Preparing to Teach

What does it feel like to learn to teach? What experiences are you likely to encounter and what challenges might you face? This book gives you the chance to learn from the experiences of students who have just completed a course in preparing to teach. They offer all manner of insights, from the amusing to the cautionary to the thought-provoking. Course tutors provide additional commentary, identifying key themes and structuring chapters and the whole book to mirror the process of learning to teach.

Each chapter takes a different facet of learning to teach, the first exploring the motives and influences that lead people to commit to teaching. Further chapters concentrate on learning about teaching in the school setting, considering:

- the observation of experienced teachers
- interaction with pupils
- discussions with mentors and new colleagues
- the exploration of the concept of ‘subject knowledge’
- learning as you teach, lesson-by-lesson.

Later chapters consider the many frameworks in which you will find yourself working, the Qualifying to Teach standards included, but also acknowledging tacit frameworks such as ‘the hidden curriculum’. In the final chapter, students talk about what they learnt of themselves and how it felt to become a teacher for them.

If you are thinking of learning to teach, applying for a course or just starting one, you will find voices here that give you a sense of how it feels to work through that process. The book is a companion; its tone friendly, conversational, and relaxed. Even at the most testing times in a course, you can turn to Preparing to Teach: Learning from Experience and find voices that say ‘yes, I’ve felt like that too’.

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Preparing to Teach

Learning from experience

Edited by
Jeff Battersby and John Gordon
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Contributors

This book is authored by highly experienced teaching and research staff in the education centres at both the University of East Anglia and the College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth. The programmes at each institution are highly regarded by student teachers (evident in their evaluations), colleagues in partnership schools, and by OFSTED, which has frequently awarded their courses the highest of inspection grades. Many of the authors listed here have been involved in projects sponsored by the Training and Development Agency for Schools, developing teacher-education practice and resources at a national level, while some have also contributed to research informing national strategies in the secondary phase. All contributors have prior experience of teaching and management responsibilities in state secondary schools.

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John Gordon is a lecturer in education and course leader for English within the University of East Anglia’s Secondary PGCE programme. He also contributes to the secondary course’s professional development strand, Fast Track and MA QTS routes. He has authored and overseen the development of CD-ROM resources designed for training school-based mentors on behalf of the TDA, has completed reviews for the Teacher Training Resource Bank, and been part of a systematic review team concentrating on quality in initial teacher education. He has published articles in national (English in Education) and international (The International Journal of Learning) journals. His doctoral research has focussed on the teaching of poetry as an oral and aural medium. Previously he worked as a teacher of English and Media Studies in urban (and ‘special measures’) and rural comprehensive schools.

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Caroline Still is a lecturer in education and Co-Course Director of the University of East Anglia’s Secondary PGCE course, co-ordinating the Fast Track programme. In addition, she holds particular responsibility for Science and specialist Biology training as part of the PGCE programme. She is involved in an environmental project working with Norfolk schools and businesses. Her main research interests are centred around Biological Education.
Acknowledgements

It is impossible for us to credit directly each quotation that you find in this book, given that many were provided in anonymous responses to paper-based questionnaires. Where names do appear in the main text, they have been changed to preserve anonymity of the speaker. However, we feel it is important to thank the many student teachers whose combined remarks constitute the substance of this book.

Below, then, is a list of all students who gained Qualified Teacher Status and the PGCE award in the summer of 2002, most of whom now continue work as fully qualified teachers. The experiences they describe typify those of many of the student teachers we have worked with, and we thank them all for their part in Preparing to Teach: Learning from Experience. In addition, we would like to acknowledge the influence of all students and colleagues we have worked with before and since the preparation of this book, whose comments and experiences have also shaped its content and ethos.

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Introduction

John Gordon

About this book

If you’ve picked up this book, bought it or just browsing – flicking through in a library or book shop, perhaps – chances are you are considering a course of teacher preparation. Maybe you’ve just started one, in the throes of the first few days or weeks. In either case, you perhaps want to get a better sense of what lies ahead, learning from those who can, could, and did teach for the first time in a situation similar to the one in which you now find yourself.

You would have noticed that the book is called Preparing to Teach: Learning from Experience. But why that name? Even if you are only starting to think about learning to teach or the sort of course that might best suit you, you’ve already started to prepare. It’s possible that you selected your first degree with this in mind; spent time during your own schooling on ‘work experience’, shadowing teachers with half a notion that you would like to be one too; or that you’ve made very deliberate steps already to make a shift from one career or profession to another.

We intend this book to be helpful at the earliest stages of preparation: to offer you the benefit of the experiences of others, of those already working through a course, and of those who have just completed. If you are just starting a course yourself, we hope the book can be a companion: that it describes thoughts and feelings you recognise, and at the same time offering some encouragement. Though on the one hand it is so much about communities and people, teaching can at times be quite an isolating experience: you may be the only adult in a room of youngsters, having little contact with other adults through a school day, even lacking the opportunity to meet with colleagues at break or lunchtime. If you are a student teacher this feeling may be exacerbated by virtue of
your relatively transient ‘guest’ status, especially if you are the only person in such a position in your school. One of the most useful things we hope this book can do is reduce any sense in which you might feel alone, that you are the only person ever to have your challenges, problems or misgivings. There are the experiences of close to two hundred people represented here, often directly voiced. You should find amongst them some that match your own and, hopefully, some that offer reassurance, support or encouragement.

It is important to note that this book is not called ‘How to Teach’, or even ‘101 Tips for Beginning Teachers’. This is not really a book about how to teach, though of course the student teachers represented in these pages do offer advice at times, as do the experienced colleagues who worked with them. Instead, we hope it captures something of the feel or flavour of learning to teach across a whole course, the often challenging and very personal experience that involves. When we first had the idea for the book we were certainly very clear about one thing: that we didn’t want to create a book that explains individual teaching competences, the minutiae of the curriculum, or ways of demonstrating each of the ‘standards’ (TTA, 2003) that every beginning teacher has to meet. As tutors, with combined experience of working with student teachers amounting to decades and involving hundreds of individuals, we were only too aware that the teaching profession already enjoys an abundance of books that offer such information, and that at the current time in particular, documentation telling you what to do and how to do it flows continuously from the Department for Education and Skills, as part of one strategy or another. It is easy in the face of such information – a plethora of frameworks, specifications and statistics, which of course have their uses – to lose sight of the individual, and of the fact that being a teacher – even more so the process of becoming a teacher – can be emotive, frustrating, testing and compelling. This personal, affective dimension is at least as significant as those that are codified and quantifiable: it is the dimension any preparing teacher lives – and it is worth acknowledging.

So most of this book is made up of direct quotations, drawn from student teachers, sometimes written and sometimes shared in discussion. The authors play an incidental role, making links between comments, highlighting contrasting views, or simply identifying patterns. Combined, the voices reflect on experience, and offer you a picture of preparing to teach informed by different perspectives,
Introduction

sometimes opposing but often in agreement. As such, the content
does not fall readily into lists or bullet points, but we’ve done what
we can to organise the book into meaningful chapters. However,
teaching is usually a messy, open-ended business, so don’t expect
absolute coherence!

**Context for the book**

The student teachers who comment throughout the book consti-
tuted a cohort completing the University of East Anglia’s secondary
phase Post Graduate Certificate in Education. This PGCE course is
the result of a partnership between local schools and the university’s
School of Education and Lifelong Learning, and individual course
tutors based there are responsible for the chapters you will find here.
In addition, the Dean of the School of Education and Professional
Development at the College of St Mark and St John (Plymouth) also
contributes a chapter and the book’s conclusion, bringing to the text
an alternative perspective. The authors represent a diverse range of
subjects, and all of those offered by UEA at the time of research for
this volume. These included History, Geography, Modern Foreign
Languages, Religious Education, Physical Education, Mathematics,
Biology, Chemistry, Physics and English: Leisure and Tourism has
been offered since.

Of course, PGCE courses are only one of several possible routes
into teaching, which now include those offered by Schools’ Initial
Teacher Training consortiums (SCITTs) and also Graduate Training
Programmes (GTPs). Though the UEA course has its own distinct
characteristics, it has many similarities not only with other PGCE
courses but also with these other routes. Whatever route you choose
or have already chosen, the experiences described here will often be
relevant to you.

In common with most routes, the UEA course includes school-
based placements and taught courses relating to subject specialisms
and the wider professional role of teachers. Starting the course
in mid- to late September with time observing in primary and
secondary schools, student teachers then attend a taught course
at UEA over seven weeks, visiting their placement school two or
three days a week before starting a ‘block’ placement in mid-
November, in school every day over a period of five or six weeks
until Christmas. In January the cycle repeats itself, minus the initial
observation and with an extended second placement, typically of a couple of months’ duration.

**Guide to content**

**Wanting to teach**

The first chapter, Penny Lamb’s ‘Wanting to teach’, explores the reasons that lie behind the very decision you may be about to make yourself: choosing to become a teacher. What influences shape such a decision, and who else might be involved? As a group, the student teachers Penny quotes reveal that the motives people have for joining teaching vary considerably, and that the decision to go into teaching can be made at very different junctures in their lives. Some students interviewed made the decision immediately after their first degrees, whilst others made a change much later on, often moving from a successful career in another profession.

Many of us can remember inspiring teachers from our own time as pupils, and the impact of these is clear upon many of the students speaking here. At the same time, though fortunately not so commonplace, is a reaction against poor teaching: remembered experiences of unhelpful and barely competent teachers have spurred some individuals on to represent their field of expertise more successfully, as if to undo the faults of predecessors. Also influential are family members: several of the students interviewed here, and on courses every year, come from ‘teaching families’. Recollections of parents’ verve and enthusiasm for their work are vivid, and a sense of the impact of teaching on domestic life is conveyed. Alongside the sheer energy and commitment there is often reference too to copious amounts of marking. The influence of parent-teachers was so great on one student that she used to ‘play teacher’ at home, having her own imaginary classes and pretend registers!

Before making the step to apply for courses of teacher preparation, many of these student teachers arranged visits to schools for observation. Sometimes they returned to their own schools, having to make a leap of the imagination from pupil-experience to teacher-perspective. In some cases, these observation visits helped individuals decide the age group with which they would feel most suited to working. Like some of them, you too may decide you want to become a secondary phase teacher because you feel that this is the stage of schooling where pupils make momentous decisions
that shape their later lives, or perhaps you have a personal passion for your subject and feel you can inspire pupils just as you were inspired yourself.

A number of the students commenting in this chapter see teaching as a vocation and an opportunity to bring about change in the lives of individuals, with some viewing the choice to join the profession also as a rejection of a corporate, materialistic ethos in other lines of work. Penny complements the comments of students she interviewed herself with findings drawn from a survey of career-changers joining teaching (Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant, 2003). The combined experience of students here suggests that they made carefully considered and informed choices about becoming teachers. Hopefully you will find remarks with which you can identify, comments that describe circumstances or aspirations that accord with your own.

**Learning about teaching**

Once you join a teaching course, how do you get to grips with its many different elements, practical and academic? Jeff Battersby’s chapter charts the experiences of student teachers coming to terms with the myriad demands of teaching as they go into schools to adopt the teacher role for the first time. It’s an overview of the whole process, considering how you might negotiate the challenges thrown your way and respond to the mass of advice you’ll receive, which can often be contradictory. Which should you take on board, and which ignore?

What happens if your lesson goes so badly that you want to leave teaching, there and then, at that very moment? Worse still, how do you react if your mentor or tutor sees it? Can teaching really be so difficult? Many of the comments offered by students in this chapter reflect on how they dealt with pupils’ (mis)behaviour and classroom management. Despite all the advice offered, and even though they knew what they should do, it appears mistakes are inevitable, in fact crucial, to your development as a teacher. The students here are candid, happy to describe their most disastrous moments. However, as Jeff points out, it is easy to be over-critical, missing successes and failing to acknowledge your own strengths as a developing teacher. Students also consider how they evaluated their own teaching, becoming willing to adapt to unpredictable circumstances, gaining the ability to respond positively to the most
awkward situations. ‘Expect the unexpected’ is one lesson to be drawn here! No matter how well you ‘know your stuff’, no matter how good your preparation, the fact that you may be working with 30 individual pupils at any one time will soon make clear that not everybody perceives things in quite the way you do.

**Learning about your subject**

If the notion of ‘subject knowledge’ is not yet significant to you it soon will be, constituting as it does one of the three major areas of the Qualifying to Teach standards. Requirements specified by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) for all courses make it inevitable that you will at some point be asked to complete a ‘subject knowledge audit’, not only to identify your own areas of expertise and those for development, but also to assist those working with you, such as mentors and tutors, in giving you the opportunity to develop your subject knowledge as much as possible. This perhaps makes ‘subject knowledge’ sound simple and unproblematic, implying that there are clear domains of knowledge content within easily identifiable boundaries.

The experience of student teachers described here, and the contextualising comments provided by Nalini Boodhoo, demonstrate that actually ‘subject knowledge’ is a complex concept, which no audit is ever likely to recognise sufficiently. The difficulties become apparent even at the point of application for a teacher preparation course. You may have encountered recommendations to demonstrate that 50 per cent or more of your first degree is directly relevant to your chosen specialist teaching subject. How, though, can any course supervisor or tutor be certain that your course is likely to provide you with the knowledge pertinent to qualifying to teach, given the diversity of university degree programmes, optional modules and different contexts for teaching experienced in those institutions? And what of transferable skills? Could you not argue that a graduate in any humanities subject may have developed knowledge, skills and understanding relevant to several school subject disciplines? Of course, this line of thought already fails to recognise knowledge acquired in other contexts, perhaps professionally or through leisure interests. And once you begin a course, no matter how much subject content you know, and no matter to what level, do you know what to do with it in a classroom, studio or playing field? Can you make it meaningful to pupils, appreciate
their take on it, recognise steps in a thought process you’d like them to master?

Subject knowledge is so much more than your own grasp of particular factual details or your own ability relating to a particular skill: it relates to pupils’ conceptions of subjects and topics, to the curriculum design of your subject, to methods and contexts of teaching, even to a philosophy of your subject, its values, aims and purpose. Furthermore, as the curricular as well as the ‘real world’ context continues to change, so must your knowledge and understanding of your subject. Certainly, it is not finite: your ‘subject knowledge audit’ may help you make steps forward, but you will never reach a point where you can sit back and say to yourself ‘Ah, at last, I know it all now’. But that’s perhaps one of the things that has attracted you to teaching, the prospect not only of helping pupils learn, but also of constantly learning yourself.

**Learning through observing**

One way of developing subject knowledge – in the more complex sense – is through observation, especially of the expert practice of experienced teachers. Sue Cramp asks student teachers about the benefits of observation, and about approaches they have taken to it. The chapter traces learning from the earliest observations – those made even before you decide you want to teach, during your time as a pupil – to those made late in a course after considerable experience of teaching classes yourself. As in the chapter ‘Wanting to teach’, it becomes clear what a powerful influence your own teachers may be on your own developing style in areas such as your relationship with pupils, your exposition during lessons, even your attitude to administrative responsibilities.

One of the challenges of observing once you begin a course is to move beyond observation from the pupil perspective towards consideration of the design of the whole lesson, and the way it might help all pupils learn. For some students, observing others helped them identify appropriate expectations of pupil behaviour: even though you may become aware of rules for behaviour in a given school, it can be especially useful to see how these operate in practice. The students commenting in this chapter identify progress they make from early observing preoccupied with the actions of the teacher, towards greater focus on the learning of pupils, at the same time commenting on how they learned to observe, a skill in
itself. Increasingly, their observations were made with a specific purpose in mind. Sometimes they observed concentrating on a particular approach to a topic, or to reflect on how an experienced teacher arranged a lesson to allow all pupils across the ability range to be sufficiently supported and challenged. Others remark on observations they made in subject areas other than their own, and the insight this can provide. You too may find, as in the case of one student here, that observing yourself is an extremely powerful means of developing your teaching.

**Learning about pupils**

As well as watching colleagues teaching, you will probably learn a great deal during the time you spend working with pupils yourself. The chapter ‘Learning about your subject’ indicated that this involves a sensitivity not only to what pupils know, but also to their misconceptions. Pupils’ level of understanding at any one time will become apparent in all sorts of different situations, at the point of whole-class discussion, eavesdropping on small group activities, watching pupils work in a gym or drama studio, or looking at written or graphic work away from lessons, in your time for assessment at school or at home.

As you work through placements you will gain not only a good understanding of what to expect of pupils generally at different stages in their education (depending on their year group, say, or key stage), but also of the way in which individuals respond to certain activities, the ways in which they think. As you see pupils working in your lessons over time, and perhaps in other subject areas through observation, you may develop a sense of their broader interests and motivations, the way they relate to other teachers and to each other. At some point it is inevitable too that a pupil will know something you do not, or that one possesses a skill or aptitude you don’t have. How should you react? How do you learn from the experience to inform your teaching in future?

As well as learning about pupils through working closely with them, you will encounter during your periods in school diverse sources of information about each individual. Some of this will be confidential, relating to particular learning needs or circumstances which may affect an individual’s response to your subject, to other people and to the experience of school. Other information available may derive from other schools and earlier examinations,
from primary school perhaps, schools in other local authorities, or schools abroad. You will have access to files, reports, statements and mark books, gain information from parents, and learn a great deal too from informal comment from other teachers. One of the challenges you face as you prepare to teach is how to interpret all this information, and how to act on it to help each pupil learn. You will be working through a cycle very similar to the one your mentor works through with you.

Learning while teaching and with teachers

Roy Barton’s chapter reports on students’ thoughts on learning from the experience of working alongside experienced colleagues. Roy describes the nature of the student–mentor relationship, and students offer some suggestions on how to make the most of opportunities presented in such dialogue. Roy also outlines a cycle of formative assessment common to many courses, in which you meet with your mentor on a regular basis to reflect on achievements to date and then to agree on areas for development over the week to follow, often devising very precise targets to be reviewed at a later date. Some courses, like the one described here, use a form of log or journal to record the outcomes of these meetings. The chapter provides a very detailed account of just such a log and the way in which it recorded and informed progress over a placement.

Of course, meetings with your mentor are not the only way in which you learn from colleagues during your time in school. The role of observation has already been mentioned, and in addition there are numerous ways of being introduced to teaching responsibilities gradually, such as team-teaching. This may involve working with your mentor (or indeed another colleague) to take responsibility for leading a section of the lesson, introducing a particular activity or having a go at a teacher-led phase involving, perhaps, explanation and use of a whiteboard. The student teachers commenting in this chapter indicate that though this can be a very positive experience, it presents its own challenges! Of particular importance in this chapter are the comments students make not only about the good advice from mentors and colleagues, but also concerning how they responded to comments that were at first difficult to take. For many speaking here, the ability to be candid about your mistakes and openly acknowledge difficulties becomes key to learning about teaching and continuing to make good progress.
Learning from ‘the hidden curriculum’

Moments of preparing to teach are likely to pull you up sharp, to force you to interrogate your own values and beliefs. You may gain a heightened awareness, for example, of the diversity of pupils’ home backgrounds, where values and beliefs differ significantly from your own. Maybe your subject necessitates you dealing with controversial subjects, those that provoke impassioned debate and emotional response.

The students who comment in Marian Agombar’s chapter describe the points at which they became aware of ‘the hidden curriculum’ – those aspects of education that are not easily contained in subject curricula and other written documents, yet which may constitute the most powerful basis for learning about life in the school experience of a pupil.

Have you ever considered the power of teachers as role models? Is it possible that the way you respond to pupils, for instance in the way you treat comments from boys and girls, reinforces certain stereotypes about the sexes? Does your teaching style perpetuate stereotyped behaviour in itself? Frequently these questions do not remain hypothetical, abstruse contemplation: they arise from memorable moments of teaching, presenting personal challenges to student teachers. Even the most innocuous item – remaining unseen – causes one student to reconsider. Who would have thought a belly-button ring could create such a seminal moment? At the same time, students describe moments when they have made crucial decisions about the welfare of children in their care, the full implications of the phrase in loco parentis coming to be recognised.

Running throughout the chapter is a sense of students rethinking their view of teaching, returning to their motives for joining the profession, and often redefining their understanding of education.

Learning to work within frameworks

As you begin to teach you will find yourself engaging with a variety of frameworks, from the institutional (your school, your course provider) and curricular (the National Curriculum, the Secondary Strategy, examination specifications) to the conceptual (theories of learning, subject pedagogies). As a student teacher you will have to familiarise yourself not only with these but also with the Qualifying
to Teach standards. This framework specifies the knowledge, skills and understanding you must demonstrate during your course, and as such represents a framework for assessment. However, it has no doubt influenced the structure of the course you follow significantly too, making it to a greater or lesser extent a framework for your learning also, shaping decisions about the sequence of your course programme, the nature of activities in each session, or the emphasis of course assignments.

Terry Haydn’s chapter identifies a number of the frameworks you will encounter and their relationships, while students describe their experiences of working within them. Terry also includes the comments of school-based mentors and university tutors, the various perspectives teasing out the implications of frameworks for your daily life as a student teacher. It becomes very clear that no teacher can act as a completely ‘free agent’. Part of becoming a successful teacher seems to be about understanding these frameworks, recognising that sometimes their aims and values may contradict each other.

The remarks made by students could be helpful to you in the way that they offer advice about how to respond to so many frameworks, many describing moments when they realised that it is not absolutely necessary to know every detail of every framework from the start, that some details are more significant than others, and that frameworks which exist in document form often need some mediating to be understood in practice, requiring some adjustment to the necessities of time, place or people involved.

The remarks made by mentors and tutors highlight the importance of your professionalism (itself ‘frameworked’ in area one of the Qualifying to Teach standards) in schools and the other contexts for your learning during your course, acknowledging too that not all frameworks are explicit or codified. Schools but also individual departments have their own – often unspoken – value systems which inform professional relationships, interaction with pupils, teaching styles and schemes of work, and these can be incredibly difficult for you to gauge correctly in order to fit in.

Having successfully negotiated these frameworks in one school, you are likely to find strikingly or subtly different ones in a second placement. The combined experience of students, mentors and tutors suggests that beginning in a second school can be more challenging than starting in the first: you may have become institutionalised more quickly than you realise, the experience of teaching
in a second school making the unspoken frameworks of the first more apparent, perhaps too bringing to light assumptions about teaching and learning you never knew you had – revealing your own personal framework.

**Learning about yourself**

The penultimate chapter is about how student teachers learn about themselves as they follow a course in preparing to teach. For much of the time you will be thinking so much about the learning of others that it may be difficult to find the opportunity to reflect on how much you learn yourself as part of the process.

For many students, teaching their subject to others makes them feel they understand it far better than they ever did as a pupil, even than they did as an undergraduate. The emphasis of comments here, though, is not really on learning in your subject. It’s more about the personal dimension of teaching, about how becoming a teacher feels as you work through a course, from early experiences such as your first lesson, to moments when you feel your view of yourself in the role of teacher shifts significantly.

As in ‘Learning about frameworks’, the notion of professionalism becomes important. Many of the remarks in this chapter concern responses to adopting the identity of a teacher, and the extent to which that corresponds to the person you see as ‘yourself’. Some students are committed to the idea that you cannot teach without acting, while just as many are convinced that you cannot be anything other than yourself. It becomes evident that the experience is different for everyone, and each student has their own strategy for becoming a teacher.

As well as contemplating your own responses to your development as a teacher, you are bound to receive commentary from others, often uninvited! Sometimes pupils may comment, but so too may friends and family. As you become a teacher yourself, you may have similar experiences to the students commenting here, whose close relatives saw them changing, growing in confidence and assertiveness, drawing on aptitudes and talents latent until teaching made them apparent not just in school but also in life beyond. Many of the students who comment in this book joined teaching because they wanted to bring about change. It seems that that process of change begins with yourself.
Learning from experience

The book concludes with a summary by Jeff Battersby, in which he identifies patterns emerging from previous chapters. He signals the significant challenges you will encounter during teacher preparation, raising important questions to have in mind as you work through a course towards Qualified Teacher Status. The same questions are likely to be ones you return to again and again during what we hope will be the successful and fulfilling teaching career that follows.

Terminology used throughout this book

Teaching has its own jargon and more than its fair share of acronyms that can be bewildering to the newcomer or outsider, so here we clarify the use of a few common terms throughout the book.

Student teachers

We have chosen to refer to those preparing to teach as ‘student teachers’ or ‘students’, rather than trainees. This accords with the philosophy of the book: that learning to teach is not just about the practical skills developing as a result of training, it can also involve education in a broader sense. Some teacher preparation courses are presented as Initial Teacher Education (ITE) rather than Initial Teacher Training (ITT), containing distinctive emphasis on the philosophy, psychology and history of education, as well as the specific ‘competences’ described in the Qualifying to Teach standards. You may encounter some confusion on the part of others yourself – maybe friends and even colleagues will refer to you using both ‘trainee’ and ‘student teacher’. Where you find ‘student’ in this book, infer ‘student teacher’.

Pupils

If we use the term ‘student’ to refer to nascent teachers, we can’t use it without confusion to refer to the children they may teach in school. All children referred to are therefore considered ‘pupils’.
Teacher preparation courses

If you have made any progress along the lines of considering a course of teacher preparation, you have probably encountered a confusing array of options. We use the term ‘teacher preparation’ to refer to all of these possibilities, which include long-established routes such as PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) courses, Bachelor of Education degrees (of varying duration), and newer routes such as Graduate Training Programmes (GTPs) and those provided by SCITT (Schools’ Initial Teacher Training) consortiums. It’s worth bearing in mind that the experiences represented here are those of PGCE students, though there remain significant areas of commonality with the experiences of students following different paths. There now exist pre-preparation courses too, such as the Students’ Associate Scheme, while some institutions also offer ‘booster’ courses for prospective student teachers to brush up on their subject knowledge relative to the National Curriculum. It would be stretching our term’s usefulness to include those, but many of the experiences described here will be of interest to anybody who has gone that far in preparing to teach.

The Qualifying to Teach standards (QtT)

All providers of teacher preparation courses must give students the opportunity to meet the Qualifying to Teach standards (2002) – sometimes abbreviated to QtT – and their courses are structured accordingly. Elsewhere, you may find these referred to as the ‘02/02 [February 2002] Standards’, ‘the QTS [Qualified Teacher Status] Standards’, or simply ‘the Standards’. There are numerous prior versions, and it’s not unfeasible that you will encounter material relating to some of these, especially the ‘4/98 Standards’, introduced in April 1998. Fortunately for you, the manner in which such standards are articulated has become rather less complex since then.

Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), formerly the Teacher Training Agency (TTA)

The TDA is an executive and non-departmental public body of the Department of Education and Skills, with its board appointed by the related Secretary of State. The TDA website (accessed March
2006) describes its own remit as working ‘to improve the training and development of the whole school workforce. Together with our partners, we will help all school staff, teachers and school leaders realise their potential.’ Part of this remit relates to your experience of learning to teach, because a good part of your teacher preparation will occur in the context of frameworks and initiatives originating from TDA. The change in the body’s title is a result of an expansion of their role to cater more fully for the continuing professional development of teachers and teaching staff, going beyond its prior focus on initial teacher education.

And before you begin . . .

A good way to read this book, perhaps, is to think carefully about some of the comments from students in isolation, linking them to your own experience of learning to teach. Of course, only you can know how you respond to your own circumstances, how you are responding to the process of preparing to teach: each quotation will have a different resonance for each individual.

Maybe the voices here will confirm to you that you do want to become a teacher, helping you towards the decision. If you are already working through a course, they should provide some solace, help and encouragement.

No matter how the process of preparing and learning to teach goes for you, we wish you the best, and hope the experience shared by voices here helps you along the way.
References


