teacher. At the end of each chapter there are suggestions for further



reading, together with a list of questions and discussion points. These questions are not designed so much to test your factual knowledge as to draw attention to some of the most important issues discussed in the chapter and to start you thinking creatively about them.

David Fontana  
University College Cardiff, 1981

# Introduction to Second Edition

A number of extensive alterations to the material contained in the first edition have been made. Some of this material, in keeping with the policy for the *Psychology for Professional Groups* series of which this book is a part, was by authors other than myself. These contributions do not appear in the new edition, as I have rewritten the topics covered by them with teacher education exclusively in mind. The convention in the first edition of dividing the theoretical content of each chapter from the practical content has also been changed in the new edition with the result that each chapter now links theory and practice closely together throughout.

Opportunity has also been taken in the new edition to amalgamate the two chapters on personality, since this further helps the linkage of theory and practice. Across a wide area of subjects new sections have also been added, for example on early attachment, ethnic groups, neglected children, the home-school conflict, language and the school, teacher language, approaches to personality, personality states, measuring the self, social status, social roles, social skills and teacher stress. In addition, each part of the book has been thoroughly revised and updated, in the light both of current developments within the field of educational psychology and the feedback to the first edition obtained from students, practitioners and book reviewers. It is the hope of the publishers, the series editors and myself that these extensive alterations will further strengthen the book's usefulness both to student and to serving teachers.

David Fontana  
University College Cardiff, 1988

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# Part one

## The Early Years

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**Introduction** The child's social life begins in the home. Throughout the formative years the child spends more waking hours in and around the home than in school. For a five year old the ratio is approximately 5:3 in favour of the home, and for an adolescent it rises to about 2:1. Our closest relationships are usually formed within the home, and the child also locates there most of his or her physical possessions and leisure interests. Not surprisingly, therefore, the influence of the home is of critical importance in a child's psychological development. In particular, it helps determine how individual abilities are used, how attitudes and opinions are formed, and how motivation towards school and towards one's future develops.