

# **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

## **A Guide to Reflective Teaching**

**Fourth Edition**

**George J. Posner**



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Reflective Teaching**

**George J. Posner**

*Cornell University*

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**Field Experience: A Guide to Reflective Teaching,  
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**To Adrienne, Becky, and Prema**

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# Preface

*Field Experience* is intended to help students who are engaged in teaching-related fieldwork reflect on their experiences. Whether the students' field experiences consist of tutoring someone in biology, working with a reading group, leading a 4-H group, assisting an experienced English teacher with a whole class, or taking sole responsibility for teaching a social studies class, this book will help students learn from the experience. As such, it can be used as the primary text for early field experiences or student teaching or as a supplementary text in courses with field components, such as educational psychology, methods of teaching, and introduction to elementary or secondary education.

Topics include an examination of the students' concerns and goals regarding field experiences, the use of fieldwork logs, the study of the school and the community, observation of learners, interviews with the cooperating teacher, the analysis of lessons and curricula, an examination of one's own perspective on teaching, and the use of concepts from foundations and methods courses to facilitate reflection on teaching.

This book is designed to provoke thought; it is not a text filled with facts to memorize nor is it a handbook filled with do's and don'ts. If it is to stimulate reflection, students will have to do more than read this book. They will have to respond to questions, do exercises, analyze experiences, and state personal beliefs. In order to encourage this type of active involvement, the book provides space for students to write down their responses. Some of these devices will provoke more thought than others and, therefore, require more extensive and detailed responses. Some will help students work out problems they are having, whereas others will seem irrelevant to their particular field experience. Students should feel free to focus their attention on the questions and exercises that seem most pertinent to their situation.

Although the entire book is intended for use throughout a teacher education program, certain chapters are more appropriate for certain phases of the program than

others. Chapters 1 to 3 are orientation chapters and are most useful before placement in a field experience. These three chapters aid in the selection of the most appropriate positions and in the use of fieldwork logs for weekly reflection on field experiences. Chapters 4 to 11 are best used to help prepare for the field experience once the position is chosen and during the early weeks of the experience. Chapter 12 helps reflection on the field experience as it nears completion. The Epilogue at the end of Chapter 12 assumes the completion of the field experience and suggests ways of reflecting on it in order to prepare for the next experience. The Appendixes provide actual examples of student fieldwork logs and progress reports as well as several self-assessment instruments.

The book's chapter organization is intended to provide flexibility of the text for use in elementary and secondary settings and in a wide range of subject matter-specific courses. You are encouraged to use the text in whatever order is appropriate to your particular syllabus.

This new edition retains many of the features of the third edition, including the basic organization of chapters. The major addition consists of an extended and more detailed treatment of fieldwork logs. Here I have attempted to incorporate what I have learned over the past few years about how to teach students to write logs that foster reflection. New logs are included in Appendix B to illustrate these points.

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# Acknowledgments

**T**his book is in some ways a collage of ideas relevant to field experience in teaching. Although each chapter reveals the influence of many people and their writings, most chapters reflect the influence of one or two principal pieces of work.

The dominant influence on Chapter 1 was Joseph Schwab's notion of "common-places" in his 1971 *School Review* article, "The Practical: Translation into Curriculum." Chapter 2 has two sources: M. Cohen's master's thesis at Ohio State University, "A Factor Analytic Study of Elementary School Student Teacher Concerns," as reported in Andrew Schwebel et al. in *The Student Teacher Handbook* (Barnes and Noble, 1979), and Janet Sitter's dissertation from Michigan State University entitled "The Student Teaching Experience from the Perspective of the Student Teacher." Chapter 3 is based on Carl Grant and Ken Zeichner's "On Becoming a Reflective Teacher" from the book edited by Carl Grant entitled *Preparing for Reflective Teaching: A Book of Readings* (Allyn and Bacon, 1984).

The exercises in Chapter 4 were inspired by books such as *Teaching Is . . .* by Merrill Harmin and Tom Gregory (SRA, 1974). Chapter 5 is based on many sources, including Tom Good and Jere Brophy's *Educational Psychology: A Realistic Approach*, 2nd ed. (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), and Michael Young's *Knowledge and Control* (Collier-Macmillan, 1971). However, the basic structure of the chapter and the issues addressed is based on Ann Berlak and Harold Berlak's *Dilemmas of Schooling* (Methuen, 1981).

Chapter 6 uses ideas from Doug Roberts's "Developing the Concept of 'Curriculum Emphasis'" in *Science Education* (1982), and ideas of Ed Smith and Neil Sendelbach presented in "The Programme, the Plans and the Activities of the Classroom: The Demands of Activity-based Science," a chapter in *Innovation in the Science Curriculum*, edited by John Olson (Nichols, 1982).

Chapter 7 draws on research carried out by Ken Zeichner and Bob Tabachnick at

the University of Wisconsin at Madison (based on Berlak's work). Chapters 8 through 11 derive from Dan Lortie's *Schoolteacher* (University of Chicago Press, 1975), Willard Waller's *The Sociology of Teaching* (John Wiley and Sons, 1932), and Rob A. Walker and Clem Adelman's *A Guide to Classroom Observation* (Methuen, 1975).

Chapter 12 is developed out of my own work with students at Cornell in a field-based course on teaching.

Beyond these specific contributions, the general orientation of the book derives from Ann Berlak and Harold Berlak's *Dilemmas of Schooling*, the many articles and papers on the student-teaching experience, and reflective teaching by Ken Zeichner and company (including Bob Tabachnick and Carl Grant) then at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In addition to these major sources, criticisms by the following of earlier drafts have provided valuable help: Ken Zeichner and some of his students at Wisconsin; Bill Schubert and his students at the University of Illinois, Chicago; Richard Duschel at the University of Pittsburgh; Ken Strike, Deborah Trumbull, and Joan Egner at Cornell; Jeff Dean and his colleagues and students at SUC-Oneonta; the faculty and students at Mansfield University; and Al Rudnitsky and his students at Smith College.

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part I

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# Orientation

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# Types of Field Experience

**T**he one indispensable part of any teacher preparation program is field experience. Student teaching can be considered a special type of field experience. It is so special that it is given a specific name and preferred status within preservice programs. In certain respects, however, all field experiences are similar. In this chapter we will discuss some common features of all preservice field experiences. These common features will serve us in subsequent chapters as a map on which to locate the concerns, goals, and issues faced by all students about to begin such experiences.

## COMMON FEATURES

All teaching situations have four features in common.<sup>1</sup> Although these four features may seem too obvious to mention or simply appear to reflect common sense, they will be useful reference points. First, almost by definition, a teaching situation must include a teacher or teachers of some sort. (The term *teaching agent* could be used to include texts or machines that teach, such as programmed instruction.) Second, there is at least one learner (termed pupil or student, depending on how old or how serious about learning the person is). Third, there is some subject matter or material that the teacher shares with, presents to, or negotiates with the learner; that is, there is something that the teacher teaches (the “stuff” of teaching), be it academic knowledge, personal feelings, or technical skills.

There is always a danger that a teaching situation will lack the necessary balance of these three features. When teaching ignores the learner, there is a tendency to be autocratic; when it ignores the teacher, it tends to be laissez-faire; when it ignores the subject matter, it is typically empty.

This “triad”<sup>2</sup> occurs within the fourth feature of a teaching situation—a social and

physical *context* consisting of rules, facilities, values, expectations, and personal backgrounds, which act as resources, constraints, and direct influences on teaching and learning. Figure 1.1 summarizes these features.

When we think of teachers, learners, subject matter, and context, many issues come to mind. Each of these features serves as a category of issues for a discussion about educational topics. In fact, if these four features are truly comprehensive, we would expect all educational issues to fall into one or more of these categories.

## Teachers

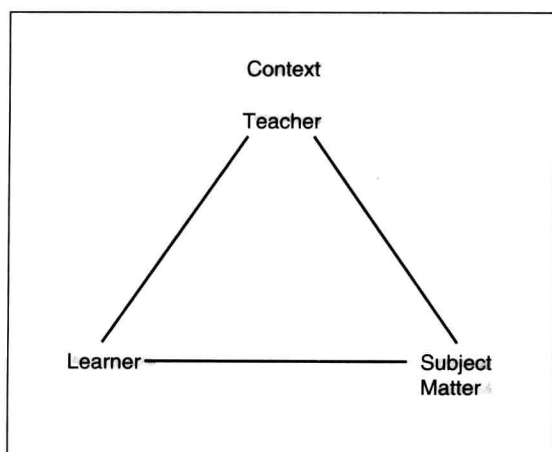
When we consider the teacher, we are addressing issues such as the following:

- The kind of person the teacher should be
- The proper role of the teacher
- The reasons people choose teaching as a career and stay in or leave the profession
- The reasons teachers burn out or remain fresh
- The tasks teachers face in classrooms

## Learners

In a sense, we are and will always be learners, regardless of our age or position. Obviously the range of potential learners is immense, particularly if we consider not only ages but also purposes, aspirations, and backgrounds. We must also consider that this

**FIGURE 1.1** The four common features of teaching





diversity greatly affects any teaching. Furthermore, there is quite a difference between teaching in a one-on-one situation and teaching a large group of diverse individuals. In one-on-one (or one-to-*small* group) situations, issues such as the following arise regarding the learner:

- What the learner already knows
- What comes easily or with difficulty
- What learners consider to be relevant
- The anxieties that must be taken into account
- The learner's future career
- What the learner is likely to find interesting, stimulating, or challenging

When teaching a group of learners, additional issues arise:

- The treatment of learners, as unique individuals or as members of categories (e.g., gifted and talented, non-college bound)
- The degree to which learners should be treated equally or differently
- Whether the fastest, the middle, or the slowest learners should be used as a reference for decisions about when to move on to new material (i.e., pacing)
- Whether the teacher should try to develop a sense of “groupness”

## Subject Matter

What teachers teach ranges from facts and concepts to thinking processes, to physical skills, to values and feelings. One issue of concern is the relative importance of each of these domains of subject matter. For example, we might question the legitimacy of using the teacher's or the learner's own feelings as subject matter for instruction. Or, we might try to decide whether to regard subject matter as truths to be learned or to emphasize how truth is reached.

Another important issue concerns the fact that time is a very scarce commodity. We simply do not have the time to teach everything as completely as desired. Therefore, we always seem to be faced with the “breadth versus depth” issue. For example, how much should we try to cover, and to what extent should we take the time to get all the students to understand the material fully? How do we reconcile these often conflicting demands for coverage and mastery?

## Context

Students and classrooms are unique places that do not change very much. They have distinctive physical and social qualities that persist from generation to generation. Philip Jackson<sup>3</sup> asks us to imagine entering a school at night with nobody else there and all the lights off. The smell alone would tell us where we are. The distinctive smells of cleaning fluids, chalk dust, and pencil shavings would give it away. Turning on the lights would confirm our location.