

# Being a Teacher

## Professional Challenges and Choices

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*The SAIDE Teacher Education Series*

**Saide**   
South African Institute  
for Distance Education



# Being a Teacher

Professional Challenges  
and Choices

## Learning Guide

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**Being a Teacher**

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# Preface

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## The SAIDE Teacher Education Series

*Being a Teacher* is one of the modules in the SAIDE Teacher Education Series developed between 1998 and 2002.

This comprehensive multi-media series comprises:

- Learning Guides, which operate much as a teacher does in structuring learning, explaining concepts, exploring debates in the field, and direct readers to other parts of the module at appropriate times;
- Readings which function as a 'mini-library' of edited readings for further exploration of concepts, issues and debates raised in the Learning Guide;
- An audiotape which use interviews and classroom events to develop the issues raised in each of the modules (not for all modules)
- A video which bring issues and debates from the modules to life (not for all modules).

Although designed to support the learning guides, the readings, as well as the audio and video resources could also be used independently of the learning guides. Used creatively, they provide valuable resources to support existing teacher education programmes.

This set of learning guides with accompanying readers develop teachers' abilities to use theory in practice; and to understand, intervene in and improve their practice as teachers. The diagram below shows the inter-relationships of the modules in terms of curriculum coverage.

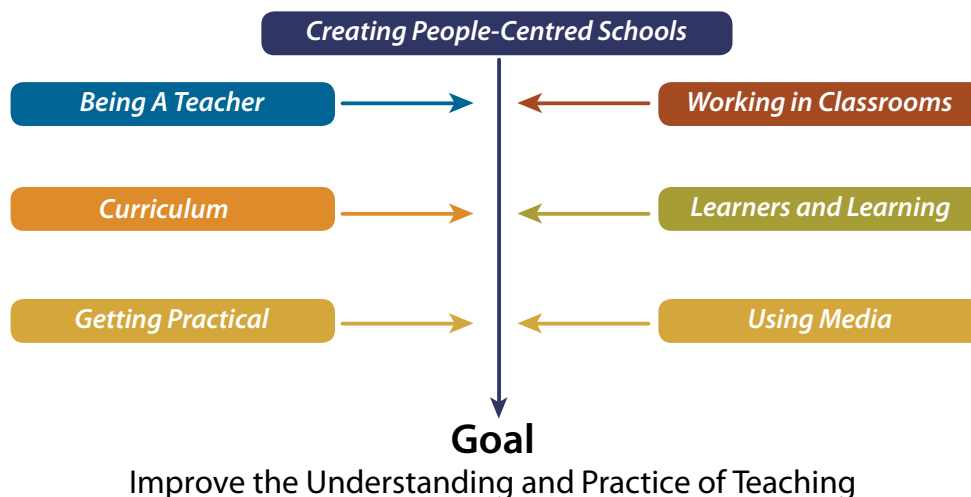
From within a framing context generated by *Creating People-Centred Schools*

- *Being a Teacher* and *Working in Classrooms* cover the professional and classroom contexts within which teachers practise
- *Curriculum* and *Learners and Learning* provide a theoretical understanding of resources or tools teachers may draw on
- *Getting Practical* and *Using Media* draw on the above in guiding practice.

*Curriculum* and *Getting Practical* are available in second editions from Oxford University Press.

The other titles are available on [www.oerafrica.org](http://www.oerafrica.org).

## Inter-Relationship of SAIDE Teacher Education Modules



## Components of the Being a Teacher module

Teachers are not just teachers. They are also people. In straddling issues of both professional and personal identity, this module comes to grips with the professional choices teachers are required to make, and do make, in developing the knowledge, skills and values of learners.

This module is suitable for both inducting novice teachers into the role of the teacher and for in-service programmes in which practising teachers could valuably compare their own experiences with this systematic overview of the role of a teacher and teaching as a profession. The contextual setting in South Africa is readily adaptable to other settings: the core issues are the same.

### **Learning guide**

The different sections in this module present a coherent progression. However, the seven sections are downloadable as individual units.

#### **1. Section One: Introducing the module**

This section argues the case for studying what 'being a teacher' means in relation to national needs and those of individual learners, and explains how the writers intended the module to be tackled.

#### **2. Section Two: Being a teacher in South Africa**

This section is not as strongly rooted in South Africa as its title suggests. It addresses the basic question of what it means to be a teacher in a broader social setting.

#### **3. Section Three: Teaching as a profession**

The meaning and implications of teachers' professional responsibilities are developed and extended through comparison with other professions.

#### **4. Section Four: The teacher's authority: sustaining an effective learning environment**

The issue of an orderly learning environment (involving rules, discipline and punishment) is explored in relation to broader issues of individual rights and freedom in a democracy.

#### **5. Section Five: The teacher as knowledge-worker**

Should teachers be imparting content knowledge or playing the role of a facilitator in a more learner-centred approach? This fundamental question – which may not have an either / or answer – links well the module 'Learners and Learning'.

#### **6. Section Six: Teachers, values and society**

Nothing in teaching is free of social dimensions and value questions. Teaching can therefore not be 'neutral', and teachers cannot sidestep the issue of their role in relation to sets of values. This section explores the role of the teacher in exercising and encouraging particular values.

#### **7. Section Seven: Making a difference**

What essential qualities do teachers (and schools) need in order to 'make a difference'? This section provides a platform for teacher agency and reflective practice.

### **Readings**

There are 20 edited key readings to support the following topics (Sections 2-7 above):

- Introduction to the readings
- Section One: Being a teacher in South Africa
- Section Two: Teaching as a profession
- Section Three: The teacher's authority: sustaining an effective learning environment
- Section Four: Teachers as 'knowledge-workers'
- Section Five: Teachers, values and society
- Section Six: Making a difference

Not all the copyright holders of these readings have given permission to release them digitally. Where we do have permission, the titles on the content page of each section will hyperlink to the text of the reading.

The available readings can be downloaded from the Being a Teacher module page on [www.oerafrica.org](http://www.oerafrica.org).



## Video

Part of the module is a 47 minute long video which introduces viewers to the perceptions, doubts and concerns of student teachers about their choice of career. Through a range of interviews with two celebrities and teachers, as well as clips of classroom teaching and school management practices, we explore the role of the teacher as a knowledge worker; care giver; and change agent through teaching and management. On the basis of these experiences, we return to the questions that initiated the tour of schools and classrooms.

The video is divided into clips each approximately 10 minutes long. These can be downloaded from the Being a Teacher module page on [www.oerafrica.org](http://www.oerafrica.org).

# Acknowledgements

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# SECTION ONE

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## Introducing the module

1.1	Why study a module on 'being a teacher'?	3
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# Why study a module on 'being a teacher'?

## 1.1

### A key role for teachers?

We frequently read in the media today that the role of teachers is crucial to the reconstruction of education, and even to South Africa's survival in a competitive global economy.

Yet teachers who take their role seriously encounter many contradictions. Frequent public calls are made for professionalism, but many teachers are called on to work in conditions that hardly encourage them to see themselves as professionals. Many teachers in recent years have faced the choice of redeployment or retrenchment; many have been designated 'temporary' for years while performing the same duties as other teachers.

Though some teachers have seen reductions in the size of their classes, the experience of others has been the opposite. Many still do not have the most basic facilities – a classroom with a roof, walls or working surfaces for the learners. Progress has been made in reducing inequality in state spending on education, but many South African teachers still have to make do in seriously under-resourced classrooms and schools.

On the other hand, for many committed teachers who try to carry out their duties professionally in spite of these difficulties, a major obstacle they face is the lack of support they receive from colleagues who fail to grasp the importance of professional standards.

Since the advent of a democratic political system in 1994 – and an end to the repressive minority control of education – teachers enjoy more freedom to experiment and teach creatively than they did in the past. But this relative freedom, and the task of transforming education, has brought its own uncertainties and challenges, such as the shift away from teacher-centred and content-based instruction in the classroom.

A new code of conduct and a new appraisal system have introduced unfamiliar forms of quality assurance. These transformations not only represent a transition from South Africa's past, they reflect worldwide trends in teaching administration and curriculum change.

In this context there is at least no contradiction between the need of the *nation* and the need of its *learners* for a body of competent teachers, professionally equipped to educate South Africans, confident of what their roles entail, and secure in the self-esteem that comes from knowing what, why, and how to do what they do well. It is here that this module seeks to play a role.

# 1.2

## What is this module about?

### Some key questions

*What does it mean to be a teacher in South Africa today?*

*Does our society really need teachers?*

*If so, what sort of teachers do we need?*

These questions provide the structure for this module. If you have already been teaching for some years, they may strike you as rather pointless. Yet some of the answers may surprise you. Today, as we look back on years of conflict and dissatisfaction in South African education, we face the enormous challenge of transforming our education system. This great task includes turning an entirely new curriculum into a classroom reality. In such a situation, we cannot take for granted even the most basic concepts, in case we repeat past mistakes.

The process of change has been accompanied by a fair amount of turbulence, confusion and controversy. There cannot be many societies in which issues relating to teaching and learning arouse more public attention and passionate debate than ours. Issues of teacher professionalism and morale, order and discipline in schools, and the very nature of the teacher's role in developing the knowledge, skills and values of the young – all of these regularly 'make the headlines'. This module sets out to address each of these issues in ways that will enable you to teach with greater confidence based on deeper understanding. We have also attempted, in Sections Four to Seven, to link this understanding to practical approaches and strategies for teachers.

We have divided the module into seven sections. Each section poses, and provides tools for answering, a critical question that follows from the key questions above:

Section	Critical question	Exploration
<b>Section Two:</b> <i>Being a teacher in South Africa</i>	A challenge: will you become part of the solution to the problems confronting South African education, or will you remain part of the problem?	We explore how teachers' reasons for teaching affect their practice and what forces are at work in the context of South African teaching.
<b>Section Three:</b> <i>Teaching as a profession</i>	What distinguishes professions from other occupations, and what forms of professionalism will help teachers in their efforts to serve learners?	We compare teaching with other professions and occupations. We examine what forms of professionalism are most appropriate in teaching. We look at threats to professionalism in teaching and the issue of teacher accountability.
<b>Section Four:</b> <i>The teacher's authority</i>	How can teachers regain and maintain their authority in a democratic learning environment?	We explore the nature of teacher authority, rules, discipline, freedom, and punishment. We examine whether true authority is compatible with democracy and freedom.
<b>Section Five:</b> <i>Teachers as 'knowledge-workers'</i>	Should teachers adopt the role of imparter of content knowledge, developer of skills, or facilitator of learner-centred development?	We examine whether this is an 'either/or' choice, or whether there is an alternative. We also explore what we mean by the concepts of 'knowledge' and 'teaching'.

Section	Critical question	Exploration
<b>Section Six:</b> <i>Teachers, values and society</i>	What kind of role should teachers play in influencing the values of learners? Should they attempt to teach values or try to be neutral? On what should they base moral choices and decisions in the classroom?	We explore what we mean by 'values' and examine whether moral values can be 'taught' – whether they are merely a matter of preference or relative to one's culture. How can we choose sound values for the learning environment?
<b>Section Seven:</b> <i>Making a difference</i>	What qualities do teachers need in order to 'make a difference'?	We examine what makes for 'extended professionalism', especially reflective practice, experimentation and risk-taking, and the notion of 'agency'.

## Choices

Teachers are required to make professional choices in all sorts of situations. As they prepare or give lessons, relate to parents, and participate in unions or professional associations, teachers make hundreds of decisions, judgements and commitments – all of which involve *choosing*.

Some of these choices are momentary and immediate, others are long-term, and slow to reveal their results. Both kinds may have important consequences for other human beings. This is one of the reasons why this module takes questions about *professionalism* seriously.

So, as you study each section in this module, keep in mind the following questions:

*What choices do I have about the various roles I might play as a teacher?*

*Why do some choices make more sense than others?*

*What practical challenges do these choices present?*

While these questions and this module do not focus on specific teaching strategies, which are the subject of other modules in this series (*Getting Practical* and *Using Media in Teaching*), we have taken care to illustrate each section with many practical examples, and have designed some of the activities and case studies to take you back into the everyday practice of teaching.

“  
Teachers make  
hundreds of decisions,  
judgements and  
commitments – all of  
which involve  
choosing.  
”





## SECTION TWO

---

# Being a teacher in South Africa

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2.8	Some teachers' responses: powerlessness, divided consciousness and inaction .....	21
2.9	Conclusion .....	24



# Introduction

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Teachers in South Africa today face considerable challenges. They also find themselves in a climate of uncertainty, not only because they face less job security than in the past, but because they have to:

- maintain discipline and authority in a *democratic* school environment;
- adapt to new roles and major shifts in the curriculum;
- adapt to a new code of conduct and a new appraisal system; and
- meet the demands of more informed and assertive parents.

This module is an attempt to dispel much of this uncertainty, to help you understand and cope with a degree of uncertainty, and to help you to develop some of the special competences needed to meet the challenges of being a teacher.

As you study this module, it may be helpful to think of yourself as undertaking a 'journey', moving towards a clearer understanding of the world of teaching as you answer questions that increase your practical competence and professional confidence.

In this section, the key questions will therefore focus on the personal and public contexts in which teaching takes place in South Africa. The section begins by stepping back to question our 'common-sense' view about the need for teachers, before going on to explore what motivates teachers to take up teaching as a career.

Teachers do not teach in a 'vacuum' – their own understandings of what teaching is, their reasons for becoming teachers, the circumstances under which they teach – all these factors affect their teaching. These contexts naturally bring to light the various problems and challenges facing teachers, for which we provide a simple framework. Finally, we present you with an important challenge relating to your teaching practice at the end of the section.

## Learning outcomes for this section

When you have worked through this section, you should have a clearer understanding of, and be able to discuss:

- teaching as a career choice;
- the contexts in which teaching takes place in South Africa; and
- the challenges that face teachers in South Africa today.

Let's begin by asking whether human beings really do require the attentions of teachers, and confinement in schools, in order to learn. In other words, are teachers really necessary?

## 2.2

# Are teachers really necessary?

Many young people in South Africa today seem to be questioning the value of institutionalized teaching in schools. Though many of them may never have sat down to think hard about the question, their actions – loafing at school, dropping out, and so on – signify a rejection of what schools and teachers have to teach.

The controversial but accurate portrayal of what life is like in some township secondary schools in the well known television series *Yizo Yizo* conveyed this vividly. Dull, uncreative chalk-and-talk teaching, the alternative pull of ‘easy money’ from petty crime and sex, and the knowledge that few who complete their schooling will easily find jobs – these are some of the factors that have contributed to this state of affairs.

Another very small but growing group who are questioning the ‘common sense’ view of schooling in South Africa today are those (mainly white and middle class) parents who are choosing to educate their children at home.

Even more radically, some writers have suggested that young people may be their own best teachers. For example, research on the process of acquiring a language indicates that we learn, not by being taught by others, but from everyday experience – by listening to others, trying out patterns of words, and eventually discarding ones that don’t seem to work. In fact it may be said that we learn our language *despite* adults trying to teach us.

Children *do* have an enormous capacity to learn about the world around them, and schools have sometimes been criticized for gradually *extinguishing* this capacity rather than using it or extending it. Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist, was brought up by a grandmother who refused to send her to school, so that her education would not be spoilt. Perhaps this idea was best expressed by the playwright George Bernard Shaw, who claimed that his education was interrupted only by his time in school!

So how do we answer those who challenge the value of institutionalized teaching in schools? We could say that to equip the young learner for modern life, there is too much for him or her to learn at home or out on the streets. Learning to speak a language may be one thing; learning to read and write it – and to master the various *forms* of written language required in the modern world – is quite another. Parents might feel confident in teaching the basic skills, but it is likely that they would have reservations about teaching a second language, not to mention the ‘languages’ of mathematics, science and economics.

Clearly, although learning doesn’t have to take place under the tutorship of officially-appointed teachers, or in schools, some form of institutionalized teaching in schools seems for the foreseeable future to be the most practical option for the majority of young people.



When adults try to correct a child who uses the word ‘foots’ for the plural of ‘foot’, they are interfering with a pattern that the child is applying with perfect logic. To add an ‘s’ to a word when there are more than one of a thing is true for well over 90% of English words. Left to its own devices, the child would eventually drop the incorrect form and begin to use the irregular form ‘feet’.

# Teachers are ordinary people

## 2.3

So far we have written about teaching in a very generalized way. The danger of any general or abstract discussion on teaching is that we may assume it is true and relevant for all teachers, in all circumstances. Nothing could be further from the truth. Teachers are ordinary but unique people who become teachers for different reasons, have different teaching objectives, and work in different circumstances, against a background of unequal educational provision. We therefore need to ask:

What does teaching mean for the individual teacher? Does this individual meaning and experience affect the way they teach? How does their individual context affect their experience and style of teaching?

Perhaps the best way to avoid too much generalization and abstraction is to introduce some teachers into our module. Let's start by looking in on the life of a teacher named Peter Adonis.

### One teacher: Peter Adonis

*It was 15:30 on Thursday afternoon. The children had all left some time ago, and Peter Adonis was getting ready to go home. Walking over to close the windows, his eye fell on a many-times folded piece of paper under a desk. He should have just thrown it away, but curiosity made him unfold it and read what was written on it.*

*'Do you know what Doons is on about?'*

*'I did – about half an hour ago.'*

*'Ag well, it's just the usual sh—. I'm not gonna pass anyway. Are you going to Paul tonight?'*

*Relieved that the contents (which referred to himself) were not more insulting, Peter crumpled the note and threw it neatly into the wastebasket. But the note had shifted his perspective, so that for a few minutes he found himself looking back on his lessons from the point of view of his students.*

*The books he had been marking from the day's lesson included many errors and misunderstandings. Could it be that he was teaching badly? The work was of average difficulty and he thought he had explained the concepts carefully, using a diagram that he'd come to school early to draw on the board. His humour had seemed to make the lesson go well ... so what could he do to improve the situation?*

*Peter had started out as a teacher filled with enthusiasm for his subject, fuelled with the desire to impart the joy of learning that he had experienced as a student. He felt that if he could help some of the poorer children find their way to a better life as he had done, he would have achieved something of value.*

*After his first frantic year of teaching, he had overcome many of his anxieties about discipline. He had found that he enjoyed interacting with his teenage students. The fact that some of them came to him to talk about their interests and even, occasionally, the very real problems some of them experienced at home, was very rewarding.*



Since we don't have space in this module to explore the challenges facing the first-year teacher, you may gain great benefit from reading some of the growing body of literature on this topic. (For instance, Bullough, R.V. *et al.* 1991. *Emerging as a Teacher*. London, New York: Routledge.)

Peter's story raises a number of issues, but let's start by focusing on the reasons why he became a teacher in the first place, because these initial choices are likely to colour subsequent choices in a teacher's career.



You need 10 to 15 minutes for this activity. Read the dialogue on page 15 carefully and then answer the questions again.

### ACTIVITY 1: REASONS FOR BECOMING A TEACHER

- 1 What were some of Peter's reasons for taking up teaching as a career?
- 2 What added to his job satisfaction once he had adjusted to the work?
- 3 What motivated you to choose teaching?
- 4 How have your feelings changed, if at all, since you made this choice?

## Why become a teacher?

---

Peter Adonis is in fact inspired by some of the most commonly-encountered motives we find among teachers: enthusiasm for his subject, and a desire to share the joy of learning with younger people, especially those whose circumstances might be improved by completing their schooling.

Michael Huberman and his team of researchers (Huberman, 1993: 113–117), basing their conclusions on interviews with 160 teachers in Europe, found the following motives for teaching to be the most common. Nearly all implied a desire to ‘make a difference’:

- the pleasure of contact with young people;
- the love of a specific subject, usually linked to the desire to impart it to others;
- the unexpected discovery of teaching as a pleasure in an unplanned teaching situation;
- the sense of a ‘calling’ to help others understand and to facilitate their learning;
- the influence of an esteemed former teacher, or family member who was a teacher;
- the desire to have an influence on young people, on the way in which teaching is conducted, or on society as a whole.

As another writer has pointed out (Bolin, 1987: 8), all such motives come from sources that are *personal* to the individual teacher, and linked specifically to teaching itself, rather than from the external rewards that teaching may offer, such as long holidays, and, in the past, job security or prestige within certain communities. This is borne out in a study by Fullan and Hargreaves (1992: 33):

*The greatest satisfactions of [...] teaching are found not in pay, prestige or promotion but in what Lortie (1975) called the psychic rewards of teaching. By this, he meant the joys and satisfactions of caring for and working with young people. The teachers in the [...] study talked a lot about the pleasures of being ‘with the kids’. They spoke of the immense pleasure of hearing a child read his or her first word or sentence [...] Several were eager to say that while they had been critical of certain aspects of their work they did not want the interviewer to think they disliked teaching [...] Even when bureaucratic pressures and constraints seemed overbearing, it was the kids and being with the kids as they learnt that kept these teachers going.*

# 2.5

## More than just a job

Peter Adonis probably doesn't consider himself a bad teacher, but knows that this does not necessarily make him a *good* teacher. A number of researchers (Lortie, 1975; Sikes, 1985; Huberman, 1993) have noticed a tendency of teachers in their early to mid-careers to be dissatisfied with the *adequacy* of their practice. It suggests that for many teachers, the career of teaching is more than just a job.

The 'performance gap' that these teachers experience between their ideals and the reality of the classroom, suggests that teaching is a 'calling', or a '*vocation*'. And although we've seen that a vocation can cause some performance anxiety, it also holds a number of important rewards for such teachers. Let's examine what a highly respected schoolteacher, Herb Kohl (1984), says about teaching as a 'calling':

The word '*vocation*' comes from a Latin word meaning 'to call'. It refers to the feeling that one is 'called' to a particular occupation by something in or beyond oneself in order to serve others.

**Altruistic** impulses refer to intentions that place the happiness and good of others before personal interests.

*I believe the impulse to teach is fundamentally altruistic and represents a desire to share what you value and to empower others [...] I began teaching when I was twenty-five and my students were twelve years old. Now I'm forty-five and those youngsters are in their thirties. There's not as much difference between forty-five and thirty, as between twenty-five and twelve. Your students 'catch up' with you and quite often end up knowing more than you do. It's wonderful to witness that continuous growth at the same time as you're taking on another group of learners [...] You can see and feel your students grow, and that finally is the reason to teach and the reward of teaching.*



You will need 10 to 15 minutes for Question 1.

### ACTIVITY 2: A JOB, OR A VOCATION?

- 1 Kohl provides some stories by students to give substance to his assertions about teaching, and we have included some of these in the Reader. Turn to Reading 1 on page 3 of your Reader, and read Excerpt A, entitled 'Patience and belief as key teaching tools'.
  - a From Huberman's overseas study, it seems that personal motives and values, and rewards that are linked specifically to the act of teaching might be the most important influences that prompt people to become teachers. How might this tendency benefit teachers? (The last sentence in the passage quoted from Fullan and Hargreaves' study above will give you a clue.) What disadvantages might it have for teachers?
  - b What point about learning and teaching does Herb Kohl seem to be making in James' story?
- 2 (Optional) You may find it interesting to make an informal survey among your colleagues or fellow-students of what motivated them to take up teaching as a career:
  - a Approach at least five colleagues or fellow-students individually to tell them about your informal survey, and to ask them why they decided to become teachers.
  - b Avoid asking the question in a group, as some people tend to be influenced by other people's opinions in group situations.
  - c Avoid asking questions in a way that makes your colleagues feel bound to give you the answers they think you want, rather than their honest reasons.
  - d Jot down the answers, and compare them.
  - e What did you learn? How many of your colleagues expressed ideas that involved making the world, or some part of it, a better place, or that involved making a difference in society?



In the story of James, Herb Kohl illustrates that even the most frustrating learners have a capacity to learn and grow, and it is such unexpected growth that teachers find especially rewarding.

For those disillusioned by a *materialistic* culture in which television and advertising media promise satisfaction from being able to buy and possess material goods, a career like teaching holds a particular attraction. Perhaps they seek what Fullan and Hargreaves describe (1992: 33):

*These psychic rewards of teaching [...] are central to sustaining teachers' sense of value and worth in their work. In many ways, what the primacy of these rewards points to is the centrality among [...] teachers of [...] an ethics of care, where actions are motivated by concerns for care and nurturing of others, and connectedness to others.*

Unfortunately, the same psychic or *intrinsic* rewards of teaching have led to salary exploitation. People assume that teachers will be happy to accept lower salaries. In the past, South African teachers, the majority of whom have been women, received lower salaries than other, similarly qualified employees of the state. The implied gender discrimination has played an important role in the way society regards, and treats, teachers (see Heather Jacklin, Reading 3, page 14).

A **materialistic** culture enjoys worldly pleasures that involve money and possessions.

**Psychic** rewards would be ones that satisfy the mind and soul.

An **intrinsic** reward would be one that was an essential part of the work.

## Non-vocational reasons for teaching

What about people who become teachers primarily for *extrinsic* reasons? In many countries, teaching offers relatively easy access to tertiary education for those who could otherwise not afford it and a chance to escape from rural or urban poverty into the middle class. This was especially true in South Africa. For instance, black women in South Africa have until quite recently had few career choices beyond nursing, teaching or becoming a homemaker.

Other 'non-vocational' reasons for teaching include long holidays, and in the past, unstructured afternoons and job security. But we should be cautious about looking down on such motivations because they are often mixed with what we might call more 'vocational' reasons, and in many cases, people have had very limited career options.

Nevertheless, if extrinsic reasons are uppermost in a teacher's mind, they are unlikely to sustain motivation for long, especially in trying circumstances. Extrinsically motivated teachers will tend to relate to teaching primarily as a *job*; they are less likely to see difficulties as challenges, and are therefore more likely to find their motivation weakening in the face of problems.

Realistically, career choice usually involves a *mixture* of motives. We know many teachers without an initial vocation who find themselves enjoying the work and becoming very committed. We also know teachers who had an initial vocation who find their enthusiasm and motivation waning over the years. So teachers in *both* these categories may in time have to deal with de-motivation.



Teachers are the largest occupational group in the state's employ. Their combined salary bill usually accounts for over 80% of state expenditure on education, even up to 100% when budgets are tight. Because this leaves little over for school facilities, curriculum reform and teaching materials, the cause of improving teachers' salaries is seldom popular.

# 2.6

## The contexts of teaching

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The personal motivations of teachers don't exist in a vacuum. So let's shift our focus from the 'private' level of personal motivation to the more 'public' level of teaching contexts – social, political, economic and administrative factors that influence teachers to varying degrees.

Let's rejoin Peter Adonis, who is trying to figure out why he is feeling uneasy.

### Everyday anxieties

*Peter was feeling less, rather than more, sure of himself after three years of teaching. And the reason didn't seem to be his inexperience, but things that were happening at work. Earlier in the day, for example, he had planned to revise cyclonic rainfall, and move on to the next chapter so that his class would be ready for the test that was being set for the whole grade. But he realized that the special lesson he had prepared the previous week had taken longer than planned, so he was under pressure to cover the prescribed work.*

*Just then the Deputy Principal announced practice for an inter-school choir competition, leaving Peter only 15 minutes with his class. And then a few minutes later, a student came to collect the Big Walk money from his register class. The collection was R3 short, so Peter put in his own money to save time.*

*However, Peter was forced to tell the class that they'd have to finish reading the section on cyclonic rainfall from the textbook at home, and ask him about anything they didn't understand in the next lesson. He knew, however, that few would do so. And there was a certain irony in knowing that it was cyclonic rainfall that caused the patched roofs of their pre-fab homes to leak every winter, making their homes uncomfortable for living, let alone studying.*



Spend about 10 minutes on this activity.

### ACTIVITY 3: PUTTING PROBLEMS INTO WORDS

**Earlier we referred to the fact that newly qualified teachers often experience problems in their first year. Here Peter, after some years of teaching, experiences problems that certainly do not seem to be of his own making. Try to summarize in your own words some of these problems.**

You probably did not interpret Peter's experiences in quite the same way as we have done, but the problems we noticed were: the pressure to keep to, and keep up with, the syllabus; conflicting priorities in the school day; and administrative interruptions.

These are the kind of difficulties that make up the day-to-day contexts in which teaching takes place. We will try to put them into perspective, along with other contextual factors, in Section 2.8.

## Conflicting theories and 'policy downpour'

*Back at college, Peter's pedagogics lectures had made everything seem so predictable: if you applied the right methods, and adapted them to the age group of your learners, your students would have no problems!*

*But now it seemed as though his training had only deepened his problem. The pedagogics textbooks seemed to discourage any teaching that didn't fit into the Christian National Education framework. Later, when he learnt of other teaching approaches that seemed useful, he couldn't decide which ones were more valid. They all seemed to be backed by strong, even factual, arguments, yet they often seemed to contradict one another. Should the curriculum focus on the needs of the child or those of society? Should they go 'back to basics' or move towards outcomes?*

*Since the arrival of Curriculum 2005, there seemed to be a new policy for teachers to implement every few months, each of which created more uncertainty among Peter and his colleagues. How much attention were they supposed to give to content in an outcomes-based curriculum? Did continuous assessment mean setting more tests? What did the role of learner-centred facilitation entail? How could learners develop skills if they had to spend so much time working in groups? How were teachers to maintain order without caning?*

*In the light of all these alternative theories and reforms in educational policy, was it realistic to hope that one could make a significant difference in the lives of children?*

A **valid** approach is one that is sound, one that you can defend with a strong argument or solid evidence.

### ACTIVITY 4: CERTAINTY AND UNCERTAINTY IN EDUCATION

- 1 Why do you think Peter's reality was so much less predictable than his lectures had led him to believe?
- 2 After reading about Peter's experience, would you agree or disagree with the writers Lieberman and Miller (1984: 2–3) that 'no uncertainty is greater than the one that surrounds the connection between teaching and learning [...] the knowledge base in teaching is weak; there is simply no consensus [...] about what is basic to the practice of the profession'?
- 3 Why do you agree or disagree?

Peter is beginning to see doubts about his own competence in a broader context. He feels doubtful about any educational theory that claims to be the only acceptable doctrine, but also about theories that contradict one another. Perhaps teachers need to weigh educational theories and policies against real, complex everyday practice. And educational policies, which after all are based on particular theories about teaching, learning and other social behaviour, seem open to the same doubts. This is a theme we will return to in more detail in Section Five on the teacher and knowledge.



These questions require some concentrated thinking, without much support from the Learning Guide or the Reader. Give yourself about 20 to 25 minutes to do this activity.

No **consensus** means that there is no general agreement.

## Schools without purpose

Many teachers may recognize policy overload and identify with Peter's uncertainties about educational theory. But perhaps for some, these problems seem something of a luxury. The discrimination and neglect that we associate with apartheid, and the resultant boycotts and rejection of authority, have resulted in a great number of schools that have lost a sense of purpose. In such schools, internal and community problems are so serious that a culture of learning and teaching has all but ceased to exist.



You should spend about 60 minutes reading the article and making a comparison.

### ACTIVITY 5: THE CULTURE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN YOUR SCHOOL

- 1 Botshabelo Maja is a researcher who spent the whole of 1994 interacting, observing and recording what went on, and what did not go on, in the daily life of a Soweto high school. Read about this research in 'The future trapped in the past', Reading 2, on page 7 of your Reader.
- 2 Imagine that you are also a researcher conducting a study on a school with which you are familiar (as a teacher or a student). Borrow any six subheadings from the Maja reading and write them down (they provide useful 'concept clusters'). Now jot down a point under each subheading about how they compare.

We are not going to provide a follow-up comment on Activity 5, partly because we imagine answers would differ widely. However, in Section 2.7 below we will attempt to categorize these 'school culture' factors, along with the other contextual factors we have described.

## Race, gender, social class and location

In South Africa, *race, language and ethnicity, gender, social class and location* have all had a strong influence on how teachers have been identified and how they have identified themselves. For instance, the experiences of black teachers in underfunded schools in the former black 'homelands' were very different from the experiences of their counterparts in suburban 'white' schools. And in many of our schools, women teachers have been identified as 'ordinary teachers' rather than as suitable candidates for leadership positions.

Despite corrective policies and legislation since 1994, it is wrong to assume that the old social arrangements have disappeared. Heather Jacklin's article 'Teachers, identities and space' (Reading 3 on page 14 in your Reader) shows how race, gender, class and location continue to shape the lives and teaching of teachers in South African schools.



Jacklin's main argument is that race, gender, class and locality have had particular significances attached to them at different times through our history. Consequently, these factors have had a profound effect on teaching experience and practice. Teachers' identities, and the spatial organization of teaching and teachers did not just 'happen' – they were created by social groups. This means that they are not fixed, but can be changed by the government, or by ordinary teachers themselves. Spend about 60 minutes reading the article, and then answer these questions.

### ACTIVITY 6: THE TEACHER IN SOCIETY

**Read Heather Jacklin's article 'Teachers, identities and space' (Reading 3 on page 14 of your Reader), and then answer the questions below.**

- a Write down three important changes that you think have occurred in the identities of South African teachers. Refer either to changes described in the article, or to changes you have experienced yourself.
- b Say whether these changes were brought about by the efforts of teachers or some other part of society (the Government, parents, press, learners).
- c What were the effects of the changes on teachers, and how might they in turn have affected learners?

Here are some of the changes in teacher identity that we found in the reading and elsewhere. Do not worry if your ideas are different.

- During the nineteenth century, teachers were primarily viewed as representatives of Christian religious denominations. A number of factors changed this, particularly the policies of the British Colonial Government after the South African War, which aimed to break the power of the Dutch Reformed churches in the schools of the former Boer republics. This seems to have resulted in greater autonomy for teachers, and a self-identity that is closer to the professional.
- During the years of apartheid, the racial categorization of teachers was regarded as more significant than the fact that they were teachers. Unfortunately, many teachers came to identify themselves in this way. While such forms of self-defini-

tion take time to fade, most teachers can now define themselves as teachers first and foremost.

- Until the 1990s, women teachers were paid less than male teachers, could not receive housing subsidies, received lower pensions and were viewed as better suited to lower positions and primary education. Today women are – officially at least, and in terms of basic conditions of service – on a par with men. This was achieved partly by the continuous campaigning of some teachers' organizations over many years, and partly by the new South African Constitution, in terms of which such discriminatory identification and practice was outlawed.



- With retrenchments, rationalization and redeployment in the latter half of the nineties, job security is a thing of the past. Such changes have been brought about by government policies aimed at achieving greater equity in schools across the country. All teachers have been affected by these changes, but teachers in working class areas experience greater insecurity because their schools are less able to pay for extra teaching posts.

These examples bear out Jacklin's argument that teachers' identities did not just 'happen', but have been 'constructed' over time by various groups in society. But at the same time it is important to remember Jacklin's observation that our 'constructed' identities have often been *contested*, sometimes by teachers themselves, and sometimes by teachers in concert with others in society. Teachers have been able to *redefine* identities that were constructed for them.

The importance of this fact will become more apparent as we consider whether teachers themselves are able to exert any influence on their situation, or whether the contextual challenges they face are overwhelming. This will be a major focus of the final section of this module.

# 2.7

## Contextual challenges that teachers face

There are so many contextual factors over which we may seem to have little control, that from time to time we need to 'step back' from everyday routines. This is the beginning of a 'reflective practice', an approach that is increasingly being expected of teachers (see Section Seven). The first step is to try to clearly identify contextual factors, giving them generalized names and grouping them in categories. This is how we have categorized the factors we have been considering in Section 2.6:

- **Unpredictable events:** In the everyday reality of schooling with its practical challenges and problems, things are never completely under control. This is considered normal in almost any school in any country. Unexpected problems can be annoying, yet many teachers thrive on the element of surprise – up to a point.
- **Community factors:** The socio-economic and cultural structures that shape the lives of various communities can deeply influence teaching. In one community it could be the influence of gangs, parental poverty, ill health and taxi wars. In another community, it could be values of individual competition for higher grades, sports prestige and status possessions. These factors create different senses of entitlement in young people, which may work against their making an active contribution to their own education.
- **Political and social transition:** The consequences of apartheid education, its legacy of inequality and resistance, have led to a continuing breakdown in the culture of learning and teaching. The fact that some schools are completely isolated from such problems simply points to continuing inequality in the schooling system.
- **Educational reform policies:** The new policies, initiatives, and regulations that come thick and fast from education authorities, every one of them requiring responses (and sometimes major shifts) from teachers, are another contextual challenge. Curriculum 2005, teacher appraisal, and the abolition of corporal punishment are mixed blessings for many teachers. The fact that reforms sometimes seem to contradict one another may create a sense of confusion and uncertainty.
- **Race, class, language, gender and location:** The fact that teacher identities were essentially constructed by groups of people, meant that teachers were able to contest and redefine their identities. This raises the possibility that teachers might be able to make a difference in the other contexts we outline above – all of which have been constructed by human beings (we take up this argument in Section Seven).
- **Global change:** Another contextual factor that we have not yet touched on is the fact that teachers in all countries, including South Africa, are experiencing pressure from government, employers and parents to prepare children for competitive employment in a global economy. Indeed, curriculum reforms like Curriculum 2005 are in part an attempt to redirect South African teaching towards this competitive global economy.

**Entitlement** refers to the belief that one has a right to something.

We do not claim that the way we have categorized the contexts of teaching is comprehensive. You may think of other contextual factors or categories yourself. For instance, you may believe that young learners have become more assertive or defiant than they were in the past, and that it is now more difficult to manage a class of children or adolescents, for reasons that vary from political upheaval to television.

The contextual factors outlined here confront teachers in South Africa with considerable challenges and are bound to affect the way they experience teaching and the way they teach. So it's a good idea to keep in mind the environment in which teachers work as you study the rest of this module.

# Some teachers' responses: powerlessness, divided consciousness and inaction

## 2.8

Challenging contexts can create a sense of *powerlessness* in many teachers. For teachers who are *intrinsically* motivated, a vocation may carry them far in the face of difficulties and threats. But for teachers who are *extrinsically* motivated, these difficulties are unlikely to be perceived as challenges that require strategies. A lack of intrinsic motivation tends to leave them open to demoralization when the difficulties mount up.

For this reason some teachers become *fatalistic* and simply give up, becoming part of the problem. Some adopt a bureaucratic 'mask' or image and begin to lead a 'double life'. Maxine Green, an American philosopher of education, has written of a '*divided consciousness*', in which teachers aim merely at efficiency, content for their students to achieve surface learning rather than 'deep' learning that endures, is adaptable, and helps the student to develop intellectually (1987: 180).

This divided consciousness also leads to *detachment* – teachers relating to students only in terms of their roles as 'learners', rather than in a full awareness of, and in response to, their differences of background and their individuality as people. These teachers lose sight of the goal or purpose of their actions (perhaps the strongest reason for introducing OBE with its focus on real, demonstrable learning outcomes).

*Inaction* in the face of disorder is another typical reaction of teachers to difficult teaching contexts, as Andrew Patterson and Aslam Fataar observe in their article 'Teachers, moral agency, and the reconstruction of schooling in South Africa' (Reading 4 on page 29 in your Reader).

### ACTIVITY 7: RESPONDING TO A CONTEXT OF DISORDER

**Read 'Teachers, moral agency, and the reconstruction of schooling in South Africa', by Fataar and Patterson, which appears as Reading 4 on page 29 of your Reader.**

- a** Why, according to Patterson and Fataar, do dysfunctional schools find it nearly impossible to break out of the 'vicious circle' of disorder and inaction? Give reasons that apply to individual teachers as well as reasons that apply to schools as institutions (and principals as the heads of institutions). Write about ten lines.
- b** The writers 'theorize' that there are three types or groups of teachers in dysfunctional schools. In which group, or groups, would you expect to find teachers who have a sense of a calling or vocation?

Patterson and Fataar's study focuses on how teachers in difficult schools experience teaching, how they see themselves, and how this influences their practice. These writers explore the *institutional* environment by contrasting functional and dysfunctional schools.

The functional school environment is associated with order, consensus and clear lines of responsibility. A well-organized and supportive work environment ensures that difficulties are shared. The dysfunctional school is associated with disorder and community problems that distract teachers and staff from using the school as a learning institution.

A common teacher response in dysfunctional schools is to assume a victim position and feel powerless to improve the situation. The state is seen as the only institution powerful enough to have an impact. As a result, many teachers do not take any moral responsibility for what happens around them. This is what the writers label 'moral minimizing'.

If you have a **fatalistic** attitude, you believe that events are decided by fate, and are therefore beyond human control.



Take about 45 minutes to read this article and answer the activity questions.



The institutional response in dysfunctional schools manifests typically in a loss of moral authority on the part of the principals. They feel that they can do little more than keep the peace between conflicting factions in the school community and feel unable to act as leaders, inspiring a collective vision for the school. Their energies are scattered and diffused. This is what the writers label 'moral diffusion'.

The three types of teachers identified by Patterson and Fataar are:

- those who appropriate vital functions such as fundraising to make themselves indispensable, and who acquire considerable power in the process;
- those who disengage from any sense of responsibility for their environment and who experience a relatively low self-esteem in proportion to their low output; and
- those who take on more and more responsibilities and eventually either burn out or leave the teaching profession.



The writers do not tell us whether the third group of teachers (who take on too much responsibility) actually manage to teach well. But their ability to do so must be severely limited by the prevailing atmosphere in such schools, and by their own overloading.

Teachers with intrinsic motivation are more likely to be found in the third group, yet they can also be found in the first two groups. This is because Patterson and Fataar perceive these responses to contextual challenges as *adaptations* to a bad environment rather than the mark of bad teachers as such.

So while intrinsic motivation is an important driving force for teachers, especially in difficult environments, it is unlikely to be enough on its own. Something else is needed, not only to *sustain* teachers through difficult times, but to ensure that they teach well and maintain a positive self-identity. Could the missing element be professionalism? Before we turn to this topic in the next section, let's look in on Peter Adonis to see how he faces challenges.

## Back at home

*That evening as he opened the newspaper, Peter's eyes fell on a report about renewed calls from leading politicians for professionalism among teachers. This didn't exactly make him feel cheerful, even though he knew he was not guilty of the things attacked in the report – absenteeism, drunkenness, losing exam papers and having sexual relationships with learners. At the supper table, his wife Rachel noticed his thoughtful mood.*

*'Is something bothering you, Peter?'*

*'No, it's nothing ...' A long pause followed, Rachel waited. 'Oh all right, I was just beginning to wonder whether I was really a good teacher. But*



*these days I'm not too sure that anyone knows just what a good teacher is. And with everything the Department wants us to put into practice at supersonic speed, when we haven't even got overhead projectors in most of our classrooms...'*

*'Peter Adonis, are you going to sit there and play the victim, or are you going to do something about it? We're not judged according to the problems facing us, but according to how we tackle them,' said his wife.*

*Over the next few days, Peter wondered how he could answer this challenge. There were so many questions he had never tried to answer about teaching. Should he get to know his subject better in order to teach it better, or become more learner-centred and try to relate the work more to their world? Should he 'take a stronger line' with his learners or take the risk of allowing them more freedom?*

*How could he help them to become something in the world if he just moaned about the Department? The children he was teaching were certainly going to experience plenty of difficulties and challenges in their lives. How could he equip them to deal with some of these problems?*

Taking up Peter's questions, and slightly modifying our key question about what it means to be a teacher in South Africa today, we now need to ask what is required of teachers in South Africa today? What do they need to do to become 'part of the solution'? How can they prepare learners to face challenges?

In fact, you have already begun to answer these questions if you have chosen to study a module like this as part of your formal or informal professional education as a teacher. What you learn here will equip you to begin the journey towards 'becoming part of the solution'. Once equipped, you will also learn from your own observation, from other books or courses, from some of your colleagues, and most of all from the learners in your own classes.

# 2.9

## Conclusion

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In this section you have learnt how the intrinsic or extrinsic rewards that motivate teachers are likely to affect their approach to teaching, and to the challenges they face in South African schools. You have also learnt how to categorize the often confusing contextual challenges that teachers face. And you have been encouraged to 'make a difference' rather than adopt a 'victim' position in these contextual challenges.

In the next section we examine the rather controversial concept of professionalism in teaching to discover whether it can help teachers to become 'part of the solution'.

### Key learning points

1. The reasons for becoming a teacher are likely to influence the educational choices and decisions that teachers make throughout their careers.
2. Intrinsic motivation among teachers would include an overriding interest in learning, a belief in the ability of all learners to learn and to grow, a desire to participate in and promote that growth and a desire to make a difference in other people's lives. Extrinsic motivation would include the attraction of external factors or perks, such as inexpensive access to tertiary education and longer holidays.
3. The contextual challenges facing teachers may be broadly categorized as:
  - unpredictable events, a degree of which are normal to schooling everywhere;
  - community factors such as the influence of gangs, parental poverty, and taxi wars;
  - a legacy of resistance to apartheid, which has led to a loss of faith in education;
  - identities constructed around race, class and gender, which can be challenged;
  - global trends, which include preparation for a global economy; and
  - educational reform, which is partly a response to some of the factors above.
4. Teachers who are motivated primarily by intrinsic values are more likely to experience teaching as a vocation, and see contextual factors as challenges. Teachers motivated chiefly by extrinsic reasons tend to relate to teaching primarily as a job. Such motivation will not provide the drive and incentive to subordinate contextual problems to the challenge of assisting young people to learn and grow.
5. Faced with very difficult teaching environments, many teachers develop various coping strategies that may not attack problems, but instead contribute to inaction and passivity, and lead to a loss in self-esteem.
6. Tackling contextual challenges requires more than strong motivation from individual teachers. It requires a shared vision or goal in each school to enable teachers to function well in spite of the difficulties.

## SECTION THREE

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# Teaching as a profession

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At the end of Section Two, we posed a challenge, asking you how you could become 'part of the solution' in our current teaching context, and what you could do to empower learners to face their own challenges in the future.

When we last met Peter Adonis, he was beginning to realize that teachers would not be in a position to help learners 'become something in the world' if they saw themselves as victims, helpless in the face of difficulties. Does at least part of the answer lie in the notion of 'professionalism'?

But what is professionalism exactly? The word seems to mean very different things to different people. Let's listen in as a group of teachers at Artis Secondary, Peter Adonis' school, discuss the same newspaper article that Peter has read, about renewed calls for professionalism among teachers.

## Teaching and professionalism

*Shahieda was upset: 'There go the politicians again – flogging teachers for being unprofessional, and blaming them for whatever problems they can't sort out themselves. After all, it's only a minority of teachers who set a bad example and make things uncomfortable for the rest of us.'*

*'Isn't that what why we have a Code of Conduct and a Council of Educators?' asked Elmarie. 'When politicians attack teachers they makes us seem more like naughty children than professionals. It's like punishing a whole class of learners because a few have done something wrong.'*

*'Teachers do a good job of breaking down the profession themselves when they come to work in open-neck shirts or the latest fad in hair-styles,' said Livingstone, an older teacher. 'The breakdown in discipline we're seeing among pupils is what happens when you start relaxing standards among teachers.'*

*'Come on, Livingstone, you're living in the stone age if you think that professionalism amounts to a dress code,' said Shahieda.*

*'I agree,' said Peter. 'There must be something more to being a professional than keeping to a dress code. But just what do we mean by the word "professional"? I'm not even sure that teaching is a profession.'*

*'I've been thinking about how that word was used to keep us all in line in the eighties,' said Fana. 'Do you remember? It was "unprofessional" for teachers to discuss political topics in the classroom – unless we took it for granted that what the government did was right.'*

*'Yes, I know what you mean,' said Peter, 'People need to think about what they mean when they use the word "unprofessional". Behaviour that is unprofessional for some people, may be quite acceptable to others.'*

These teachers bring to light some interesting issues regarding teaching as a profession. Like members of the police force and lawyers, teachers are often a target for public criticism. Should teachers jointly take responsibility for controlling their own conduct? And, in any case, what *is* professionalism? Does it mean more than a dress code and punctuality?

As we can see from the dialogue above, the meanings of words are not fixed, but 'built' over time by *the way people use them*. So it's not surprising that they come to be used in very different ways by different people. It's possible to use words to wield power over people if you say, 'It's "unprofessional" to do this or that.' You can shape

A concept is **contested** when various groups disagree about it and question it.

someone's way of thinking, in other words. No wonder there are sometimes vigorous debates about which meaning of 'professionalism' counts, or whether the word 'professional' even applies to teachers.

So which meanings of these terms 'matter'? What *forms* of professionalism will help teachers in their efforts to serve learners? And does this contested concept hold a key to the renewal of teaching in this country?

## Learning outcomes for this section

When you have worked through this section, you should be able to:

- recognize and distinguish between the various meanings commonly attached to the terms 'profession', 'professional' and 'professionalism';
- point out the problems with taken-for-granted, 'common-sense' views on professionalism in teaching;
- critically discuss the various arguments and practices associated with the idea of teaching as a profession, and be able to distinguish which of these are more beneficial and urgent for both educators and learners;
- recognize what factors in today's world threaten to prevent teachers from acting professionally; and
- critically discuss three key documents on which professional accountability in South Africa is based: the South African Council for Educators (SACE) Code of Conduct, the Education Labour Relations Council's (ELRC's) Manual for Teacher Appraisal and the same body's Resolution on the Duties and Responsibilities of Teachers.

# Making sense of professionalism

## 3.2

### ACTIVITY 8: YOUR VIEW

**You will gain more from your study of this section if you begin by putting down on paper your own thoughts on what the term 'professionalism' means. Make a simple list in your workbook starting with the words, 'Professional teachers ...'**

Let's find out how the term 'profession' is generally understood and how a 'profession' differs from other kinds of occupation.

Eric Hoyle and Peter John are two writer-researchers who have thought hard about the concepts of a profession and professionalism. In their 1995 analysis, 'Professional Knowledge and Professional Practice', they summarize the thinking of a number of writers on the subject of teaching as a profession. Drawing on their description, we will say that a profession is associated with the following qualities:

#### 1. *A crucial social function*

A profession is an occupation that performs a crucial social function or service requiring a considerable degree of skill and competence.

#### 2. *Specialized knowledge*

Professionals draw on a well-established, well-tested body of specialized knowledge, for instance medicine or the law. Acquiring this body of knowledge and skill requires a lengthy period of higher education.

#### 3. *Professional competence*

This competence is exercised in situations that are not wholly routine, but which present new problems and require more than *recipe-type knowledge* or simple, 'right or wrong' judgements. For example, doctors may well face situations in which the best course of action is not clear, or in which two *right* courses of action are in direct conflict with each other. In contrast, electricians often make relatively straightforward decisions, even though they draw on a variety of solutions that involve technical knowledge.

#### 4. *Professional responsibility*

The long period of education required by professions entails socialization into professional *values*, which focus on serving the client's interests rather than deriving economic profit. In other words, society expects professionals to make decisions that involve considerable risk, and to take a high level of *responsibility* for these decisions in the interests of their clients, for example a doctor diagnosing and treating a patient's illness correctly. These professional values are set down in an ethical code of conduct, to which all registered and licensed members of the profession are bound to adhere.

#### 5. *Professional autonomy*

Professionals require considerable freedom or autonomy to make judgements, because they have to draw on knowledge-based skills and values-based decision-making in non-routine situations that are often complex and risky. This involves relative freedom from very restrictive bureaucratic control by the government or from public interference.

This freedom extends to the professional organizations that have control over the



Spend 5 to 10 minutes on this activity. Its purpose is not to test the 'correctness' of your understanding of professionalism. However, as you work through this section, you will find it useful to look back every now and then and compare what you read or think with what you have written here – and to note whether your thinking has changed or not. We will remind you to do this at appropriate points.

**Recipe-type knowledge** refers to simple, 'how-to' knowledge, rather than a deeper, theoretically informed understanding.

A process of **socialization** would include learning the attitudes, values and actions appropriate to members of a particular culture or group.

**Bureaucratic control** would involve having to apply a large number of rules and procedures in every imaginable situation.

professional responsibilities and conduct of their members. These organizations enjoy the autonomy to register their own members, and to discipline them if they infringe the code of conduct.

### **6. Professional accountability**

In exchange for professional autonomy, the controlling body of the profession assures society that its members are competent, responsible, and accountable. It also ensures professional control over their *credentials* and their entry into the profession; and it ensures a high degree of accountability through published codes of conduct, disciplinary committees, and *audits*.

However, this autonomy is not a 'reward' bestowed on a profession by a grateful public, but a hard-won right acquired over a long period of time, which is always open to challenge from members of society. For example, if people became suspicious that doctors were too readily prescribing expensive medicines, which they also sold from their own surgeries, these people might react by challenging doctors' rights to sell medicines.

Your **credentials** are the qualifications that prove that you can do a particular type of work.

An **audit** is a careful, detailed and official check on quality.



# Is teaching a profession?

## 3.3

### ACTIVITY 9: ASSESSING TEACHERS' CLAIMS TO PROFESSIONAL STATUS



You will need around 20 minutes for this activity.



Use the summary of professional characteristics you have just read and the table we provide on the next page to compare the two occupations shown here. If you feel that the description 'fits', just put a tick in the appropriate column. If you feel it doesn't fit, or doesn't *quite* fit, briefly write your reason for saying so. (If you are in doubt, think of the South African situation, rather than of doctors and teachers in general.)

Characteristic	Doctor	Teacher
1. Performs a crucial social function		
2. Able to draw on a well-established, well-tested body of specialized knowledge		
3. Expected by society to use considerable skill in non-routine, complex situations		
4. Required to undergo a lengthy period of higher education		
5. Required to have strong professional values, which focus on client interests		
6. Expected to take a high level of responsibility for professional actions		
7. Professional obligations set down in an ethical code of conduct		
8. Has considerable professional autonomy		
9. Professional body ensures competence and accountability by controlling admission to the profession and monitoring conduct		

## Weighing up teaching as a profession

When we did this activity ourselves, we found that doctors fitted the description pretty well. When it came to teachers, we entered a number of ticks, but were hesitant in ticking some characteristics. Here are our reasons:

### 1. *Performs a crucial social function?*

Yes, most people agree this is true, but their actions fail to support their opinion. Some people think that if someone is available to control children’s behaviour and see to their safety, computers and well-crafted learning materials could provide an adequate means of learning.

Another important reservation we have is that *some* South African teachers do not seem to regard their function as crucial. They give out this message through their absenteeism, lateness, and lack of preparation.

### 2. *Specialized knowledge?*

Society is unlikely to place a convinced tick in this block. Although a great deal has been written about teaching, there is considerable disagreement as to how reliable it is, compared with other professions. There is also considerable disagreement within educational circles about the various theories of learning and teaching (we deal with this in more depth in Section Five).

### 3. *Skilled in non-routine, complex situations?*

We unhesitatingly ticked this block when we thought of what is required of teachers every day in the classroom. But we doubted that the majority of the public expected this of teachers, especially if they had themselves experienced poor teaching. And then there are educational administrators and researchers who seem to think (incorrectly) that teaching can be reduced to a limited number of 'formulae', making it essentially a technical activity (we discuss this in Sections 3. 5).

### 4. *A lengthy period of higher education?*

Interestingly enough, a tick here becomes more and more appropriate, as time goes by. A few years ago, the majority of South African teachers would not have qualified, but now, more and more teachers have higher education diplomas and degrees. In fact, it is increasingly difficult to gain a promotion post without a post-graduate degree.

### 5. *A focus on client interests?*

We had no problem ticking this one, if we looked at the majority of teachers. Though there would be many differences of opinion as to who teachers' clients are (learners or parents) and what their best interests might be.

### 6. *A high level of responsibility?*

Yes, but the responsibility for the safety and good education of learners is *shared* among many teachers (over a number of years, and, in secondary education, among several teachers in the same year). So the public is only likely to regard teachers as highly responsible in the case of a crisis, such as when a child fails, or when there is a dispute about discipline. It is more likely to be impressed by the weight of individual responsibility.

### 7. *An ethical code of conduct?*

Yes. However, this is a recent development for all teachers in South Africa. The South African Council of Educators' Code of Conduct became legally binding only in 1998. Before that, only the Teachers' Federal Council (for white teachers) was allowed to develop its own code of conduct during the 1980s. Again, this is evidence that teachers are moving increasingly in the direction of a full profession.

### 8. *Considerable professional autonomy?*

Not quite half a tick here. The South African Council of Educators (SACE) has created a certain amount of autonomy for the collective body of teachers. Yet its powers are mainly *regulatory* (registering and disciplining) and *developmental*.

Control still rests to a great extent with the provincial departments of education as employers and bodies responsible for schooling. Increasing control has passed to the school governing bodies since the Schools Act of 1996, as schools employ more teachers in additional 'governing body' posts. However, even when teachers are relatively tightly controlled, they enjoy a degree of practical autonomy *in their own classrooms*.

### 9. *Controlled by a professional body?*

Here we put half a tick. The SACE does control registration and licensing. This is an example of *professional accountability* (see Section 3.6). However, the teachers themselves share responsibility for control of their conduct with the provincial education authorities. The teacher unions negotiate responsibilities and conditions of service (including salaries) with the state as employer at the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC).

In South Africa, teachers are held to account through the regulations and require-



Note the tendency for lawyers, architects and other professionals to *share* responsibility by working in *teams*. General practitioners also tend to refer patients to specialist doctors when they feel that the responsibility for diagnosing a particular illness or prescribing a particular treatment exceeds their level of training or experience.



At this point, look back to what you wrote in Activity 8, and compare it with what you have learnt since doing so.

ments of the provincial education departments and through an ELRC appraisal system.

## Back to Artis Secondary

Some of the staff at Artis attended a one-day seminar on professionalism presented by their teachers' union. They performed an activity very similar to the one referred to above. This is part of the discussion that developed in the staffroom the following day:

*'Well, I think we should forget about the whole idea of calling teaching a profession,' said Peter. 'So much depends on how society sees an occupation – it all boils down to public perceptions. Our efforts to establish ourselves as a profession will come to little if society in general doesn't recognize us as one.'*

*'I wouldn't say it all depends on what the public thinks,' objected Shahieda. 'I think you're being pessimistic.'*

*'Well,' said Peter, 'a lot of people think that teaching's something anyone could do if they wanted to – that there's nothing special about teachers' knowledge.'*

*'Yes,' said Elmarie. 'The public aren't really aware of the responsibility that good teachers carry for their learners, how they try to awaken an interest in reading or science when it seems so remote from their learners' lives, how they worry when a bright student starts doing badly.'*

*'Maybe you're right,' said Shahieda. 'People usually talk about responsibility only when a teacher does something wrong. But I still think we're missing something here. Maybe the idea of recognition is just not that important, and it's something else we should be aiming at as a profession.'*

*'I think so too,' said Peter. 'When I look at the description of a profession, what I see is something to strive towards, not an accomplished fact – and we're only part of the way there. Striving to achieve professional status is a distraction from the real struggle.'*

*Fana had been listening without saying anything until now. 'I agree,' he said. 'The real struggle is to transform our schools and our teaching. For a long time many teachers have seen professionalism as a key to improving their status. To them it meant dressing conservatively, being particular about what political party you belonged to and choosy about who you associated with.'*

*'Remember when the word "professional" had a bad name?' asked Shahieda. 'When the first teachers' unions were formed in the late 80s, members thought of themselves as "workers", whereas the more conservative teachers' organizations called themselves "professional associations". Teachers were polarized: those who belonged to the professional associations tended to think that they had a monopoly on professionalism. Those who belonged to unions saw themselves as workers and tended to reject the idea of teaching as a profession.'*

*'That's right,' said Peter. 'But what really polarized teachers was the question of whether teachers should go on strike.'*

People can become **polarized** over an issue when they assume opposed positions over an argument; if they disagree in other words.

**Strike!**

**Strikes are by nature dramatic events, and the period preceding a strike is always characterized by considerable tension – between workers and employers, between different employee organizations, and even between employees within the same organization. People fear loss of salary, employment, the hostility of colleagues, even open conflict. Co-workers who generally agree begin to divide. These are some of the reasons why virtually no-one enjoys going on strike, or only chooses to strike as a last resort.**

**But newspapers and other news media like strikes because they make a good story. Unfortunately, all the drama tends to make us forget the policy discussion, research and hard bargaining that make up employee/ employer relations. Nevertheless, strikes are certain to divide teachers decisively on the issue of professionalism; they pose a very considerable professional dilemma for many.**

### ACTIVITY 10: TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM AND TEACHER UNIONISM

- 1 Read the two brief passages that make up Reading 5 in your Reader: 'Teachers want what students need' by Randall van den Heever on page 39, and 'Tricky tension for teachers' by Archie Vergotine on page 41. These passages were written by the leaders of teacher organizations on either side of a 1994 debate on strikes. Read them with care and compare the use of the word 'professional' in each extract.
- 2 Can you justify depriving learners of their teachers for a day or more in order to campaign for better conditions for teachers?
- 3 One side of the 'strike debate' believed that learners might be more harmed by their teachers having to work in poor conditions, and under poor conditions of service, than they would if teachers were out on strike for a few days. Can you think of circumstances that might support this argument?



Take about 10 minutes to answer the questions.

On the one hand, Vergotine stresses the professional characteristics of teaching, subordinating teacher concerns for the good of the learners. He writes of the tension that results from being both a worker and a professional. On the other hand, Van den Heever seems to justify teachers' use of the strike as a possible strategy. He sees no tension between professional work and union activity. Notice how he uses the word 'professional' as an adjective to describe a type of work, rather than laying a very strong emphasis on the idea that teachers are professionals.

Can you justify depriving learners of teaching in order to campaign for teacher rights? You might have said, 'Under no circumstances' to this question (see point 4 in Section 3.2 and the discussion of *responsibility* in Section 3.6, 'Beyond accountability'), that it would be a breach of professional responsibility, set a poor moral example to learners, and squander the remaining respect that people have for teachers.

Or you might have said that learners' rights need to be balanced against teachers' rights to take home an income that enables teachers to support families of their own. You might have pointed out that in many countries such as Australia and Canada, teacher unionization and strikes are *not* regarded with dismay, and have at times secured important reforms in the schooling system. You might have picked up that time lost through strike action should be compensated for – presumably by running catch-up classes.

Could poor teaching and service conditions harm learners more than a strike? It has long been argued that if teachers' salaries or conditions of service are allowed to fall too far behind those of other occupations, the calibre of people drawn into

teaching will drop – to the long-term disadvantage of learners.

In 1998 the retrenching of temporary teachers brought the National Professional Teacher Organizations of South Africa (NAPTOSA), which had always opposed strike action as being unprofessional, to the point of striking. This policy was seen to threaten an increasing burden on the remaining teachers and consequently to threaten the quality of teaching. It was argued by all unions that even though this policy aimed to achieve redistribution of resources to disadvantaged schools, the **way** the policy was being implemented meant that many of those disadvantaged schools were having to shoulder the burden of staff reduction.

Such shifts in the reasons for striking, coupled with a legislation that identified former professional organizations as 'unions' if they engaged in collective bargaining, tended to narrow the gap between various teacher organizations in the later nineties. Yet the fundamental issues expressed by the two writers in Reading 5 (on pages 39 and 41 in your Reader) remain. The questions of moral responsibility towards the 'client', of conflicting principles of right action, mean that the decision to strike is a professional issue for teachers.

# Striving for professionalism

We suggest that neither taking for granted your status as a professional, nor abandoning your identity of a professional is a healthy way to see yourself as a teacher. Instead we recommend a different approach, one that Peter was beginning to develop in the last dialogue, namely that of striving towards, not professional status, but professionalism.

This shifts our understanding of professionalism from a state or condition, to something we can aim for, an ongoing goal that allows us to keep abreast of educational trends and developments, in other words to remain 'life-long learners' ourselves.

<sup>1</sup> See Clause 6.2 of the SACE Code of Conduct, Reading 9 (page 52), and 1.80 of the Manual for Teacher Appraisal, Reading 9c (page 58), in your Reader.




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To strive for professionalism is not to see it as a state or condition, but as a goal.

But what **forms** of professionalism are most likely to help teachers in their efforts to serve learners? In order to introduce some clarity into this picture of striving for professionalism, we need to distinguish between two forms that 'professionalism' may take: professionalization and professional development.

## Professionalization and professional development

The concepts of professionalization and professional development both express goals or values to strive after, but the actual goals of these two forms of professionalism are rather different.

The goal of **professionalization** is to achieve public and legal recognition of an occupation's full professional status. This usually involves:

- working to establish a self-governing body, like the Bar Association for lawyers, or



In the world of teaching, the term 'professional development' usually refers to in-service *programmes* of capacity-building aimed at improving teachers' competence and practice. We prefer this term to Hoyle and John's 'professionalism', because we can extend the former term to include a striving towards improved competence and practice. The word 'professionalism' is an invented term that is not yet generally recognized.



Look back to the list of professional qualities at the beginning of Section 3.2, where we describe professional competence and professional responsibility.



A non-teaching example of 'professionalization' occurred in the late nineties in the form of the 'Talk to my lawyer' advertising campaign, which sought to get more people to employ the services of lawyers. A teaching example occurred in recent years in the pre-school sector, which expanded with the increased demand for qualified pre-school teachers from clients (in this case parents).



You will need about 30 minutes for this activity.

**Self-aggrandizement** is the desire to increase one's status or power.

the South African Council of Educators; and

- strengthening credential boundaries so that it is not too easy to enter the profession.

Given the need to assure the public of special knowledge and good service, there are good reasons for these goals. Over time **professionalization** leads professionals to develop a market for their services, to define who is competent to provide these services, to restrict their numbers by imposing ever-higher entrance qualification requirements, and to achieve the exclusive legal right to supply these services (Hoyle & John, 1995: 7). By these means they assure themselves of job security, social prestige and the ability to demand higher salary levels.

The goal of **professional development** on the other hand, aims to improve the quality of service provided – teachers' skills, values and practice, in the interests of clients. This form of professionalism needs little explanation, but the urgency of South Africa's need for it becomes clear if we think back to the 'moral minimization' that Fataar and Patterson found in their study of teachers' coping strategies.

One can see from this comparison that professionalization tends to focus more on the attainment of status and rights (extrinsic motivation), while professional development focuses on taking teaching responsibilities seriously (intrinsic motivation).

### ACTIVITY 11: PROFESSIONALIZATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1 Read the article 'A culture of teaching' by Wally Morrow, Reading 6 on page 43 in your Reader.
- 2 Morrow emphasizes the need for teachers to discover or rediscover their special responsibilities as teachers. Is he calling for profession-alization or professional development? Explain your answer briefly.
- 3 Morrow also says that the reconstruction of education in South Africa is not merely a matter of individual teachers 'trying harder'. What reason does he give for this?
- 4 Like Fataar and Patterson, Morrow is writing mainly with dysfunctional schools in mind. This is where the need for professional development is probably most urgent. Do you think it is also a necessity in more 'functional' schools, or are they places where teachers can afford to get on with achieving professionalization goals?

The whole of Morrow's article points to the need for teachers to see themselves as crucial agents in bringing about a 'culture of teaching and learning'. The concern here is not about teachers' status or autonomy, but about their 'special responsibilities' to serve their 'clients' and society.

Professionalization **may** contribute to practitioners' professional competence and ability to serve society by establishing professional bodies like the SACE, but **may not** necessarily result in the development of professional competence. Indeed, some features of the professionalization agenda are more likely to deflect practitioners' attention from self-improvement towards self-aggrandizement (Hoyle & John, 1995: 16). This is partly why the SACE has strongly identified with the professional development function, as have the various teacher unions.

The Artis teachers pointed out that there are several reasons why the public is unlikely to be convinced in favour of a professional status for teachers, even though some of their reasons may be unsound – some people can't imagine how a teacher taking seven-year-olds through a number game can be called a professional. The point is that professional status must be **earned**, not simply claimed, and will only be forthcoming if teachers as a group demonstrate client-orientated responsibility, and base their authority to teach on specialized knowledge and a high degree of competence.

For the individual teacher, long-term job satisfaction is more likely to result from the daily accomplishment of this knowledge and competence, than from the increased status gained through professionalization. Long-term satisfaction is based



on competence in serving others, and the self-esteem that it gives rise to. This is not quite the same as the pleasure associated with professional status, which results from political effort in favour of oneself and one's colleagues.

According to Morrow, what the situation demands is a **collective** effort, which requires **all teachers** to contribute and participate in professional development, for example by sharing resources with less fortunate schools.

Agreeing with Morrow, we advocate that teachers pursue, individually and collectively, a goal of professionalism-as-professional-development, aimed at serving the best interests of learners with ever-increasing competence. They should not let themselves be distracted by too much attention to issues of status and autonomy, so that it can truly be said of **all** teachers that 'teachers want what learners need'. As one union organizer and campaigner for school/community renewal from Soshanguve commented, 'You're a teacher before you're a member of a teacher organization.'

Having argued strongly in favour of the pursuit of professional development, we must hasten to prevent some possible misunderstandings:

- First, we are not saying that professionalization is an unworthy aim in itself, simply that it has the **potential** to be, and often is, self-serving. It would be more helpful to think of professionalism as a continuum rather than two completely separate forms. At one extreme is the status-seeking professionalization process described above, at the other extreme are simplistic 'recipe' efforts to improve teaching, which have little connection with the idea of teachers as professionals.

Establishing a teachers' council, a code of conduct, and certain minimum credentials for qualification as a teacher would be somewhere **between the extremes**, nearer to the 'professionalization' end. What we have called 'professional development' would be closer to the 'improvement' end.

In fact, teachers and teacher organizations don't need to make an either/or choice here. We are arguing that teachers, collectively and individually, need to prioritize, putting the professional development 'agenda' (and therefore learners) ahead of the professionalization one. It is **through** professional development that teachers' status as professionals will come to be more widely recognized.

- Second, we are **not** advocating that teachers should not engage in union activities, both those relating to professional development and those relating to 'bread-and-butter' issues. History has all-too-frequently demonstrated the need for teachers to be collectively vigilant with respect to salary levels.
- Third, we still think that teachers need to strive against the many current trends toward de-professionalization in the world of teaching. When we examine the current situation on the issue of professional teaching, we find that the context is quite contradictory. For example, some 'professional development' programmes actually tend to **de-professionalize** teaching.

When something is in a **continuum** it changes gradually, keeping a common character from one extreme to the other.

# 3.5

## The contradictory context of professionalism

### Favourable policies

On the one hand, current official policies are generally favourable to professional development, on the other hand, the legacy of apartheid as well as current trends towards de-skilling often work against professional development.

Research conducted in KwaZulu-Natal in 1998 by the President's Education Initiative (PEI) Research Programme, the University of Natal Pietermaritzburg (UNP) and financed by the Joint Education Trust (JET), set out to examine the 'fit' between the latest policy and practice of teaching. It analysed four key documents,<sup>1</sup> which, taken together, set out the responsibilities and expected norms of professional conduct, as well as the frameworks for developing and appraising teacher competence.

The analysis found a general coherence and consistency among the documents, despite the fact that they had been drafted by different agencies. It found that they 'work together to promote teaching as a profession, and attempt to create a balance between professional accountability and professional autonomy' (1998: 37). In combination, the policies require:

- planned professional growth on the part of teachers;
- accountability through democratic appraisal; and
- a demonstration of competence in teaching practice.

<sup>1</sup> The four documents studied were the *Norms and Standards for Teacher Education* (1998: Committee on Teacher Education Policy, or COTEP); the *SACE Code of Conduct* (1997: South African Council for Educators, or SACE); the *Manual for Teacher Appraisal* (1997: Education Labour Relations Council, or ELRC); and *Duties and Responsibilities of Educators* (1998: National Department of Education).

See Reading 3, 'Teachers, identities and space' by Heather Jacklin.

See the account of bureaucratic accountability by Linda Darling Hammond in Reading 8 on page 47 of your Reader.

### The unfavourable legacy of apartheid education

Unfortunately, the legacy of apartheid works against professional development. It was only in the mid-nineties that teaching in South Africa began to emerge from a racially fragmented education system characterized by top-down administration, which took very little account of real teacher professionalism except to **control** teachers ideologically. Any teaching that encouraged learners to question the situation they were in, or the government's part in creating that situation, and any participation in any form of resistance to the machinery of apartheid government, was branded 'unprofessional' by the state and by many teachers. As a teacher on the Cape Flats explains (Reeves, 1994):

*I could never understand why I had to submit my exam question paper on prescribed books in English to an inspector who would often acknowledge that he hadn't even read the books. How could I claim to be a professional when I handed over responsibility for my work to some outside person?*

The school curriculum, the examination system and an authoritarian inspection system were all designed to leave little room for teacher initiative, interpretation and creativity – or for teachers to use fine judgement in complex, non-routine situations. All of these, of course, would have been marks of the professional. Rigid bureaucratic regulation was applied in a routine way, with everyone from the principal down to the learners being forced to comply without questioning.

This unquestioning approach was also instilled by the dominant form of professional education in most black and Afrikaans-language universities, *fundamental*

*pedagogics*, which was presented and taught as the 'science' of education, and therefore as beyond criticism (Taylor and Vinjevoold: 132–133). This oppressive stance hardly encouraged individual teachers to acquire a professional knowledge base. And attitudes bred over decades do not die out overnight.

## De-professionalization

In addition to this unfavourable legacy, current international trends tend towards *de-skilling* and *de-professionalization*. Since the late seventies, teachers in the US and Britain have resisted these trends with limited success. Unfortunately South Africa has also been influenced, even while many teachers remain set in unprofessional ways of thinking. To meet this challenge, we therefore need to better understand some of these counter-professional trends.

When any trend takes root in society, there has to be a context to provide fertile ground for it. In countries like the US and Britain, teachers have seen their professional autonomy eroded over the last two decades. This has happened in the context of a conservative backlash against the progressive educational trends of the sixties and seventies, accompanied by the election to office of conservative political leaders in those countries. Added to this were the threats of competing economies such as the Japanese economy. The schooling system was blamed for relatively poor economic performance, and it was expected to produce a more competitive workforce.

The usual tendency of conservative governments is to decrease spending on social services such as welfare and education. This indeed happened in both of these countries in the late seventies and eighties, while at the same time teachers were held to account for the *results* they had produced in the light of government spending (of taxpayers' money) on education.

In Britain, teachers' relative freedom to make their own decisions in the classroom, which they had slowly won and enjoyed in the sixties and early to mid-seventies, was increasingly restricted by the introduction of the National Curriculum and the increasing perception of teachers as technicians. Centralized administration and bureaucratic control regulated what and how teachers could teach. In the US, where the control of schooling is much more decentralized, and the curriculum far less standardized than in Britain, bigger schools (especially secondary schools) have tended to become impersonal bureaucracies.

## De-professionalization in South Africa

Educational trends in the US and Britain often tend to influence South Africa. So we need to ask: is the context right for these de-professionalizing trends here?

At first appearance the answer is no. In policy terms, the transition to democracy in the nineties has created a context that seems favourable for improvements in professional development. In fact, draft transformation policies in education were well-advanced before the new government took power in 1994 and teachers are acknowledged as key roleplayers in the transformation of education.

Another reason for optimism about teachers' professional development is that South Africa spends a significantly higher proportion of its government's operating budget on education (22.1% in 1999/2000) than countries like Portugal, Chile and Egypt. This proportion compares favourably with those of developed nations like the US and Britain. And in South Africa, the various provinces spend between 85% and 95% of the education budget on educators' salaries (Taylor and Vinjevoold, 1999: 27). So these contextual factors certainly favour professional development.

However, the educational context has many contradictions and many reasons for teachers to be vigilant as the scope for de-professionalization trends increases. This scope is increasing locally because:

**Fundamental Pedagogics** claimed to be scientific and objective in nature, homing in on the 'essences' of the 'phenomenon of education'. However, as an orthodoxy it discouraged dissent, and in fact incorporated many assumptions based on the State's ideology of Christian National Education.

- educational bodies have to redress costly system imbalances inherited from apartheid;
- educational bureaucracies tend to adopt a technical approach to teaching and in-service teacher training;
- global economies require that schools create a competitively productive workforce, which also puts pressure on schools to become more like technical training institutions; and
- overseas companies promote education materials that require little of teachers.

## The effects of de-professionalization

How might such forces affect teachers who are striving to develop themselves as professionals both individually and collectively? Here are some of the effects that have been observed in schools overseas and at home.

- The underestimation of teachers' knowledge and capabilities, leading to 'professional development' programmes that are 'done to' teachers, rather than carried out with them, or by them.
- Narrow in-service training of teachers based on 'recipes' for effective teaching. This usually takes the form of isolated, one-to-five-day courses focused on particular problems or techniques. The techniques tend to remain external 'tools'; they do not combine into a coherent, long-term course of professional development that builds internal vocational commitment or professional qualities.
- Knowledge-making (the work of researchers and writers) comes to be viewed as quite separate from and superior to knowledge transmission (supposedly the work of teachers, who are often considered to simply 'transmit' a simplified version of the knowledge to learners).
- The idea becomes widespread that anyone who can control a class of young learners can transmit knowledge in the appropriate form. The pre-service education of teachers is therefore reduced to education in 'subject knowledge' (mathematics, languages, science or whatever) plus an introduction to practical methodology, the basics of which can supposedly be taught quite quickly. The rest is supposed to be learnt 'on the job' in schools, where theory is often downplayed or ignored, and the emphasis falls on mastering a number of practical skills and techniques.
- Hasty in-service training results in misconceptions about the teacher's role. For instance, many South African teachers have come to believe that facilitation and learner-centred teaching do not require much preparation or actual teaching.
- The increasing flow of 'teacher-proof materials' such as teaching kits, reading laboratories, sophisticated learning texts, videotapes and computer-aided instruction. Some of these have considerable value as teaching aids, but many are designed to minimize or eliminate the role of the teacher. To be profitable, they also have to address the **broadest** audience possible and this standardization (especially if imported from overseas) fails to recognize local conditions.
- Added to this, all but the best of these 'teacher-proof' materials reinforce the idea that there is one correct answer to every question. They don't ask open-ended questions requiring interpretation because these would require a professionally skilled teacher.
- Finally, these materials reinforce the common misunderstanding that knowledge is something 'out there' that learners have to 'take in'. This view fails to see that knowledge is something that learners have to **construct** for themselves from new learnings, in conjunction with what they have learnt and experienced already – often with the guidance of an educator (see Section 5.7).
- Under the pressure of economic necessity, high learner-classroom ratios result in large classes that teachers are not equipped to handle. This can lead to teachers developing 'survival strategies' (like the 'chalk-and-talk' approach) that fail to



'Teacher-proof' materials are designed to minimize the role of the teacher.

deliver quality teaching.

- When education is driven by economic needs such as global competitiveness, outcomes-based education tends to be understood in a narrowly technical way. A narrow 'educational objectives' approach more suited to technical training replaces a more integrated, formative approach that seeks to foster *all* aspects of the learner's development. Competence is perceived in terms of demonstrable *skills* that can be assessed in a straightforward, measurable way, but the values and purposes that connect and inform these skills are considered 'luxuries'.

### ACTIVITY 12: PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT IN TEACHING

- 1 Read the brief excerpt from *What's Worth Fighting For in School? Working Together for Improvement* by Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves (Reading 7, page 45 in your Reader). These British writers have vigorously opposed the trends towards de-professionalizing teaching in Britain.
- 2 Think of an example from your own experience in which you or another teacher had to 'make a discretionary judgement in a situation of unavoidable uncertainty' in the interests of a learner or learners. Describe it briefly in your workbook.
- 3 What made the decision difficult? Do you agree with Fullan and Hargreaves that '[in] teaching, as in a number of other occupations, the core of its professionalism is best defined and described not in terms of pay or status or qualifications, but in terms of the distinctive kinds of action and judgements that professionals typically make'?



You will need about 20 minutes for this activity.

Compare teaching with an occupation like plumbing. If a plumber's client complains of water pipes making banging sounds in the wall, the plumber knows two or three possible solutions to such a problem. He will try one method (say, checking the hot water cylinder pressure valve), and if that doesn't solve the problem, he will try the next treatment and so on, until the problem is solved. The attempted solutions are technical and recipe-like, and are either right or wrong. Qualified plumbers are extremely well paid in South Africa, but they are not considered professionals.

Teachers in South Africa are not widely considered to be 'full professionals' in the sense that doctors, lawyers or managers are. Teaching is unlike plumbing in that one

'right' approach may conflict with another 'right' approach. Yet those who are at all conscientious, practice professionalism in their decisions and actions every day, balancing one learner need against another. What truly matters in professionalism is that these decisions and actions reflect competence and quality in knowledge, skills and values, and that they are made in the best interests of those learners.

## Licensed to teach?

*At Artis Secondary, Elmarie was indignant. The Principal had put quite a lot of pressure on her to help him out with a staffing problem. As she explained to her friends in the staffroom at break: 'You know Rosemarie's leaving at the end of the term. Her husband got a post in Ladysmith, and she's decided to move there with him. Now the Boss wants me to teach her two Grade 11 economics classes for the rest of the year. I told him I've never even studied economics, but he said it shouldn't be difficult to swot up enough to get the kids through their exams!'*

*'You probably won't find it so bad,' said Livingstone. 'Quite a few of us play Jack-of-all-trades. If you're a teacher, you can teach anything if you just swot it up and keep a step or two ahead of the pupils – like you probably did in your first year of teaching!'*

*'But isn't this being unprofessional when you think about it?' asked Fana. 'I mean, isn't the saying "Jack-of-all-trades, master of none"?' Elmarie's qualified to teach English and geography. When teachers have to teach in areas they aren't qualified in at all, what are we saying to the community about the value of schooling?'*

*'That's what worries me,' said Elmarie. 'I'm not qualified to teach economics. Look, I know a thing or two about teaching, so I can probably keep the classes busy and maybe even learning something. But how am I going to be able to answer tricky questions? And at the end of the year, I'll have to give an account of myself if a lot of them fail.'*

Elmarie has a problem, and there's certainly more than one way of looking at it. We will come back to the problem of teaching on the basis of insufficient content knowledge in Section 5.3, but right now let's try to get a better understanding of 'giving an account of oneself', and how it is connected to professionalism.

# Professional accountability

## 3.6

The intention of developing professional competence is one thing, but how does an occupation provide a reasonable warranty of competence and quality service so that the public can have the assurance that learners are being given the best possible attention?

In a democratic society, teachers need to provide such a warranty, otherwise the professional privileges of control over their own responsibilities and standards will not be recognized, or will be withdrawn. There must be a mechanism for finding out whether teachers are 'delivering', and not breaching the constitutional rights of the learners. This is where the principle of accountability comes in.

Linda Darling Hammond's article 'Accountability for professional practice' (Reading 8, page 47 of your Reader) points out the importance of educational accountability in a modern society. She sets out to dispel some of the confusion surrounding this issue by categorizing a number of different *forms* of accountability. Three of these are as relevant to teachers in South Africa as they are to teachers in the US:

- **legal accountability**, which implies that some fairly serious harm has *already* been done (this process is not only expensive; it is reactive rather than proactive);
- **bureaucratic accountability**, which was the predominant means of educational management and accountability under the apartheid government, and which is still with us; and
- **professional accountability**, which as we will discover, offers proactive rather than reactive reassurance.

### ACTIVITY 13: BUREAUCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

**Read pages 47–50 of the article 'Accountability for professional practice' by Linda Darling Hammond (Reading 8 in the Reader), then note down your thoughts on the following questions:**

- 1** What are the advantages of bureaucratic accountability, if any?
- 2** What are its disadvantages for teachers?
- 3** What are its disadvantages for learners?

Darling Hammond mentions the good intentions behind bureaucratic accountability. It has the advantage (at least in theory) of ensuring that:

- clients such as learners are treated equally and consistently, so that decisions affecting them are not made subjectively by officials and teachers;
- rules and standard procedures are in place to control the actions of officials, and there are unpleasant consequences for those who do not follow them; and
- time and money are saved by laying down standardizing procedures and services (this point is not mentioned by the writer).

According to Darling Hammond, the disadvantages of bureaucratic accountability for teachers (and implicitly for learners) heavily outweigh the above advantages because:

- teachers become functionaries following the prescriptions and regulations handed down by authorities without scope for their professional development ('Just follow the syllabus!');
- teacher accountability takes the form of inspection based on rule-following and exam results, and as a result it cannot guarantee educational outcomes or professional competence because it can only hold teachers accountable for following standard procedures; and



If a teacher is guilty of misconduct that involves breaking society's laws, he or she could face criminal charges in court, in addition to disciplinary action within the profession. This is, of course, the case for members of any profession.



You will need about 40 minutes for this activity.

- it makes the false assumption that standardized procedures are appropriate for all students in all educational circumstances.

As the following two teachers explain (Reeves, 1994: 39, 41):

*You became completely mechanical and 'routinized' in the system. You run to get permission for every little thing you do. The lack of democracy in schools is profound. Staff meetings are generally one-way shows, with the principal doing most of the talking. Policy is simply decided on, and your function is to implement it.*

*Our school was very efficient. Teachers were completely caught up in performing their bureaucratic functions – getting their marks in on time, preparing schedules and reports by the due date and so on. We were so busy being functionaries of the system that we never had time to think about our real role in society.*

## Professional accountability

If accountability is necessary in a democratic society to control corruption, negligence, incompetence and the abuse of trust, is holding teachers to account compatible with the idea of teaching as a profession? And are there forms of accountability *other* than bureaucratic and legal accountability that can function in teaching? The answer to both these questions lies in what Darling Hammond calls *professional accountability*.

Read the brief section headed 'Professional accountability' in Reading 8 if you haven't done so already. Darling Hammond suggests that professional accountability holds much more promise than legal or bureaucratic accountability. It provides a sort of 'forward-looking' accountability by emphasizing the regulation of practitioners at the point of entry into the profession, guaranteeing that whoever enters it has been thoroughly prepared for the demands of the work. Emphasis therefore falls on the preparation, evaluation, selection or 'screening' and certification of candidates for the profession.

In South Africa, teaching is moving in this direction through compulsory registration by the SACE and the Norms and Standards for Teacher Education (2000) document, which outlines processes of quality assurance for teacher education institutions and defines the norms and standards for evaluating teaching qualifications.

The Norms and Standards for Educators describes seven key roles that effectively combine to form a picture of a competent teacher. The qualifying teacher must achieve applied competence in various aspects of these roles. In other words they have to be able to demonstrate:

- the *practical ability* to perform various actions required of teachers, having considered carefully a range of possibilities;
- *foundational competence*, or the ability to understand the knowledge and theoretical thinking that underpins such possibilities; and
- the *reflexive ability* to connect practical performance and decision-making with an understanding of relevant theory, and to adapt to changing and unforeseen circumstances appropriately rather than in a haphazard way.

In exchange for this regulation at the point of entry into the profession, teachers gain relative autonomy of practice, for example, the deregulation of teaching. Unfortunately, the entry level qualifications of many South African teachers have not equipped them with the confidence to exercise any real degree of professional autonomy in the classroom. They feel threatened by the relative freedom that Curriculum 2005 offers them in how they plan their lessons and help learners achieve learning outcomes. Hence the need for in-service professional development directed at giving teachers this confidence.

Ideas are **compatible** when they exist in harmony.



How would you judge the action taken by Elmarie's principal in the light of professional accountability? She is certainly not qualified to teach economics. But what can her principal do if a qualified economics teacher is simply not available at the time?



Turn to Reading 9b, 'Duties and responsibilities of South African educators' (page 55 in your Reader), and read through the brief description of the seven key roles of teachers from the *Norms and Standards for Educators*. Some of these roles will be discussed in Section Five, when we deal with the teacher as a knowledge-worker.



As Darling Hammond argues, professional accountability promises society competent teachers, an expanding knowledge base, and an overriding concern for the welfare of learners. As legal accountability provides the possibility of redress in court *after* a teacher has been guilty of some misconduct, so professional accountability provides assurance of good service *prior* to the teacher's actual engagement in teaching.

What about holding teachers to account in their day-to-day practice? This is the business of codes of conduct such as that which binds all teachers registered with the SACE, and of appraisal systems such as the Manual for Teacher Appraisal negotiated at the ELRC. We need to examine these two key policies and assess whether they are:

- compatible with professionalism (professional development and professional status);
- compatible with democratic rather than bureaucratic management of teaching;
- likely to improve the quality of teaching and learning in South Africa, and restore teachers' professional self-esteem; and
- able to construct professionalism, accountability and teachers' self-view in a way that is beneficial for all concerned.

#### ACTIVITY 14: THE SACE CODE OF CONDUCT

**Turn to the SACE Code of Conduct (Reading 9a, 'A code of conduct') and the extract from the ELRC 'Manual for teacher appraisal' (Reading 9c). These two official documents will probably have a very considerable bearing on your life in the years to come. So we strongly recommend that you read them actively, and keep in mind the following questions:**

- 1 Do you find the Code of Conduct enabling for teachers, or do you think it is a 'whip' to beat teachers with? (Mention an example or two as evidence for your opinions.)
- 2 How do you think the Code might differ from policies of the past?
- 3 Towards which form of professionalism do the Code of Conduct and the appraisal system 'lean' (professionalization, or professional development)?
- 4 What sort of accountability – bureaucratic, legal or professional – do the Code and the appraisal policy 'construct'?
- 5 What kind of self-view do they construct for teachers?

Contrary to the impression created by many media reports that SACE is a body for 'whipping teachers into shape', we found only about half the clauses in the SACE Code of Conduct dealing with the educator and the learner to be prohibitive. The other half hold up positive principles for teachers to strive for:

- acknowledging the uniqueness, individuality and specific needs of each learner;
- recognizing learners as partners in their own education;
- helping them to develop values in line with the Bill of Rights and the Constitution; and
- promoting gender equality.

This pattern is carried into the other sections too, where principles like recognizing parents as partners in education and keeping abreast of educational trends and new developments outnumber prohibitive rules such as those prohibiting teachers from discussing confidential or official matters with unauthorized persons.

This is not to say that prohibitive rules are regrettable, or that they are not necessary. We are simply saying that the Code of Conduct is as much a set of enabling principles as it is a mechanism for controlling teachers. As such, it not only spells out what teachers may not do, it is designed so that teachers can internalize its positive, enabling principles as general guides and goals, with room to use their own discretion as to how to follow them.

This design will become very apparent if you compare the SACE Code of Conduct



You will need 60 minutes to read and digest the policies, and to respond to the questions.

with the kind of service conditions that prevailed in years gone by. The example here is from America, but the views of conduct appropriate for teachers were similar in many countries at the time.

### TEACHER'S CONTRACT

This is an agreement between Miss ....., teacher, and the Board of Education of the ..... School, whereby Miss ..... agrees to teach for a period of eight months, beginning Sept. 1, 1923. The Board of Education agrees to pay Miss ..... the sum of \$75 per month.

Miss ..... agrees:

1. Not to get married. This contract becomes null and void immediately if the teacher marries.
2. Not to keep company with men.
3. To be home between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. unless in attendance at a school function.
4. Not to leave town at any time without the permission of the chairman of the Board of Trustees.
5. Not to smoke cigarettes. This contract becomes null and void immediately if the teacher is found smoking.
6. Not to drink beer, wine or whiskey. This contract becomes null and void immediately if the teacher is found drinking beer, wine or whiskey.
7. Not to ride in a carriage or automobile with any man except her brother or father.
8. Not to dress in bright colors.
9. Not to dye her hair.
10. To wear at least two petticoats.
11. Not to wear dresses more than two inches above the ankles.
12. Not to use face powder, mascara, or paint the lips.
13. To keep the schoolroom clean:
  - a. to sweep the classroom floor at least once daily.
  - b. to scrub the classroom floor at least once weekly with hot water and soap.
  - c. to clean the blackboard at least once daily.
  - d. to start the fire at 7:00 a.m. so the room will be warm at 8:30 a.m. when the children arrive.

(Source unknown)

Two things are especially interesting about the 1923 contract: there is not a single reference to actual teaching, and every clause is a mechanism of control, either a prohibitive rule or a rigid regulation. This contract is a very clear example of bureaucratic accountability, where it is only possible to hold teachers to account for complying with *regulations*, not for educational outcomes, which aren't even mentioned.

Compared with this document, the SACE Code is a model of commitment to professional development and democracy because:

- its architects include practising teachers;
- it is based on the Bill of Rights and the Constitution;

- it considers learners, parents and employers to be ‘partners in education’; and
- it requires teachers to exercise authority with compassion, respect the dignity and rights of child learners, and promote gender equality.

Clauses 7.1 and 9.1 of the Code require teachers to co-operate with colleagues and to ‘behave in such a way as to enhance the dignity and status of the profession’ (7.1). The Code does not encourage self-seeking aims, but several clauses incline towards professional development. Clause 2.2 insists that the quality of education in this country depends on the dedication, self-discipline and training of teachers. Clauses 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4 require teachers to keep abreast of educational developments, promote the ongoing development of teaching as a profession, and provide professional support for new members of the profession.

At the time of writing, the 1999 Manual for Teacher Appraisal (Reading 9) is well on its way to being accepted by the same teachers who in 1990 participated in a defiance campaign against the appraisal policy introduced by the apartheid education authorities. Many teachers are ‘impressed by the fact that [this new] appraisal system [is] not marked by negative fault-finding, but [is] driven by a commitment to the professional development of teachers’ (National Teacher Appraisal Pilot Project Report, 1997: 54).

The SACE Code of Conduct and the appraisal policy create considerable scope for teachers to use their professional discretion in practising a number of principles, therefore they cannot be considered bureaucratic. The ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ are expressed in broad terms rather than as precise regulations. Obviously this Code can be used as the basis for a legal case of misconduct brought against an erring teacher, but the main, positive thrust of the Code is towards ensuring that teachers conduct themselves *professionally* rather than as bureaucratic regulation-followers.

Appraisal, too, is clearly no longer seen as a form of judgmental ‘inspection’ aimed at rewarding or penalizing teachers for compliance or non-compliance. Instead, as we can see from Reading 9c, it is aimed at development as much as it is aimed at making teachers accountable – to themselves as much as anyone else.

A simple test should suffice to highlight the self-view that is constructed by these two accountability mechanisms. Glance through each of them again, and ask yourself whether you feel that your self-esteem has been diminished or enhanced? Again, it might be helpful to imagine yourself as a teacher bound by the requirements of the 1923 contract and to ask the same question.

If the SACE Code of Conduct has any faults, these lie in what it leaves out. We think that one point that could have been more explicit is the promotion of non-violent means of resolving conflict, including the use of alternatives to corporal punishment.

However, as Brijraj says in the audiotape, the Code is a living document, and with teachers represented on SACE and the ELRC, it is very probable that the two accountability mechanisms considered here will be modified to fit changing circumstances and perceptions.

## Beyond accountability

Finally we need to ask whether accountability mechanisms are *enough* to ensure that teaching quality and professional development are maintained, that a vibrant culture of teaching and learning is developed, and that teacher self-esteem is restored.

Our answer to the above question would have to be no. Accountability involves a sort of unspoken transaction and *obligation* between professional and client. As you have seen, it is part of an understood ‘bargain’ in which the freedom to use professional discretion is allowed because there are clear assurances that standards have been met.

There can be no doubt about the necessity of such social arrangements in a democracy. However, because it is an obligatory transaction, its power to motivate teachers to perform their multiple tasks to the best of their ability is limited, espe-

“  
*The 1999 Manual for  
 Teacher Appraisal is  
 driven by a  
 commitment to the  
 professional  
 development of  
 teachers.*  
 ”

“  
**Would you be happy to  
 have your own  
 children taught by  
 someone who is not  
 under an obligation of  
 accountability?**  
 ”



In this activity you will need 10 minutes for the reading, and about 5 to 10 minutes to jot down points and questions.

cially when no-one is looking. For instance, one may be well-qualified and able to come across well within the context of appraisal, but mark homework in a slapdash way, or be careless in how one handles a delicate situation involving learners.

According to Eric Hoyle and Peter John (1995: 110),

*Systems of accountability are vital to the attainment of quality education, but they are not in themselves sufficient. They must be balanced by responsibility.*

Although ‘accountability’ and ‘responsibility’ are often used in such a way that they mean much the same thing, ‘responsibility’ is the broader concept. For example, I am being responsible if I accept that accountability is necessary, but the reverse does not apply.

Keeping in mind what we have said about accountability involving an obligatory transaction between teachers and society, responsibility involves a more *internal* and *intrinsic* commitment to principles of good practice and to a set of values that prioritize the interests of the learner, even when no-one else is aware of it. However, this does not mean that it is only a matter for individual conscience, as the next reading shows.

### ACTIVITY 15: RESILIENT SCHOOLS

**Look back to Section 2.9, where we described teachers who ‘give up’ in the face of difficulties. Do you know any such teachers? If not, imagine one, and as you read the extract from Pam Christie and Mark Potterton’s study of effective South African schools (Reading 10 on page 64 in your Reader), and the brief discussion below and on page 55, jot down a few points in your workbook that you might want to convey to this teacher, or questions that you might want to ask if you were the Head of Department.**

Here responsibility is seen as a quality that goes beyond the obligations of accountability, as a characteristic that is crucial in those schools that have succeeded despite the odds against them. It is seen as a shared responsibility on the part of the whole staff, as well as an individual, internal commitment to the welfare of learners. Collectively taking responsibility for their own school, teachers in these ‘resilient’ schools do not act like victims, or sit around complaining and waiting for a government department to tell them what to do.

Let’s return for a moment to the particular problem Elmarie faces at Artis Secondary:

*‘So what are you going to do, Elmarie?’ asked Peter.*

*‘Well, I suppose I could refuse to teach the economics class, and the Boss will have to do whatever he can to get a substitute economics teacher out of the Department, though he says it’s very unlikely. I don’t know, maybe that would be the best for the kids in the long run. But what if it takes ten weeks to get a replacement like it did the last time? Then they’ll have lost out on a term’s teaching. I’ve always been curious about economics whenever I’ve heard them talking about it on the news. I suppose I can give it a try, though I’ll be learning along with the kids, that’s for sure. And I won’t be going out much in the evenings.’*

*‘If you do decide to take it on,’ offered Peter, ‘I’ll suggest to the Boss that we share out your detention duties so that you can get home a bit earlier.’*

Being responsible is essentially a moral commitment. It implies that one can be relied on by others, and by oneself, not to put one’s own interests first when this is inappropriate, and not just to act on one’s whims of the moment. It could even mean **opposing** an official accountability measure for good educational or moral reasons. If Elmarie was overcommitted and did not have time to prepare properly, she could

show a sense of responsibility by **not** agreeing to teach in a learning area for which she has no qualification.

Responsibility therefore goes 'deeper' than the explicit requirements of accountability. It is more closely associated with a 'calling' or 'vocation' such as we discussed in Section Two.



Take one last look back to what you wrote in Activity 8, and compare it with what you have learnt since.

# 3.7

## Conclusion

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We come back to the questions with which we introduced this section. We hope you have found some answers and suggest that you look back to the learning outcomes to assess yourself.

We started out by suggesting that, in addition to a sense of vocation, professionalism might be what's required for today's teachers to become 'part of the solution' rather than part of South Africa's education problems. Could a concept that seems to have so many different meanings hold one of the keys to the renewal of teachers and teaching in this country? This question led us to explore the many meanings attached to the term 'professionalism'.

After assessing teaching against the characteristics of generally recognized professions such as doctors and lawyers, we concluded that we should not assume that teaching is a profession, but rather think of professionalism as something to strive towards. This in turn led us to investigate different forms of professionalism. We did this by asking which forms would best help teachers in their efforts to serve learners as well as build their self-esteem by doing a job that others would recognize as professional.

We found that teachers did not have to make an either/or choice between status-seeking professionalization and professional development. There are some good reasons for teachers to pursue some of the aims of professionalization, but they need to prioritize, putting the professional development 'agenda' (and the learners) ahead of the professionalization one.

Since accountability to learners and parents is crucial to the idea of professional teaching, we also examined various forms of accountability. We found that teachers, individually and collectively, need to move from bureaucratic forms of accountability towards more professional forms, embracing reasonable minimum qualifications, a code of conduct established and maintained by teachers, and a democratic, developmental system of appraisal.

Finally, we found that even formal accountability measures such as these need to be accompanied by responsibility, a more internal and individual commitment to the interests of learners – something closely related to what we have called a 'vocation'.

But we also need to examine what *professionalism* demands of the teacher as the person responsible for organizing and maintaining an effective, safe environment for learners and learning, as a 'knowledge worker', and as someone likely to have a considerable influence on learners' values. In the following section, we address the question of how teachers can regain, or establish, their professional authority in the learning environment for which they have responsibility.

### Key learning points

1. There are various meanings attached to the term 'profession'. Some have greater value than others, so teachers need to use the term with care.
2. Essentially, there are three elements that society recognizes as constituting a profession:
  - *Knowledge*. Professionals are expected to use considerable skill in non-routine, complex situations where interests are often in conflict and where simple techniques or 'recipe' knowledge are insufficient. Therefore they must be able to draw on a well-established, well-tested body of specialized systematic knowledge, requiring them to undergo a lengthy period of higher education.

- *Responsibility/accountability*. Professionals are required to act in the best interests of their clients, taking responsibility for their professional actions in performing a crucial social function. These and other professional obligations are often set down in an ethical code of conduct, according to which they can be held accountable.
  - *Autonomy*. Professionals, collectively and as individuals, enjoy considerable freedom from regulation in making professional decisions. In exchange, society expects the professional body to ensure the competence and accountability of its members by controlling admission to the profession, registration, responsibilities and conduct.
3. For teachers, professional status is not an accomplished fact, it is something to strive towards.
  4. The question of whether teachers have a right to strike or an obligation not to strike, is very much a professional question, involving issues of moral responsibility towards the client, and the complex nature of situations where different 'goods' are in conflict with each other.
  5. Different forms of professionalism have different goals:
    - *Professionalization* seeks to gain recognition for the professional status of an occupational group such as teachers. It is concerned with such aims as the pursuit of professional status and autonomy, the setting up of a self-governing professional body, and 'gate-keeping'.
    - *Professional development* aims to improve the quality of service provided and the professional competence of teachers in the interests of clients. Teaching and learning constantly develop and quality teaching requires continual professional development.
  6. Teachers need to prioritize professional development, so that their professional status has solid foundations. But in the light of the global trends towards de-professionalization, some aspects of professionalization remain important to ensure that teachers are not perceived as mere technicians.
  7. Of the various *forms* of professional accountability, two are particularly relevant to teachers in South Africa:
    - *Bureaucratic accountability* ensures that rules and standard procedures are in place to control the actions of teachers. Procedures and services are standardized, and inspectors check that teachers comply; there is little scope for professional development or discretion.
    - *Professional accountability* ensures, 'in exchange' for relative autonomy of practice, that whoever enters the profession has been thoroughly prepared. Hence 'screening' and certification are important, and all teachers must be registered (by SACE, in South Africa). Professional accountability promises competent teachers, an expanding knowledge base, and an overriding concern for the welfare of learners. It also includes measures such as a code of conduct and an appraisal system.
  9. Codes of conduct and appraisal systems may be bureaucratic or professional in nature. To be professional, they need to be both democratic and clearly focused on teachers' professional development (both the SACE Code and the ELRC appraisal system are). They need to provide professional guidance and allow scope for professional discretion rather than emphasize regulation-following.
  10. Accountability is not enough to ensure professionalism among teachers. Responsibility is also a key requirement. It is a more internal commitment to principles of good practice and to the interests of the learner, and is therefore associated with the idea of a 'calling' or 'vocation'.

## Tutor-marked assignment 1

**After several years of teacher retrenchment and low enrolment in teacher education, there is once more a demand for teachers. Imagine that a young cousin, nephew or niece has approached you for advice on becoming a teacher. You sense from what this relative says that he or she has not thought about this career choice in much depth, and may be partly motivated by such benefits as supposedly long holidays and short working days.**

- 1 Compose the letter you would write to this person, in which you set out what you see as being required of teachers in South Africa today. Your letter should be 800 to 1000 words long (about three A4 pages, handwritten or typed in double spacing).**
- 2 In planning what to write, engage with the ideas you have read about in Sections Two and Three. Try to get the recipient of your letter to think seriously and critically about:**
  - teaching as a vocation;
  - the contexts in which teachers will be working; and
  - professionalism and accountability.**Demonstrate your understanding of these concepts in some depth.**
- 3 Avoid being merely sentimental and superficial about teaching. For instance, do not merely express 'how wonderful it is to work with children, and to prepare the leaders of tomorrow'.**
- 4 Under no circumstances may you repeat sections of text from either the Learning Guide or the Reader. Try to turn the ideas you find here into questions for your relative to answer. For instance: 'Before you buy a timeshare on the South Coast, have you thought about the time you will need to spend during some holidays doing further study or attending in-service courses?'**



## SECTION FOUR

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# The teacher's authority: sustaining an effective learning environment

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# Introduction

## 4.1

There are three main questions that propel this section: How are teachers to maintain, or regain, their authority? What is the teacher's role in a democratic learning environment? How can teachers exercise effective authority in practice – how can they establish and maintain order that is not based on fear?

Our discussion of these issues will reveal confusions in what people ordinarily understand by 'authority' and 'democracy'. The first question will lead us to ask what the nature of teacher authority is. And as we explore the meaning of teacher authority in the context of democracy in the second question, we will ask whether democracy erodes or enhances teacher authority.

We frame the discussion in a practical way by examining these questions in familiar situations and then we provide some practical strategies to help you to exercise effective authority in a democratic learning environment.

This last topic, practical strategies for a democratic learning environment, is explored more fully in another module in this series, *Getting Practical*.

## Learning outcomes for this section

Working through this section should give you the ability to teach with added confidence based on an ability to:

- recognize and explain the nature of the authority crisis that teachers face in South Africa;
- identify what constitutes legitimate teacher authority in a democratic learning environment;
- distinguish between concepts such as discipline and control, freedom and licence, authority and authoritarianism;
- recognize the scope that a democratic learning environment gives you to use your professional judgement in managing that environment; and
- employ a few teaching strategies to help you exercise effective authority in practice; in other words, to establish and maintain an atmosphere of creative, dynamic order among your learners.

# 4.2

## The nature of teacher authority

### A challenge to authority

*Livingstone strode over to Fana in the staffroom. It was very easy to see that he was angry. 'Do you remember saying that we need to transform our teaching by striving for professionalism?' he asked. 'Well, can you tell me how we're supposed to do that when the children don't respect us any more?'*

*Fana knew that Livingstone must be pretty upset to say this. 'You'd better tell me what's happened,' he said.*

*'That damn Joba in Grade 10, he was sitting in the back of the class stroking the arm of the girl next to him. I actually ignored it for a while. Before, I'd have pulled him to the front by the ear and given him a good thrashing, but now we can't do that so I thought, what's the use, I might as well ignore him, pretend I haven't seen. But then he started getting carried away and really causing a disturbance, so I stopped teaching and said that from his gutter manners we could see where he had been brought up. The next thing he's saying, "What's it to you? I suppose you were brought up in a mission!" and sort of daring me to do anything about it.'*

*'I tell you, I was so close to hitting him. I was ... Go re nka moja a phela. I just told him to shut his mouth and get out of the room. I couldn't think of anything else. All this stuff about professional approaches! What I want to know is how do we get the kids' respect back like we had it in the past? Not through all this learner-centred teaching and banning the cane, for sure. It just takes away our authority. Like the Department telling us we've got to move away from teaching content – where does that leave us? I'll tell you, it's like being on a rope bridge, with the Department at one end and the kids on the other – each with knives out to cut the rope. This is what democracy's done for teachers.'*



You should spend around 15 minutes on this activity.

#### ACTIVITY 16: A PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY

**Jot down brief responses (one or two lines) to each of the following questions, trying at the same time to think how people with different views to your own might respond to them. If you are studying this module with others, try to find an opportunity to discuss the questions in a small group. (By the way, we do not think there is a single right answer to each of these questions.)**

- 1 It's pretty clear why Livingstone was frustrated at not being able to use corporal punishment on Joba, but if Fana was right, what do you think it was that Livingstone might have feared?
- 2 Do you think Livingstone was right:
  - to speak out as he did?
  - to send Joba out of the class?
- 3 From the evidence supplied in this story, what do you think might have given rise to Joba's behaviour:
  - before Livingstone spoke to him?
  - after Livingstone spoke to him?
- 4 To what extent do you agree or disagree that democracy has taken away the authority of teachers?

It is in the nature of young people to 'test the limits', so no teacher is likely to teach for long before receiving some challenge to his or her authority. Through experience, most teachers learn to respond to the majority of these challenges with varying degrees of effectiveness.

Sometimes, however, teachers find that such confrontations bring with them an element of fear that their authority is waning, or that they may lose their temper and break the law against corporal punishment. Also, while physical attacks by learners are rare, they are certainly not unthinkable. Every teacher should think seriously about how to avoid them, and about how to respond if threatened, rather than not think about them at all.

## Authority lost?

We sometimes hear teachers saying that many young people of today lack the respect for authority that teachers used to be able to count on. In many ways this is probably true, though even 2500 years ago, Plato was saying the same thing about young people – older generations always believe that the current generation of young people is more rebellious than those of the past. The question to ask, however, is, if respect for authority has been lost, why was it lost, and what *kind* of respect was lost?

During the seventies and eighties, many young black people lost their respect for teachers for reasons that were mainly political (Molteno, 1987: 192, 198). Teachers, after all, had been implementing apartheid education. Young people also perceived the older generation in general as having failed to resist apartheid during the sixties and seventies. Teacher authority probably lost much of its legitimacy when school-going youth were briefly in the vanguard of resistance during the protests of the seventies and eighties.

Since 1989, youths have been deprived of the significant leadership role they enjoyed during the struggle, many of them while at school. Their schooling has not necessarily provided them with jobs in the new democracy. Many live surrounded by the attractions of a *consumer culture* that they have no means to acquire themselves. Some argue that this has led to an identity crisis among the adolescents of the nineties, creating a disillusionment that could lead to crime – to satisfy the rebellious urges many young people experience and to enjoy the material comforts they crave.

But this 'history' of the youth of South Africa does not fully explain what teachers experience as a loss of authority. 'Authority' is still interpreted by many teachers as '*power over others*', a power based on a tradition that assumes students should always *defer* to their teachers, or a power based on the fear of force or unpleasant consequences.

Much of the 'respect' that has been shown to teachers has been built on such fears, often on the routine and brutal use of corporal punishment. After the seventies and eighties, however, many young people would no longer tolerate this approach. It seemed to be out of key with the constitutional rights that they or their older brothers and sisters had fought for, as well as with their desires and aspirations.

Teachers also need to acknowledge that with political resistance out of the way, television and computer games, sex, alcohol and drugs provide more compelling competition for young people's attention. Young people still believe education can improve their lives, but when so much of the teaching that learners experience is still authoritarian, uncreative, and perceived as boring and irrelevant, school simply cannot compete.

So what can teachers do when bored and unstimulated learners turn to disruptive ways of creating excitement? Let's first examine some approaches that do *not* appear to work, and some that may work better.



We are not suggesting here that teachers who break the law should not take responsibility for their actions and accept the legal consequences. We are simply acknowledging that physical violence is possible in both students and teachers, and that it does not only happen to 'other people'.

A **consumer culture** is one that is based on possessions, and on the ability to buy highly-priced products such as designer-label clothing.

When you **defer** to someone, you yield to or accept their superiority.

## Teacher strategies

In the classroom drama we have just encountered, Livingstone was right to confront Joba. In fact we believe that he shouldn't even have ignored him before confronting him. Many writers on the management of behaviour in the classroom warn against turning a blind eye to unacceptable behaviour (Kyriacou, 1991: 90; Humphreys, 1993: 30; Kounin, 1970: 90). If it is something you as the teacher should see if you're alert, it doesn't help matters to pretend that you haven't noticed – this simply places you under the offender's power. If the learners are seeking attention or 'testing the limits', they will simply be provoked by your non-response to do something even more calculated to arouse your anger.

So if Livingstone probably did the right thing in checking Joba, what went wrong? Well, a great deal depends on **how** the teacher 'does the right thing' as opposed to simply following a 'recipe'. It also depends on the circumstances that led up to the teacher's action. In this case, Livingstone ignored the arm-stroking, allowing it to go on for some time. This could well have given Joba the idea that the teacher was weak, or experiencing a moment of weakness. In fact this was partly true: Livingstone was frustrated that he couldn't resort to 'old ways'.

When Livingstone finally took action, he unfortunately resorted to insults and hints directed not only at Joba, but also at his upbringing, and even at his family. Again, something virtually all writers on classroom 'discipline' agree about is that insults, hints and sarcasm or any sort of personal verbal attack on the **person** rather than on the unacceptable **behaviour**, is self-defeating. It may appear to produce compliance for a while, but it inevitably leads to resentment. Either this produces an insolent, tit-for-tat reply, as it does in Joba's case, or it 'goes underground' as the student waits for a chance to 'even the score'.

It's difficult to blame Livingstone for losing his temper, but a more productive response would have been to take decisive action earlier, speaking to Joba in a calmer, but definitely firm manner, before anger welled up. This would have left Joba in no doubt that his behaviour was unacceptable **in that classroom** and had to stop. It is important here that the teacher's voice and 'body-language' must both convey the same conviction. But nothing unpleasant should have been said about the boy himself or his background.



Jot down exactly what you might say if you were placed in Livingstone's position.

## Humour

A teacher can diffuse a negative situation with humour. Naturally, this depends on the circumstances, which only the teacher will be in a position to judge. A teacher can make clear that a certain behaviour has to stop, but in the form of a joke – even if the humour does have a mild 'sting'.

There is a big difference between a hurtful and sarcastic attack on the student, and a funny statement or question that embarrasses the 'offender' about his or her behaviour. Both will produce a laugh among the rest of the class, but the offending learner is far more likely to recover quickly from the second, without feeling that the teacher is an enemy.

Humour can also **prevent** disruptive behaviour: learners are usually more than willing to co-operate with teachers and one another in a laughter-filled classroom. Of course, not every teacher feels capable of generating the right sort of humour. The best allies in this are usually the majority of learners themselves, if the teacher doesn't take herself or himself too seriously.

In the writer's experience, the skill of humour is something most teachers can learn over time, but one thing that they must get out of the way is their **ego**. If teachers take personal offence at the students' behaviour or comments, the possibility of humour goes out of the window. It helps greatly if the teachers direct some of the humour at themselves, and are prepared, at least occasionally, to appear foolish.

The teacher's **ego** refers to his or her sense of importance as a person to be respected.



If teachers don't take themselves too seriously, the majority of learners will be their strongest allies.

## Avoiding battles no-one can win

You are probably asking, but what if Joba was the 'hard-boiled' type, who would have been unmoved by humour, or by a firm demand? Clearly, teachers need to have 'back-up' strategies in mind.

Was Livingstone right to send Joba from the class? Many would agree that this strategy is at least partly appropriate. The object is to separate the 'offender' from whatever is rewarding his or her behaviour: the girl's admiration for Joba's daring, the awe of the other learners, the teacher's anger, or Joba's control of the situation (by his successful distraction of the teacher from his work).

However, once again so much depends on the *manner* in which the dismissal is carried out. It should be done without shaming or humiliating the learner in front of his or her peers, because this will simply provoke tit-for-tat behaviour. What Livingstone gets is an insolent response that only arouses his own anger even more. And a lost temper is probably the 'first prize' for the 'offender'. Joba would know he could always caress the girl in some other place at some other time – the added 'spice' here is the anger shown by Livingstone, so giving it to him is effectively 'rewarding' the unacceptable behaviour and encouraging further inappropriate responses.

Again, the dismissal should be done calmly, but firmly: 'Joba, I can see you're choosing to be outside the classroom – leave it now so that we can get on. You'll be called for later, and I expect you to be right outside.'

But other forms of back-up strategy are usually necessary to address the factors that lead to the behaviour in the first place. Showing an interest in the 'offender' as a person, and trying to understand what makes him or her behave in a particular way, often uncovers problems in the young person's life that have led to problematic behaviour as a way of coping.

In the video, the Grabouw teacher who sends the boy out of class questions him, discovering factors that would have contributed to his behaviour. She does not adopt an apologetic attitude, and he has been punished because he has after all infringed the rules of appropriate class behaviour. But such an approach creates a



See Excerpts B and C from Herb Kohl's 'On becoming a teacher', in Reading 1 on page 3 of your Reader, for two interesting examples of approaches to behaviour problems.

healthy atmosphere in the classroom, because young learners almost always respond to a teacher who relates to them as individual human beings, not just in their role as a group of learners.

The best *preventative* strategy for disruptive behaviour is to teach in a way that captivates and involves the learners as active partners in their own learning. They become the teacher's best 'allies' when a disruptive learner starts acting up because *they will want the learning to continue*. And at the first sign of trouble in the year from potential 'hard cases', try to find ways of giving them some special responsibilities. We pursue effective teacher strategies later in this section.



You will need 15 minutes for this activity

### ACTIVITY 17: TEACHING AND LEARNING

**Think back to your own experience of teachers, from the times when you were a learner. Make a few notes about these questions in your work-book:**

- 1 What behaviour on the part of teachers helped you to learn?
- 2 What teaching behaviours made it more difficult for you to learn?
- 3 Why do you think this was so?

## Disruptive students

As for Joba, stroking the girl's arm in class was almost certainly an attention-seeking move. Yet his reaction to Livingstone's cutting remarks were fairly natural for someone being insulted. And it's important to realize that, even though Joba was silenced by Livingstone's insult, it is unlikely that he would be very responsive to the teacher as a source of authority in the long term. Even if Joba appeared to 'respect' the teacher's authority, respect and authority are exactly what the teacher would have lost.

How can this be? Is it not removing the cane that has cost teachers much of their authority? Joba's response seems to taunt his teacher with disrespect because he knows Livingstone can't whip him. And was it not the eighties' message of 'ungovernability', and the coming of democracy, that led to this breakdown? Joba would be quick to argue for his constitutional rights if Livingstone were to lose his temper and hit him. How could we suggest that the teacher was responsible for a loss of respect?

Well, perhaps we should turn these questions around and ask whether by behaving in a *more* democratic way, the teacher could have produced a better response from his disruptive student, and increased his authority. In fact, this is the kind of case we will be making throughout this section. Can we find solutions to these problems through a deeper understanding of democracy?

Sometimes we have to remind ourselves, as we complain about increases in crime and unemployment, to value the democracy that so many strove and fought for in this country. No longer are South Africans embarrassed to be South Africans – either branded as oppressors or downtrodden masses. All South Africans now enjoy rights that cannot be trampled on with *impunity*: the right to vote, to move about freely, to join any organization, and to gain an education. Irrespective of how we vote, relatively few South Africans would seriously consider returning to the old restrictions.

So how do we reconcile democracy with teacher authority, and respectful relationships between teachers and learners, when there is so much evidence of freedom bringing many schools to the point of chaos? Livingstone says teachers have lost authority, and he seems to blame the learners, the authorities, and democracy. But we are suggesting that in this situation Livingstone has contributed to the loss of his own authority.

Clearly, there is confusion around the question of what 'authority' is, and we need to gain a sound understanding of it, otherwise all the good teaching strategies in the world will not solve the problem of disorder at its source.

When a person acts **with impunity** there is no possibility of being punished.



## ACTIVITY 18: CONFUSING POWER AND AUTHORITY

**Read Wally Morrow's article, 'Authority, responsibility and democracy in creating climates for learning' (Reading 11 on page 71 in your Reader). The article includes excellent brief activities throughout, so we will not provide additional questions on this reading. At this point, you will need to read Part 1, 'Power and authority'.**



Morrow's reading will be referred to throughout this section. You will need between 35 and 45 minutes to read Part 1 and work through the short questions.

## Legitimate authority

Morrow, in our reading, helps us to see that when we talk about 'authority' and 'respect', we often forget that people may attach several different meanings to these words. What some understand as a loss of 'respect' or 'authority' may well refer to a loss of 'fear' or 'power'.

Many teachers assume that, once they are appointed to be 'in charge' of young learners, this position automatically gives them 'authority'. When they find that the learners do not automatically respect this 'authority' all the time, they may try to back it up with corporal punishment, or at least the threat of corporal punishment.

In fact, what these teachers are doing is moving away from true, legitimate authority – into the area of power and force. Why are power and force different from authority? Because authority is based on *rights*, while power and force have nothing to do with rights. Let's look at authority first.

Part of what a teacher is expected to do is to maintain an orderly environment conducive to learning, for the benefit of all concerned. This is seen as the teacher's right or legitimate authority. So for a teacher to 'take charge' in this way is not undemocratic, any more than a soccer referee, responsible for maintaining an orderly game, is undemocratic for showing a yellow card to a player who becomes violent.

However, power and force are not based on rights at all. As Morrow points out, rights and power/force are simply not compatible. If I have power over you, I can ignore your rights. But if you have a way of ensuring that your rights are honoured (recourse to a legal system, for example), then my power over you is restricted, especially if it's a case of my forcing you do something *against* your will. So when a teacher relies on force, as in corporal punishment, that teacher is expressing power, not authority. And trying to force disruptive learners to respect others' rights is not likely to succeed in the long term because they would not see this as respecting *their* rights.

We've said that many teachers *assume* that their position automatically gives them authority. However, if teachers are put in charge for the sake of ensuring that the learners' right to a decent education is honoured, no assumptions about automatic authority can be justified. Teachers need to *earn* their authority by carrying out their regulatory function effectively. A referee would have little authority or respect if he did not bother to call players to book for foul play.

Teachers are also expected to earn their authority insofar as society expects them to have the best interests of the learners at heart, to be knowledgeable and skilled in what they teach to learners, and to be knowledgeable and skilled in how to teach it.

“  
*Just as it is not healthy for teachers to assume the status of the professional, but to strive to be professional – so it is healthier for a teacher to earn authority, and her learners' respect, than to assume it.*  
 ”

## 'In authority' or 'an authority'

It was the philosopher of education, R. S. Peters, who first pointed out the difference between a teacher being legitimately 'in authority' and a teacher being 'an authority'.

Teachers, like referees and traffic officers, are generally legitimately placed 'in authority'. However, this authority needs to be built and maintained. When teachers neglect to maintain an orderly learning environment, or rely on force such as corpo-

ral punishment rather than rights to do so, they sacrifice the legitimacy of their authority.

On the other hand, many teachers are not only 'in authority', but 'an authority', to the extent that they have a sound, broad and deep knowledge of what is to be taught, and how to teach it (we develop this idea further in Section Five).

Just as it is not healthy for teachers to assume the status of professional, but to strive to be professional, so it is healthier for a teacher to *earn* authority, and her learners' respect, than it is to assume it.



You will need about 10 minutes for this activity.

### ACTIVITY 19: THE EFFECTS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

**Turn to Reading 12, which consists of extracts from the article 'Spoil the rod, spare the child' by Salim Vally. If you are working in a study or tutorial group, this would be an excellent article to discuss. If you don't have access to such a group, try to discuss the article informally among your colleagues.**

# Teachers and learners: the teacher 'in charge'

## 4.3

In this section, we continue to explore the nature of teacher authority, but we focus on another confusion that has undermined the authority of teachers – the confusion between political and educational authority. We examine the teacher's role in a democratic learning environment and try to reconcile the principles of equality and authority in a democratic learning environment.

### ACTIVITY 20: POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITY

**Read Part 2 of Reading 1, 'Political and educational authority', and do the activities that are built into the reading.**



Spend about 40 minutes on the reading and the activities.

## The question of equality

*The Artis teachers had sympathized with Livingstone, but it was soon clear that they didn't have constructive answers to the problem he had expressed. Then Shahieda remembered something she'd read on a course dealing with the problem of authority. She made copies of it for her colleagues, so that everyone could read it.*

*All of them had been teachers or students during the eighties, when high school students had been in the thick of the action against the apartheid state, so they understood why it was that the idea of political accountability and authority had become mixed up with educational authority in the first place. However, there was something that worried Fana about the reading:*

*'I agree that educational authority must be based on something other than that required of public office-bearers in a democracy. But there's something I don't understand. In Part 2, Morrow argues the inequality of teachers and learners in the classroom, but surely there must be some senses in which they are equal?*

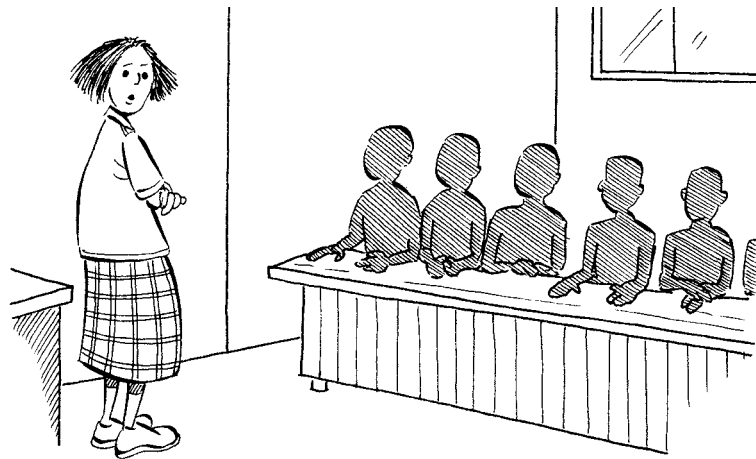
*'I think I can put your mind at rest about that,' said Shahieda. 'In another article, Morrow does in fact make the point that teachers need to treat learners as persons – in that sense, they should be seen as equals (1989: 133). It might not sound like a big distinction, but it's easy for a teacher to relate to a class in a bureaucratic way, as a collection of students, rather than as individual learners. Some of our learners have the potential to turn out far more knowledgeable and capable than we are, so we'd be wise not to treat them impersonally, or as inferior beings.'*

*Peter had been following all of this, but now it was his turn to express a doubt: 'Wait a minute,' he said. 'You're saying, or Morrow is saying, that as persons, learners should be treated as human beings, as they would be in any other sphere of life. But in their role as learners, students are in a position of inequality to teachers because they know less or have fewer skills, at least in the area in which they're being taught.'*

*'That sounds right,' answered Shahieda.*

*'But in our in-service training,' said Peter, 'they've been trying to persuade us that teaching is not just a matter of transferring knowledge into empty heads, that learning involves learners actively constructing*

Remember Herb Kohl making a similar point in Section 2.5?



It's easy to relate to a class simply as a collection of students, rather than as actual human beings.



Paulo Freire, the author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and many other books, has been highly influential in educational thought since the seventies, particularly in developing countries and in the USA. In South Africa, his books, though banned by the apartheid government, were extremely influential among those who resisted apartheid in the field of education.

*knowledge or competence for themselves. What writer was it that said both the teacher and the students have to be learners?'*

*'That was Paulo Freire,' said Shahieda. 'He said that a good teacher would listen to and learn from her students, in order to be more attuned to their worlds and to promote their growth as "persons". I see what you're getting at – that sounds a bit more like equality, doesn't it?'*

*'Hang on,' said Fana. 'Freire was writing mainly with adult learners in mind. In schools for younger learners, even a democratic teacher would still have responsibility for structuring activities, providing challenges, and keeping order. In that sense, surely the teacher's still the one in charge?'*

This question of the teacher's role ('as an authority') with respect to the learner's construction of knowledge is a key one for teachers, and it needs to be examined more carefully in Section Five. But at this point we have to look at another aspect of the teacher's role: authority within democratic education.

# Democracy and freedom in the learning environment

## 4.4

In this section, we will again examine the teacher's role in a democratic learning environment. It will be our task to try to dispel common confusions surrounding the teacher's role with regard to discipline, the nature of freedom and authority, and the choice/compromise between learner freedom and teacher authority.

### ACTIVITY 21: RULES AND BOUNDARIES

- 1 Read 'Authority and the organization of learning-space', Part 3 of Reading 11. Again, the activities are built into the reading. Even if you only think about your answers to Questions 18 and 19, be sure to jot down some rules in answer to Question 20.
- 2 Read the brief extract from an article by David Winkley, a primary school principal in England, in Reading 13.



You will need 35 minutes for this activity. (Note that the value questions involved in this situation will be discussed in connection with another, similar situation in Section 6.5.)

## Discipline or control?

Part 3 of Morrow's reading focuses on regulative and constitutive rules. This distinction is closely linked to the distinction between a teacher's '*in* authority' function and his or her '*an* authority' function, as we shall soon see.

### Regulative rules

In their different ways, both Morrow and Winkley believe that regulative rules in school need to be justified, that they should only exist for a learner-centred purpose, which may be:

- **social**: maintaining an orderly environment for learning to take place; and
- **psychological**: maintaining a secure atmosphere in which learners can grow and develop.

Here we are talking of the control and prevention of disorderly and disruptive behaviour by means of rules, vigilance and penalties. To the extent that this may be part of a teacher's role, his or her '*in* authority' function is involved. How does Artis Secondary deal with the problem?

*Immediately after assembly on a particular morning there was an atmosphere of shock in the Artis Secondary staffroom – a matric boy, Gerry, had punched one of his female classmates, Nosipho, because she had made a comment about his trousers. She had a lump on her forehead and had lost a tooth. Gerry was unrepentant. He said that he had been circumcised and was a man, and women had to respect him. Nosipho had shown disrespect by commenting on his trousers.*

*The young woman was furious and shocked. Shahieda had taken her to the district surgeon, and would then take her to the police. Nosipho was determined to press charges and let the law take its course. The big question was, what should the school do?*

*The Principal, Mr Isaacs, announced, 'I have sent Gerry home to fetch his parents. I want to see the HODs and the vice principal in my office now, please.'*

*At break he announced in the staffroom that they had decided to consult the staff before a final decision was made.*



You will need about 15 minutes for this activity.



Morrow's use of the word 'discipline' to refer to the constitutive rules of a subject is not as common as Winkley's use of the word, which refers to anything that has to do with maintaining control and order in school classrooms.

An **irony** is an unexpected truth, contrary to what one might think to be true.

## ACTIVITY 22: MAINTAINING A SAFE AND ORDERLY SPACE

- 1 Write down a rule for inclusion in the school's Code of Conduct to deal with problems of this sort in the future.
- 2 Write down brief guidelines on how this rule should be applied (a few lines will do).

### Constitutive rules

Constitutive rules are bound up with the very existence of human activities such as sports and disciplines; they 'constitute' or form the very possibility of such activities. Constitutive rules are the internal, structuring rules that make soccer soccer and painting painting. In the case of soccer they may be actual rules, in the case of painting they may be principles of effective practice. If we value these pursuits and submit to the discipline involved, we do not need to question the purpose of the rules that constitute them. If the teacher needs to initiate the learner into the requirements of these disciplines, that teacher is required to be 'an authority' in the field.

### Do rules restrict freedom and creativity?

What kind of rules did you think would be appropriate in your classroom in Part 3 of the Morrow reading? What purpose did they serve? Would they help to maintain the orderliness and safety of the learning environment? Would they create the kind of environment that Winkley suggests – one that your learners might prefer to their own homes in the holidays?

In Part 3 of the reading, Morrow makes the point that if we undermine the sort of rules and authority that help maintain a safe, systematic and productive learning environment, we will not advance democracy and freedom. But he also asks whether these rules restrict the freedom and creativity of learners. The answer seems to be that they may in fact create the conditions for the exercise of freedom and creativity, much as the good referee's enforcement of rules allows good soccer players to display their skills to maximum effect.

Of course it is possible for rules, and the punishment by which they are enforced, to become so restrictive that learners neither feel safe nor feel any incentive to be productive in their learning. This was the situation at the *Yizo Yizo* school at the beginning of the first series – a school under the grip of a 'disciplinarian' headmaster.

However, much of that fear was aroused, not by the Principal's cane, but by criminal elements in the school, bullies who tortured other learners out of sight in the toilets. This fear became a distorted image of the Principal's reign of fear. It's an irony often found in schools where the rules are grim and restrictive. Despite the tight control, youthful cruelty can co-exist and even thrive. In such schools, rights count for very little; they are ignored by both the Principal and the bullies. How can learners attending such a school learn that people's rights are important and to be respected?

In fact, it is not necessary for rules to be so restrictive, or applied so restrictively. Many teachers seem to think that their only choice is between authority and licence (freedom from all restrictions). This thinking is based on a double confusion. Democratic freedom in teaching is confused with licence (learner-centred teaching taken to extremes), just as authority in teaching is confused with authoritarianism (the abuse of authority for one's own ends). The faulty perception that results is that teacher authority and democracy are incompatible – many teachers wrongly assume that if they are to move away from the authoritarian teaching of the past, they must move toward licence – the removal of restrictions.

## Freedom from and freedom to

Behind the double confusion described above lie oversimplified ideas of both freedom and authority.

The philosopher, Charles Taylor (1985: 211–299), points out that democracy requires two forms of freedom:

- 'freedom from' interference, restraint and oppression; and
- 'freedom to' act and fulfil one's potential as a human being.

This distinction is particularly important when we shift our focus from the world of politics to the world of education and growth. An overemphasis on the removal of restrictions can create a world without boundaries in which children feel insecure and in need of structure, and in which bullies can make life very miserable for the rest. Therefore a balance needs to be struck in which the conditions necessary for learning, growth and development are maintained.

## Authority and authoritarian

An oversimplified understanding of the word 'authority' is also responsible for much confusion among teachers. Paulo Freire has commented on this confusion in his dialogue with Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (1987: 91):

*The democratic teacher never transforms authority into authoritarianism. He or she can never stop being an authority or having authority. Without authority, it is very difficult for the liberties of the students to be shaped. Freedom needs authority to become free. It is a paradox, but it is true. The question nevertheless is for authority to know that it has its foundation in the freedom of the others, and if the authority denies this freedom and cuts off this relationship, this founding relationship, with freedom, I think that it is no longer authority but [...] authoritarianism.*

*[On the other hand] if freedom does not meet authority because authority renounces itself, denies itself, the tendency is for freedom to stop being freedom in order to become licence. Because of that, I am convinced that the educator, no matter if she or he works at the level of pre-school or primary school or the university, has to assume the necessary authority which he or she must have, without going beyond it by becoming authoritarian.*

A **paradox** is a statement that seems to contradict itself (because it contains opposing ideas), but that nevertheless makes sense.

In fact, an either/or choice between licence and authoritarianism is not forced on us by democratic education, or by Curriculum 2005, though many teachers think this is so. Let's look in on the classroom of a teacher grappling with the requirements of the new curriculum.

### ***Lukile's story***

**Lukile, a Grade 5 teacher, had witnessed examples of learner-centred teaching during her teaching practice at a progressive, previously 'white' school. She was keen to bring the benefits of this experience to less privileged learners in a township school, where she was given the responsibility for teaching a class of 40.**

**Despite this intention, at the end of her first term as a full-time teacher, she found herself heeding the frequent advice from her more experienced colleagues: 'Start tough!' She was surprised by the ability of**

eleven-year-olds to create havoc, and in fact 14 of the 40 learners in her class were considerably older. 'Making an example' of a few ring-leaders seemed to help, as did a few break-time detentions for the whole class, though she hated doing this. Still, it had worked to the extent of enabling her to get through her first year without becoming a nervous wreck. The children took her threats seriously, and mostly they co-operated.

Lukile started her second year with more confidence, again with the intention of introducing more learner-centred activity. Lukile arranged the learners' tables in groups of six, hoping that the learners would experience the classroom as a more natural environment, and learning as a more active and pleasant pursuit.

Much of the time, though, she found that she had to conduct the lesson in the 'traditional' way, standing at the chalkboard and explaining the work. This was mainly because in the group arrangement, the learners related to their groups as well as to herself. She felt she had less control in this situation, and the children sensed this too – they tended to become very noisy and to distract one another. Even when she gave the groups specific tasks to do, half an hour or more would pass before they would get down to working.

Sometimes she would say, 'I'm going to count to five, and I want everyone to be quiet,' but find herself counting to 'four ... four-and-a-half ... four-and-three-quarters ...' still unwilling to act out the consequences of her rather empty ultimatum. Eventually she was forced to shout at them. She knew they were playing with her lack of resolve.

The fact was that she didn't really feel comfortable punishing them. She associated stern discipline with teachers she'd had as a child – the sort who made everyone afraid. She wanted to give the children the opportunity to express their growing understanding of the world, and to give them a sympathetic ear. However, they just didn't seem to share her desire for intelligent discussion; they seemed more interested in chaos!

Such a lot of time seemed to just get wasted. And when the learners did get down to the tasks she set for groups, there were always a few learners who dominated the activity. Some of these were witty, showing signs of leadership, others just bullied the smaller children. No-one gave the quiet children a chance, or asked what they could contribute. It was all going wrong ...



The teacher from next door stormed in and yelled at the class.



**One day, when the learners were getting out of hand, Oliver, the teacher from the next-door classroom stormed in and yelled at the class. They immediately kept quiet. Lukile was sure that Oliver had caught sight of her at the back of the room, where she was stooped over the work of one of the learners, trying to help him with it. But he pretended not to as he scolded the children for disturbing his own class, and 'behaving like savages'.**

**When he left, Lukile was so embarrassed she hardly knew what to say to the children. She felt that Oliver was right, yet she knew that despite the order in his classroom, his Grade 6 learners were usually bored stiff. His nickname was not 'Drone' for nothing. Lukile wondered what her nickname was among the children ...**

**Oliver obviously didn't lose any sleep over his learners, which Lukile felt was wrong. Yet she sensed that she was doing the wrong thing, even if it seemed to be for all the right reasons.**

“  
*In situations where democracy is mistaken for a removal of restrictions, the teacher can arguably cause more harm to learners than stricter colleagues.*  
 ”

Lukile assumes that learners will be eager to learn and behave sensibly. She doesn't want her learners to be restricted by fear. But despite all her good intentions, she is disappointed and her performance falls far short of professional. She knows that punishment makes life easier for the teacher, but regrets the costs – for herself and her learners. However, it's clear that removing the restrictions leads to disorder.

The mere arrangement of learners in groups does not make for active learning. The children don't seem to know how to work together, much time is wasted, little systematic learning takes place, and a battle of nerves and willpower follows. So the teacher falls back on transfer-of-information teaching, which, with the children seated around tables in groups, has been called mere 'cluster teaching, not group-work at all.

In despair, the young teacher considers giving up teaching after only a year and a half – a waste of all her training. But has this training contributed to her problems? It has not helped her to understand why learners do not respond to her efforts to win them over. It has not equipped her with the skills required for working collaboratively so that she can develop these in her learners. It has not provided her with a well-grounded sense of her own authority as a teacher. All she has acquired are a few vague notions about groupwork and children's capacity to develop if not too many restrictions are placed on them.

What we may see in Lukile's story is the confusion over authority and freedom that many teachers experience, especially when old, essentially authoritarian attitudes are giving way to more democratic attitudes. In such a situation, where democracy is mistaken for a removal of restrictions, the teacher can arguably cause more harm to her learners than her stricter colleagues. So let's examine this confusion.

Lukile adopts what is often called a *laissez faire* approach; Oliver adopts an authoritarian approach. In the *laissez faire* approach, the child is given licence; young learners look in vain for secure boundaries; bullies tend to dominate. Learners are unlikely to learn to respect the rights of others in this environment. This approach discounts the inexperience and relative immaturity of young learners, as well as the essential need to grow that Kohl describes.

In the authoritarian approach, rules are restrictive, there is an overemphasis on control, and teacher power is based on force or the fear of punishment. The teacher is not accountable, and therefore abuses his or her power. This approach discounts the learner as a person with potential for growth, and it discounts the possibility of the teacher being wrong, or at least short-sighted.

A *laissez faire* approach refers to the principle of allowing people's activities to develop without exerting any control over them.

## A different approach to order: democratic authority

The limitations of these two approaches are obvious. Fortunately, there is another approach – the way of democratic authority, which focuses on empowerment, in which the **freedom to** learn and grow in constructive ways is as important as the **freedom from** restriction. This does not discount either immaturity and inexperience, or the learner as a person with potential for higher development.

It regards teachers and learners as equal insofar as they are persons, but not equal in terms of their roles in the teaching/learning situation. This is because, as we saw, teachers are appointed in authority and given the right to exert this authority over learners, especially when the learners are disruptive. In such cases, the learners' equal rights as persons are subordinated to the rights of other learners, and to the teacher's legitimate right, in order to maintain an orderly learning environment.

Democratic authority encourages learners to participate in class because it is focused on the learner's potential. But it recognizes the teacher's central role in maintaining an ordered, safe and stimulating learning environment, that will challenge and extend learners. It therefore requires the teacher to be both 'in authority' and 'an authority' in the classroom. It is neither authoritarianism, nor licence. In democratic authority, rules are not absent, they exist to create the possibility, security and freedom for creative growth to happen.

In fact, democracy and authority are completely compatible. Democratic teachers do wield authority. They are not weak, and do not just passively let things happen. But on the other hand they do not rely on 'claimed' or traditional authority, or on respect that is based on force or fear. Rules (both constitutive and regulatory) and boundaries are very much a part of democratic authority, but they are not enforced for their own sake, or for the sake of the teacher.

Clearly, a democratic teaching and learning environment gives teachers a choice of roles that is not limited to authoritarian strategies on one hand, or licence on the other. The teacher who wields democratic authority constantly seeks a balance between order and freedom – the one never excludes the other, and with larger or smaller classes, at different times of the day or the week, the teacher will display her authority by knowing when to lean towards order, and when to lean more towards freedom.

“

*In fact, democracy  
and authority are  
completely  
compatible.  
Democratic teachers  
do wield authority.*

”

# Effective teacher authority in practice

## 4.5

### ACTIVITY 23: EXERCISING EFFECTIVE AUTHORITY

Read Part 4 of Reading 11 by Wally Morrow ('Effective authority'). Complete the activities that are built into the reading.

The last section of Morrow's reading is very brief, but it raises some issues that seem to concern teachers a great deal. One of these issues (the abuse of authority) has already been discussed in Section 4.4. The first issue raises concerns about the penalties and punishments that ultimately back up the rules on which the orderly maintenance of learning environments is based.



You will need about 15 minutes for this activity.

## Punishment

In the case of soccer referees, rule enforcement is backed by *sanctions* that are formally laid down and widely recognized. The sanctions available to teachers, however, are far less systematic and are by no means agreed on by everyone in society.

Sanctions can range from subtle to drastic measures, such as the suspension of a learner from a school. The range is enormous, limited only by the Code of Conduct and the law against physical force. Usually these are left up to individual teachers. However, individual teachers are usually supported by the collective authority of the school, and in many cases by the community that it serves.

Although a system of sanctions or punishments needs to be in place to give enforceable meaning to regulative rules, it is important for teachers not to confuse punishment with discipline, or with control. When many teachers talk about discipline, they automatically think in terms of punishment. For this reason many are afraid that to abolish caning is to abolish discipline.

This is another double misunderstanding: control is confused with discipline, and punishment is confused with control and order. This misunderstanding severely limits a teacher's stock of teaching strategies, especially if he or she becomes *fixated* on one form of punishment, such as corporal punishment.

As Winkley points out, the goal of discipline strategies should be a safe learning environment that encourages learning. Another goal that is often mentioned is the gradual development of self-discipline in learners. For such goals, punishment should always be a last resort.

One reason why it is *not* always seen as a last resort is that many teachers have a limited understanding of discipline and authority, and see them as dependent on punishment. You may recall Fataar and Patterson's statement that the abolition of corporal punishment seems to have added to the breakdown of order and discipline instead of creating a 'human rights-friendly' climate in some schools (Reading 4).

Another reason is that teachers often view disruptive behaviour as an attack on, or an insult directed at, themselves personally. Their egos become too involved, and punishment is meted out partly out of revenge, to show the class 'who's boss', or to maintain a reputation of being 'in control' among colleagues.

In fact, very little disruptive behaviour is a personal attack directed at the teacher. Dreikurs and Cassel, in an influential study called *Discipline without Tears* (1990: 30–41), analysed the often unconscious goals behind young learners' unacceptable behaviour. After working with hundreds of children over many years, they identified only four goals of misbehaviour:

**Sanctions** are penalties or rewards that force or persuade people to keep to a particular rule or standard of behaviour.

A person is **fixated** when they are obsessed with one particular thing to the exclusion of others and are therefore unable to think of alternatives.

- attention-getting;
- power;
- revenge; and
- displays of inadequacy (a desperate avoidance of any expectation).

Of course, behind these goals may be many factors and combinations of factors in the young learner's background and personal makeup, but the single drive behind all four goals tends to be the child's deep desire for *social acceptance*.

If various factors have discouraged particular children in their quest for recognition and belonging, they are likely to imagine that their misbehaviour will gain them the social acceptance they need. Even the goal of 'revenge', which may seem like a personal attack on the teacher, usually stems from deep discouragement experienced in the child's social environment (including family and community), rather than from some particular hurt inflicted by the teacher.

Knowing this, teachers should be able to recognize how inappropriate punishment and criticism of the learner (rather than criticism of the *behaviour*) may be in many situations. In addition to the negative effects of corporal punishment noted in Reading 12 on page 84 of the Reader, there are many other reasons why teachers should keep punishment in the *background* of their thinking until rules are actually broken.

When rules *are* actually broken (preferably rules that have been agreed upon by all involved), punishment needs to be meted out in a calm but firm manner, making it clear that it is a consequence of breaking agreed-upon rules. The learner should not be led to feel that the punishment represents revenge, or a display of power, on the teacher's part.

Herbert Kohl gives an example of a teacher using a calm but firm approach *without* resorting to punishment where many teachers would have punished the offender (see Excerpt B of Reading 1 on page 5 of the Reader). The teacher's approach in Kohl's example also takes note of the need for social acceptance that underlies the boy's anti-social behaviour.

The reasons for not relying on punishment as a means of establishing and maintaining one's authority are well summarized by Chris Kyriacou (1991: 97):

#### THE SHORTCOMING OF PUNISHMENT

**The most important aspect of punishment to bear in mind is that its impact is largely dependent on it being used as a formal and weighty sanction employed for serious incidents of misbehaviour when other strategies have been unsuccessful. There is, however, an element of illusion involved here, since very few classroom sanctions are in fact of any weight, with most involving only a short period of unpleasantness or having a nuisance value. Their impact owes much more to using them in a way that conveys the seriousness with which the misbehaviour is being viewed. It is also largely the case that the type of pupils most likely to be punished – notably disaffected pupils who have little respect for authority and the values and ethos of the school – are the pupils least likely to respond by behaving better in future. In contrast, those pupils who would be most worried about punishment are those for whom skilful use of other strategies should be sufficiently effective.**

The word '**disaffected**' means discontented or lacking in loyalty.

**The main drawbacks to using punishments are:**

- They form an inappropriate model for human relationships.
- They foster anxiety and resentment.
- They have a short-lived 'initial shock' effect.
- They encourage pupils to develop strategies (such as lying) to avoid getting caught.
- They do not promote good behaviour directly but simply serve to suppress misbehaviour.
- They do not deal with the cause of the misbehaviour.
- They focus attention on the misbehaviour.
- They are tiring to maintain as a method of control, and can create unnecessary hostility.

“

*Those pupils who would be most worried about punishment are those for whom skilful use of other strategies should be sufficiently effective.*

”

## Some strategies for exercising effective authority

Part 4 of the Morrow reading also deals with the *manner* in which authority is exercised, whether you are confronting, preventing or punishing unacceptable behaviour. Acting with authority is so much more than following a technique or a laid-down rule. Much of it involves action that will **prevent** undesirable behaviour.

There are many positive ways to create and maintain an orderly, safe and effective learning environment, ways that enable teachers and learners to move away from a relationship of punisher and punished. Here is a brief selection to convince you that neither order and discipline, nor democratic, legitimate authority need be sacrificed when caning is banned.

- Work on a 'charismatic' or winning personality – it isn't everything, but it certainly helps. It's also something you can develop in a two-way interaction in which you and your learners bring out the best in one another. Being prepared and relaxed for a creative lesson that involves active participation from the learners can do wonders for your 'personality'!
- Make variety a principle in lesson preparation; use your creativity. Remember you're competing with television, the Internet, sex, soccer, and so on for learners' attention.
- Develop your awareness of individual needs, abilities and styles of learning, and prepare your lessons accordingly.
- Remember that learners' need to find work relevant to their concerns and interests.
- Actively manage your class with the aim of encouraging and challenging active, purposeful learning.
- Give learners as many opportunities as possible to learn actively through participation and inquiry-based groupwork activities. Plan these activities carefully so that learners understand their purpose, and structure them so that they know exactly what they are expected to do. Monitor groups, intervene with questions that challenge further investigation and give instructions that encourage disciplined, systematic work.
- Being 'in authority' does not mean 'standing on your dignity' – be prepared to 'suspend your ego' (See Reading 1, Excerpt C, page 5 of the Reader). Admit when you're mistaken, don't try to cover this up, and don't let your teaching be limited by the fear that the learners may ask you something you cannot explain. Better still, make it clear to learners from the outset that you're not, and aren't meant to be, **infallible**; that you're also learning, and that learning is a lifelong necessity.
- Hold back when you are tempted to 'hold the floor'. Listen more often to what learners have to say, and create more opportunities for them to speak – they will

When a person is **infallible** they are incapable of being wrong or making an error.

find themselves learning by doing and by speaking.

- Show in small ways that you care for your learners as people.
- Listen to offenders; make inquiries, their stories may be legitimate, and you may possibly be about to punish someone unjustly. This does not mean being 'soft'.
- Remember that having a reason doesn't excuse breaking the rules. There must still be consequences for wrong actions and moral mistakes.
- Find subtle ways to reward positive behaviour. Such small rewards as a smile or a 'Well done!' will count for a lot with learners if your good opinion matters to them; and it will come to matter to them if they know you care for them as learners and as people.
- As far as possible, avoid 'rewarding' undesirable behaviour – such rewards may include your losing your temper, or even corporal punishment if it's seen as a 'badge of honour' in your school. Refuse to play the student game of 'I'll make you punish me'.
- Model responsible behaviour yourself in as many ways as possible, without seeking to become 'too good to be true' – the latter is more likely to put young learners off than to serve as a role model.
- Develop a code of conduct for your class together with learners. Remember that it will be much more effective with learners if it's binding on you as well. And resist the temptation to make this a long list of rules. Draw the learners' attention to the function of codes of conduct, constitutions, and accountability as the pillars of democracy.
- When learners do breach the code, permit punishment by natural consequences as much as possible. For instance, latecomers were locked out of a school because the school perimeter had to be secured against criminals when teachers and learners were in the classrooms. This approach carried risks, but most latecomers were embarrassed when their parents found out that they had not been in school. After a few days, late-coming ceased to be the major problem it had been at this school.

In this section you have learnt how teachers can establish or regain their authority among learners: it does not have to be imposed through force or fear; neither should it be claimed simply as one's traditional 'due'. You have been shown how the democratic teacher wields an authority that is legitimate, that is unafraid to employ rules, that does not impose control for its own sake but to ensure an effective learning environment in which all learners are safe to learn and be creative. This type of authority also seeks a dynamic balance between freedom and control, and is therefore neither rigid and unbending, nor lax.

In the next section, we will turn our attention to that other crucial source of teacher authority, namely the teacher's knowledge of the learning area that he or she is to teach, and the teacher's knowledge of how to teach it.

## Key learning points

1. Many teachers in South Africa today contribute to their own lack of authority by confusing *authority* and *power* – they still interpret 'authority' as 'power over learners'. Such power is based on the fear of corporal or other punishment, in other words force.
2. *Force* is not based on the recognized *right* of the teacher. It is simply based on the teacher being in the stronger position, and it ignores the rights of the learner. *Authority*, on the other hand, is based on the teacher earning the right to control the learning environment in the interests of the learners, and on the learners' rights to a secure learning environment.
3. Teachers could get better responses from disruptive students – and increase their own authority – by behaving in more, rather than less democratic ways. This would earn them *legitimate authority*, in which society grants teachers the right to control certain situations for the benefit of all. However, if teachers rely on force rather than rights, they sacrifice this legitimacy.
4. In addition to being legitimately appointed with an acknowledged right to control the learning environment ('*in authority*'), a teacher should also have sound knowledge and skill ('*an authority*').
5. Legitimate *political authority* in a democracy is based on the principle of equality, but legitimate *educational authority* involves inequality between teachers and learners – at least in respect to what is being taught and learnt. This is because even democratic teachers are responsible for structuring activities, providing challenges, and keeping order.
6. Democracy and freedom are not in conflict. Nor do rules and authority restrict the freedom and creativity of learners.
7. Constitutive rules are different from regulative rules.
  - *Constitutive rules* structure human activities. Without them, most human activities would have little form or logic.
  - *Regulative rules* exist to help ensure order and safety in human activities. Two legitimate purposes of regulative rules are social (to maintain order) and psychological (to maintain a secure atmosphere).
8. Control and discipline are two different things.
  - *Control* has to do with the 'external' prevention of disruptive behaviour by means of regulative rules and penalties. Teachers are placed 'in authority' to ensure a reasonable measure of control in the learning environment. This is not undemocratic.
  - *Discipline* has to do more with 'internal' rules and structures of a human

activity. To learn, one has to submit oneself to the 'discipline' of the appropriate form of this knowledge or skill. A teacher is seen as 'an authority' to the extent that he or she is able to initiate learners into such a discipline.

9. Authority is not the same as authoritarianism.
  - *Authority* involves the two roles 'in authority' and 'an authority'. Both are necessary to enable learners to achieve the knowledge, skill and attitudes required for successful participation in human activities, and to have the freedom to participate creatively. Authority is therefore compatible with, and essential for, freedom and creativity.
  - *Authoritarianism* cuts learners off from freedom and creativity by imposing rules and restrictions as an end in themselves, or for the sake of imposing one's will on others.
10. There are two forms of freedom, 'freedom from' and 'freedom to'.
  - *Freedom from* excessive, authoritarian restrictions is necessary for growth and creativity. But an overemphasis on freedom from restrictions removes the safety that comes from boundaries.
  - *Freedom to* act and to achieve one's potential as a human being provides a purpose for freedom; it does not mean freedom for freedom's sake.
11. Teachers therefore have a third choice besides *authoritarian* and *laissez faire* approaches. The former discounts the learner as a person with potential for growth; the latter discounts the inexperience and relative immaturity of young learners.
12. The *democratic* approach, on the other hand, gives teachers a choice of roles that is not limited to authoritarian strategies or licence. The teacher who wields democratic authority constantly seeks a balance between order and freedom.
13. Many teachers are afraid to abolish caning: they think that this amounts to abolishing control, thereby confusing control with punishment.
14. If the goal of regulative rules and control is a safe learning environment that encourages learning and self-discipline, then punishment should be used as a last resort.
15. The type of pupils most likely to be punished – those who have little respect for authority and the values of the school – are the pupils least likely to respond with better behaviour in future. The type of pupils least likely to be punished – those who worry about punishment – are the pupils for whom the skilful use of other strategies should be effective.



## Tutor-marked assignment 2

**Write a few pages describing the discipline policy at the school where you are teaching, or doing your practice teaching, or where you have taught in the past. Give the school a made-up name in your assignment. If a formally stated policy does not exist, describe what actually happens at this school with regard to maintaining order (in other words, the actual discipline 'culture' at this school). If there is a document setting out the school's official policy, quote from this, and use it as a basis for analysis when you answer the questions below.**

**The length of this assignment should be approximately 800 to 1 000 words (about three A4 pages, hand-written or typed in double spacing).**

- 1** What were the contextual factors that led to the shaping of this policy? Use your own knowledge of the school, of the community surrounding it, and of their history. Consider asking staff members who have been associated with the school longer than you have. Remember to tell them that you are doing this for an assignment, not 'snooping'.
- 2** Describe to what extent the policy or culture of discipline at the school seems to be based on fear and a need to use power to establish and maintain teacher authority. To what extent does it help learners to gain the freedom to achieve their potential as learners and as human beings and members of a democratic society? Provide some examples.
- 3** Do you think the school's culture of discipline emphasizes the enforcement of regulative rules in order to create a climate for systematic, disciplined learning, orderly activity and healthy development? Or are rules there to impose control, to show the learners 'who's boss'? Again, give some examples.



If a teacher is guilty of misconduct that involves breaking society's laws, he or she could face criminal charges in court, in addition to disciplinary action within the profession. This is, of course, the case for members of any profession.



## SECTION FIVE

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# The teacher as knowledge-worker

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# Introduction

# 5.1

.....

We have just explored the 'in authority' role of teachers with respect to managing the learning environment. Now we turn to the role of the teacher as 'an authority', one who is expected to have a sound knowledge base that includes the skill of imparting knowledge to learners, in other words, a curriculum practitioner.

Since 1997, the advent of Curriculum 2005 has had a tremendous impact on what is expected of South African teachers in the classroom. However, these expectations have also been strongly influenced by significant changes over the past three decades in how we understand terms like 'knowledge', and even 'teaching'. These factors all shape the learning outcomes for this section.

## Learning outcomes for this section

Working through this section should give you the capacity to teach with added confidence based on an ability to:

- recognize and distinguish between the various roles teachers have been called on to play in South African classrooms: transmitters of knowledge, facilitators of learning, and developers of skills;
- analyse critically what we mean when we talk of 'knowledge', 'teaching' and 'learning', especially in the context of teaching in South Africa today; and
- identify how today's understandings of 'knowledge' and 'learning' shape the role that teachers need to play in the classroom, particularly that of the mediator of learning.

Let's drop in on a primary school staffroom to hear how the teachers are coping with their roles as 'knowledge-workers'.

## 5.2

# Teachers and Curriculum 2005

**OBE** stands for Outcomes-based Education.

The words '**di tsie badimu**' mean 'claptrap'.

*Like Livingstone, the Grade 6 teachers of Mountain View Primary are concerned about a loss of authority, but in a different way. It's the beginning of the school year and they have to implement Curriculum 2005 for the first time at that level.*

*'My best lesson,' said Gillian, 'focused on map-reading and was based on an idea from a supplement in "The Teacher". It had all the specific outcomes set out one-two-three, and I just followed the suggestions. At the end of the lesson, just about everyone could find the right point on the map from the clues on the worksheet. I would not be worried if all my lessons worked that well. But until we get some new textbooks with more lessons linked to skills and outcomes, I don't know how I'm going to manage. I'm worried about lesson ideas.'*

*'Well,' said Otsile, 'I don't intend worrying about that. Until we get new OBE books to replace the old ones, I'm going to go on teaching pretty much as I have for the past eighteen years.'*

*'But what about assessment?' asked Gillian. 'We're supposed to assess their competence against all those assessment standards throughout the year.'*

*'Oh yes, "Assessment standards!" I always thought they were di tsie badimu from the beginning. Well, I suppose I'll be setting tests more regularly. My only problem is all the marking. I'll have to set one-word answer tests so that the kids can mark each other's work. It may not match all the assessment standards, but I'd like to hear anyone complain about that if we don't have the textbooks that match them.' Secretly, however, Otsile was worried.*

*Lerato wasn't sure if she should mention that she'd hardly thought about using a textbook all week. Instead she said, 'Well, we had some interesting discussions, and our field trip to the stream was great. But I am worried about how to fit everything together in the new curriculum. You know, we all sound a bit lost. Maybe we should talk to Mmapule, the HOD.'*

*Mmapule's response took them all by surprise: 'It sounds as though you're all doing different jobs. And I think the new curriculum has something to do with it. Otsile, you want to go on teaching as you have always done – with the old textbook – it seems you're not too keen on the new ones.'*

*Gillian, you seem to have taken to the new curriculum with enthusiasm. In my imagination I see you with a clipboard like a trainer at the tech, ticking off those children who have achieved skills. But do you know where you are going in your learning programme with those children? A learning area is not just a collection of skills, or a collection of lessons.*

*And Lerato, you are taking children out of the classroom, which is good, and having some interesting discussions in class, but you seem to be unsure of how to teach your curriculum in a systematic way.*

*In a way, that is one problem we all seem to share – we don't have enough clear guidance yet, in textbooks or anywhere else, to show us how to make this new curriculum work. I myself don't know how to assess a learning outcome when each child takes a different amount of time to achieve it. But it seems to me we need to start with the problem of what*

*our role as teachers is in this new curriculum, when we're all seeing our roles so differently. Maybe we should make this the focus for our staff development programme this term.'*

## Key characteristics of Curriculum 2005

Mmapule realizes that a central problem facing her teachers relates to their authority as knowledge-workers: their role in the new curriculum. In a way, these teachers are looking for the *constitutive rules* of teaching – those internal rules that constitute the very nature of teaching and learning in terms of Curriculum 2005.

To help them along, we identify the key characteristics of Curriculum 2005 in the table below. Note that we do not list 'Assessment' separately as a third category. It can sit comfortably alongside the 'Curriculum' and 'Pedagogy' categories, because in outcomes-based education, assessment is ongoing and forms an integral part of both what is learnt and taught, and how it is learnt and taught. It is not something that suddenly 'hits' learners at the end of a process. It involves assessing how the learner is progressing towards the goal of demonstrating various competences.

Key characteristics of Curriculum 2005	
<b>Curriculum</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 A focus on competence, skill, and 'being able to do' (moving away from a focus on the recall of content knowledge)</li> <li>2 The integration of different areas of school knowledge (by arranging the curriculum into Learning Areas), and the integration of school knowledge with everyday life and the world of work</li> </ol>
<b>Pedagogy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 A focus on the learner (moving away from a focus on subject content, with the teacher as the centre of attention and control)</li> <li>4 Learners themselves construct meaning, making sense of the world through active, collaborative learning.</li> </ol>

### ACTIVITY 24: TEACHERS AND CURRICULUM 2005

**How would the three Grade 6 teachers identify with the key characteristics we have just listed? In the table on page 90, write each teacher's name in the second column, next to the characteristic you associate with each teacher. In the third column, write each teacher's name in the block that represents their problem and summarize that problem in a few words. To get you started, we have put Mmapule's name, with the problem she expressed, in the appropriate box. Note:**

- You don't need to put down general problems that all the teachers seem to have, such as confusion and a lack of guidance – just their particular, individual problems.
- You can have more than one teacher's name in a block.



Spend not more than 5 to 10 minutes on this activity.

	<b>Key characteristic</b>	<b>Teacher who identifies with a particular characteristic</b>	<b>Teacher who experiences a problem with a particular characteristic</b>
<b>Curriculum</b>	Competence, skills, focus on being able to do  Integration of knowledge		<i>Mmapule – how to manage assessment when learners achieve a particular competence at different times</i>
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Learner-centred teaching  Active learning by experience		

If you had difficulty 'placing' Otsile, that is because he doesn't 'fit' anywhere in the table. What does this tell us? He does not identify with the goals of the curriculum or with the means of achieving them (the pedagogy). For this reason, he doesn't have any particular problems with the curriculum either – he dismisses the whole idea of Curriculum 2005.

Gillian, of course, is situated entirely in the first row of blocks: she identifies wholeheartedly with the competence approach, and that is where she experiences her particular problem – a lack of good ideas for OBE lessons. Mmapule also recognizes that she lacks a sense of where she is going, of direction and coherence, so she shares the same box as Mmapule, but for a different reason.

Lerato, who identifies strongly with a learner-centred approach and orientation, is also easy to locate. Her problem is in the area of integration, but, as Mmapule has seen, they all seem to have a problem with integrating the various aspects of Curriculum 2005.

## Confusion about the role of the teacher

The key characteristics of Curriculum 2005 *should* make it easy for us to work out the key role that a teacher has to play in implementing Curriculum 2005, but they *don't*. Some of the reasons for this confusion are:

- tensions in the curriculum;
- the problem of 'teacher-tell'; and
- confusion about the nature of knowledge.

## Tensions in the curriculum

In the current policy there is a tension between learner-centredness on the one hand, and the more economy-driven need to make schooling efficient and productive on the other.

The *Curriculum Framework for General and Further Education and Training* (1997: 11) says that education 'should put learners first, recognizing and building on their knowledge and experience, and responding to their needs'. This leads to the re-identification of teachers as 'facilitators' of learning, and a focus on collaborative methodologies.

The same curriculum policy document, on page 15, says that the emphasis in education 'must be on what learners know and can do: on the *intended results of*



*learning* [...] rather than the prescription of content.' This, says John Gultig, a member of the technical task team who developed the 1998 *Norms and Standards for Educators*, 'shifts the educational focus from internal educational processes to external outcomes, and from internal processes of learning to external measurements of doing' (1988: 6).

While both of these emphases in South Africa's new curriculum move away from the teaching of content knowledge, there are tensions (if not contradictions) between them. The one emphasizes the child as a spontaneous learner, the other emphasizes the practical use of learning, the 'product' of teaching.

## 'Teacher-tell'

Neither competence-based teaching nor learner-centred teaching 'comes naturally'. What does come naturally to most teachers is 'teacher-tell', the ability to tell children what to do and how to do it. No matter what teachers learn in their professional education, no matter what they hold as firm beliefs, research<sup>1</sup> has shown that what teachers *do* most of the time is 'tell' or talk.

Most teachers are great talkers, they seem to assume that information is what learners need, and that it will 'stick' if learners would only pay attention. Paulo Freire frequently called this compulsion to talk 'narration sickness'. It is so widespread that the role of facilitator, which includes the ability to keep quiet and listen, to observe learners demonstrating their competence, may seem unfamiliar and threatening to many teachers.

A recent study, part of the President's Education Initiative Research Project, found an average of 81.82% of the lesson time taken up by teacher talk (Taylor and Vinjevd, 1991: 142). This occurred in language development lessons, where the learners should presumably have been given the maximum opportunity to exercise their own linguistic skills.

<sup>1</sup> The President's Education Initiative (PEI) Research Project published in May 1999 is the latest among many research projects that have found significant discrepancies between what teachers say about learning and teaching, and what they actually practice. See Taylor and Vinjevd (1999: 142).

## Confusion about the nature of knowledge

Confusion about the nature of knowledge is common. Remember Peter Adonis' problem in Section One: his doubts caused by the contradictory, pedagogic knowledge that he'd been introduced to in pre-service and in-service education? That was just one aspect of a much wider problem concerning knowledge itself, in fact, a problem with which many are grappling the world over, and not only in the field of education, which we will deal with soon.

Let's return to Mountain View Primary.

*Gillian, Lerato, Otsile and Mmapule spoke to Andy Villiers, the Deputy Principal, and suggested 'The Role of the Teacher in the New Curriculum' as the next focus for their professional development.*

*Lerato explained the difficulty: 'Mmapule was right when she said we all seemed to be doing different jobs. Are we meant to be facilitators, educators, teachers, or what? Should we be learner-centred, teacher-centred, subject-centred or skills-centred?'*

*'I think our staff need a starting point, they need to know where they are heading,' Mmapule confirmed.*

*'Well, okay,' said Andy. 'Does anyone have any good ideas of how we can go about this? Perhaps you can give me a clearer idea of what you see as the problem. I'll need to explain it to Mr Moloj, the Principal, when he gets back from the Department. Can you start us off, Lerato?'*

*'Well, in our INSET courses last year we were told that we should see ourselves as "facilitators of learning", to discourage us from just drumming facts into learners. We need to encourage them to develop their*

own abilities as learners so that they can go on constructing knowledge with confidence when we're not there to help them.'

'I have a problem with that idea,' said Otsile. 'How are the children going to develop their ability as learners when they have very little idea of a subject like science on their own? If we don't teach them some solid facts, they can end up ignorant and confused. When children try to understand how plants obtain food, they think in terms of how people eat unless I teach them otherwise. I'm not ashamed to say that I rely a lot on the textbook. Textbooks are written by experts, they allow me to teach the subject with some certainty. So I think my business as a teacher **is** to get facts into children's heads.'

'Okay, I think I begin to see the problem!' said Andy Villiers. 'This talk about experts gives me an idea. We need help from someone who's thought through these issues more than we have. I think one of my Honours lecturers may be able to help us, or she may be able to suggest someone else who could.'

Andy Villiers described the confusion about teacher roles to his lecturer, Vaneshree Pillay, who agreed to run workshops around three basic teaching positions:

- imparting knowledge to learners (Otsile's approach);
- facilitating in learners the ability and confidence to learn actively (Lerato's approach); and
- developing the skills required to undertake specific types of work (Gillian's approach).

Vaneshree also wanted to encourage staff to question the assumptions that often underlie common sense ideas about knowledge, learning and teaching.

In the following sub-sections, we are going to adapt some of the materials and activities that Vaneshree prepared. Here is the first activity she gave the staff of Mountain View:



You will need about 5 minutes for this activity.

### ACTIVITY 25: WHY IS THERE SUCH A THING AS TEACHING?

Take a look at the photographs below and answer the questions that follow.



- a How do you think these birds learnt to fly?
- b How do you think these children learnt to write?
- c What would you say is the major difference between how young birds learn to fly and how young humans learn to write?

No-one has ever observed birds being *taught* by their parents or any other birds, how to fly. Many species push their young out of the nest when they reach a certain stage of growth. The young bird may falter at first, but it soon flies without aid. It is as if the knowledge or skill is automatic. We refer to this 'automatic' behaviour as 'instinct'.

Writing a simple statement in your home language may seem quite automatic to you. But this kind of behaviour only came to seem automatic after much practice. Although we are pretty much our own teachers when we learn to speak our home language, it is unlikely that most of us would have learnt to read and write without the help and support of a teacher or parent. In fact, we humans seem to have almost no true instincts to help us perform most of the actions we need to. Apart from a few simple behaviours, humans seem to have to *learn* almost everything they need to know in order to survive.

This may come as a shock – don't we talk of doing things 'instinctively', of the 'maternal instinct' and the 'survival instinct'? However, when we apply the word 'instinct' to animals, we realize that we are not compelled by instinct in the same way. A tired mother tern cannot decide that it would far rather sit out the winter at home and give the annual migration a miss. It will fly north with all the other terns, even if it dies in the attempt, because it is *locked* into an instinctive pattern that gives it no choice.

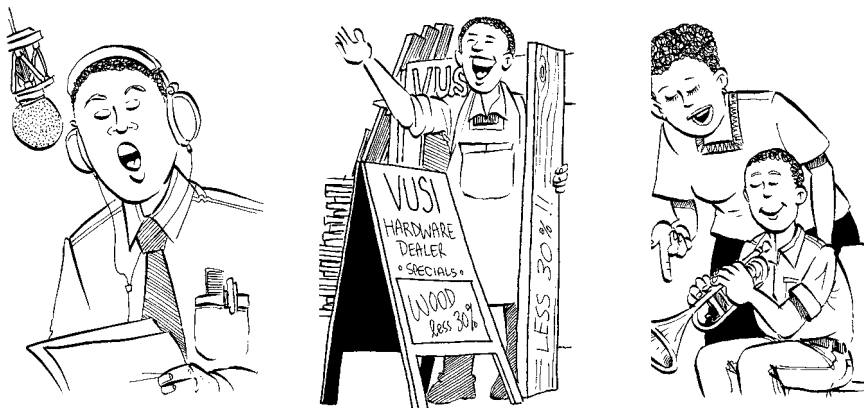
On the other hand, if the 'maternal instinct' or the 'survival instinct' were truly instincts in the sense that zoologists use the word, such acts as abandoning babies or committing suicide or sacrificing one's life for another, would be impossible. Yet these things happen. Clearly, human beings are not locked into behaviour patterns in the way that most animals are.

Put simply, human beings aren't capable of surviving on instinct the way animals do. The capacity of the human brain allows us very much more scope and flexibility of action than instinct allows to any other animal. But this same scope and flexibility require much more guidance, tutoring and initiation into the complexities of the world than other animals require. Humans are very much a learning species, and are probably more dependent on teaching than any other species. But we still need to ask what it means to teach and what a teacher is.

“  
Human beings are very  
much a learning  
species, more  
dependent on  
teaching than any  
other species.  
”

### ACTIVITY 26: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'TEACH'?

Take a look at the illustrations below and answer the questions that follow.



- What do the actions of these people have in common?
- Which of these people are teaching?
- What enables you to answer **b**?



You will need only a few minutes for this activity..

All the people in these illustrations are communicating with others, but only the woman on the far right is teaching. Many humans provide us with information, but this is not what we would call 'teaching'. The information imparted by newsreaders

and advertisers is not intended to help people develop.

But this is exactly the intention of teachers; to make a lasting difference in the lives of learners by contributing to their growth and development. The music teacher on page 93 has a more direct, sustained, and committed relationship to her listener than either the newsreader or the advertiser has to theirs. Passing on information is only a part of that task.

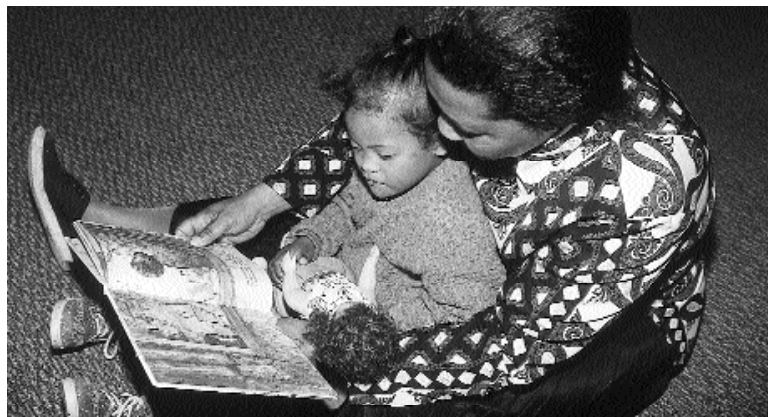
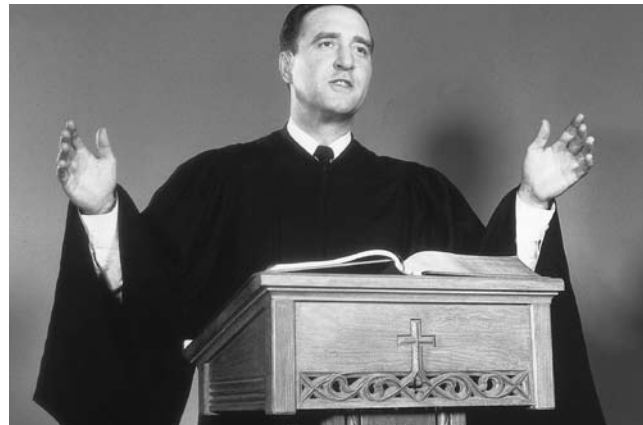
However, this does not entirely satisfy us if we want to know what a teacher is.



You only need about a minute for this activity.

### ACTIVITY 27: WHAT IS A TEACHER?

Take a look at the three photographs below and answer the questions that follow.



- a What do the actions of these people have in common?
- b Which of these people would we call a 'teacher'?

All of the people on page 94 could be said to be teaching. In fact, in traditional societies, it was usually parents, grandparents or elders who performed the task of teaching the young. But today we would not normally refer to any of the people in these photographs as 'teachers'. In modern societies teaching, like tending the sick (doctors and nurses), or arguing disputes on behalf of others (lawyers), is a specialized occupation.

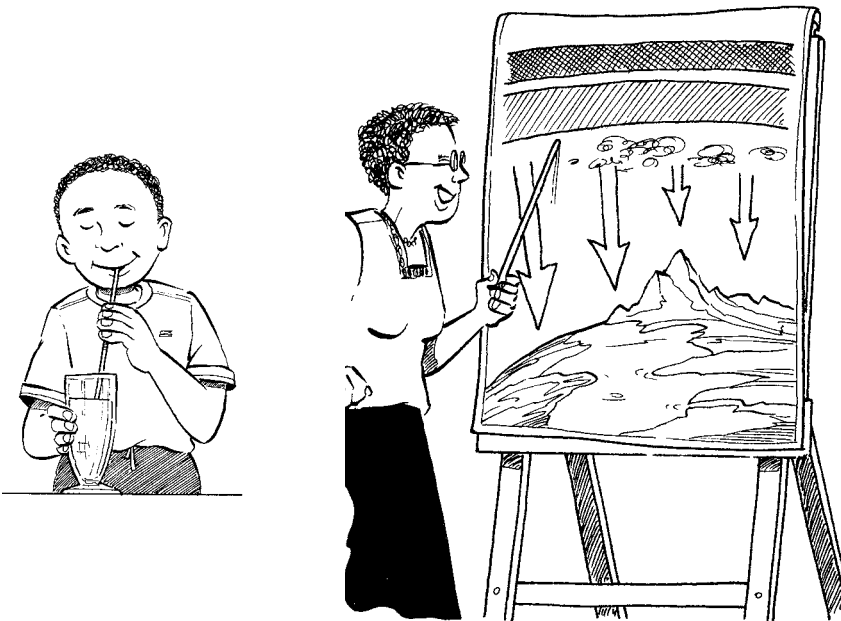
A teacher's special function is to aid and ensure the development of human learning in those areas that do not take place naturally and automatically. This specialization means that they need:

- a sound grasp of the knowledge, skills and values needed to equip learners for modern life (academic, or content knowledge); and
- a knowledge of how to ensure that content knowledge is learnt; this would involve a knowledge of learners, learning, and a variety of ways to make knowledge learnable, as well as skill in maintaining an appealing and effective learning environment (pedagogic knowledge).

We are building a fresh picture of the teacher's particular function – as a knowledge-worker in human society. But does this picture tell the whole story? We also need to ask what kind of knowledge it is that teachers teach.

### ACTIVITY 28: WHAT IS IT THAT TEACHERS TEACH?

Take a look at the two illustrations below and answer the questions that follow.



You need about five minutes for this activity.

- How do you think the child on the left would explain what he is doing?
- How do you think the teacher on the right would explain what the child is doing?
- How would you describe the difference between these two types of understanding?

The child would probably say that he is using a straw to suck or 'pull' the cooldrink up into his mouth. The teacher would probably explain that the child creates a vacuum by sucking the air out of the straw, and that the *weight of the atmosphere* on the cooldrink does the rest of the work.

The teacher would probably also precede or follow this explanation by demon-

strating that air has 'weight', which would lead her to explain how this weight varies according to the amount of atmosphere above us, and that atmospheric pressure decreases with altitude. This would then be used to explain why climbers and athletes have to do so much more 'work' to breathe in air at high altitude than they do when they are at sea level, and so on. The teacher's explanation would be aimed at building a *systematic conceptual framework* that should enable the learners to understand *more* than how a drinking straw works.

Here we have a demonstration of the difference between learners' everyday knowledge and school knowledge. *Everyday knowledge* is drawn from our experience of life, and is based on common-sense understandings of that experience. It is limited in its ability to take one further in understanding the principles and concepts that underlie and explain other phenomena.

*School knowledge* takes place at a more abstract level than everyday knowledge. But it builds a conceptual framework to take the learner to the levels of understanding required in today's society. This type of knowledge is a key aspect of a teacher's specialization.

We will return to this important distinction between 'everyday knowledge' and 'school knowledge' later in this section. In the following sections, we will examine the limitations of teachers as knowledge-workers who impart knowledge, facilitate, and develop skills. As we look into each of these approaches, we will also be exploring different aspects of the nature of knowledge. And we will begin to see that each of these approaches only causes problems when used in isolation from the others.

# What's wrong with imparting content knowledge?

## 5.3

*'But so much "knowledge" isn't even reliable,' said Lerato. 'I mean, we're already teaching the weather differently from the way I learnt it when I was at school. Even facts seem to go out of date. And look at the history books we used to have not so long ago – they only told the story from the point of view of whites.'*

*'You may be right about history, which teaches us about people,' said Andy Villiers, 'but in science the facts have a more sound basis – experts insist on evidence for every explanation, and they test it over and over before they accept it as a fact and publish it.'*

*'I suppose you're right,' Lerato conceded, 'but I don't think people have as much faith in the knowledge of scientific experts as they used to. I mean, one day we read in the papers that certain kinds of exercise or food or medicines are good for you; the next day we read that other scientists have proved the opposite.'*

*'I think that's why the new curriculum puts such emphasis on skills, on what learners can do at the end of the day, rather than on how many facts they know,' said Gillian.*

The next group task Vaneshree organized for the staff of Mountain View required each group to discuss a different map, picture, diagram or short passage, and then report back to the whole staff. Once again, these form the basis of your next activity.

### ACTIVITY 29: POINTS OF VIEW

- 1 Have a look at the map of Africa below and consider the questions that follow on page 98.

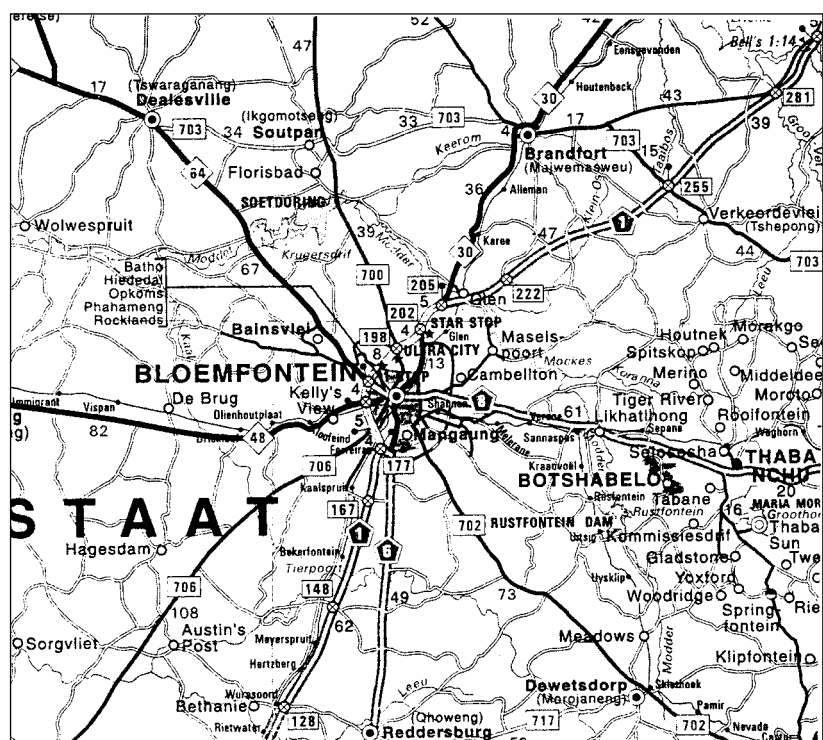
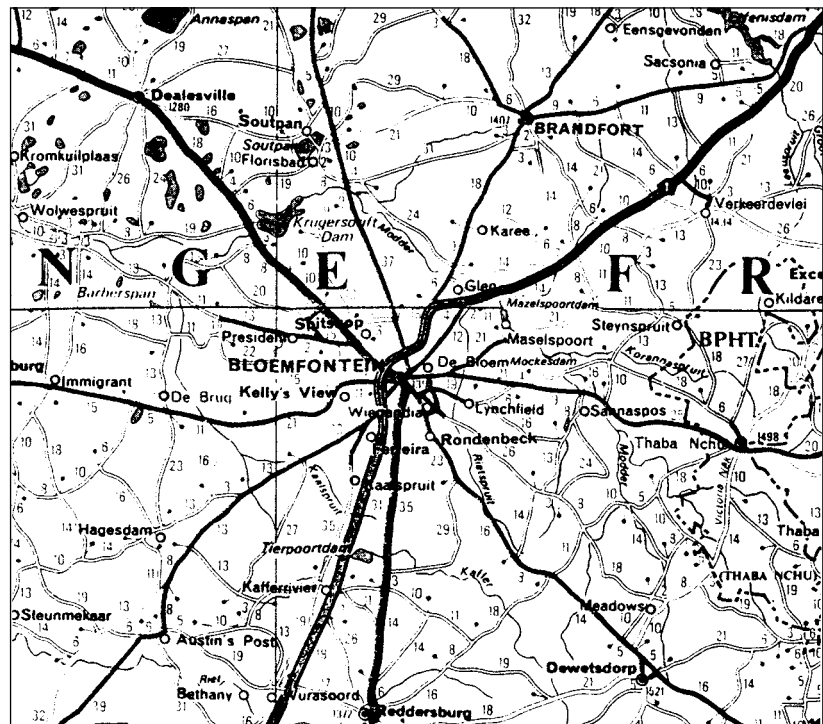


On your own, you need about 25 minutes for this activity. As a group you will need about 45 minutes to discuss all the questions.

Note that we do not use the phrase 'points of view' to mean 'opinions'. Rather we are using it in the sense of 'perspectives', or different points from which to view things. The same scene, or experience, may appear quite different from a different vantage point.

The idea for Questions 1 and 2 in this activity came from H. Janks, 1993: 3.

- a What is your first reaction on seeing this map?
  - b Is this a valid map of Africa? Why, or why not?
  - c Can you think of points of view from which this map could be considered acceptable?
  - d Why is it that we have come to know this map as the 'correct' representation of Africa only when it is inverted?
- 2 Carefully compare the two roadmaps of the area around Bloemfontein below. What strikes you as different about them? If you were told that the one above was printed in 1975, and the one below in 2000, could you explain how they came to be different? What does this say about our way of knowing South Africa?





- 3 Let's look now at an example from the history of crime and punishment – an area of human activity that involves 'knowing right from wrong' (Giddens, 1989: 121):

*In pre-industrial Europe the most serious crimes, those which received the highest penalties, were religious in nature, or were crimes against the property of the ruler or the aristocracy. The transgressions involved are either not treated as crimes at all today, or are thought of as minor offences. Heresy (proclaiming religious doctrines other than Christianity), sacrilege (stealing or damaging church property) and blasphemy (using God's name in vain, or speaking negatively about religious matters) were for a long time punishable by death in many parts of Europe. Hunting or fishing, cutting down trees or bushes, or picking fruit on the lands of the king or the aristocracy by the common people were also capital offences (although the death penalty was not always enforced).*

*The murder of one commoner by another was not generally seen to be as serious as these other crimes; the culprit could often atone for the crime simply by paying a certain amount of money to the relatives of the victim. However, the victim's family would sometimes take justice into their own hands, by killing the murderer.*

What can we make of these examples? Much of our knowledge seems rather **tentative**, because the way we come to know the world can change if we view it from different points in time or space, or if different languages or cultures shape the way we experience reality.

Knowledge is **tentative** when it is uncertain. In this case we keep it provisional until we can judge for certain whether it works.

## How *situation* affects our knowing

If we see the map of Africa as 'upside down' it's because we've inherited a point of view that regards Europe as the centre of the world, and that excludes other ways of seeing it. But from outer space Africa has no 'top or bottom'. Seeing the map displayed in Question 1 of Activity 29 shows us that this really is only a matter of convention.

When we compared two maps of the same region created at different points in time (Question 2), we realized that we were once discouraged from seeing black settlements and towns; they were 'invisible' in geography lessons. And relatively few thought to question this. Our knowledge of South Africa was strangely skewed, not only by biased history lessons, but by the apparently 'neutral' version of the country in our roadmaps.

The cultural history passage about crime and punishment (Question 3) demonstrates how some actions punishable by death two hundred years ago, are now not even considered to be crimes. On the other hand, some of the serious crimes of today (such as the murder of ordinary citizens) would not have been regarded by authorities in eighteenth-century Europe as grave enough to warrant setting in motion the machinery of trial and punishment. Again, point of view in time and place make all the difference.

Surely many of the discoveries and innovations that have advanced human knowledge have been made by people who have broken out of the moulds provided by the society they grew up in? This is undoubtedly true. Is it possible to escape these 'cultural maps' in our minds, which are bound to particular times and localities? Only partly.

No single culture or system of thought would provide a completely reliable grasp of reality, even if exposure to different cultures, broadens our perceptions. For many, including Andy Villiers, modern science has offered a culturally neutral way of achieving certainty, but even this claim needs to be examined critically.

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We are becoming aware of the fact that scientific method reveals only part of the “picture”.

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### SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS

**Thomas Kuhn, the science historian, made an interesting discovery when he studied the actual manuscripts of Isaac Newton, the influential eighteenth-century scientist. He found that what he had read and been taught about Newton’s work simply did not ‘fit’ with the actual questions and facts that Newton had been concerned with. Kuhn concluded that this was because everything he had learnt about Newton, as well as Kuhn’s own training as a scientist, had been written from a different frame of reference, one that was based on the twentieth-century theories of Albert Einstein. Further studies of the methods and discoveries of leading scientists who worked at different times in history, led Kuhn to a remarkable conclusion.**

**When scientists reject something because it doesn’t ‘fit into the picture’ it’s usually because they are working from a particular frame of reference. Scientists regard this frame of reference or ‘scientific paradigm’ as ‘normal science’ until too many questions arise that can no longer be explained through its terms. Eventually, the unanswerable questions mount up until a switch into a new frame of reference becomes inevitable. Kuhn referred to such changes in the history of science as ‘scientific revolutions’, as they are not simple steps of logic or reasoning so much as completely new ways of understanding problems.**

**Kuhn’s theories have cast doubt on the complete ‘neutrality’ of modern science, and raised strong arguments in favour of viewing science itself as a social process that involves loyalties to a particular type of reasoning, experiment and sifting of evidence.**

In the same way that our particular language creates the ‘grid’ of meaning through which we observe the world, so particular scientific paradigms create the grids of meaning through which scientists observe it and make sense of it. Furthermore, as the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas has pointed out, the dominant form of modern Western science, which aims to arrive at explanatory ‘laws’ of cause and effect, conceals beneath its apparent ‘neutrality’ an underlying interest in *controlling* the area of study and what is studied.

### Uncertainties surrounding the world of ‘science’

**Hypotheses** are ideas that are thought suitable to explain things that we don’t understand in depth.

**Hybrid** crops are specially bred from different varieties of crops.

Modern science, with its strict testing of all *hypotheses*, seems to provide reliable knowledge – knowledge that we employ every day in the technology we use. Yet we are becoming more and more aware of the fact that scientific method reveals only *part* of the ‘picture’. We have seen evidence of technology miscarrying in unforeseen ways.

Slow-ripening and low-yielding local grains in West Africa have been destroyed by the introduction of fast-growing, high-yield *hybrid* crops, which failed to ripen late in the season and so prevent famine. Drug-resistant micro-organisms such as those that cause malaria have begun to evolve as a result of the widespread treatment of disease by means of modern drugs and antibiotics.

These and many other technological disasters or potential disasters are not the fault of scientific method, which is after all just systematic discovery. Rather, they resulted from the human tendency to assume that science can give us *all* the answers when in fact the answers it gives us are quite limited, and the tendency to be over-hasty in turning these answers into technology. Yet this has been enough to make people rightly cautious about putting all their faith in scientific progress.

After their discussion about 'knowledge', the teachers began to feel that they were coming to understand the concept more fully. But at the same time they were feeling nervous about their own roles as providers of knowledge, when even the most certain form of knowledge (science) was beginning to look shaky. Those like Otsile, who saw his chief role as 'getting the important facts into the learners' heads', felt especially uncomfortable at this point. However, Vaneshree had another knowledge-problem for the staff.

## Knowledge and power

*'Before we call it a day, let's take a second look at the examples we've just discussed. Did anyone notice another factor, apart from our point of view in history, place, culture or language that affects the way we see and know our world?' Vaneshree asked.*

*It was Mmapule who thought she might have an answer: 'In the road map example, I think oppression was an important factor. It was black settlements that were omitted from maps, and that must have suited the apartheid bosses very well. According to them, black people weren't supposed to be in the "white" parts of the country anyway.'*

*'That's certainly the factor I was thinking of,' affirmed Vaneshree. 'The makers of school atlases might have left the towns out more consciously, but I imagine the makers of roadmaps might not even have been aware of their omission.'*

*That's how power works in the area of human knowing: not only in the consciously produced form of propaganda churned out by servants of the state deliberately manipulating facts, but also by simply pervading our ways of thinking, our everyday practices, and the artifacts of our culture like roadmaps – things that seem quite "innocent" and neutral, yet contribute to the continued dominance of groups with power.*

*And this way of thinking does not have to be engineered by people; it is a manifestation of the strong links that exist between knowledge and power. Can anyone see this at work in the other examples we discussed?'*

It did not take long to identify the influence of colonial power in the way people accept that Europe is at the top of the map. The staff also identified the legacy of feudal power in the severe punishment inflicted on people who 'poached' and picked fruit on land owned by the aristocracy, and in the definition of those who questioned the authority or doctrine of the church as 'criminal' when the killing of a commoner might not even have been defined as a crime.

Vaneshree explained what she meant by the strong links between knowledge and power. She said that in every society, various 'groups' have different amounts of power. The staff suggested that men, the middle class, city dwellers, particular race groups, ethnic or religious groups, and so on, usually have more power. When she had recorded these on newsprint, she displayed another set of concepts:

- what is widely accepted as knowledge and truth in society;
- what counts as a legitimate, acceptable way of thinking;
- what people see as 'natural';
- what people see as possible or not possible; and
- those words, and their meanings, that are recognized, and those that are silenced.

These concepts tended to reflect the interests of the dominant groups in society, rather than the *interests* of those with less power. Therefore, a dominant form of knowledge is related to the power of a particular social group. And if we think about this for a moment, we'll see that this has important implications for teachers as knowledge-workers.

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Things can seem quite  
“innocent” and  
neutral, yet contribute  
to the continued  
dominance of  
powerful groups.  
”

**Interests** refer to whatever benefits a particular person or group, or puts them at an advantage.

Vaneshree asked the staff to read a handout as preparation for the second workshop. This was an extract from a book called *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age*, by Andy Hargreaves, who has written about classroom interaction, teachers and educational change (see Reading 14 on page 93 of your Reader). Vaneshree warned the staff that the extract might make them feel even more unsure of the reliability of knowledge in today's world, but reassured them that it also pointed the way towards dealing with this uncertainty.

### ACTIVITY 30: DEAD CERTAINTIES

**Go to Reading 14 on page 93 of your Reader, 'Dead certainties: a post-modern world' (the extract referred to above). You may want to go through it twice, as it covers a lot of ground in three pages. When you have read it, write down your answers to the following questions in your workbooks:**

- 1** Hargreaves identifies five or six global trends that have undermined some widely-held 'certainties'. Select two, and explain in your own words how they have tended to do this.
- 2** Describe a long-cherished 'certainty' that is no longer certain in education (some are referred to in the extract, but you may have some examples of your own).
- 3** Hargreaves writes of accepting that knowledge is provisional, and of a shift from scientific certainty to situated certainty. What do you think he means by 'provisional knowledge' and 'situated certainty'?



You need about an hour to do the reading and answer the questions.

In this context, **scientism** and **Marxism** refer to the belief that science will provide all the solutions to humanity's problems.

Hargreaves writes about the decline of nineteenth- and twentieth-century belief systems like *scientism* and *Marxism*, and then mentions other reasons why certainties that have served us for a long time have begun to dissolve. The 'explosion' in the amount of information and knowledge that comes at us all the time, and constantly changes, dissolves a straightforward mental 'picture' of the world in which everything 'fits' and has its appointed place. No single, unified, coherent 'grid' of 'common sense' can make sense of it all (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 11).

Even as we come to know more about ourselves through sociological and psychological research, that very research often contributes to changes in the society that we are trying to understand better. Electronic communication also dissolves the isolation that has permitted societies to think that their ways were the only sensible ways to do things. And this trend is accentuated by the ease of international travel, and the migration of different cultures. Today's technology accelerates the pace of change more rapidly than most human beings can adapt to it. The more science and technology opens up the world to us, the more aware we become of how much more we need to know.

Where does this change and uncertainty leave teachers? Let's join the discussion at Mountain View as the staff grapple with this question at the beginning of their second workshop.

## Provisional knowledge and situated certainty

*Vaneshree asked the staff what they thought the main point was that the writer was making and whether the writer was suggesting a way of coping with this uncertainty.*

*Gillian ventured that old certainties were being replaced by a culture of uncertainty. 'But he doesn't really offer solutions. In fact, I think he's saying that single, supposedly "certain" solutions are out of date and don't work, and that the crisis of educational purpose is still unresolved.'*

*Andy Villiers added, 'Well, he does suggest that teachers need to rely on one another and have a wide stock of teaching strategies that they can use flexibly in different learning situations.'*

*'Yes,' said Vaneshree. 'In the last two paragraphs of the extract Hargreaves says that teachers need to accept that teaching knowledge is provisional and situated, that is, dependent on particular contexts. This allows them to adapt their approaches in different teaching situations and not become bound by a single tradition of teaching or by a favoured methodology. What do you think he means by knowledge being "provisional" and "situated"?''*

*'Well, by "provisional" I suppose he means that knowledge is not a fixed thing,' Lerato said. 'We hold it provisionally until something comes along to challenge it or change it. And by "situated certainty", he's suggesting that our language, where and when we grow up, make us perceive the world in a particular way. So the form of our knowledge is situated along with our situations. There is no such thing as completely "neutral", "un-situated" knowledge.'*

*'Yes,' said Vaneshree, 'Hargreaves is suggesting that the supposedly reliable knowledge about effective teaching based on scientific findings is probably less valuable than the combined knowledge of teachers "situated" in their own experience. Book knowledge about a practice like teaching is of little value unless it is interpreted within the real contexts that particular teachers find themselves in,' she added.*

## Knowledge as dynamic and provisional: implications for teachers and learners

So how can we use the concepts put forward by Hargreaves to help us as teachers? What are the implications of moving from deceptive 'certainties' to more authentic uncertainties?

Hargreaves' concepts show up the problems inherent in the 'transmission' model of teaching. 'Getting facts into the heads of learners' and transmitting the heritage of culture to the next generation appear more problematic than teachers like Otsile imagine. Human knowledge is not fixed; there is no single way of explaining the world.

Rather, it is a dynamic process, better conveyed by the verb 'knowing' than the noun 'knowledge'. It is an open-ended journey, an adventure. To be reliable, knowledge does not need to be fixed and unchanging for all times and all situations. To be relevant, it needs to be tried out continually in practice. This means taking risks.

Therefore it won't do to teach learners heaps of facts in the hope that this will prepare them for life in the twenty-first century. Instead, learners need:

- to be taught with a view to active knowing rather than with a view to storing knowledge like a library or museum;
- the opportunity to probe, discover, and make sense of their experience;
- to collaborate in pairs or groups;

When people **lose their bearings** they do not know where they are.

- to question the knowledge that comes their way;
- to learn how to select from mountains of information;
- to learn to live with uncertainty without *losing their 'bearings'*; and
- to experience learning as a lifelong venture.

It is also necessary for teachers to model learning as an ongoing venture. As the British philosopher R. S. Peters said (1965: 110), 'to be educated is not to have arrived at a destination, it is to travel with a different view'. This is as relevant to the knowledge of teaching as it is to the knowledge to be taught. For example, a teacher can view a multicultural class as a source of stress, or as an opportunity for the class to experience the richness of different cultures and perspectives.

As for ongoing changes in the way we teach, our only real caution should be that singular models of teaching cannot claim to be 'the answer'. It is in fact this feature that contributes to teaching as a profession, as something more than technique. Teachers have to remember that 'today's solutions often become tomorrow's problems'. So the professional approach is to stay flexible, to cultivate a 'broad repertoire' of teaching approaches, and to use these approaches appropriately.

## Knowledge and power: implications for teachers and learners

Earlier we pointed out that the *situated* element in human knowledge – the ingredient shaped by the knower's context – is integrally linked to *human power*. We suggested that dominant ways of knowing usually benefit dominant groups in society.

This close relationship between knowledge and power places a responsibility on teachers as knowledge workers. If teachers are in the business of initiating learners into fields of knowledge, the relationship between knowledge and power means that they also have a responsibility to equip learners with the tools of *critical thinking*.

Although we cannot do justice to this topic in a section devoted to the role of teachers, we introduce some examples in Activity 29, suggest further reading, and now provide a few guidelines.

- Encourage learners to question. Traditionally in South African schools, teachers have asked the questions. Now we need to encourage learners to use knowledge to explore, and to probe knowledge in and outside the classroom for its usually concealed 'power content'.
- Create activities, opportunities, and a general climate in your classroom in which exploring and analyzing ideas is not only accepted but expected. Critical thinking is a prominent element of the critical cross-field outcomes; it should be an important element of much of your teaching.
- Model a climate of critical thinking as a teacher. This is necessary because it's not easy for anyone to question the assumptions that have shaped their lives, especially if these assumptions have been fostered by their family, community, the mass media, and society as a whole.
- Keep yourself well informed on current trends and debates to model creative thinking. Think actively and critically about the knowledge you're imparting, and how it fits into the 'bigger picture' of life. Discuss it with friends and colleagues.

- Think relationally (as opposed to seeing things in a vacuum, or without cause and effect) about the everyday knowledge and experience that learners bring to the classroom and encourage learners to do the same.
- Bring the 'world' into the classroom. Collect items from newspapers and magazines for critical activities. Among South African newspapers, the *Mail and Guardian* often raises 'uncomfortable' questions on a wide variety of topics. Other periodicals like *Mad Magazine* and *Noseweek* poke fun at trends in society and entertainment.
- Launch critical activities with the everyday and commonplace. Hamburgers and Levi jeans, roadmaps and videos all provide an initial stimulus. If you have a world globe on your desk, use it to broaden learners' 'mental maps'. Get them to draw mental maps of their own living areas as a way to explore their lives.
- Make the familiar unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar familiar, in the words of Paulo Freire, whose theory and practice of awakening people's consciousness has been the model for critical teaching.
- Start preparing young learners to think critically for themselves. This section is as much for learners in the Foundation and early Intermediate Phases, as it is for later phases. Encourage them to investigate in ways that are appropriate for their age, to become active meaning-makers and problem-solvers. The 'Breakthrough' literacy materials encourage learners to build words and sentences, to create their own 'readers' from their own experiences.

Finally, an important caution. Don't make the mistake of thinking that critical thinking is not needed in a newly elected or even established democracy. There is truth in the saying that, 'The price of democracy is eternal vigilance.'



Ask questions like, 'What, or who, caused this to happen, or to be the way it is?' 'Who benefits, directly or indirectly, from it being this way?' 'Who, or what, might have suffered en route to things being the way they are?' 'Who, or what, may suffer in the future as a result?'

“

*Make the familiar unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar familiar.*

”

# 5.4

## What's wrong with facilitating?

In this sub-section we focus on the teacher as a facilitator of active learning and self-development and pick up on some of the themes from the previous section.

*At the Mountain View workshop, Otsile asked whether the idea of all human knowledge as situated meant that all human knowledge was biased and therefore useless. He wanted to know how a teacher could be an authority in the classroom if all knowledge was seen as provisional.*

Rousseau argued that teaching practices and the curriculum should be focused on learners and what we know about them, rather than on society or the knowledge accumulated by society (both of which he regarded as corrupt and corrupting). He also saw children as natural self-teachers, whose innate abilities to learn required only well-chosen stimulation, encouragement and a minimum of guidance from the teacher.

The problem that Otsile raises relates to the learner-centred idea of teaching as the facilitation of learning and development. This idea is largely a reaction against the idea of the teacher as someone who transfers content knowledge to learners' minds. However, it has its own theoretical foundations in the theories of the eighteenth-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and subsequent European theorists of child-centred education such as Froebel and Montessori.

Since the introduction of Curriculum 2005, South African teachers have learnt to refer to themselves as 'facilitators'. But we need to examine this idea closely to see whether the idea of the 'teacher as facilitator' involves any pitfalls for teachers and learners.

### Two problems for the teacher as facilitator

We take a look at two of the problems that the role of teacher as facilitator can create:

- a disillusioned response to the idea that all knowledge is relative; and
- a tendency to blur everyday knowledge and systematic knowledge.

Firstly, an overemphasis on knowledge as fluid, provisional, and situated can lead to the inaccurate assumption by teachers and learners that all learners' ideas are equally valid, and to a general disillusionment that 'nothing matters' because 'anything goes'.

Secondly, when facilitators follow the ideals of learning as an 'adventure', but fail to distinguish between everyday knowledge and systematic knowledge, they begin to blur these two ways of knowing. This can result in teachers failing to teach what learners need to learn in order to progress.

#### **Problem 1: Relativism and disillusionment**

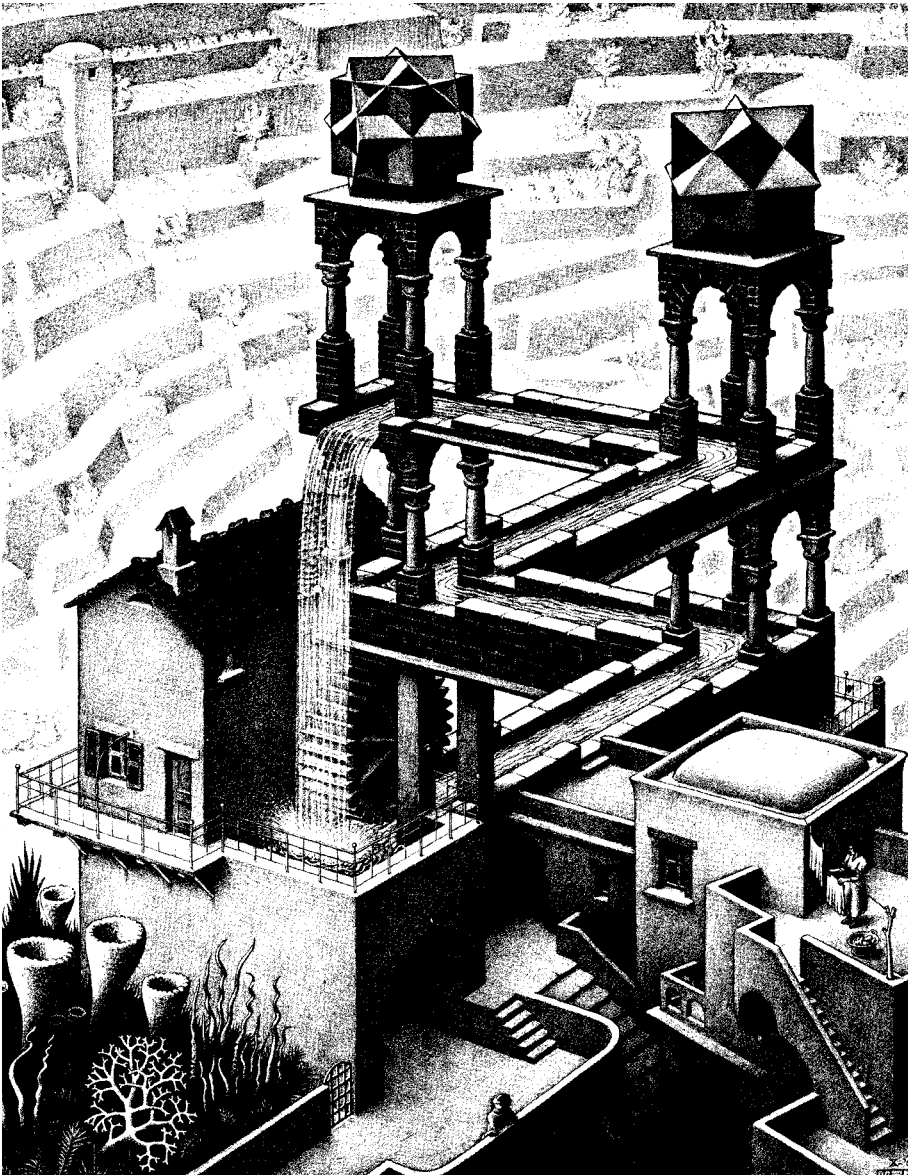
Look closely at the drawing on the next page. As in most pictures by this artist, Maurice Escher, there is a visual 'trick' built into its structure. Look at it one way, and the water falls from a considerable height to the water-wheel below. Change your point of view (without moving your head), and the water that flows beneath the wheel is higher than the top of the 'waterfall'! In fact if you follow the course of the water's movement through the picture, you are made to change your perspective, making mental 'leaps' in the process. What you observe in the picture is entirely relative – what's happening in it depends on, or relates to, your 'point of view'.

The point that we want to make is that even though the picture is detailed and exact, the artist has created an optical illusion; what it depicts is an impossibility. And human beings could not live in such a world, where everything is entirely relative to their point of view.

Earlier we suggested that a recognition of knowledge as provisional and situated (and hence relative) could make learning and teaching an adventure, cut free from the 'certainties' and thought systems of the past. That was the positive side of such

Escher's picture is therefore an extreme version of the principle we demonstrated in Activity 29.





an approach. But there is also a negative side.

Uncertainty, and the idea that knowledge depends on one's point of view and is constantly changing, can easily lead learners (and teachers) to go too far, and to conclude that all knowledge is biased, and therefore worthless as a representation of reality. In other words, one person's understanding of any given thing is just as good (or worthless) as anyone else's. Underlying this idea is the suspicion that there is *no real world* that is independent of our different versions of it. Hence there would be nothing solid against which different 'knowings' could be measured.

Such views ultimately leave the thinker feeling helpless, afloat on a sea of meaningless truth claims in which 'anything goes'. The only factor that could make any one version of reality more important than others would be the power of the person or group holding it. There would be no such thing as better, more accurate, or true-to-life accounts of reality.

How might teachers contribute to this? Some teachers think that being a 'facilitator' means allowing all points of view an 'equal voice' in class or group activities, in the interests of preventing any one voice (including their own) from dominating – regardless of how weak or faulty some 'points of view' may be. If this happens, we should not be surprised if learners make demands like 'Pass one, pass all'.

To **refute** an idea means to prove that it is mistaken.

### Refuting relativism

Fortunately, these notions of relativism aren't too difficult for teachers to *refute*. Just because there is no absolute human knowledge of the world, doesn't mean to say that there is nothing out there for human beings to interpret or try to know. We can always try to check various versions of reality against the real thing. Poor descriptions or explanations give way to more accurate descriptions or explanations.

According to David Bohm, our knowledge of the world is a giant task that is inevitably 'in process' – a developing understanding that consists, at any one time, of more *and* less accurate representations of reality. We need to use our critical abilities to determine as best we can what is 'the best account we have so far'. And Bohm does imply that underlying all our varying interpretations, there is a real world out there.

We need to take this argument one step further and look at social achievements that would be impossible – unthinkable – if all knowledge were completely relative. Enterprises, organizations, schools, railway systems, government – all of these depend on the co-operation and shared understanding of many individuals. Our everyday communal life depends on a shared knowledge that works reasonably well – even if there may be many varying perspectives on how well the knowledge 'fits the picture'.

We have presented a response to teachers who might fear that *all* human knowledge is biased and therefore useless. We will return to the problem of relativism in Section Six when we look at values.

### Problem 2: Blurring everyday knowledge and school knowledge

There are other dangers associated with the ideals of learning as an 'adventure' of discovery, and of learners making sense of the world for themselves. These ideals simply can't be realized if facilitators fail to distinguish between everyday knowledge and school knowledge; if they begin to blur these two ways of knowing.

We are not suggesting that 'everyday knowledge' and 'school knowledge' are completely distinct and separate, or that school knowledge cannot be developed from the starting point of everyday knowledge. But it is a mistake to believe that there are not significant differences in the nature of these two types of knowledge. We are *not* talking about differences in quantity – school knowledge is *not* just a matter of knowing more.

Group activities designed to draw on learners' everyday knowledge, do not necessarily lead to the kind of concepts that constitute school knowledge. Without the teacher's intervention (or a very carefully designed and prepared activity) this systematic knowledge, which organized society requires from its members in order to function, cannot form.

School knowledge often works by interfering with and *disrupting* learners' everyday knowledge as it focuses systematically on key structures and abstract principles in any given field. This is because everyday knowledge is more haphazard, unorganized, and closely linked to the circumstances of people's lives.

For instance, everyone knows what a watch is, but if we were to try to define it in school we might say, 'It's a small clock' or 'Something I wear on my wrist that tells me the time,' based on our everyday and personal knowledge. Thinking systematically, a teacher would probably ask, 'What *category* or *class* of things does a watch belong to?' (precision instruments); 'What does the concept "watch" *exclude*?' (grandfather clocks, sundials, and large clocks); and 'What does the concept "watch" *include*?' (stopwatches, wristwatches, lapel watches worn by nurses). The final definition would come out as something like, 'A watch is an instrument worn on one's person, for the purpose of measuring time or informing one of the time,' in other words, a precise, but rather unfamiliar, description. School knowledge in this way removes concepts from everyday contexts and generalizes them so that they can be applied across many contexts<sup>1</sup>.

We base the following comparison on the work of Ian Moll (1995), a student of the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky:

“  
School knowledge is  
not just a matter of  
knowing more.  
”

Everyday knowledge is:	School knowledge is:
1. Informally acquired. Not organized systematically.	1. Formally acquired. Organized systematically. Consciously structured to enable learners to understand key principles and structures so that learners can use them across different activities.
2. Located in specific contexts – the familiar contexts of everyday life.	2. Removed from particular contexts, local understandings and everyday experiences. Abstract concepts. School knowledge removes concepts from everyday contexts and generalizes them so that they can be applied across many contexts.
3. Developed without conscious effort, in action.	3. Not <i>spontaneous</i> : learners submit themselves to the rules that constitute particular disciplines. Requires sustained intellectual effort.
4. Largely practical (for instance, riding a bicycle, shopping for bargains).	4. Knowledge has abstract, de-contextualized nature (for instance, water consists of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen).
5. Acquired independently, in the course of everyday experience.	5. Developed through the <i>mediation</i> of teachers in schools. Beginning in familiar, everyday concepts, but often disruptive of everyday experience, rather than building on it in a smooth progression.

<sup>1</sup> Remember Paulo Freire's advice about making the familiar unfamiliar?

Something **spontaneous** happens naturally, without much influence or intervention from outside.

Teachers act as **mediators** in this context because they introduce learners to knowledge and supervise their learning; learning takes place through them.

Now that we have mentioned some of the dangers of relativism and the blurring of everyday knowledge with systematized school knowledge, we turn to the implications of these problems for facilitators.

## Challenges for teachers, implications for learners

The problems of relativism and the failure to distinguish between everyday knowledge and school knowledge, are both linked to a loss of regard for **formal, systematic knowledge**. If knowledge is relative (if 'anything goes'), teachers can end by failing to make a distinction between everyday ways of knowing and higher-order concepts, principles, and cognitive operations.

### A misreading of Paulo Freire

Equating different forms and levels of knowledge may derive from oversimplified interpretations of Paulo Freire's teaching methods, which have been highly influential in this country. Freire advocated that teachers (particularly literacy teachers working among poor communities) should always begin by listening to and learning from the common knowledge of those they intend teaching.

However, according to Freire's literacy method, for instance, the teacher identifies from this listening and learning a number of key themes in the learners' everyday lives. From these themes, the teacher generates key words to use in a highly systematic way to teach literacy, and, at the same time, to teach learners to think critically about their own situation. Learning to think critically would also be systematic, as the teacher provides the learners with conceptual frameworks to help them understand the workings of power that shape their lives in ways they might never have thought to question.

Clearly, there is no relativism, and no lack of regard for systematic content, in Freirean teaching. And Freire emphasized the difference between everyday knowing and more structured, critical knowledge. In fact, although the good teacher would listen to the learner, and take the learner's everyday knowledge as a starting point, that knowledge may soon need to be **disrupted** by the teacher's more critical, broader, and deeper understanding. This is, in fact, what teaching for critical thinking is about.

“  
*There is an authority  
 role for teachers.*  
 ”

### **Neglecting content knowledge**

Curriculum 2005 officially requires teachers to act as facilitators after decades of teacher- and content-dominated teaching. Many teachers are therefore confused about their roles and consequently neglect content knowledge, including skills like reading, writing, and numeracy. We look at the implications of this neglect in the following areas:

- teacher authority and responsibility;
- content teaching;
- surface learning;
- forms of knowledge;
- reading and writing; and
- groupwork.

### **Teacher authority and responsibility**

There *is* an authority role for teachers. We have shown that it *is* possible to distinguish between weaker and stronger arguments. Therefore there cannot be equality between the roles of learners and teachers, by reason of the teachers' specialized role as 'an authority'.

This, of course, places a responsibility on all teachers to be authorities. In fact, the role of facilitator specifically requires teachers to have, not only a wide range of teaching strategies, but a thorough knowledge of their learning areas – including a critical awareness of those areas and how they are linked to other learning areas.

The role of facilitator does *not* provide a reason for 'getting by' with only superficial knowledge, on the misguided grounds that the learners will somehow come up with what they need to know themselves.

One Eastern Cape study for the 1998/99 President's Education Initiative (PEI) Research Project found that teachers' knowledge of key mathematics and science topics at the Grade 5 to 7 levels was little better than that of their pupils (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999: 141). A number of the studies in this project confirmed that the level of conceptual knowledge of many teachers was unacceptably low.

Even if there are historical reasons for this being the case, it is exactly what teachers, individually and collectively, need to overcome if they are to be accepted by society as accountable professionals. Teachers need to maintain a reliable knowledge base to give them the necessary agility to depart from rigidly following the textbook when appropriate, to encourage exploration and dialogue in unfamiliar territory.

### **Content teaching**

At the beginning of this section, we described the contradictory tensions of Curriculum 2005:

- the OBE focus on the ability to perform socially-valued (and work-orientated) operations and tasks; and
- the learner-centred pedagogic focus on building learner competence in making sense of the world themselves.

Clearly, both orientations reduce the importance of content knowledge. While OBE explicitly shifts our focus away from content knowledge, learner-centred teaching does so implicitly. The former shifts our focus to competence, while the latter shifts it to learners and their sense-making apparatus, which tends to emphasize the learners' everyday knowledge rather than systematic, formal content knowledge.

While we have to be grateful for moving away from a fact-laden syllabus requiring so much memorization, we need to be cautious about disregarding content knowledge. A South African teacher educator, Crispin Hemson, in an article describing lessons in which the trainee teachers pay little attention to content because they are so concerned to involve learners in simulated experiences and role-play, writes the following (Hemson, 1996: 192–194):

### IN DEFENCE OF CONTENT

**A common objection to an emphasis on content is that knowledge is always evolving, and that because of technological change, knowledge is increasingly rapidly outdated [...]**

**Knowledge does not change in such a way as to make all previous knowledge irrelevant. Some knowledge continues to be more fundamental and core, and this should continue to have priority. What we learnt or tried to learn at school, perhaps a couple of decades ago, is not without value – the skills we learnt even with what now seems inadequate or insufficient content are still of value. What has changed with the rapid development of knowledge is a greater understanding that educators cannot achieve command over such a wide range of content as in the past. But what we must learn, in order to have a basic grounding in physics or English or mathematics, has changed little. The needs to know the Arabic number system, to be able to estimate likely answers in mathematics, to be able to extend from positive to negative numbers, to be able to compute percentages, do not I suspect disappear because of technological change.**

**But even where content knowledge does change greatly and rapidly, there must still be specific content from which to learn more generalized skills. Some content will be far more effective than other content in enabling that learning, and we will need to teach specifically the ways of transferring the skills to other content. ‘Learning how to learn’ is an important goal, but I would be interested in seeing how it is taught without a focus on some specific content.**

Unfortunately, the PEI research revealed disturbing signs that a substantial number of South African teachers *do* show a disregard for content.

### Surface learning

Much teaching in South Africa produces only ‘surface’ learning. This means learning facts or simple operations largely by rote, without any real understanding of the *concepts*, *conceptual structures*, or *principles* that enable the learner to make sense of those facts or to use those operations to solve problems.

This results in an inability to apply learning in unfamiliar contexts, to make conceptual connections between different learnings, or to understand what is wrong when errors are made. These higher-level cognitive operations require both that the teacher is an authority, and that the learners submit themselves to the discipline concerned.

In mathematics education, surface learning is referred to as ‘procedural’ learning. An example would be knowing to ‘carry’ values into the next column when subtracting a three-digit number like 479 from another like 823, without any real understanding of *why* one does this. A number of the PEI studies found that teachers tended to model procedural thinking and talking among learners by using predominantly procedural language themselves in their teaching, seldom moving into the explanation of higher-order concepts (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999: 147).

Other forms of teaching that produce surface learning are ‘closed’ questions that require answers of only a few words, teaching concepts well below the learners’ level of ‘readiness’ (see Love and Mason’s ‘On readiness and “fading”’, Reading 16 on page 103), and unnecessarily repeating or revising work done in previous grades or weeks.

The same report found that Grade 4 mathematics teachers spent a lot of time revising work that they should have done in the Foundation Phase. They also tended to teach only those aspects of calculation that learners found the easiest, avoiding

“  
We need to be cautious  
about disregarding  
content knowledge.

”

more complex examples and ignoring the need to get to grips with deeper conceptual structures. The pace and direction of the class were determined by the weakest learners and as a result, teachers were unable to complete the curriculum:

### Everyday knowledge and school knowledge

Not surprisingly, teachers frequently find ways of beginning a lesson in the world of learners' everyday experience, and explain concepts by means of 'real world' examples. However, the PEI research (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999: 147–149) found evidence of teachers:

- failing to extend such lessons and explanations beyond the procedural (for instance, by introducing questions designed to develop insight into principles or structures);
- neglecting to ensure that learners understand the relationship between *analogies* from everyday experience and the concepts they are supposed to learn from them (so that the analogy becomes the focus of learning rather than the concept it illustrates);
- having difficulty in helping learners distinguish between their own everyday knowledge and the sort of concepts required of them in science.

**Analogies** are explanations in which someone compares whatever it is you are trying to understand to something similar.

### Reading and writing

A critical factor that contributes to surface learning is the inability of many learners to read or write at appropriate levels. Some PEI studies found that some teachers were even unsure of whether they had to teach reading, and some never used textbooks with learners (or gave them any other opportunity to read other than what was written on the chalkboard).

According to one researcher, the integration of reading with other learning in the Foundation Phase has in some classrooms led to the haphazard and sketchy teaching of reading. In some instances, very little writing was done by learners beyond short answers in their workbooks or on worksheets, and learners were never required to read or write extended passages.

### Groupwork

The mere 'clustering' of learners in desks will not in itself produce systematic learning, and may even be counter-productive (ibid. pp. 150–151). Without careful preparation and monitoring, and without intervention, guidance and support at appropriate times, children's discussions tend to remain at an everyday level.

If teachers don't ensure that learners have access to a sufficient knowledge base, if teachers don't check that activity instructions and goals are clearly understood, and if the groups are left entirely to their own devices, they waste learning time and encourage behaviour to deteriorate.

Further, teacher/facilitators need to ask themselves whether learners' 'interesting' discussions always lead to new insights, whether the discussions consolidate learning in any way. Group discussions do not always require *closure*, but learners need to have a sense of having learnt something at the end of the process.

All of the above points are well illustrated in the video, where we see a teacher, Heather Blankensee, beginning her unit on cells and cell structure with an experiential session. For this session she devises a type of simulation, with the learners in groups, in which they have, surprisingly, to design factories (as an analogy for cells). To do this they have to draw on their collective imagination and their observation of the world at large, but their success in designing factories depends on their exercising interpersonal skills such as collaborative problem-solving.

What makes this a successful unit? In addition to the obvious fun and the challenge of designing a factory together, the teacher:

- prepares the lesson carefully, reading up on the topics of cells and factories beforehand to become 'an authority' on the topic so that she is relaxed and able to deal with problems as they come up;
- organizes the structure and sequence of the various parts of the unit, and makes

A discussion has **closure** when it is complete, when all questions have been answered for all the participants.

sure that the materials are available and ready for the learners' use without the kind of delays that create behaviour problems;

- makes the instructions and the goal clear to the learners (not directly shown in the video);
- ensures that there is enough time to focus on the target knowledge (about cells rather than factories);
- monitors the groups' progress by providing information, keeping them on track, and asking questions that steer their learning indirectly and that get them to rethink things at a higher level;
- adopts a variety of teaching strategies: collaborative groupwork and reading, learner presentations, individual teaching while the students are working in groups, and fairly conventional lecturing;
- controls the learning unit rather than the learners (is 'in authority'). For instance, she relies on her own discretion in allowing only a few groups to do presentations since the main learning points have already been covered by producing the designs;
- teaches content when the time comes to convey a body of information that the class as a whole will probably not know, by drawing out a comparison between the design of a factory and the design of a cell through questions, as opposed to simply presenting the facts.

In the above account of challenges and implications, most of the teaching strategies for *resolving* the problems mentioned are implicit in the problems themselves, so we have spelt out only a few. But there is now widespread recognition of the need for in-service professional development programmes that specifically address these issues.

### ACTIVITY 31: A 'REALITY CHECK' ON YOUR OWN TEACHING

**Write a brief note on your own experience of groupwork, either as a participant or as a teacher, or both. Mention the following:**

- 1** What was positive?
- 2** What was negative?
- 3** What you could do to make groupwork a more positive and productive learning experience in your classroom.



You will need about 20 minutes for this activity.



# 5.5

## What's wrong with imparting skills?

In this section we look at the idea that in an OBE curriculum, teaching should be primarily focused on developing demonstrable competence, especially skills that can be assessed against clearly-set criteria of performance. This is the role that Gillian seemed to embody; she approached the teaching and assessing of skills in a rather technical manner.

You may remember that Gillian was particularly 'at sea' about what to do when she ran out of ready-made ideas for outcomes-based lessons. She tended to view the specific outcomes of the new curriculum as separate items, which she could work through mechanically, one at a time, and 'sign off' when they were achieved by learners.

As a teacher shifting from content-based teaching to competence-led teaching, she seemed at risk of losing sight of the 'bigger picture'. She had difficulty integrating skills and competence into a framework of knowledge and values that would provide a sense of purpose for the skills.

In the previous section, in the Crispin Hemson passage, we saw the danger of neglecting content knowledge. But teachers need to be aware of the fundamental place of **values** in learning as well. An over-emphasis on skills and content knowledge at the expense of values is a particularly dangerous path for a schooling system to embark on.

It is possible to illustrate this danger in many ways, but the revelation in the mid-1990s of the Aum Shinrikyo sect in Japan is a particularly vivid one. Members of this **sect**, which gave allegiance to a self-styled **messianic** leader named Asahara, included highly qualified scientists. These graduates from Japan's top universities used their highly advanced skills to develop means of mass destruction, including the secret manufacture of sarin nerve gas, which was used in a devastating attack on a Japanese city in which 14 people died and over a hundred were injured.

A **sect** is an offshoot religious group with its own special teachings and practices.

A leader is **messianic** when he or she promises salvation to followers.



Chizuo Matsumoto changed his name to Asahara in 1984 when he founded the Aum Sect. Following the 1995 sarin gas attack in the Tokyo underground, Asahara and the Aum 'executives' were arrested and imprisoned.



These events led to the questioning of the intensive schooling received by Japanese learners (among the most competitive and efficient in the world), a schooling that could produce technically advanced graduates whose sense of values and powers of critical reflection were so grossly underdeveloped.

Mark Mason's article, written in 1997 when Curriculum 2005 had just been introduced (Reading 15 on page 99), makes use of a simple but powerful conceptual framework developed by the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle to make a similar point about the need for values.

Ryle pointed out that the knowledge we learn consists not only of content knowledge ('knowledge *that*'), but of skill or 'doing' knowledge ('knowledge *how to*'). In outcomes-based learning, these two types of knowledge may be seen in demonstrations of competence. In addition, Ryle argued that learners need to acquire a competence of a different sort, in the area of the values that motivate our doing ('knowledge *for*', or 'knowledge *to*').

### ACTIVITY 32: THREE KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

**Read Mason's article, 'Outcomes-based education in the context of three kinds of knowledge' (Reading 15 on page 99), and then answer the following questions:**

- 1 Which of the three kinds of knowledge: propositional ('knowledge that'), procedural ('knowledge how to'), or dispositional ('knowledge to/for') is most readily associated in people's minds with Curriculum 2005, possibly to the exclusion of the other two?
- 2 Why do you think people perceive it this way?
- 3 What reason does Mason give in support of his argument that 'propositional knowledge is not much good in and of itself'?
- 4 Why does he suggest that a focus on procedural knowledge alone would undermine learners?
- 5 What does he suggest are the dangers of an exclusive focus on dispositional knowledge?



You need 30 to 40 minutes to read the article and answer the questions.

## An emphasis on skills: implications for teachers and learners

Curriculum 2005 and its association with outcomes-based education, tends to be identified with procedural knowledge (skills), probably because of its emphasis on outcomes. The principles of OBE require that learning outcomes are specified from the outset so that learners as well as teachers know clearly what is to be accomplished. The principles of OBE also require outcomes to be stated clearly in terms of demonstrated performance, thereby reducing personal bias in assessment.

The committees that draw up assessment standards for OBE are discouraged from using phrases like 'Learners should be able to understand' since 'understanding' can be difficult to assess reliably, and because it might easily be taken as indicating that only content knowledge is required. Instead, active verbs like 'distinguish between' or 'design a plan' are called for. This focus on demonstrated, visible performance has the effect of emphasizing procedural knowledge at the expense of propositional or dispositional knowledge.

However, as Mason argues, too strong an emphasis on any one of these to the exclusion of the others is educationally unhealthy. Learning content knowledge is pointless unless it can be put to good *use*, which involves skills and values (how it is to be put to use, and for what purpose). Learning skills without a grounding in propositional knowledge and an active set of workable values, creates unthinking technicians (the techno-demons of the Aum sect). Finally, an overemphasis on values and attitudes at the expense of other forms of learning would be suspect (think of some approaches to Christian National Education during the apartheid era).

The key point here, as Mason reminds us, is the need to include a *balance* of skills,

'content' knowledge, and values in our teaching, and to *integrate* all three so that they can interact with and influence one another in all fields of knowledge and action.

But if we need to balance these types of knowledge, we come back to the question of how to identify teaching with a *positive* role, something that signifies a definite approach, without committing to the role of teacher of content, teacher of skills, or facilitator. The suggestion for this positive role is that of the 'mediator'.

# The teacher as mediator

We firmly believe that none of the *teaching roles* we have discussed are, by themselves, appropriate for teaching in schools – in much the same way as the three different *kinds of knowledge* are, in themselves, inadequate curriculum goals. If teachers adopted any one of these roles exclusively as a source of professional identity, each of them would have serious problematic consequences for teachers and learners, as we have tried to demonstrate in Sections 5.4 to 5.6.

So the teacher's role in the new curriculum needs to be flexible enough to occupy each of the teaching roles as the ever-changing situation of learner, teacher and curriculum demands. The name we have used for this complex and flexible role is 'mediator'.

Adopting the identity of mediators, teachers do not have to shed all traces of content teaching and give up their authority and responsibility. They do not need to become mere 'trainers' focused on developing skills. And they shouldn't resort to 'chalk and talk' methods in desperation if they come up against serious difficulties in either of these last two roles.

Rather, the role of mediator develops the wide range of strategies Andy Hargreaves speaks of in Reading 14, and moves comfortably between roles, even within a single teaching unit. Botlhale Tema has summed up this function of the mediator very well (1997: 6–7):

## WHAT TEACHING METHODOLOGY IS RECOMMENDED FOR OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION?

**Child-centred discovery approaches need not lead to undirected learning [...] The methodology that will be used in any learning programme is suggested by the specific outcomes to be achieved. For example, when the outcome states that that 'learners should use process skills to investigate phenomena related to natural science', the teacher may design a learning activity which gives students an opportunity to go outside and investigate phenomena or to work in the laboratory or to read and analyse a publication which contains the information required. The teacher will then decide whether this activity will be best done individually or in groups, or by the teacher explaining. So, for example, 'teacher telling' is clearly not appropriate when pupils already know what is being taught or can work out for themselves what is being explained. But it *is* appropriate to explain things pupils would find difficult to fathom for themselves such as that matter consists of electrons, protons and neutrons. This explanation will be news worth hearing!**

**Similarly groupwork has clear advantages for certain learning activities. Pupils feel bolder to say things they might not say alone. Groupwork gives them an opportunity to test ideas on peers. Students in groups can also challenge each other's thinking, make the learning experience richer and more meaningful. However, it *is* important that groupwork is a learning experience. The teacher has to ensure that the pupils are aware of the deliverables or outputs so that groups are working groups and not chat groups. Groupwork also needs constant monitoring by the teacher to guide, act as a resource and to prevent dominance by one or two pupils.**

**The choice of teaching and learning methods is also guided by the critical outcomes – the cross-curricular outcomes such as critical thinking,**



Note that we do *not* mean to suggest that the three teacher roles (impartor of content knowledge, impartor of skills, and facilitator) *neatly* correspond to Mason's structure of propositional, procedural, and dispositional knowledge.

Obviously the first and second of these sets *do* correspond, but it would be straining both of these conceptual frameworks to try to make the role of 'facilitator of learning' correspond closely to 'dispositional knowledge'.

In fact, an important focus of the facilitator of learning is usually taken to be the learner's *cognitive* development.

**Self-actualization** happens when you achieve your full potential as a human being.

**teamwork, problem-solving and effective communication. Groupwork would thus be suitable when attempting to meet the critical outcome of working co-operatively. Similarly, class discussions will provide opportunities for pupils to develop the ability to think critically and to communicate effectively.**

**OBE thus recommends the provision of a variety of learning opportunities or teaching methods which include groupwork. The teacher's role is to exercise professional judgement when deciding on which method is appropriate for any learning activity.**

**The success of outcomes-based education depends on the teacher's good judgement and on her possession of a wide repertoire of teaching methods.**

If we relate these principles to the staff at Mountain View Primary, we can say that Lerato needs to carry her learner-centredness into the achievement of identifiable competences (including, perhaps, more coherent, structured knowledge). Gillian, on the other hand, needs to step back from her rather narrow focus on skills, and try to see the learners, and what they need to learn, in a wider perspective. And Otsile, too, should be prepared to make some moves towards engaging with the wider (economic and personal growth) needs of learners, even if sometimes he is required to 'fill their heads with facts'.

The term 'mediation' has taken on a number of meanings in different theories, including that of the Israeli educational psychologist Reuven Feuerstein, whose theory is outlined in the module *Learners and Learning*. But one thinker's work has contributed immeasurably to our appreciation of the teacher's role in mediating knowledge for learners – in a way that comfortably includes all three roles of imparting knowledge, imparting skill and facilitating learners' cognitive development. That thinker is Lev Vygotsky, whose distinction between everyday knowledge and systematic, structured knowledge we referred to in Section 5.5.

## Vygotsky's theory of the teacher as mediator

Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist whose work in the twenties and thirties was largely unknown outside the Soviet Union until the seventies, when it was introduced to the West chiefly by the British educationist Jerome Bruner. Since then his theories of cognitive development have become more and more influential. Vygotsky's theory informs much of the content of *Learners and Learning*, but in this module we will restrict our focus to his best-known concept, the zone of proximal development. This concept offers both a vivid picture of what it is to act as a mediator of knowledge to the learner, and a powerful theoretical 'tool' that will help teachers to meet the challenges set out in this section.

For Vygotsky, the role of the teacher is to lead learners to higher levels of thinking by interpreting and giving significance to things and events. This is a process Vygotsky called 'intentional mediation'. Mediation involves leading learners to increasing degrees of complexity by providing 'scaffolding' for the learners to reach the next level. The concept of 'scaffolding' is based on a metaphor taken from building.

When a builder wants to work at a higher level, he uses a scaffold, but once that level is reached, the scaffold is removed. When teaching, the teacher/mediator provides the 'scaffold' to aid learning. Once learners demonstrate competency at a particular task, the teacher reduces the help provided so that learners can refine and develop their thinking skills, without becoming dependent on the teacher. The teacher's role is therefore a constantly dynamic one. The teacher provides scaffolding by:

- **explanation:** explaining the set tasks so that they are understood by the learner;

“

*For Vygotsky, the role of the teacher is to lead learners to higher levels of thinking by interpreting and giving significance to things and events.*

”

- **instruction**: giving clear instructions to the learner to aid completion of the set task;
- **interpretation**: allowing learners to make meaningful interpretations of the tasks set;
- **modelling**: demonstrating possible strategies to attain the task set by the teacher;
- **questioning**: using higher-order questioning to challenge and encourage the learner's thinking; and
- **feeding back**: feeding back information, not as a score, but in the form of detailed information on how the learner can improve his or her performance.

The teacher as mediator always tries to be as aware as possible of the learner's level of understanding – their **Current Level of Development (CLD)** – so that learning can be appropriately targeted. Vygotsky also describes the **Potential Level of Development (PLD)** as the level that the learners will reach at the end of a learning experience. Neither the CLD nor the PLD are suitable levels around which to design learning. If it is directed at the CLD, the learners will not find the work challenging. If it is directed at the PLD, learners will find the work too difficult.

Vygotsky advocates directing learning at the more advanced edge of the **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**, which lies between the CLD and the PLD. This is the level at which learners cannot quite manage to grasp a concept or perform a mental operation on their own, but soon will be able to, especially if assisted by the mediator. In this way, the mediator continually extends and challenges the learners, assisting them to move towards higher-level cognitive operations or concepts (for example, from everyday concepts to systematic concepts).

Unlike Piaget, whose theory depicts the learner's cognitive development 'unfolding' stage by stage, more or less as 'programmed' by nature, Vygotsky regards the learner's social and cultural interaction, mainly through the medium of language, as vital to the young learner's development. Given the central role of the teacher/mediator in this process, it is clear that Vygotsky credits the teacher/mediator with considerable authority.

### ACTIVITY 33: LEARNING READINESS AND SCAFFOLDING

**Read 'On readiness and "fading"' by E. Love and J. Mason (Reading 16 on page 103 in your Reader) and then answer the following questions.**

- 1 The idea of learners being 'ready' or 'not yet ready' to understand concepts at particular levels of difficulty seems sensible enough. Yet the writers argue that this understanding of learning is problematic. Try to sum up Love and Mason's objections to this idea in about half a page or less.
- 2 In what way is Vygotsky's approach to readiness more 'elastic' than prevailing notions?
- 3 After reading accounts of the mediator role and scaffolding in the Learning Guide and the Reader, how 'comfortable' do you think a mediator of this kind would be with the three roles of imparting content knowledge, teaching skills, and facilitating learner-centred learning?
- 4 How 'comfortable' would our mediator be with the ideas of knowledge as 'provisional'?
- 5 How would a teacher-as-mediator respond to a learner's everyday knowledge?

Learning does not proceed in a steady fashion, where learners have to complete one step before taking the next. Just as we climb real stairs, not watching the step we're actually treading on but looking ahead, our learning often 'runs ahead of itself', assured that our forward motion will not let us lose our balance. In the same way, children learn to make sense of conversation before they have mastered it themselves – and that is how they come to master it. Yet in learning to speak, children seem to move forward in spurts between periods of seemingly slower growth while their minds are assimilating particular patterns of speech that they hear and try out for themselves.

Therefore keeping learners 'on hold' until they appear to be ready (or worse still,



Now that you have been introduced to the theory of scaffolding and the ZPD, you should not find Love and Mason's reading too demanding. It approaches Vygotsky's theory from the point of view of an interest in learning 'readiness' – a matter of concern in South Africa, where the learning of far too many children is 'on hold' while their teachers, uncertain of their own knowledge base, opt to teach at a 'low level'. The questions in this activity, on the other hand, are fairly challenging, like Vygotsky's 'mediator' – but worth the effort, so don't be tempted to 'skip' them. Allow about 30 minutes for the reading, and about 45 minutes to answer the questions.

“

*Learning does not proceed in a steady fashion, where learners have to complete one step before taking the next.*

”

until a whole class is ready) goes against the way human beings develop. Likewise, labelling learners as ‘ready’ or ‘unready’ will tend to make them feel and act as ready or unready, since what we are is partly a product of how we are seen by others. Even simplifying one’s speech for the sake of being understood by everyone in a class, for instance, fails to ‘extend’ anyone.

Vygotsky links the learner’s growth to social interaction with others in a much more liberating way. Higher psychological functions such as complex tasks or self-monitoring are learnt by interacting with others. Therefore growth may occur more, or less, rapidly, partly as a result of the type of social interaction that the learner experiences. Teachers working to extend learners within the zone of proximal development, or learners talking with co-learners about what they are doing, both strengthen and accelerate this learning.

Vygotsky’s mediator has a crucial scaffolding role, one which also involves both initiating learners into the content knowledge and skills and competences that are valued by society, and helping learners to construct meaning themselves in an active engagement with their teachers.

The role of mediator is a particularly dynamic one, in tune with the idea of ‘knowing’ as an ongoing ‘work in progress’ – for the teacher as well as the learner. The notion of knowledge as provisional finds a parallel in the ‘scaffolding’ teacher, who ‘dismantles’ support as the learner moves on to a higher order of concepts and skills.

Although both of these concepts are dynamic, there is no place in the mediator role for an extreme form of relativism. Since the mediator’s chief role is to organize the learning path of learners, the mediator needs to have a reasonably clear sense of where that path is leading, even if it is acknowledged that human knowledge is by its very nature subject to change. If one thinks about it, the very notion of ‘scaffolding’ must be hostile to an understanding of relativism in which ‘anything goes’.

This is demonstrated clearly in the way a mediator will respond to a learner’s everyday concepts. Working with the zone of proximal development means identifying where the learner’s everyday knowledge reaches the upper limits of its range – where the learner cannot quite achieve an operation or understand a concept – and enabling the learner by various means to move towards more systematic understanding or more accomplished performance.

A final word of caution. You may have formed the impression that scaffolding can work only when a teacher has a small class to teach, allowing for a good deal of individual monitoring and instruction. While such a situation no doubt creates the ideal circumstances for teacher/mediator and learner, the emphasis in mediation is on forward movement, based on a firm belief (like Herb Kohl’s) in the potential of all learners to grow. This therefore remains appropriate for South Africa’s often-crowded classrooms where many learners are used to putting their learning ‘on hold’.

In this section we have examined the confusion that surrounds the concept of 'knowledge' and the roles of teachers as knowledge workers in Curriculum 2005: imparters of knowledge, facilitators of active learning, and developers of skills. We pointed out that teachers often mistakenly adopt one of these roles exclusively, instead of integrating all three to develop a wide range of teaching strategies that they can draw from at appropriate times.

In the process of examining these roles, we developed a deeper understanding of the various characteristics of human knowledge. In each case, we identified the implications of these characteristics for the process of teaching and learning. We explored knowledge as provisional, situated, and closely linked to questions of power.

We discussed the disillusionment that surrounds relativism, which stems from the realization that knowledge is provisional and situated. And we pointed out the need for teachers to be able to distinguish between everyday knowledge and systematic school knowledge. Finally, we argued that the three forms of knowing (knowing that, knowing how, and knowing to), like the three roles of teachers as knowledge workers, need to be integrated in the teaching process.

We concluded the section by identifying an appropriate, fourth role for teachers: that of the teacher as a mediator of learning, which combines the strengths of the other roles in a dynamic focus on learner-teacher interaction. In the next section, we turn our attention to the teacher's role in developing values in the learner.

## Key learning points

1. There seem to be three key potential roles that teachers might play as 'knowledge-workers':
  - to impart knowledge to learners;
  - to facilitate in learners the ability to learn; and
  - to enable learners to develop actual skills that will demonstrate that they are competent to perform specific operations and undertake specific types of work.
2. For each of these roles, teachers need to understand different things about the nature of knowledge. In each case this will help you to understand the limitations of the particular role.
3. The limitations of imparting only knowledge to learners:
  - The idea that imparting knowledge is the teacher's primary role tends to ignore the dynamic, unfixed, and 'situated' nature of knowledge – and to play down the learner's role as an active constructor of knowledge. Since there is no single system of human thought, not even modern science, which can give us a totally reliable overall grasp of reality, teachers need to move away from deceptive 'certainties' to a more authentic *uncertainty*.
  - Rather, knowledge is a dynamic process: knowing rather than knowledge. Therefore it won't do to teach learners heaps of facts. Learners today require to be taught with a view to active knowing, and to live with uncertainty. They need the opportunity to probe, discover, and make sense themselves of what they experience. This process is helped greatly by structured, co-operative work in small groups of peers.
  - Teachers need to remain open-minded and flexible, cultivate a broad range of teaching approaches, and know how to make learning more of an adventure.
  - The situated element in human knowledge is also integrally linked to

human power – it privileges some knowledge, and forms of knowledge, while concealing or ‘silencing’ others. Therefore teachers also have a responsibility to equip learners with the tools of critical thinking, encouraging learners to question knowledge.

4. The limitations of facilitating only active knowing and learning:
  - The idea that a teacher’s primary role is that of a facilitator tends to play down the value of formal, systematized knowledge and teaching. Seeing human knowledge as situated and provisional can make learning and teaching an adventure, cut free from ‘certainties’ and thought-systems of the past. But such relativism may also give rise to the extreme notion that all human knowledge is biased (and therefore useless) or unreliable.
  - Such thinking makes it difficult for teachers to see themselves as an authority in the classroom. They may allow all points of view an ‘equal voice’ in class, no matter how faulty some of those ‘points of view’ may be.
  - Human knowledge is always a mixture of what is correct and what is incorrect. Hence poor explanations give way to more accurate explanations. We need to use our critical abilities to determine as best we can what is ‘the best account we have so far’.
  - Teachers should not blur the difference between ‘everyday knowledge’ and systematic ‘school knowledge’. The good teacher takes the learner’s everyday knowledge as a starting point, but soon needs to ‘disrupt’ everyday understanding, to bring about broader, deeper, more systematic and critical understanding.
  - Teachers should not let the pace of the class be determined by the weakest learner, or teach only what learners find easy to achieve rather than deeper conceptual structures. Groupwork does not in itself produce systematic learning. It requires careful preparation, monitoring and intervention if it is not to remain at the ‘everyday’ level.
5. The limitations of enabling learners only to develop skills:
  - The idea that enabling learners to develop skills is the teacher’s primary role tends to play down the need to integrate skills into a framework of ‘content’ knowledge. Teaching skills needs to be integrated with the cultivation of values in order to provide a sense of purpose.
  - Teachers do not have to shed all traces of content teaching, depriving learners of access to socially valued systematic knowledge. Neither do they need to become like ‘trainers’ focusing only on skills. Nor do they, when they experience difficulties as facilitators or imparters of skills, have to resort to ‘chalk and talk’ methods in desperation.
6. The value of mediating learning:
  - The teacher’s role as a mediator is to exercise professional judgement in the choice of teaching and learning methods. This choice should be guided by learning outcomes.
  - The teacher as mediator also provides ‘scaffolding’ for learners to reach higher levels of thinking and understanding, without allowing the learners to become dependent on the teacher. The teacher continually extends and challenges the learners to undertake slightly more complex learning tasks.
  - The teacher’s role is therefore a dynamic one, based on a firm belief in the potential of all learners to grow. The teacher does not keep learners ‘on hold’ until the whole class is ready to learn a new concept.



## Tutor-marked assignment 3

Imagine that someone in a supervisory role at the school where you teach (the Principal, Deputy, Head of Department, or a fieldworker from a non-governmental organization helping with staff development) asks you to give a demonstration lesson in a learning area that you teach. Write down your plans for this lesson or unit, making specific provision for at least three of the following opportunities for learners, and pointing these out where you do so:

- to pursue knowledge themselves and make discoveries – whether as solutions to problems, knowledge in books, or facts in the real world around us;
- to develop some depth in the understanding of concepts (i.e. not superficial, or rote learning);
- to pursue meaningful groupwork in a structured setting that you direct (not aimless, chaotic or unorganized);
- to do some sustained reading (silent reading or reading aloud), and a writing task (this may not be appropriate if you are a Grade 1 teacher);
- to integrate critical thinking into the learning; and
- to integrate values or attitudes into the learning.



## SECTION SIX

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# Teachers, values and society

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As the headlines suggest, maintaining an orderly learning environment is not the only value issue that teachers have to grapple with. This section will provide you with some 'tools' to help you meet the moral and value-related challenges you are likely to encounter in today's schools.

## Learning and teaching as social and moral issues

Compulsory schooling means placing vast numbers of learners behind desks approximately 170 mornings a year. We know that the content that we teach is a selection from many things that could be taught. Under such circumstances, this selection has economic, social and even moral consequences for the learners and for society. And because knowledge is always linked to power, as we saw in Section Five, we should be even more concerned about the values built into the selection.

For example, will a schooling experience tend to prevent learners from poor backgrounds from repeating a cycle of poverty, or will it tend to reproduce such a cycle? Do we teach learners to value society's inherited traditions of knowledge, or do we teach learners to question these?

Everything to do with teaching is tied up in some way with values and social issues. Put another way, nothing in teaching is ever concerned purely with facts, just as nothing in teaching is ever entirely an individual concern.

We point this out because of the tendency today to think about teaching independently of these issues. We have already shown (in Section 3.5 of this Learning Guide and in Reading 13 on page 87 of your Reader) that teaching policies are often governed by the sort of technical reasoning that deliberately ignores value questions, seeing them as irrelevant to a 'scientific' management of learning. And we have mentioned (in Section 5.4) how dangerous it is to give little or no attention to values in schooling.

“  
Nothing in teaching is ever concerned purely with facts, just as nothing in teaching is ever entirely an individual concern.  
”

## The central question that this section addresses

So far in this module we have argued that teachers need to embrace a vision of professionalism based on an overriding concern for the growth and development of learners; professional development; democratic authority; and a balanced and well-informed mediation between systematic knowledge and the learner.

In Section 5.6 we affirmed that this sort of mediation implied the need to balance propositional and procedural knowledge with dispositional (value-based) knowledge.

In this section the central question we will explore is: what role can you as a professional teacher play in helping young learners to develop a healthy disposition and sound values?

This will involve examining such underlying questions as: what are values, and in particular, moral values? Should teachers attempt to teach moral values, or should they attempt to remain neutral? How should they make moral decisions in handling behavioural problems?

## Learning outcomes for this section

### **When you have completed this section, you should be able to:**

- explain the nature of values, and moral values in particular, and their importance in teaching and learning;
- critically discuss objections to the idea of teachers involving themselves in the development of learners' moral values;
- explain your own role in learners' moral development, and justify your standpoint on how that role should be exercised;
- identify key principles relating to the development of learners' moral values, and some strategies for achieving this; and
- make sound moral decisions and resolve moral dilemmas that you face in the learning environment with increased confidence.

# What are values?

## 6.2

### ACTIVITY 34:

Take a look at the photographs below and answer the questions that follow them:



You will need about 5 minutes for this exercise.

- 1 What do you think might be a common theme in these three photographs?
- 2 In what way does the behaviour of the antelope in the photograph differ from that of the humans in the other two photographs?

In Section Five we concluded that human beings, unlike most animals, are not locked into instinctive behaviour patterns. The human brain allows far more scope and flexibility of action and choice than instinct allows to any other species. This flexibility of decision, choice and action requires human beings to be effective learners.

## Human choice

In the photograph above, the male antelope are fighting to determine who will lead the herd. Though the younger 'challenger' will no doubt watch for the most promising moment to attack the established leader, his urge to attack, and the particular time of the year when he feels this urge, are determined by instinct.

On the other hand, although the soldiers may be fighting and the boss may be exhibiting aggression and dominance, their behaviour is not bound by instinct. Bosses may *choose* to treat their subordinates more pleasantly, and soldiers may *choose* to become conscientious objectors. The fact that human thought and action are not bound by instinct, but involve choice, decision, and purpose, has an extremely significant implication in addition to our need to learn.

It creates the possibility that out of the range of actions we may choose, we may judge some to be better, and some worse, than others. In other words, we attribute a greater *value* to some choices than we do to others. We judge the action itself to be more, or less good in a moral sense.

A **conscientious objector** is a person who refuses to serve in the armed forces because of moral or religious beliefs.

## Different kinds of value

If we take the soldiers as our example, we will see that we could attach *different types* of value to their actions. We could evaluate the competence of the soldiers, the quality of their fighting skill. In doing so, we would use criteria such as the ability to foresee the enemy's movements, and a knowledge of weapons (knowledge how and knowledge that). We would call these military values *practice-oriented values*, and they would fall into much the same class of values as the 'professional values' we discussed in Section Three.

But we could also judge the soldiers' actions in another way. We could ask whether the cause for which they are fighting is a just one (defensive), or an unjust one (aggressive). In other words, we could evaluate the soldiers' actions on moral grounds. The criteria would then be justice and a reverence for human life, and we would refer to these as *moral values*, even though they appeared in a military context. So while there are values and virtues *specific* to every field of human activity, moral values are what enable us to judge whether an action is a 'good' or 'bad' action *in itself* – whatever the field of human activity.

Both of the above types of value come into the picture because human actions are not controlled by instinct, and we can judge them as 'better' or 'worse' in the two rather different senses we have just explained. Choice is part of the picture in both cases because the soldiers can choose both how and why they will fight.

So for now, we can define *values* (both practice-oriented and moral) as beliefs about the merit or relative importance of different experiences and actions. They provide the criteria by which we judge human action, and the reasons for choosing to act in particular ways. *Moral values* are not beliefs about, or standards of, competence in a particular field of human activity; rather they relate to actions or personal qualities that may be considered good or bad in a more general sense. In this section we focus mainly on moral values.

“

*Moral values relate to actions or personal qualities that may be considered good or bad in a more general sense.*

”



## Teachers and moral values

In the face of what many perceive to be a moral crisis, especially in our schools, what should teachers be doing? For a start, the professional mandate of teachers requires them to avoid assuming the role of the victim, especially if they are to help learners 'become something in the world'. Maxine Greene's contention is that teachers cannot expect to 'stir others to define themselves as individuals' if they themselves are content to be defined by others and their actions (quoted in Bolin and Falk, 1987: 8). They therefore need to become **moral agents** in the learning environment – to take an active, not a passive, role in developing learners' values and attitudes.

However, this does not imply a moral crusade or any kind of authoritarian moral instruction. What is important is that learners develop a **personal** commitment to a set of values that they themselves have helped to construct.

What, then, is the appropriate role for you to take as a professional teacher in developing sound values and healthy attitudes in learners? We have just argued that this is an active role, and in Section Four we argued that the teaching of values and attitudes needs to be integrated with the teaching of content knowledge and skills.

To answer this question, we need to look at the teacher's role as twofold, even though in practice these roles overlap:

- First, in the role of teaching itself, a teacher needs to understand what moral values are before deciding whether to incorporate or avoid them in teaching.
- Second, the teacher as active moral agent needs to model a principled approach to life that takes moral action seriously (without being gloomy, 'stuffy' or self-righteous about it) as well as make morally justifiable decisions in the learning environment.

In the field of disposition and values, the teaching of content without a corresponding demonstration of a principled approach to life, is especially futile. And to demonstrate such an approach *is* to teach values.

We now examine some of the difficulties that teachers face when they are concerned about exercising an influence on a learner's moral development. Let's get some help from the teachers at Mountain View Primary.

**Professional mandate** here refers to the right, responsibility and authority to act according to the wishes of those who employ them.

“  
*The teaching of content without a corresponding demonstration of a principled approach to life, is especially futile.*  
 ”

# 6.4

## Are moral values subjective?

*'I don't feel comfortable about the idea of formally teaching values to the learners,' said Gillian to her colleagues in the staffroom.*

*At the previous PTSA meeting, some parents had suggested that all the teachers try to include some element of values education in whatever they taught. This was in response to the moral crises they were reading about in the press. Gillian's colleagues pressed her to explain her doubts.*

*'Well, values are such a subjective area,' she said. 'I mean, they're not written in the stars; they're not visible, like trees or frogs. I don't think it's right to impose our own views and preferences on the learners. But if you don't, you can end up going round in circles.'*

*'I agree,' said Andy. 'Yesterday my Grade 7s had a class debate on whether it was better to be competitive in life, or co-operative and helpful. It was quite a good debate, and in the end I myself couldn't decide which was better. I think the kids voted in favour of competition only because Paul was so funny when he proposed the motion. How do we teach values when they're so difficult to decide on?'*

*'Hmm,' said Lerato, 'I think I would feel uncomfortable if we were **not** allowed to teach or discuss values. When I decided to become a teacher, I had a picture of myself helping kids in some small way to live better lives.'*

*'But when you come down to it, aren't values just a matter of preference?' said Gillian. 'You may think competition's better for people and society; I might feel co-operation's better – who's to say I or you are right? I think values just express what people feel about things.'*



For this activity you will need about 5 minutes.

### ACTIVITY 35: ARE OUR VALUES MERELY SUBJECTIVE?

- 1 Do you agree with Gillian? Are values really just expressions of the way people feel about things?
- 2 Think carefully about the following statements that a teacher might make. Do you think that the value expressed in each statement exists independently of our feelings or opinions, or does it simply reflect the way the speaker feels? If possible, discuss these statements with a fellow student or friend.
  - a 'South Africa needs to be a strong competitor in the global economy. Our children need to learn to work together, but they also need a good dose of old-fashioned competition as part of their schooling.'
  - b 'All South Africans must learn to value and care for our natural environment.'

By the time you have worked through this sub-section, you should have a set of concepts that you can use to help you decide whether you agree with Gillian's view that values reflect feelings.

### The problem with subjectivism

Many people, like Gillian, believe that values are really nothing more than expressions of what individual people *feel* or *think* about issues. Because they hold that all values, including moral values, are purely subjective in this way, their belief is called 'subjectivism'.

Imagine a Foundation Phase teacher saying to a young learner who has refused to let the girl next to him use one of the pile of crayons in front of him, 'But Davy, you know we always share things with our friends'. According to the subjectivist view, what the teacher is really saying is something like, 'I think everyone should share, and that's what I want you to do.'

There is indeed some sense in this argument, as the above example demonstrates. As a Foundation Phase teacher, the speaker probably *feels* that sharing reflects a spirit of co-operation and unselfishness that is a worthwhile value to encourage in young children.

By putting moral pressure on Davy, the speaker probably also *hopes* that these words will have the effect of preventing a looming squabble. But many teachers would question this assumption, and point out that in practice the sharing of certain personal items often leads to more squabbles than it prevents. Although they might not outlaw sharing altogether, they may discourage it in respect of certain possessions, and they would disagree with the 'absolute' character of this teacher's statement ('we *always* share things with our friends').

We need, however, to examine the arguments in support of subjectivism carefully because if they are correct, then there can be little point in discussing moral values or values education any further. If *all* values come down to people's *preferences*, on what basis could we argue that learners should be encouraged to embrace one value rather than another – showing consideration for others, for instance, rather than selfishness?

All we would be able to base our arguments on would be our own preferences, and these may not, of course, be in agreement with others' preferences. If we failed to agree, and individual preferences or feelings were *all* we had to base our arguments on, there would be *no other way* to reach any conclusion. It is not difficult to see how this kind of thinking leads to the sort of goalless, 'anything-goes' attitude that we described in Section 5.5.

To weigh up the subjectivist argument, and at the same time deepen our understanding of values, it is helpful to distinguish between moral value statements and two other kinds of statements – factual statements on one hand, and statements of preference on the other.

## Values are not facts: descriptive versus prescriptive statements

First, consider these two statements:

- a** 'The earth is round, like a ball.'
- b** 'People should be honest with one another.'

Statement **a** is factual: it describes the earth, and is therefore what we would call a *descriptive* statement. On the other hand, statement **b** does not describe anything. It does not say anything, factual or otherwise, about the way things are. Rather, it says something about the way things *should* be. We call this a prescriptive statement, since it offers a 'prescription' of how things should be.

We can say that description **a** is true because human beings have observed the earth to be spherical from outer space. You may also consider statement **b** to be true, but this would not be because it describes anything correctly. If someone acts dishonestly by cheating in an exam, that person disregards a moral principle, but the moral principle does not become false just because things turn out to be different from the way they ought to be.

All this means is that values are true or false in a different way from the way factual statements may be said to be true or false. Descriptive statements of fact, and prescriptive statements of value, serve different human purposes. We do not decide on the truth or falsity of prescriptive statements by observing the world carefully to check whether they correctly describe things as they are. Rather, we decide whether they are true or not by the use of *reason*.

The distinction between descriptive and prescriptive statements is a well-known one. The particular way in which we have explained it above is based on the account by Strike and Soltis (1985).

“

*If the reasons given are sound, then we must acknowledge that the moral statement is true, and that it applies to us.*

”

## Moral values are different from preferences

We now need to shift our attention to the second distinction that we set ourselves to examine – the distinction between moral values on the one hand, and more general judgements of value such as preferences, personal taste, or appraisals of better or worse performance on the other. Consider the following value statements:

- a** ‘There’s nothing as good as a cup of coffee to get me started at the beginning of the day.’
- b** ‘Mandisa is very good at getting learners to co-operate.’
- c** ‘A good teacher will never lie to learners.’

All of these statements claim that some thing, or some action, is ‘good’. The first statement **a**, however, is quite different from the moral statement **c**. It simply expresses an individual’s preference for something that that person finds positive. It implies no duty, and imposes no obligation on anyone: no-one is expected to feel the same way about coffee. Therefore we could not reasonably expect the speaker to ‘defend’ his or her liking for coffee by supplying logically persuasive reasons for it. All we could require of the speaker is to be sincere for the statement to be acceptable.

The exact opposite applies to moral statements like **c**. This statement implies an obligation on all teachers never to lie to learners. Because of this implied obligation or ‘duty’, we are entitled to ask *why* it would be wrong to act in this way. In other words, we have a right to expect that moral statements or principles, which seek to get us to act in certain ways, be backed by logically convincing reasons. If the reasons given are sound, and acceptable to reasonable people, then we must acknowledge that the moral statement is true, and that it applies to us. On the other hand, if no good reasons can be given, we would be justified in rejecting the statement as subjective and having no hold over us.

## The importance of reason in moral issues

Notice here that it is not enough to have strong *feelings* about a moral issue to make something wrong, or right. Pointing out that moral issues often arouse strong feelings, and that these may often be admired as a sign of taking such issues seriously, the American philosopher James Rachels nevertheless warns (1995: 10):

An **impediment** is a hindrance, a person or thing that gets in the way of something.

*But [feelings] can also be an impediment to discovering the truth: when we feel strongly about an issue, it is tempting to assume that we just know what the truth must be, without even having to consider arguments on the other side. Unfortunately, however, we cannot rely on our feelings, no matter how powerful they may be. In the first place, they may be [...] nothing but the products of prejudice, selfishness, or cultural conditioning [...] Another problem is that different people’s feelings often tell them exactly opposite things.*

*Thus if we want to discover the truth, we must try to let our feelings be guided as much as possible by the reasons, or arguments, that can be given for both opposing views. Morality is, first and foremost, a matter of consulting reason: the morally right thing to do, in any circumstance, is determined by what there are the best reasons for doing.*

Later (p. 39), Rachels goes on to say:

*It is not merely that it would be a good thing to have reasons for one’s moral judgements. The point is stronger than that. One must have reasons, or else one is not making a moral judgement at all. This is part*

*of what moral concepts mean. To say, 'It would be morally wrong to do X, but there is no reason why it would be wrong,' is a self-contradiction.*

Value statements that may be prescriptive but not specifically moral, often refer to competence or performance – statement **b** ('Mandisa is very good at getting learners to co-operate') is an example. We call these statements *appraisals*, because they may include a degree of personal preference. They are often subjective, but this is not necessarily the case. Some appraisals based on practice-oriented values are sound, accurate, and objective evaluations. But, as with moral values, we will only be able to judge whether this is the case or not if good reasons are given. So appraisal statements lie somewhere between mere preferences (they can be subjective) and moral value statements (they need to be supported with reasons).

The key point about the arguments surrounding subjectivism is that, just because moral values and preferences both involve valuing, it does not mean that they are both subjective. As Strike and Soltis (1985) put it:

*The tendency to lump moral judgements under the general class of 'value judgements', and then to treat all value judgements alike, is the source of much confusion about morals. People tend to assume that value judgements are subjective matters [...] a matter of free choice on our part. It is then assumed to be wrong to impose our values on others.*

This, of course, is exactly the assumption that Gillian made with regard to teaching values at Mountain View. What is it that makes the difference between moral values and preferences? It is, as we have seen, a basis in good reasons, and the use of reason that looks impartially at *all* sides of a case.

Of course, people may give poor reasons to defend statements of value and moral advice, but this does not mean that all moral values are based on similarly poor reasons. Fortunately, if people are allowed the freedom and scope to reason and debate moral issues without privileging their own interests, then poor, unconvincing reasons tend to give way to good reasons. This is probably the strongest argument in favour of providing opportunities for learners to '*exercise*' moral reasoning in group discussions.

Finally, then, the subjectivist argument itself collapses because it cannot provide good reasons. If all values are merely preferences, then the moral values of the child molester or the drug merchant must be considered just as valid as the moral values of Mother Theresa.

Further, if *all* our ideas of value are entirely subjective, these would include the moral value of *truth*. And if the principle 'Truth is better than untruth or error' were merely subjective, there would be no grounds for claiming that any argument is valid – including the subjectivist argument itself.

Many people tend, like Gillian, to accept the subjectivist argument because they think that there are only two possibilities where the status of moral values is concerned. Either:

1. moral values must be 'things' – matters of 'objective fact' like stars and frogs; or
2. moral values are nothing more than expressions of our subjective feelings.

They forget that there is a third possibility, that:

3. moral values may be true if they are supported by better reasons than the alternatives.

As Rachels points out (1995: 40), the truth of moral values is:

*objective in the sense that they are true independently of what we might want or (our opinion) – we cannot make something good or bad just by wishing it to be so, because we cannot merely will that the weight of reason be on its side [...] Reason says what it says, regardless of our opinions or desires.*

“  
Morality is, first and foremost, a matter of consulting reason.

”

We may have 'buried' the idea of subjectivism, but unfortunately there is another popular form of thinking, which, in a more reasoned manner, and from a quite different starting point, also leads to relativism in the field of moral values. Let's return to Mountain View to see how teachers might experience this.

# Are moral values relative to culture?

## 6.5

At the Mountain View PTSA meeting, which represented a wide range of cultures and religious beliefs, the parents supported a proposal to investigate the possibility of implementing the recommendation that all teachers try to include some element of values education in whatever they taught, without tying themselves to any particular creed.

Gillian, as we can guess, had accepted this policy with some reluctance. But her own Life Orientation class dealing with 'respect for others' had gone fairly well. Her class had scoured the newspapers for reports of people showing respect and disrespect for others' rights and had produced some insightful collages.

While the posters were being displayed, Themba, who at 14 was two years older than most of his classmates, and whose group had produced one of the best posters, told the two girls in his group to pick up the mess of paper scraps lying on the floor beneath their table. One of the girls had grumbled, and Themba, feeling that he had both right (tidiness) and authority (as a male, and an older male at that) on his side, had scolded her loudly.

Gillian, whose attention was caught by the squabble, asked Themba whether there was not a contradiction between the sentiments implied in the poster that his group had produced and his treatment of some of his classmates more or less as servants. Themba looked angry at this criticism, and as Gillian put it later in the staffroom, 'went into a sulk'.

Eventually one of the other boys explained why Themba could not accept that he was in the wrong. As far as Themba was concerned, in his community girls, and particularly younger girls, were inferior to him socially, and as such it was the duty of the female members of his group to clean up, not his.

Somewhat indignant about this display of sexism, Gillian took the occasion to engage the class in a discussion about gender discrimination. However, she was aware that throughout the rest of the lesson, Themba's look grew more and more sullen.





For this activity you will need  
60 minutes.

### ACTIVITY 36: A CLASH OF VALUES

- 1 Spend about 10 to 15 minutes thinking about the following set of questions (or discussing them, if you're working with fellow students):
  - a Does Gillian have a right to correct Themba? On what grounds?
  - b If she does, is she not guilty of imposing her values (or those of her culture) on him? It may be that these are deeply held beliefs in his culture.
  - c Whose values should prevail in the classroom? Does a girl's right to equal treatment with boys override the right to have one's cultural norms and values respected? On what grounds would you answer yes or no?
- 2 Read the chapter 'The challenge of cultural relativism' by James Rachels (Reading 17 on page 111 in your Reader). This reading, while not difficult, is not suited to a quick read in, say, a group tutorial session. Give yourself about half an hour to read it, preferably in one sitting.
 

The writer presents cultural relativism as an idea with strong appeal, and as one from which some valuable lessons can be learnt, but he rejects it on logical grounds. He also presents reasons why it might be harmful. What dangers are present in the idea that all values (including moral values) are merely relative to one's culture?

Gillian *does* have a right to challenge Themba in terms of her professional mandate to maintain a safe, ordered learning environment. She is also acting as a role model in protecting the rights of others, especially of the less powerful. But isn't this disregarding Themba's right to have his culture respected? If different cultures have different values, what right has the teacher to interfere?

## Different cultures, different values

Cultural anthropologists have put forward the idea that our values, far from being *subjective* in origin, are the result of our being socialized into the beliefs and practices of the culture we grow up in. These collective values define what a particular society considers to be desirable or worth preserving.

In various societies, collective values might include, for example, the pursuit of material wealth, competition and ambition, co-operation and collective effort, and so on. But it's obvious that different societies, or different social groups within a single society, may hold very different values.

For example, in Papua New Guinea (in the East Indies), much of what we in South Africa would consider private property is shared. Different persons may actually hold different rights on the same land. There is no 'owner': one person may hold ceremonial rights, another fishing rights, another hunting rights, another dwelling rights, and so on.

In 1983, young men in one Papuan village were killed after developing export businesses for their own personal profit. They were viewed as being too individualistic and as no longer contributing to the common good. This example reminds us that what is valued in one society – being very well-off financially – may lead to a death sentence in a different culture (Ellis and Ellis quoted in Schaefer and Lamm, 1992: 80–81).

## Values in conflict

The members of traditional, close-knit societies like the Papuans are generally in agreement on single sets of values. But under the impact of colonizing powers, or in complex societies in which many 'sub-cultures' exist side-by-side as a result of immigration and colonization, values may come into conflict. This is the situation Andy



Hargreaves referred to in Reading 14 as a multicultural situation bringing different belief systems into contact, and leading to the questioning and even the collapse of long-held belief systems that claim to be universal.

## Cultural relativism

This diversity of values between cultures and within societies raises challenges for teachers like Gillian, who are preparing children for life in increasingly multicultural environments. But cultural diversity has also given rise to the idea that what we think of as 'right' or 'wrong' is *simply relative to culture*. In other words, actions are not right or wrong in themselves, they're simply considered right if they 'work' within a particular cultural belief system.

Does the treatment of girls as servants constitute a valid cultural practice, or does it amount to an unenlightened practice wherever it occurs, a practice that might therefore require reform (see Reading 17)? Would condoning Themba's treatment of girls encourage him to develop an even more exploitative attitude to women?

On the other hand, would a 'reform' in this area lead to the crumbling of Themba's culture as a whole? Anthropologists have observed that all cultures undergo change, whether gradually or rapidly. Do all the male members of Themba's culture still adopt the 'traditional' attitude to women, or have some distanced themselves from such values? If some have, what has been the effect on their culture as a whole?

Rachels' argument effectively provides us with a tool for refuting the cultural relativism argument, and helps us to resolve dilemmas like Gillian's. Remember also that the dangers of an 'anything goes' relativism in propositional knowledge are just as relevant when we consider dispositional knowledge (values). And that in making moral judgments, it is also true that 'good reasons give way to better reasons'.

So we have grounds to pause before rushing to accept the cultural argument put forward by Themba. We might also realize that many members of Themba's culture *have* in fact distanced themselves from such beliefs, with prominent members of the South African government leading the way. And while Themba or his supporters might argue that to challenge a principle of his culture is to insult his dignity, when weighed against the direct slight to the girls' human dignity, the 'insult' to his dignity seems to be of a lesser order.



Think back to what you read in Section 5.5 about the potential dangers of relativism in the realm of knowledge as situated. Notice the parallels with relativism in the realm of moral values.



We are pointing here to the parallel between relativism in the realm of (situated) knowledge and relativism in the realm of moral values, based on the fact that norms vary from one culture to another.

# 6.6

## Are moral values absolute?

A value would be **absolute** if it allowed no doubt or exception and was binding for all people in all circumstances.

We've established that the arguments for an 'anything goes' view of moral values are weak. But how far do we have to go in the opposite direction? Is there one set of values with which we can, and should, all agree? Are moral values absolute in the duty they impose on us, allowing no exceptions, to be followed without question, and valid for all times and people, regardless of culture or circumstances?

At this point, we shift our focus from arguments in favour of moral values as 'teachable' to examine the use of moral thinking in the day-to-day decisions that teachers have to make in their classrooms.

### Dealing with a learner's plagiarism

*Linda was marking class projects in the Mountain View staffroom when she realized that one of her most promising learners had copied almost everything in her assignment out of a book, without acknowledging that the passages were not her own.*

*'This girl has so much potential too – she could produce a good assignment without plagiarizing. Oh well ... I suppose she'll have to get zero. I've warned her class that they could get nothing for plagiarizing. It's a pity, though. Pumzile could fail the year because of it – she's missed quite a lot of assessment work through being absent.'*

*'Ja, it's tough,' said Mmapule, 'but rules are rules, and she's broken the rule on cheating. Passing off somebody else's work as your own is cheating. Don't be put off by the fact that she might fail. We've got to be consistent in applying the rules on dishonesty, and not make exceptions for this and that. Other learners have got naught for cheating before – it would be unfair to allow Pumzile to get away with it.'*

*'You're sticking very strongly to principle, Mmapule,' said Lerato. 'Shouldn't Linda weigh up the consequences? If she gives Pumzile naught, she may fail – and failing at this stage might mess up her academic future. Imagine what that would do to her mother. She's a single parent and Pumzile's her hope for the future. In fact Pumzile might have been tempted to take a 'short cut' in her assignment because she has to look after her brothers and do housework every day until her mother gets back from work.'*

*'I've heard about that, and I know her mother's not very well either. That's why she's missed quite a bit of school. But we can't just allow cheating to go unpunished, otherwise the whole assessment system will mean nothing,' said Linda.*

*'I agree,' said Lerato, 'but if you call Pumzile in and explain the seriousness of what she's done – and then give her a chance to rewrite – she might pass. Of course, there's quite a risk that others may be encouraged to take a chance and try to cheat. Maybe you could give her some other form of punishment to make an example of her conduct for others' benefit. What I'm saying is that I don't think we should just judge questions like this in terms of a principle only. I think we need to consider the circumstances and weigh up the consequences.'*

### ACTIVITY 37: PRINCIPLES OR CONSEQUENCES?

**Consider carefully what you would do in the situation described above. In your workbook:**

- 1 Write down what decision you would make. Give the reasons for your decision. Explain why you think that these reasons are stronger than the reasons that would have led you to a different decision.
- 2 Mmapule's approach is based on the strict application of a principle. Carefully read again the paragraph where she speaks, and jot down her reasons for advocating this approach.
- 3 Lerato suggests working towards a decision by considering the consequences of each choice. This leads her to look in some detail at the situation of the persons concerned. Read her argument again, and write down some of the difficulties that you think Linda might have in considering these consequences.



For this activity you will need about 25 minutes.

## The right and the good: Two frameworks for moral decision-making

Teachers are faced daily with many choices that involve moral values in practice – and some may have serious consequences. Sometimes we feel that doing the 'right' thing is not always a good thing to do, or the best thing to do. And sometimes what seems to be the best thing to do is not necessarily the 'right' thing. So the right and the good might not always be the same thing.

- Mmapule believes that moral decisions should be considered strictly in terms of principle, without regard for the consequences of our choices. A moral principle will tell us what is right, and how we should act, even if the consequences do not look promising. Mmapule regards moral principles as *absolute* in the duty they impose on us, allowing no exceptions, valid for all circumstances, and to be followed without question.
- Lerato, on the other hand, believes that moral choices should be made by weighing the consequences of each choice, and choosing the action that promises to produce the best consequences. The focus here is on producing good outcomes or consequences, not on whether the choice is strictly right in terms of an absolute principle.

### *The right*

It can be argued that the '*right*' thing to do here would be to give Pumzile zero for her assignment. She has violated a moral principle on which all human communication and interaction are dependent in society – that of honesty. Serious dishonesty undermines the whole system of assessment, on which the worth of all our qualifications depends. According to this argument moral rules are universal (they apply to everybody, everywhere), and people should themselves act in a way that they would expect everybody to act – in this case to act honestly and not plagiarize work.

The generally-applied rule is that serious dishonesty of this sort is to be punished appropriately. Being given zero for work that is handed in as one's own when it is not one's own seems appropriate enough, and the learners have been warned. If this rule is not applied consistently to all, people's respect for the rule (and the moral principle it supports) will be undermined. The right thing to do would be to act impartially, without making an exception for Pumzile, and punish her offence with a zero mark.

“  
*The right and the good  
might not always be  
the same thing.*  
”

### *The good*

It can also be argued that the *good* thing to do would be to offer Pumzile another chance, given her situation, and the strong possibility that there might be what seem excessively harsh consequences for her and her mother. Notice, however, that this approach does not in itself simply signify a more lenient, forgiving approach. Lerato tries to weigh up the consequences for 'society' as well as for Pumzile and her mother. So she acknowledges that if Pumzile is seen to 'get off lightly', others may be encouraged to cheat, and she suggests that other (less destructive) forms of punishment could be tried. The words Lerato uses ('may', 'might' and 'there's quite a risk') indicate that she is also aware that consequences are never 100% predictable – there's a risk attached to whatever one does or doesn't do when moral values are the issue.

Often the right and the good do amount to the same thing. But often they do not, as is the case here. The difference between the right and the good when they do not correspond has given rise to two different approaches to making moral decisions:

- emphasizing what is '*right*', or acting strictly according to an *absolute moral principle*; or
- emphasizing what is '*good*', or focusing on the best likely outcomes or *consequences*.

Understanding the difference between these two approaches can be useful when you face tricky moral decisions, and may enable you to approach them with greater skill and confidence.

### Kant's moral principle-as-absolute approach

A **rational** human being has the ability to reason.

**The moral principle-as-absolute approach was formulated most clearly by the important eighteenth-century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, although elements of his theory, such as the 'golden rule' (see below) have been around for many centuries.**

**His theory argues that because we are rational beings, we have an inescapable moral obligation to make decisions and act in such a way that the principles guiding these choices and actions could be treated as universal rules of human conduct. For a moral rule to be universal, there can be no exceptions (including ourselves), and it needs to be applied impartially and consistently to everyone.**

“  
We should behave  
towards others as we  
would like them to  
behave towards us.  
”

Kant's rule probably sounds more complicated than it is. Let's look at a simple example. Imagine you are faced with a choice between plagiarizing or not. According to Kant, you should consider the principle underlying the choice – honesty, in this case – and consider whether you think all human beings ought to act in terms of this principle or not. Would you like people to be honest in their dealings with you? If you would, then you would want everybody to act according to a universal principle of honesty. And that would have to include you.

Reduced to its simplest form, Kant's argument gives strong logical support to the so-called 'golden rule', which suggests that we should behave towards others as we would like them to behave towards us. This is not far from a moral principle that is associated with some of the world's major religions. However, Kant does not derive his rule from a religious source; he reasoned it out logically on the basis of human experience. In the process, he provided us with a clear understanding of the reason why the 'golden rule' is such a compelling idea, and of how we can apply the 'golden rule' in making any moral choice.

In addition, the fact that Kant's principle is based on logical reason and human experience rather than on any particular religious belief, means that it can be

accepted by people of different religious beliefs. It is not likely to offend particular groups in multicultural situations, but it does not achieve this acceptability by suggesting that moral values are simply relative to cultures.

How does Kant base his moral rule on human experience? Because we can never have certain knowledge of what the consequences of our actions will be, he argued that in deciding moral issues we need to ignore consequences, and pay attention only to what *motivates* moral acts – that is, a sense of obligation, or ‘oughtness’. It is this, he held, that makes humans different from animals. Only human beings experience this sense of obligation, and this is because humans as a species are free to obey the promptings of this sense of obligation, or not, as we saw earlier in Section 6.2. Only human beings, because they are capable of choice and reason, can escape the chain of cause-and-effect that determines everything else that happens in the world of nature.

Another important part of Kant’s theory relates to punishment. Because our reason enables us not only to choose how we act, but to choose on the basis of a rational understanding of what it is we are doing, we are in the end *responsible* for our actions. For this reason we can be held *accountable* for what we do. In Section Three we examined responsibility and accountability in connection with professionalism. Now we can see how these two ideas are rooted in what it is to be a human being. Animals, who cannot reason, cannot be held responsible for their behaviour in the way that human beings can.

So when a rational human being cheats (like Pumzile), or treats other rational human beings as if they are there for the purpose of serving him or her (like Themba) – then he or she is in effect ‘declaring’ that in their judgement, this is the way human beings *should* act, or treat other people. Therefore if we punish them accordingly, we are doing nothing more than treating them as they have in a sense *decided* people are to be treated. This amounts to allowing people, as rational beings, to decide for themselves how they will be treated.

So we can see that it is Kant’s theory of moral principles as absolutes that Mmapule expresses when she urges Linda to give Pumzile’s assignment a zero, even if she has never actually heard of the philosopher himself. Let’s turn now to the second framework we are considering here, the consequences approach.

## Bentham and Mill’s consequences approach

**Probably the most influential moral theory based on the consequences of actions is called utilitarianism. It was developed by the English philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and today it characterizes many social institutions such as the justice system in many modern democracies.**

**Utilitarianism argues that the way to make moral decisions is not to apply principles that are seen as good in themselves, or inflexible. It is rather to judge according to what produces (or aims to produce) the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Utilitarianism therefore requires us to look carefully at the different sets of consequences that have arisen or could arise from different decisions, assess which set of consequences will be likely to produce the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people, and approve that decision or choose that option.**

“  
In deciding moral issues we need to pay attention to what motivates moral acts.

”

“

*The morality or immorality of a choice or an action is determined by the practical consequences of that choice or action.*

”

Look again at the reasons Lerato gives for considering the consequences before making a decision. She believes that when we make decisions we should aim at the best outcome – that we should be concerned with what is *good*, rather than what may be the right principle in theory. It may be wrong to plagiarize because it is dishonest, but would the strict application of the zero mark penalty produce the best outcome in this case?

The probable consequence of failure could have further consequences for Pumzile's life. If these came about, they would seem rather out of proportion to her offence in the eyes of many people. Perhaps she did not appreciate the seriousness of her offence. Should she not be given another chance? What would the consequences for all concerned then be? Lerato mentions the possibility of other learners being encouraged to cheat.

This is a good example of the utilitarian approach, which argues that we cannot decide on the morality of actions (including punishing people) without weighing up as many of their consequences as possible. Morality is not decided according to absolute (inflexible) and abstract principles of right and wrong. The morality or immorality of a choice or an action is determined by the practical consequences of that choice or action. Whatever action produces the most good for the most people (the greatest 'utility') is then considered to be the most moral action.

Of course, judging *past* actions according to their consequences is usually a lot easier than weighing up consequences when deciding how to act. In determining how to act morally *before* acting, consequence theories, including utilitarianism, depend on our predicting what the consequences of our choices and actions will be. They also depend on our being able to compare different sets of possible consequences in order to work out which would be the best.

How many of the consequences for Pumzile, her mother, or her fellow learners can we predict with certainty? By what yardstick would we assess which will be the better consequences? These are some of the problems of the consequences approach: the difficulty of knowing what the consequences of our actions will be, including their impact on everybody concerned; and the difficulty of determining which consequences would be best.

In addition to these problems, utilitarianism in particular involves other difficulties. One of these is that it is possible to act in ways that *do* produce the greatest good for the greatest number, but that *discriminate* against a minority at the same time.

Consider the example of how you as a teacher 'pitch' your lessons or activities, and their pace. Perhaps you design them so that they can be understood by the majority of learners in your class, which is good in utilitarian terms. But are you not discriminating against the slower learners, who may need you to explain more slowly – or build the 'scaffolding' you provide for their learning from a different starting point? At the same time, are you not discriminating against the more capable learners, who may be bored by a pace and level suited to the majority?

## Absolute principles or consequences?

When we have to make moral decisions or judgements, is there any reason to favour the view that holds that moral values are absolutes, or the view that consequences are what we should be looking at?

We would argue that *neither* view is sufficient – each view to some extent provides what the other view lacks. Whereas we have drawn attention to some of the problems in the consequences approach, in particular utilitarianism, so far we have mentioned only positive points about the idea of moral values as absolutes, in particular Kant's theory. However, these too have flaws. We will mention two here:

1. **Because Kant held that we can never know for certain what the consequences of our actions will be, he tended to regard the consequences and circumstances of actions as being of *no significance at all*, and as a mere distraction when we make moral decisions or judgements.**

Yet in practice, whenever we try to resolve a real-life moral dilemma in which two or more moral alternatives make claims on our reason, it is inevitable that we will ask ourselves what the *likeliest* results of each alternative will be.

Furthermore, is it not true that the absolute principles mentioned above (that it is wrong to cheat, to let dishonesty go unpunished) are in the end both linked to undesirable consequences themselves? Cheating cannot be accepted as a universal rule for everyone precisely because it would have undesirable consequences – the whole assessment system would become meaningless if cheating were universal.

2. Another weakness in the thinking of Kant and some other ‘absolutists’ is related to the first. This is the insistence that there can be *absolutely no exceptions* to moral rules.

Imagine the following scene: A teacher was confronted during school hours by the large and angry stepfather of one of the learners in her class. He stood with his belt in his hand, insisting on being told the young boy’s whereabouts. She had sent a message to the mother because the boy was always getting involved in fights at school – fights that he often started but did not always win because he himself was not very well-developed physically.

Instead of the mother coming to the school, the stepfather had decided to take things into his own hands. The teacher now realized that he probably abused the child physically on a regular basis, and that he had already had a few drinks that morning. He was in no mood to discuss anything with the teacher, and wanted only to make a demonstration of how he was capable of ‘disciplining’ the boy. He insisted on the boy being fetched. It was clear to the teacher that there was no point in even trying to engage in a useful discussion with the stepfather while he was in this state, and in an effort to bring the situation under control, she told him that she had sent the message because his step-son was beaten up by some older boys who had picked on him for no reason – though she knew this not to be true.

This story is adapted from Strike and Soltis (1985).





“

*No reasonable moral approach can entirely ignore consequences, neither can any reasonable moral approach argue that consequences alone are enough to consider in making moral choices.*

”

Can we really argue that the teacher should have told the truth, exposing the child to yet another cruel beating? Kant would argue that she should not have lied. Since one cannot know for certain what the consequences of lying might be, it is after all possible that the lie might have made matters worse if the boy's story did not line up with the teacher's. This may of course have happened, but the point here is that if the teacher had told the truth, a beating on the spot would have been almost certain.

Surely there is something wrong here. The morals-as-absolutes approach seems very rigid, and it seems to put an abstract principle, and the teacher's comfortable conscience, above the (admittedly short-term) good of a child. Perhaps we cannot sensibly will lying to be a universal rule for human conduct, but what about lying to prevent a child from suffering? Surely that could be willed to be a universal rule? A lot depends, then, on just how specific or general we choose to make our rules.

## The importance of reason and impartiality

Two important characteristics of moral values are common to both these apparently opposed points of view:

- ***the insistence on using our reason, and backing our actions with good reasons*** – whether thinking through the universal dimension of actions, or thinking of the circumstances and consequences of actions, and weighing up the latter;
- ***the insistence on impartiality*** – no individual or group can claim superior right to favoured treatment, either when considering whether individual conduct could be made a universal rule for *all* human beings, or when considering consequences and what might be the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In making such decisions, reason provides us with no justification for saying we should benefit one group and not another.

These two principles, then, which are associated with both of these major (but very different) moral approaches, surely provide us with the basics of sound moral thinking. What about the approaches themselves (absolutism and the consequences approach)?

We need to decide for ourselves, avoiding the pitfalls of an exclusive attachment to either theory. No reasonable moral approach can entirely ignore consequences, neither can any reasonable moral approach argue that consequences alone are enough to consider in making moral choices.

We are not simply advocating a 'middle path' for the sake of avoiding extremes: there are elements in the two theories themselves that seem to support such an approach. Moral values as absolutes have the well-being of people as an intended consequence beyond themselves. Likewise, thinking about consequences when making a moral decision has a similar objective: the well-being of people.



# What role should teachers play in developing sound values?

## 6.7

*At a Mountain View staff meeting, teachers were discussing the implementation of values education into the curriculum. Some were still uncomfortable with the idea, others were cautiously enthusiastic, and others adopted a 'wait and see' attitude. Here is an extract from Mmapule's minutes of the 'brainstorm' part of the meeting:*

### **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STAFF OF THE MOUNTAIN VIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL, HELD IN THE STAFFROOM AT 14:30 ON 22 MARCH 2001**

**The staff were given 25 minutes to put forward their concerns and points of view before breaking into smaller groups to discuss particular issues. No comment or argument was allowed in this session. The following points were made:**

1. Some staff still think the policy will mean imposing values on children whose families may hold very different views. Should teachers not remain neutral to avoid upsetting learners or parents from different cultural backgrounds?
2. Some think the area of values would be too controversial, even if all the children were from the same culture.
3. We should be careful to avoid making learners feel excluded because of their religious beliefs – teaching must be inclusive.
4. Values education has a bad name in South African schools because in the past Christian National Education tried to impose Calvinist Christian values on everyone.
5. We should be careful to avoid 'preaching' to the learners; this didn't work anyway.
6. Can moral values really be taught? Is it not true that they should be 'caught', not taught? How should we approach values, if this is the case?
7. What are 'sound values'? What values should we be imparting?
8. Many parents are looking to teachers to provide some education in values, especially those who do not get to see their children much because of work.
9. But some parents are wary of values teaching in the hands of teachers – they say this is the role of parents.
10. Children don't automatically develop moral values on their own as they grow. They learn them from their environment, which includes some very bad influences. Teachers need to do something to counteract this.
11. Young people often don't know how to choose, especially if they are faced with a choice between things that both seem right.
12. Values may be controversial, but most people in our society agree on a lot of basic values like being truthful, and not living only for yourself.

A small committee met some days later to plan how to take these questions forward. They decided that the most fundamental points were contained in Questions 1, 6, and 7, and that answers should be sought before the staff would feel happy to move forward.

Andy's suggestion of another professional development programme won support, so he decided to approach Vusi Masondo, who had done some interesting work on values teaching. Vusi thought that the questions provided a useful start, and decided to use them as the basis for a first workshop.

## Questions about moral values education

The reading that Vusi set in preparation for the workshop was from Clive Beck's 1990 book, *Better Schools: A Values Perspective*. Vusi decided to start with the part of the reading that deals with the question of the teacher taking a neutral role.



You will need about 45 minutes for this activity.

### ACTIVITY 38: IS THERE A PLACE FOR MORAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS?

**Read the extract by Clive Beck, 'Moral and values education' (Reading 18, page 121) and answer the following questions on the section headed 'Whose values?'**

- 1 Summarize the writer's arguments – in the last section of the extract – against the teacher remaining neutral.
- 2 What are some of the things that have been wrong with moral education in the past, according to the writer?
- 3 Summarize the reasons Beck gives in favour of attempting some form of moral education in schools.

Let's see what the Mountain View teachers made of this reading:

Andy Villiers opened the discussion by saying that he agreed with the writer's reasons for rejecting neutrality in the classroom: 'We couldn't run this or any other school without promoting some values, as Beck says – the value of knowledge, fair treatment, discipline and so on. We "teach" values through direct discussion, through the school rules, and through the way we conduct ourselves in the classroom. It's an implied teaching as much as it is an explicit one.'

'Yes,' said one of the teachers, 'but does that mean we have to teach values explicitly in, say, Environmental Studies? Everybody expects a school to have rules, and talks on values.'

'I think what Beck is saying is that even in the classroom, you are already teaching values, even if you are not doing so consciously. So it's not as if you can really avoid it. And if that's the case, shouldn't we be imparting some sound values? With all the influences out there over which parents don't have much control, a lot of parents look to us to play this role.'

'Yes,' said Mmapule. 'This idea that values are just subjective comes across in many public media these days. Because we have a democracy, some people think every point of view is just as valuable as any other. That cannot be right. Racism is supported by some people, but that doesn't make it right.'

At this point Vusi added, 'And if teachers try to remain neutral and silent, they are simply giving greater force to those ideas – and allowing free rein to powerful influences like drug-use or brand advertising, which try to turn children into captive consumers. The English historian Edmund Burke once said a great thing: "For evil to thrive, it is necessary only that good men do nothing."'

*'But there are also other reasons that Beck gives for attempting moral and values education. Can you help us identify them?'*

*Various staff members identified reasons from the reading:*

- *Some values, and the knowledge that supports them, are not usually 'picked up' through everyday experience.*
- *Teachers could have an important effect on the further development of learners' basic dispositions.*
- *Learners could benefit from learning how to approach moral decision-making: for example, weighing up the consequences of an action, or asking whether they would like to be treated in the way they are treating others.*
- *Learners could learn how to use reason, how to make exceptions in complex situations and how to weigh up one consideration against another, particularly in areas of mistakes in moral decision making, for example, treating moral values as a matter of authority ('Because I said so').*

*Vusi then asked the staff what they thought of Beck's ideas about moral values being controversial, or the idea that teaching such values meant imposing one group's ideas on another's.*

*Lerato answered, 'He seems to be saying that the differences between various theories and religions are exaggerated – that they actually agree on many basic values, even though they may approach them from different points of view.*

*'And in the last paragraph the writer says that the way to avoid imposing values on learners isn't to try to be neutral and hold back from promoting any values at all. Rather it is to establish a climate that encourages learners to discuss ideas freely, including disagreeing with ideas you put forward, or proposing alternatives.'*

*'That's right, and I think what he's trying to tell us about teachers in that last paragraph is that they should model conviction rather than "good behaviour". They should be able to reveal that values are important in their own lives, without imposing them on others.'*



Think back to the terms of appointment once required of teachers in the contract on p. 58. Did those terms refer to conviction or 'good behaviour'?

## How not to help learners develop values

Clive Beck describes how **not** to approach values education; by teaching values:

- as though they were absolutes, without any exceptions;
- without backing them up with persuasive reasons, and without encouraging learners to use their reason in making moral decisions;
- aimed at indoctrinating learners or imposing certain values on them.

The main reason why moral education has a bad reputation with many people is probably because it is associated with what could be summed up as 'preaching', which simply does not work. Right back in the late 1920s, an experiment by researchers Hartshorne and May conducted with Boy Scout groups and Sunday School classes showed that learners who had been given what might be called traditional lessons on morality, including honesty, were no less inclined to cheat during an examination than those who had not undergone such lessons.

A further problem with moral instruction is that its success depends to a large extent on learners submitting themselves to the teachers' social control, rather than on their wrestling with moral problems themselves and taking on the moral values as their own. This means that when the teachers or others in positions of social control are not around, the learners may well feel less obligation to comply. Furthermore, it sometimes comes as a surprise to teachers to learn that morality in fact has little to do with obedience to some authority, as we see in the following quote from Straughan (1982: 6–7).

“

*Doing something just because you are told to do it has nothing to do with acting morally.*

”

Teaching children to be good is not the same as teaching them to do as they are told; obedience to authority is strictly irrelevant to the business of making moral decisions. [An] example should make this clear.

An American psychologist conducted a series of experiments in which members of the public volunteered to take part in what they thought was a study of the effects of punishment upon learning (Milgram, 1974). The ‘learner’, who was in fact an actor, was strapped to a chair and told to learn a list of word pairs. The ‘teacher’, who was one of the unsuspecting volunteers, was seated in front of what appeared to be an electric shock generator, and was told to administer increasingly severe shocks to the ‘learner’ each time he gave a wrong answer. The ‘learner’ in fact received no shocks at all, but pretended to react and protest more and more frenziedly as the level of the shocks apparently increased.

If the ‘teacher’ protested at any point, the person in charge of the experiment would say things like ‘Please continue,’ or ‘The experiment requires that you continue,’ or ‘It is absolutely essential that you continue,’ or ‘You have no other choice; you must go on.’ In some of the experiments 65% of the ‘teachers’ obeyed the experimenter, and went on to inflict what they thought were highly dangerous shocks of 450 volts. It appears, therefore, to be surprisingly and frighteningly easy to induce people to obey an authority, but surely we would not want to say that the 65% of subjects who did as they were told were morally better and more mature than the 35% who refused. Doing something just because you are told to do it, then, has nothing to do with acting morally.



It seems, then, that there is much truth in the idea that moral values cannot be taught, if teaching means a direct form of instruction. If learners are to acquire, not just a knowledge of what values are acceptable to authority, but a set of values that will guide and shape their actions even when they are 'out of range' of teachers and other authority figures, then something more than instruction is needed.

## How can teachers help learners to develop values?

We have already made the point that teachers are called to be *moral agents* in the learning environment, both as teachers and as models of a principled approach to life. We have also seen that one of the most important moral 'skills' that teachers need to promote is the use of *reason* and logical thinking, because feelings can be very deceptive when making moral decisions. So as teachers, you should also challenge your learners to provide persuasive reasons when they make value claims or arbitrary judgements.

The use of reason also involves the principle of *impartiality*, or the idea that each individual's interests are equally important. Kant's principle that you treat others as you would be treated, strongly supports this argument. Take for instance a teacher who decides to take two days' 'leave' in the middle of the school term. She should ask herself, without making any exceptions in her own case, whether she would like her own lecturers to do this. She should also weigh up the consequences for her own learners.

### ***A learning environment in which moral values count***

As a moral agent, a teacher should have a classroom in which prejudice and partiality (against race, gender, social class) are analysed, and their dangers are brought out into the open. Teachers need to develop learner capacity to use reason and impartiality in practical situations, because these do *not* just develop unaided. Debates and discussions in which learners defend their values, test out principles for themselves, and use their reasoning skills in moral problems that include conflicting values should be a regular feature.

Teacher 'neutrality', the 'preaching' of moral values, and the idea that morals mean obedience, do not promote a learning environment in which values count. The freedom to undertake moral action does promote such an environment. Here teachers are fair and just in dealing with behaviour issues among the learners. They balance absolutes with a concern for circumstances and consequences. They never adopt a 'soppy', laissez faire approach from which children learn that 'anything goes'.

Being fair and just also means that when contradictions do arise in the classroom between the values of learners from different cultural backgrounds, teachers avoid imposing their own, or a dominant, point of view, unless other learners' rights are threatened. In a supportive environment, learners are encouraged to respect cultural and other differences, and to celebrate human variety.

Rules are necessary, as we have seen in Section Four, but they should be seen as a means to the end of supporting good learning for all, not as absolute ends in themselves. Let the learners be partners in drawing up class rules, and if possible school rules. This will afford them a practical opportunity for moral decision-making, with real consequences that they will have to live with.

From at least the Senior Phase (Grade 8), consider giving learners a 'judiciary' role too. Learners should be represented on a disciplinary committee, and in class, misdemeanours should sometimes be discussed. This encourages learner accountability and responsibility.

Since values always have a social dimension, teachers as moral agents need to show that morals and values also matter to them *beyond the confines of the classroom*. They therefore need to inform themselves of the important issues of the day, in their community and in the broader society.

Teachers should also not be afraid to show enthusiasm and participate in particular causes (women's issues, ecological issues, community issues and broader political issues). This provides some balance in their lives, demonstrates that values are to be *lived* in the 'real world', and helps to forge valuable ties between school and community.

### **Two approaches to values education**

To help learners to develop sound values, we look briefly at two well-known approaches to moral education: values clarification, and stimulation of natural development.

The first approach, values clarification, aims at developing confident, integrated learners with a strong awareness of and commitment to their own values. It sees the role of the teacher as being to help learners to get a clear idea of the nature and consequences of their own values, and to build learners' commitment to those values, without passing judgement on them (Beck, 1990: 154).

The teacher typically takes the role of a 'neutral chairperson' in discussions of moral issues and dilemmas, carefully avoiding any negative judgements of learner opinions, which the teacher is encouraging. Despite its obvious merits, values clarification can veer towards moral relativism if followed strictly. Learners still need to be shown that one can make inappropriate or wrong value and moral choices.

The second approach, stimulating natural development, was advocated by Lawrence Kohlberg, who based his theories on the work of Jean Piaget. This approach emphasizes the natural development of moral judgement in children as they interact with the world and other children.

Kohlberg describes six stages of moral development through which individuals may pass, though he points out that many *adults* never progress beyond some of the early stages. These stages are divided into the Pre-conventional level, the Conventional level, and the Post-conventional level (or the Level of Principle), indicating how the individual relates to the broad moral conventions of the community, or of society as a whole.



For more information about values clarification, and about Kohlberg's theory of moral education, we would recommend that you consult Jarrett, 1991 (see 'Further Reading' at the end of this Learning Guide).

### **Kohlberg's stages of moral development**

#### **The Pre-conventional level**

**Stage 1:** Unquestioning obedience based on the power of authority figures (usually parents). Rules are accepted without question, and right or wrong are whatever is rewarded or punished. Moral judgements are made on the basis of observable consequences, not the doer's intentions. Therefore a young child will think that it is worse to make a big mess while trying to help his or her mother than it is to make a small mess while just 'fooling around', whereas adults would tend to be more forgiving of the first act.

**Stage 2:** The child is still focused on his or her own needs, and right or wrong are seen as what satisfies those needs (and sometimes the needs of others). You behave well in order to get what you want, or to avoid the unpleasantness of punishment.

#### **The Conventional level**

**Stage 3:** Right behaviour is what pleases other people. The notion of what is seen as a 'good child' or 'bad child' operates at this stage. The individual is now capable of judging good or bad actions according to the intentions behind them.

**Stage 4:** The 'law and order' stage, in which right is seen as doing one's duty according to the conventions of the community or society, as showing respect for authority (not just obedience), and as following rules not just because breaking them will be followed by punishment, but because they are seen as 'right'.

#### **The Post-conventional level (or Principled level)**

**Stage 5:** Right is seen not so much as a matter of social rules and laws, but rather as a matter of personally-held values. (Kohlberg does not see these values as just personal preferences, but as values that may be recognized by society, such as fair play and equality.) Laws, for that matter, may be changed as society and governments change, so they are not seen as absolute.

**Stage 6:** Right conduct is determined by self-chosen moral principles such as justice and respect for the dignity of human beings (individuals and groups) and for human rights. The individual applies these principles impartially and may keep to them even if they clash with the laws of the day, or other social conventions – thereby risking society's censure or punishment.

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To risk **censure** is to risk strong criticism or disapproval.

Kohlberg advocates stimulating this process of natural development from one stage to the next by providing moral dilemmas that learners are required to try and resolve in an atmosphere where moral questions are taken seriously but do not have 'real' consequences.

His description of evolving stages is based on a powerful insight into moral judgement as something that grows and deepens, and it makes a good deal of sense to anyone who reads it, but it presents a rather neater picture of uniform development than we usually experience in reality. Therefore even a morally mature person may well respond at quite different 'levels' to various moral situations at different times in a single day. For example, I may make a courageous moral decision in the morning (at work), and act in a way that I later regret in the evening (at home).

# 6.8

## What are 'sound values'?

How can teachers judge what sort of values they could justifiably encourage in the course of their teaching? What sort of values should they promote in the management of their classrooms? In fact, what are 'sound values'? What criteria do we need to make these judgements? These would be values that:

1. can stand up to the tests of reason and impartiality;
2. can enable teachers and learners to become fully human and to develop as moral agents, not just passive recipients of whatever comes our way;
3. we (teachers or learners) would be happy to apply as a universal rule, which included ourselves;
4. lead us always to view and treat other human beings as ends in themselves, and never merely as a means to an end;
5. recognize other human beings as indispensable to our own humanity, and direct us to promote the well-being of other human beings and enhance their humanity; and
6. enable us to make good use of our human and democratic freedom of action, taking responsibility for our actions and their consequences.

“

*Act so that you treat humanity as an end and never as a means.*

”

The first three criteria need no further explanation, though we will take the point about becoming more fully human further in Section Seven. But following the principle of supplying reasons for moral claims, we need to motivate criteria 4 to 6.

### Treating others as ends in themselves

Our second criterion, to encourage moral agency, is based on one of Immanuel Kant's key principles. From this he developed another key principle, which we again use as our fourth criterion:

*Act so that you treat humanity, in your own person and in the person of everyone else, always as an end and never merely as a means.*

This is how the philosopher James Rachels explains Kant's moral law:

Human beings have **intrinsic worth** if we view them as valuable in themselves, as opposed to what they might produce.

*[According to Kant] humans have 'an intrinsic worth', i.e. dignity, because they are rational agents – that is, free agents capable of making their own decisions, setting their own goals, and guiding their own conduct by reason. Because moral law is the law of reason, rational beings (human beings are the only ones we know of in our world) are the embodiment of the moral law itself. The only way that moral goodness can exist at all in the world is for rational beings to recognize what they should do, and, acting from a sense of duty, to do it. This, Kant thought, is the only thing that has 'moral worth'. Thus if there were no rational beings in the world, the moral (and value) dimension of the world would simply disappear.*

*[Since it is rational human beings who thus make the world a place of value and morality], it makes no sense to regard [them] merely as one kind of valuable thing among others. They are the beings for whom mere 'things' have value, and they are the beings whose conscientious actions have moral worth. So Kant concludes that their value must be absolute, and not comparable to the value of anything else.*

*If their value is thus 'beyond all price', it follows that rational beings must be treated 'always as an end, and never as a means only'. This*



*means, on a superficial level, that we have a strict duty of beneficence toward other persons: we must strive to promote their welfare: we must respect their rights, avoid harming them, and generally 'endeavour, so far as we can, to further the ends of others.'*

*But Kant's idea also has a somewhat deeper implication. The beings we are talking about are rational beings, and 'treating them as ends-in-themselves' means respecting their rationality. Thus we never manipulate people, or use people, to achieve our own purposes, no matter how good these purposes may be.*

Kant thus teaches us not to treat other human beings as 'instruments' (means) to achieve our own purposes (ends), in effect turning them into 'things'. This rule is grounded in the idea of the infinite worth of all human beings, who, like ourselves, should not be manipulated or treated as 'useful things'. As a benchmark for judging the sort of values that should be promoted in our classrooms, this principle has considerable value.

### ACTIVITY 39: TREATING PEOPLE AS A MEANS TO AN END, OR AS AN END IN THEMSELVES

**Try to think of an example of someone 'treating another human being as a means to an end', and of someone in the same situation choosing to treat the other as an end in him or herself.**

**Beneficence** refers to an active goodness or good will.



You will need 5 minutes for this activity.

## Ubuntu

Recognizing other human beings as indispensable to our own humanity (criterion 5) fits well with Kant's principle of treating others as ends in themselves. It also echoes a central idea in African philosophy, which is captured in the isiXhosa expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – a person is a person through other persons. This idea, which is often reduced to the concept of 'ubuntu', is mentioned in one of the important learning outcomes in the Life Orientation learning area. As a central principle shaping much of African life, in South Africa and other parts of the continent, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* merits a closer examination.

Similar to Kant's principle of treating human beings as ends in themselves, ubuntu is based on the idea of the infinite value of other persons. Also similar to Kant's principle, ubuntu rejects relationships between persons that in effect reduce one of the parties to the status of a 'thing' to be used. If the principle of ubuntu is at work in a community, such relationships are unnecessary and absurd because sharing and community solidarity make available to us most of the things we need without having to 'use' other people.

In other ways, however, ubuntu is founded on very different views from the European philosophical traditions underlying Kant's principles. In the African view, according to Menkiti (1979: 158), it is the community that defines the person as person, rather than the individual mind or personality. The human self is seen, not as being 'inside' a person so much as existing in the person's relationships with the natural and social environment.

The European idea of a sharp distinction between the 'outside' world and the individual self that controls and changes aspects of that world, is foreign to African traditional thought according to South African philosopher Augustine Shutte (1995: 47). The personality is not as completely distinct from the world or the community as it is in European thought and culture, and it is relationships with other persons that are the most crucial in making the self what it is. Therefore it is a connectedness with the community's sustaining power, rather than a rational principle, that underlies the African rejection of a relationship that views others as a means to an end, or as 'things' that we can use.

The community is seen, not just as a collection of individuals in a certain place,

“  
A person is a person  
through other persons.  
”

“  
*The overall aim is to  
 sustain the community  
 by sustaining the  
 individual.*  
 ”

but as something that is there before the individual, with a life of its own, that sustains the individual, who would be nothing without it. Community solidarity therefore tends to be seen as more important than the needs and autonomy of the individual, and great attention is attached to achieving consensus and reconciliation in making community decisions and resolving problems that involve individuals (ibid: 50).

Discussion is therefore seen as a central feature of community life (and an ‘art’ in some cultures), and a group of decision-makers may discuss a problem for hours, looking at it from all sides, until a unanimous agreement is reached. The overall aim is not to crush individuality (unless it seriously challenges the long-term solidarity of the group), but rather to sustain the community by sustaining the individual. So a community may punish an erring individual in its own way, but club together to pay the fine that this person has been sentenced to by an official court – at least partly in order to prevent dishonour to the community.

It should be noted that this account describes a traditional ideal, one that is often transgressed by individuals, and one that may have lost much of its force in modern society. Yet it is still a principle that characterizes much that is vital in rural and township life in Africa. As Augustine Shutte argues, there are insights in the ubuntu principle and way of life that offer an alternative to the materialistic and self-centred trends in Western consumer culture today.

## Freedom and responsibility

Making use of our freedom of choice and action and taking responsibility for our actions (criterion 6) is a privilege we enjoy in the realm of organized society. It is democracy that provides us with the greatest scope for human freedom, as we saw in Section Four. But we also saw that democratic freedom does not mean freedom from all restraint. Democratic freedom is based on rules, without which there would be no possible social organization.

Therefore we are not talking here of freedom without responsibility. We mean that learners should be given the necessary freedom to develop as human beings, but be required to take responsibility for their actions and the consequences of those actions – and not blame others, or circumstances, for what **they** have chosen.

Responsibility, as we saw in Section Three, is an internal moral commitment to do the right thing, and it goes deeper than formal accountability. It is linked to notions of community and respect for others’ dignity as persons, and to Kant’s idea of linking our actions to universal moral laws. If two students choose to have a loud conversation across the classroom while the teacher is trying to explain a difficult concept to the class, they are not taking responsibility for the consequences of their noise-making for the other learners, nor are they showing respect for them (or the teacher) as fellow human beings with a need to learn (or teach).

Over the course of this section we deepened our understanding of the social dimensions of morality. We saw that many of our values are rooted in our respective cultures, rather than being based on some absolute rational standard. But we also saw that there are moral values common to all societies.

For those of us who are more inclined to see actions as either right or wrong, one of the most useful guidelines in making moral choices is to always act in ways that we would like others to act. This turns out to be an expression of what is central in human social existence: we can choose rationally to do or not to do, and our choices always affect others, as their choices affect us. Hence the further principle derived from this rule: always treat other human beings as ends in themselves, never only as a means to be 'used' for some purpose.

For those who are inclined to consider particular circumstances and weigh up the consequences of their actions, a useful guideline is to bring about the greatest good for the greatest number. Here too, the sense of being part of a network of social relationships is very strong.

We have briefly explored the African notion of ubuntu as a moral pattern for social living. This requires a certain humility in the light of our debt to society for our very personhood, and the importance of respecting the common life force that expresses itself in all of us. Finally, we have touched on the moral values that are built into the democratic social network, and the need for teachers to connect with and participate in the life and moral concerns of the broader community.

This brings us to the end of our exploration of the role of the teacher in developing sound values and attitudes in learners. In the final section of this module, we will examine the notion of 'extended professionalism', which we raised at the end of Section Three.

## Key learning points

1. Nothing in teaching is ever free of value questions or social dimensions. Nothing in teaching is ever concerned purely with facts, and nothing in teaching is ever entirely an individual concern.
2. We can attach two rather different types of value to human choices and actions:
  - some values (professional or educational) relate to competence or quality in some field of human activity; and
  - other values (moral values) enable us to judge whether an action is 'good' or 'bad' in itself, whatever the field of human activity.
3. Values not only provide the criteria by which we evaluate or judge human choice and action, they also provide us with much of the motivation and purpose that drive human action.
4. The teacher's role in influencing learners' values is twofold. There is teaching itself: for teachers to feel confident in this area, they will need to have a good understanding of values themselves. Then there is the teacher's active role in modelling a principled approach to life, and making morally justifiable decisions in the classroom.
5. Many people would question the place of values (especially moral values) in education. This is partly because of its association in the past with imposing certain values on learners. Another reason is that many people hold the view that all values are merely relative.
  - Some believe that values are really nothing more than expressions of what

individual people think or feel. This leads them to conclude that it is wrong for teachers to impose particular values on learners.

- Another form of moral relativism is called *cultural relativism*. Cultural diversity gives rise to the idea that what we think of as 'right' or 'wrong' is simply relative to culture. In other words, actions are not right or wrong in themselves; if they 'work' within a cultural belief system of values and practices, they are beyond criticism. Many think this a good reason not to teach moral values – they may offend learners whose cultural beliefs involve different moral codes.
6. However, for teachers, avoiding the topic of moral values and attempting to remain neutral in the classroom is both undesirable and, in the end, impossible.
  7. Yet research suggests that conventional moral instruction does not work. Moral instruction depends for its success on a strong authority that is prepared to back teaching with strong sanctions. It also depends heavily on learners submitting themselves to the teachers' social control, rather than on their wrestling with moral problems themselves and taking on the moral values as their own.
  8. Rather than attempting neutrality, it is more important to establish a climate in your classroom that encourages learners to discuss values and other ideas freely, including disagreeing with ideas you put forward. Teachers should model, not so much 'good behaviour', as the importance of values in their own lives.
  9. Teachers daily face choices that involve moral values in practice, some of which may have serious consequences. The right choice and the good choice might not always be the same thing. A teacher may feel that doing the 'right' thing is not always the best thing to do.
  10. The difference between the right and the good (when they do not correspond) has given rise to two different approaches to making moral decisions:
    - emphasizing what is 'right', or acting strictly according to an *absolute moral principle* (a good example is the principle that we should always act in such a way that our actions could be made the basis for a universal rule applicable to all human beings); and
    - emphasizing what is good, or focusing on the best likely *consequences*.
  11. It seems that neither the absolutist nor the 'consequences' approach is sufficient – each view to some extent provides what the other view lacks. Teachers should therefore be wary of treating either of these approaches as the only approach when making moral decisions.
  12. However, two principles are important if both of these approaches are to be of any use. These principles should form part of the values 'climate' in the classroom referred to in point 9 above:
    - the insistence on *using our reason*, and backing our actions with good reasons; and
    - the insistence on *impartiality* – no individual or group should consider itself as having superior rights to favoured treatment.
  13. *Values clarification* and *stimulating moral development* are two ways to help learners develop sound values.
  14. We suggest some principles to help you judge what values might be sound ones to encourage in your teaching. These include:
    - treating others as ends in themselves;
    - realizing that there can be no democratic freedom without responsibility; and
    - recognizing other human beings as indispensable to our own humanity (ubuntu).

## Tutor-marked assignment 4

**Discuss the question: is it acceptable for teachers to smoke?**

- **Weigh up this apparently simple question from all sides.**
- **Think critically. Don't be content with simple 'common-sense' statements like, 'It's all right in the staffroom' or 'One can't tell learners not to smoke and then smoke oneself.'**
- **Give reasons for the points in your argument.**
- **Examine the question in the light of the key concepts we have introduced in this section – subjectivism, cultural relativism, absolutism, and consequentialism. If you like, you can write this in the form of a dialogue along the lines of the Artis Secondary or Mountain View Primary dialogues.**
- **Be impartial, especially if you have strong preferences for, or against, smoking.**



# SECTION SEVEN

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## Making a difference

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# Introduction

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We have almost come to the end of our exploration of teaching. We began by introducing teaching as a profession facing numerous challenges. We considered the competences and attitudes required for teachers to (re)build their professional self-esteem and concluded that there was more to being a teacher than bureaucratic accountability. We argued that teachers who wish to become part of the solution in South African education need to see themselves as professionally accountable, and we suggested that this involved taking on the role of the extended professional.

Many years ago, Eric Hoyle introduced a distinction between the ordinary or restricted professional and the extended professional. We have adapted this distinction in the light of today's concerns for teachers. In addition to the basic responsibilities we described in Sections Three to Six, we would suggest that the extended professional would:

- remain a lifelong student;
- show concern for learners not only as a group but as individuals;
- see how teaching fits into the bigger socio-economic picture;
- participate in community concerns;
- engage in self-reflection and self-evaluation;
- experiment and take calculated risks in the interests of more vital learning; and
- identify himself or herself as an agent, someone able to make a difference rather than just a civil servant bound by bureaucratic requirements.

These principles may look impressive, but what **benefits** might they hold for teachers, learners and the community? How realistic is it to identify oneself as an agent for improvement when teachers face so many difficulties? What exactly *is* reflective practice?

Perhaps the best way to answer these questions is to return to Artis Secondary to observe some teachers becoming extended professionals, without even being aware of the fact! We will focus only on the last three principles of the teacher as extended professional: reflective practice, an experimental, risk-taking approach and a sense of agency.

## Learning outcomes

When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

- demonstrate a significantly richer understanding of the term professionalism in relation to teaching;
- recognize the value of adopting a reflective approach to your teaching in collaboration with colleagues;
- practise systematic reflective practice in your teaching; and
- appreciate the significance of agency and the scope that it creates for teachers in education.

# 7.2

## Reflective practitioners



In previous sections we saw teachers reflecting with colleagues on aspects of their teaching. In this section, we intend to highlight the process of systematic reflection itself. We will see a group of teachers focusing on a particular set of questions in relation to their teaching and the new curriculum. We will learn how reflection can be a shared, systematic and productive process, even though *some* people often associate the word reflection with a relatively aimless, solitary form of contemplation.

The unfixed and evolving nature of human knowledge is just one of many reasons why professional teachers *remain learners themselves*, learning not only from books and journals, but reflecting regularly on their own teaching situation. In this subsection, we see teachers who remain learners in both of these ways.

In Section Two, we saw Peter Adonis beginning a process of reflection when he came across a note passed between his students. He and his colleagues at Artis Secondary explored the issue of professionalism in teaching, and when we last heard of them, they were grappling with questions of authority, democracy and control in the classroom.

Let's return to Artis Secondary to look in on Peter again to see how he is doing in his quest to become 'part of the solution', as his wife Rachel put it.

### Three teachers combine forces



*Peter and his colleagues have begun to explore their problems and solutions together, at first by means of breaktime chats and the exchange of articles on teaching methods. Lately they have begun to collaborate on planning learning units aimed at integrated learning, since they all teach different subjects.*

*Concerned that his learners are often disengaged from lessons and misinterpret what he teaches them – even though he works hard to motivate them – Peter is drawing inspiration from a book he has found on a trip to the education library. The book is edited by Garth Boomer and entitled: *Negotiating the Curriculum: Educating for the Twenty-first Century*.*

*What catches Peter's attention is a passage in which Boomer compares motivated learning with negotiated learning. It addresses so clearly how differently and incorrectly his own learners interpret the work he tries to teach them. It also provides alternative methods for motivating learners.*

### THE PROBLEM WITH MOTIVATED LEARNING

**[Traditionally, before] teaching can proceed, the students must be motivated in some way. If the topic is 'Weather and Climate', this may be achieved by a trip to the local weather station, or by a lesson in which the ceiling fans are turned off to draw attention to the topic in hand. If this works, the [children's interests and intentions more or less match the intentions of the teacher. But at best the children's learnings only come close to] the teacher's goals, so the curriculum may touch only a little of the child's key interests. This leaves a good deal of what has actually been learnt unexamined and unevaluated, because the teacher tests only what is set in the curriculum. Of course, the overlapping [of the teacher's intentions and children's interests] may not occur at all, and the child is failed or subjected to remediation, which requires more intense motivation. In either case the child appears to have learnt much less than is actually the case. Irrespective of the teaching style of the teacher, there will be great wastage if this model [of teaching] is applied [...]**

**The key to negotiated learning [...] lies in the ownership principle: people tend to strive hardest for things they wish to own, or to keep and enhance things they already own. The inverse is just as true, and observable, all around us: people find it difficult to give commitment to the property and ideas of others [...] Students who are passive or acquiescent, unwilling, or even motivated externally, do not make the best learners. Equally, laissez faire has proved generally inoperable and indefensible in the classroom. Freedom without discipline is aimlessness at best, and chaos at worst. Owners recognize the constraints of ownership, just as they do its freedoms.**

**Out of negotiation comes a sense of ownership in learners for the work they are to do, and therefore a commitment to it. Learning is an active process. Teachers can't do it for learners. Information may be imposed, but understanding cannot be, for it must come from within. Students learn best when they want to (of their own accord). They want to when they are doing it for themselves, as a result of their own needs. Active involvement in classroom decision-making, and in the enactment of the decisions, results in more effective learning [...]**

When people are **acquiescent** they agree without question.

When something is **inoperable**, it cannot work.

*So closely did this writing match Peter's experience that he decided to share his excitement with two of his colleagues.*

*'It sort of makes sense,' says Shahieda, when she and the others have read the brief account, 'but I don't quite get it. I would have thought taking the kids to a real weather station would be a very good thing to do. And turning off the fans for a while on a hot day, if one had such luxuries, would be an excellent way to focus the learners' minds on weather. It's all about bringing reality into one's teaching.'*

*'I don't think Boomer is saying these are wrong,' Peter responds. 'Only committed teachers would take the trouble to come up with stimulating lessons like this. But he seems to be saying that, as good as such approaches may be, they are still only attempts to motivate the learners to give the teacher their attention.'*

*'Isn't that the best we can do?' asks Fana. 'We have to teach towards the outcomes in the syllabus after all. And a good teacher surely tries to make the work as interesting as possible, and thinks of ways to motivate the learners.'*

*'That's just the problem,' Peter breaks in. 'We can't "ensure" that the learners are motivated. We can try, and we may partly succeed in getting the learners to move in our direction. But their written work often shows just where their direction doesn't overlap with ours.'*

*'I hear what you're saying,' says Fana, 'but surely we can't just go with learners' interests. We have a syllabus to teach, and unit standards to reach; and what if half the learners are only interested in soccer, or the opposite sex?'*

*'I think that's exactly what the writer means when he mentions that laissez faire is a disaster,' says Shahieda, who has been thinking hard. 'Whatever "negotiating the curriculum" means, it clearly doesn't mean just letting the class talk about whatever may happen to interest them. Teachers usually have to take a lead, and we often have to introduce things the learners have never heard of. I think the writer is saying that the crucial thing is for the learners to have a stake in what's being learnt. As the writer puts it, they'll find it difficult to commit to the ideas of others if none of the decision-making has been theirs.'*

*'All right, but I still don't understand how this will work in practice,' says Fana. 'If the learners are not deciding what they should learn or do in class, and if teachers have to teach knowledge and skills that are laid down in specific outcomes, where does the learners' "ownership" come in? And what do they negotiate?'*

*'Yes, that is a problem,' says Shahieda. 'What about OBE? Curriculum 2005 puts the emphasis on achieving outcomes, and the outcomes need to be laid out by the teacher from the beginning, so that the learners know what they're working towards. How much room does that allow for learners to negotiate the work to be done and to have a stake in the decision-making?'*

*Peter is no longer feeling quite so sure about his new enthusiasm, but he still senses that the writer's arguments are right. 'Perhaps there's an answer in the book's next chapter, by Cynthia Onore,' he suggests. 'Its called "Negotiation, language, and inquiry: building knowledge collaboratively in the classroom" – sounds promising.'*



You will need 40 minutes to an hour for the reading, and 20 to 30 minutes to answer the questions. The activity should take between 60 and 90 minutes in total.

#### ACTIVITY 40: NEGOTIATING THE CURRICULUM

**Read Cynthia Onore's essay 'Negotiation, language, and inquiry: building knowledge collaboratively in the classroom' (Reading 19 on page 127 of your Reader) carefully. Although edited, this is still quite a long reading. However, as an actual account of a lesson that intelligently and successfully steers its way between a child-centred approach, and the content-knowledge and skills requirements of a syllabus, it is well worth reading. In addition, Onore's account serves to draw a number of threads from the rest of the module together. When you have read the article, do the following:**

- 1** Imagine that a colleague hears that you are interested in the idea of negotiating the curriculum with learners, but thinks that this would not be practical because it would mean letting the learners have an equal say in what gets taught and studied in class. In just a few sentences, how would you describe the concept of negotiating the curriculum, based on what you have read in this article, in order to allay his or her fears?
- 2** Shift your focus from the issue of negotiating the curriculum and think for a minute or two about how Peter and his colleagues are acting. It seems to us that their behaviour here is part of what we are talking about when we use the term extended professionalism. List three things they are doing that illustrate aspects of this concept.

*'Onore writes an interesting article,' says Shahieda. 'She shows how a teacher can run a class and teach according to the syllabus, but still let the learners be part of the lesson planning.'*

*'Yes, asking them how much the class already knew and what they needed to find out made a lot of sense,' adds Elmarie. 'I liked the way the children who knew more became temporary "teachers" for the ones who*

didn't know.'

'Each one teach one, hey?' says Peter.

'Yes. And that bit about the learners referring to their non-negotiating peers in other classes as "spoonies" – that was the best! The writer explains very well what may be wrong about relying on the teacher to motivate the class – I'd never questioned that before,' says Fana. 'But to get back to OBE – do you think that the "core common knowledge" that the writer mentions might cover the sort of learning outcomes laid down in our new syllabuses?'

'I don't know,' says Peter, 'but there's only one way to find out.'

'Yes, it would be interesting to try it out,' agrees Fana.

'Theory into practice?' Shahieda teases.

'Ja, but we'll be testing the theory, not the other way around,' replies Peter.

'I like this article, but not only because it answered our questions,' says Shahieda. 'What I really liked was that last part where the other teacher talks about having been afraid of her own questions, and then she learns instead to pose questions, and to look at life and teaching from more than one perspective. And to judge from the way she speaks, she actually gains more confidence.'

'Yes,' replies Peter, 'she rejects the idea that adults should have all the answers ... and that actually seems to make her a better teacher.'

Peter and Shahieda have noticed how this teacher, by putting aside an assumed authority, in which she imagines she has all the answers, learns to trust herself and the children – as learners. To produce active learners who are able to think and learn from their own experiences of a changing world, teachers surely need to model this sort of behaviour themselves. And this clearly requires a spirit of enquiry and reflection with respect to our own teaching, as well as to the world around us.

'Each one teach one' is a slogan that has been in popular use since the 1980s. It refers to the sharing of knowledge and teaching to build education and make up for the gaps from an inferior Bantu education.

“  
By putting aside an assumed authority, the teacher learns to trust herself and the children – as learners.  
”

**GETTING DOWN TO REFLECTING SYSTEMATICALLY ON PRACTICE**

**Peter and Shahieda agree to try out the negotiation approach with their own classes, attempting to combine it with outcomes-based teaching. Peter and Shahieda manage to organize things so that once a week they can visit each other's classes, keep an eye on how well they are managing to reconcile the idea of 'negotiating the curriculum' with OBE, and to act as teaching partners.**

**Shahieda has learnt a certain amount about classroom practitioner research from a teacher-development NGO, so she is able to organize and direct their experiment so that it doesn't just fizzle out. They plan together, trying to foresee some of the problems they are likely to encounter. Then, when they enact these plans in class, they each keep notes of any changes that they observe in their own and the pupils' responses, and of any problems or successes.**

**Every week they try to get together for an hour after school to reflect on what's been happening in each class. These discussions are quite frank, and although at first it feels a bit strange analysing their own teaching with others, they begin to trust one another more, and they find that their confidence grows in proportion to a self-awareness of their own practice.**

**Based on their observations and reflections, they often find themselves revising their approach slightly in order to solve problems that they had not foreseen, introducing a refinement that one of them has**

NGO stands for Non-governmental organization.



The process described here is based on a well-documented approach to improving one's own teaching that is sometimes called 'classroom action research' or 'practitioner research'. These approaches have been so extensively tried and successfully refined that they have achieved widespread acceptance as models of professional practice.

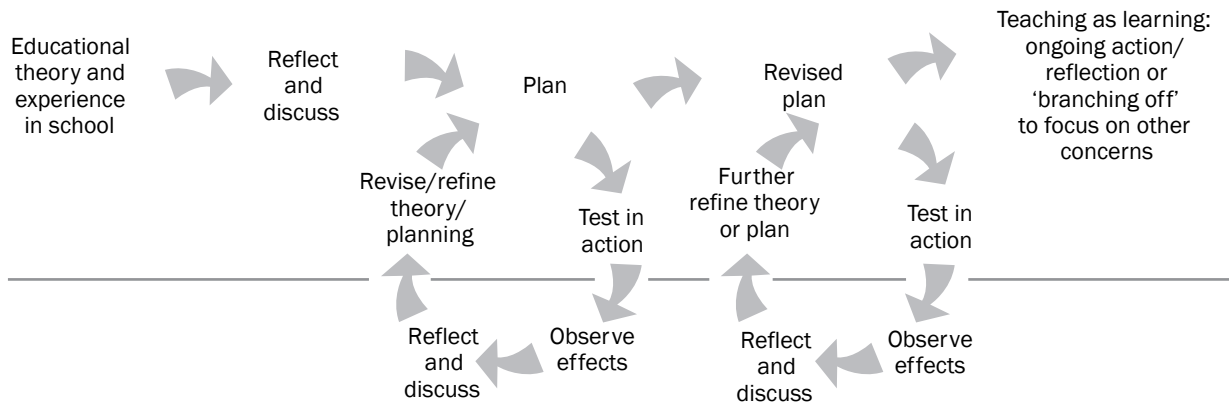
The essentials of reflective practitioner research are quite simple, and anyone wanting to read a little further can read the brief handbook by Kemmis and McTaggart (see Further Reading at the end of this Learning Guide on page 188).

An **articulate** explanation is one that is expressed well.

**suggested. And because they try to meet as regularly as the school term and activities allow (sometimes only briefly during break), these revised plans and innovations usually form the first topic of conversation for their next discussion, and lead to further refinements and explorations in subsequent lessons. So the reflection sessions become reflection/planning sessions (see the diagram below).**

**It seems to make a big difference that they are thinking critically about their own practice as a matter of choice: no one is evaluating them in order to rate them for promotion or to judge them. They gain confidence because they are in charge – of their own improvement, and of the educational theories that they are trying out. In their discussions together, various teaching approaches, methods and official policies become tools that provide real support. They no longer seem to be impersonal directives from the Education Department, or theories against which their practice will be judged.**

**They are taking their professionalism into their own hands and their colleagues begin to notice this. Sometimes other staff join their enthusiastic discussions. When a subject adviser calls on Shahieda, he is impressed by her experimental approach, the articulate explanations of her goals, and the positive manner with which she grapples with difficulties. He mentions this to the Principal, who is pleased to be able to point out that Shahieda is not the only one on his staff who exhibits these qualities.**



This model incorporates the ideas of Steven Kemmis, Shirley Grandy and Jean McNiff.

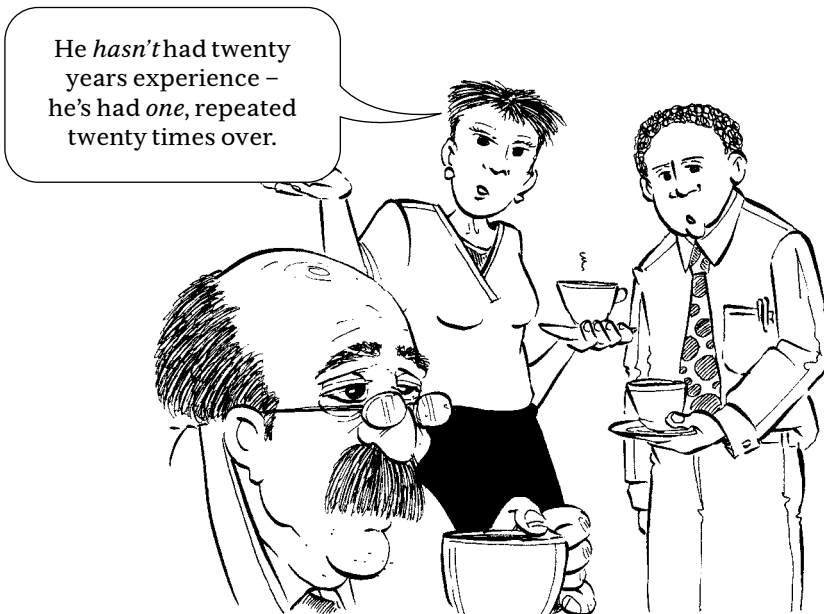
Systematic Reflective Practice: Learning from experience

## Learning from experience

In Activity 40 we asked you to write down some aspects of extended professionalism that are demonstrated by Peter and his colleagues. The three we listed were that they are discussing aspects of their work together; reading about teaching approaches together; and weighing up theories and policies in the light of their experience. Now we can add to this list that they are conducting systematic, collaborative research on their own teaching.

Not everyone on the staff, of course, is enthusiastic about these developments. Abel Abrahams, who has been on the staff for 14 years, and in teaching for longer,

is sceptical. He is the Deputy Principal at Artis Secondary, and often prefaces his remarks with references to his 20 years of teaching experience. He regards what



Peter and the others are doing as flashy, unnecessary, and unlikely to last as the school year wears on. But Abel is also known for his resistance to change – he has taught exactly the same material in exactly the same way ever since anyone can remember. As one of his colleagues said when he wasn't in earshot, 'He hasn't had twenty years experience – he's had **one**, repeated twenty times over'. Benefiting from our experience in the sense of learning, growing and being enriched by failures and successes, does not automatically follow on experience. The complex experiences that we find in professional life don't always yield clear lessons. Our egos may get in the way or there may be too many distracting experiences happening at the same time. Without making some effort to stand back from such experience and reflect on its significance, we may learn nothing that will contribute to our growth.

## Reflective action versus routine action

One important factor that tends to prevent our learning from experience is the **routine nature** of many of our experiences. This is especially true of teaching, which is bound by the bureaucratic routines of the school calendar. The influential American educational philosopher John Dewey, writing in the early 1900s, drew a key distinction between routine action and reflective action.

Dewey saw routine action as action guided by traditional ways of doing things, as action that we have become accustomed to, and that requires little weighing up or conscious choice. Dewey held that people generally undertake most of their lives in a routine, almost thoughtless way, giving little consideration to the reasons for their actions.

This is not necessarily a bad thing for much of our everyday lives, but the inherent danger of getting caught in routines is that we become more like technicians or bureaucrats than professionals. We miss vital opportunities to learn and develop as human beings, and risk becoming dull.

By contrast, reflective action involves standing back from the flow of experience, and weighing up beliefs that we take for granted in the light of evidence in practice.





This activity should not require more than 5 minutes.

According to Dewey, we are only spurred on to this type of action when we encounter a problem to be solved, or an experience that jolts us out of a half-conscious state. This suggests that some of our difficulties may have hidden advantages!

#### ACTIVITY 41

**Can you think of any advantages there might be for teachers in the difficulties we summarized in Section 2.8? One or two will do.**

This is not such a strange question. For a start, some teaching difficulties prevent us from becoming bound by routine, they remind us that we are not simply in the bureaucratic business of 'processing' learners. Another advantage would be interaction aiming at professional mastery, as we have just seen between Peter and his colleagues. Other uncertainties, theoretical conflicts, and unpredictable occurrences could provide the stimuli for similar insights and professional growth.

### An enquiring approach

*Back in the Artis staffroom, another teacher has raised an objection to the activities of Peter and his colleagues:*

*'What's so professional about observing and discussing each others' lessons?' asks another colleague, Melanie Bright. 'Surely a professional is one who knows what he or she is doing, who "knows the ropes" and has been trained to deal with the situations that are likely to arise in classrooms, who knows which are the best methods and materials to use in teaching?'*

What Melanie Bright says about professionals is right, up to a point. We saw in Section Four that a teacher's authority is based on her pedagogical and academic knowledge, and in Section Three that society's 'contract' with professions is based on the expectation that professionals will have that sort of knowledge.

But we also saw, in Section Five, that human knowledge is always provisional and situated. And if we want to develop active learners who are able to question and learn from their experiences of a changing world, then teachers must model an enquiring behaviour themselves, testing their knowledge situationally in the laboratory of real classrooms. This means trying ideas out, confirming that they do or don't work, modifying them, combining them with new knowledge, or rejecting them.

Let's look at what happens in most classrooms. While it's true that routines can swallow up one's vision as an educator, there also exists an opposite tendency of relative **uncertainty** within that routine. Routines may tend to encourage an impersonal view of our large classes, but it is very often the energy of so many individual personalities engaging with one another that works against routine and predictability in schools. For most teachers, this is one of the best things about teaching. But because each of these individuals has his or her own needs, and his or her own personalities to express, it's this factor that also places specifically professional demands on the teacher.

Philip Jackson (1964: 166) estimated that teachers typically engage in something like 1 000 interpersonal interactions on any given school day. Many of these interactions involve decision-making in situations of uncertainty, conflicting principles and complexity. As happens in so many other occupations that require professional judgement, theories do not always fit the complexity and uniqueness of the dynamic classroom situation. Consider this true story:



### THENJIWE'S STORY

Thenjiwe is a young teacher with a strong sense of caring for the individual learners in her Grade 4 class. She is very concerned about Nosisa, who is extremely withdrawn, to the extent that Nosisa never talks to anyone at school, even her peers. Attempts to talk to her in order to find out what may be contributing to this behaviour fail, there are no psychological services at hand, and Nosisa's mother can shed no light on the problem.

Reflecting on this problem, Thenjiwe realizes that since she is not a psychotherapist, she cannot attempt to cure the child; however, she senses that if she can put Nosisa in a situation where she is encouraged to communicate at the same time as she is challenged (without any hint of threat), she may yet be able to help her. She thinks of a plan that might just work.

The next day she counts the learners in her class, notes with satisfaction that there is an odd number present, and sets the class to work in pairs on a task that requires interaction. Since the other learners have given up trying to talk to Nosisa, she is the one left without a partner. Thenjiwe quickly goes to sit with her and starts on the task. The first two minutes feel like twenty, as Nosisa responds only by shaking or nodding her head, or in monosyllables. Then Thenjiwe slips in a story about herself, one which makes her sound very stupid. She laughs at herself and is relieved when she sees a smile cross Nosisa's face.

Two days later, Thenji again sets a task for pairs. After a slow beginning, Nosisa warms to the task, an exciting game in which the partners have to find the differences between two similar pictures while each can only see his or her own picture, not the partner's. The game is part of a second-language lesson, and the learners have to use the second language to ask each other which features might be different. By the end, Nosisa is not only using full sentences, but Thenji is amazed to find that the child is able to use the second language quite well.

Progress is slow but definite, and the fourth time Thenji sets a paired activity, she discreetly gets a child whom she has chosen carefully – though she makes it look as though it's a casual choice – to be Nosisa's partner. Again Thenji is relieved when the pairing works.

Before many days have passed, Thenji sees Nosisa playing happily and chatting with two girls in a corner of the school grounds during break. At the end of a month, Thenji receives a visit from Nosisa's mother, who is very grateful for the difference in her daughter's behaviour – it seems that at home too, Nosisa has become much more relaxed and communicative than anyone can remember her being. It is a triumph Thenji will never forget.

However, she finds that she has another problem on her hands. The other children in the class have been quick to observe the amount of time and attention Thenji has devoted to Nosisa, even though she has tried to give everyone some attention. She finds that the attention-seekers in the class are playing up more aggressively than ever, and overhears one child saying that Nosisa is the teacher's pet. Armed with this knowledge, she now has to work out a way to restore her relationship and authority with the rest of the class, while hopefully steering them towards some valuable moral learnings as well ...

Should Thenjiwe have suspended her careful work with Nosisa when she became aware of the jealousy building up in the other children? Not many would say 'Yes', but exactly how to deal with the complexity of this situation is something that no textbook on teaching methods would be likely to tell Thenjiwe.

Teaching is clearly not simply a matter of applying methodologies as techniques; it requires us to understand the complex effects of our own particular practice on learners. This is especially true in situations where it is not a matter of choosing between right and wrong approaches, so much as steering a way among several approaches, which may *all* be right up to a point. Unquestionably, when the stakes are high, such small decisions are the stuff of professional choice – and the challenge of professional teaching.

The need to make decisions in situations of indeterminacy and uncertainty is widely recognized as an essential aspect of professional practice. What has been called the professional's 'strategic knowledge' comes into play when a practitioner confronts particular situations or problems where principles collide and no simple solution is possible, in which each of the alternative choices appears *equally* principled (Shulman in Pollard and Bourne, 1994: 87). Strategic professional knowledge is what Thenji uses when she cannot discover the source of Nosisa's problem but wants to do something to help her anyway. And we can be sure she will be using it when she tries to win the rest of the class back without making Nosisa feel uncomfortable.

“

*Theory and practice  
turn out to be two sides  
of the same coin, and  
professional teachers  
combine the two  
constantly.*

”

We have now come full circle. We saw a group of teachers confronting a problem. Armed only with contradictory theories, their experience and their enthusiasm, they worked together to combine practice and reflection. We asked questions about their reflective practice to help you understand thoroughly (and theoretically) what they were doing. And this is not for the sake of passing an exam in theory, but to make theory a very practical tool for use in understanding and assessing *your own practice*. Theory and practice turn out to be two sides of the same coin, and professional teachers combine the two constantly.

## Teaching as a project

One area where a purely technical approach lets teachers down badly is the area of self-motivation and attitude. In Section Two, we argued that for many teachers, teaching is more than just a job, and that regarding it as a vocation is more likely to lead a teacher to see difficulties as challenges.

An important aspect of teaching-as-a vocation is, as we saw, that teachers need to see themselves as able to make a difference, whether by opening up the riches of some subject, by supporting learners in their growth and development, or by having some impact on the society of tomorrow. One of the wonderful things about teaching as a vocation is how many teachers do manage to make a difference in these and other ways.

As you saw in Section Two when you read the articles by Maja, Jacklin, and Fataar and Patterson, there are powerful forces that work against teachers making any difference in individual learners' lives, or in society, which is why the mere intention or desire to make a difference is not usually enough.

But if people's actions are partly shaped by their image of themselves, as Jacklin argued, then teachers need to see themselves as energetic doers, as agents – they cannot allow themselves to become passive **conduits** for an education system, or to wait for the Education Department to intervene and solve all the problems.

Let's see how the teachers at Artis Secondary and Mountain View Primary are measuring up to this idea.

A **conduit** is a pipe or channel used to carry something from one place to another.

### A polite takeover

*Prem, our secretary, announces, 'There are a number of people at reception who say they're from the Being a Teacher Teachers' Collective. I asked them if they had an appointment, and they said they didn't, but they were quite insistent on seeing one of the writers now.'*

*'Okay, show them in,' I say.*

*A few moments later, I look up from my desk to see three women and two men being shown in by Prem. I introduce myself and they do too; they are Shahieda, Lerato, Fana, Gillian and Peter Adonis. A little shocked, I ask Prem to bring us tea. When we are all seated, the group loses no time in telling me why they've come.*

*Shahieda is the first to speak: 'It's like this. You and your fellow-writers brought us into this learning guide, presumably to prevent it from becoming too abstract ...'*

*'That's right,' I respond. 'It would have been wrong to write a module on "Being a Teacher" without introducing teachers into the text to have their say about the world of teaching as they see it.'*

*'That's exactly our point,' Peter says. 'Shahieda showed us an article about teaching as a vocation, in which the writer, Dwayne Huebner, wrote about the importance of teachers' stories, and we realized that we've sat by for five sections while you told our stories ...'*

*'Including what you've just said about teachers needing to see themselves as able to make a difference,' interrupts Gillian.*

*Fana takes their argument further: 'And I remember reading somewhere that true empowerment is not giving power or freedom or skills or knowledge to others. It's more a case of their "taking" power, acquiring freedom and knowledge for themselves ...'*

*'So you're telling me that you've come far enough along the road of*



Throughout the rest of this section, your learning text will be largely in the form of a dialogue – something that you will have become used to by now. This is a form used in some of the oldest teaching texts we have – the best known are probably Plato's dialogues, which feature the (real-life) philosopher Socrates engaged in discussion with various citizens of Athens in the fourth century BC.

You will need to look carefully for ideas about professionalism in the words of the various characters and to take note of these.

*empowerment to take over the text of this learning guide?’ I say.*

*‘Yes, but we’d be happy to include you in our discussion,’ says Lerato.*

*‘And if I don’t agree?’ I ask.*

*‘Well, after this, try convincing the readers about teachers as “agents” and “energetic doers” without us,’ replies Peter.*

*‘I’m glad to hear you say that,’ I say as Prem brings in the tea, ‘because if a teacher wants to make a difference as an agent, the energy and passion he or she needs don’t just arise “out of the blue”, especially if they are not part of the individual teacher’s personality. They need to be sustained by a strong sense of purpose. And this points to the need for teachers to have worthwhile goals or sets of goals towards which they can strive.’*

*‘That sounds noble,’ says Gillian. ‘You sound a bit like somebody making a speech at the diploma ceremony at our college.’*

*‘Perhaps I do,’ I explain, ‘but I’m not trying to sound “noble”. What I am saying is really very practical. It is surprising how many teachers, by the time they have been through two, three or even four years of pre-service training, have only very vague educational goals, and few strategies for achieving them. This makes it very difficult for them to meet the kind of challenges we have been considering in this module.’*

*‘Just a minute,’ says Lerato. ‘Are you implying that if a teacher isn’t striving for a definite educational goal, or set of goals, he or she is not going to make a difference through his or her teaching – say, through simply being a reasonably good teacher?’*

*‘Well,’ I reply, ‘from what we’ve seen in some schools, just turning up for all your lessons, preparing for all your lessons (trying to think from the learners’ point of view when doing so) and assessing learners’ work promptly would make a very big difference!’*

*‘And making sure, if you’re the principal, that the school timetable is drawn up at the end of the year so that weeks aren’t wasted at the beginning of the next year, when learners are most receptive!’ chips in Fana.*

*‘But,’ I add, ‘remember that in a school that is really struggling, even pretty basic changes like these may require a big effort from the teacher or principal, and hence the need for a goal or vision.’*

## ACTIVITY 42: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

**If you are working through this module with fellow students, answer the following questions on your own first. When everyone has answered them, compare your answers and try to reach an agreement.**

- 1** The question that Lerato asks in the dialogue above has probably not been answered as fully as she would like. Are goals really necessary, or are things like mission statements just fashionable these days? Isn’t hard work enough? How would you answer her question?
- 2** Turn back to the reading on effective schools by Christie and Potterton (Reading 10 on page 64 in your Reader), and quickly remind yourself of what they say in the section headed ‘Sense of responsibility’. What do you think these researchers mean when they write that acting, rather than reacting, is itself an impetus towards resilience?
- 3** Now watch the parts of the videotape indicated in the margin. You will see a teacher injecting new life into her school by combining traditional song and dance with her teaching. You will also see a teacher conducting community classes after hours in addition to her school teaching. And you will see a teacher organizing learning groups among her peers, helping them to further their qualifications. What particular educational goals would you say each of these three teachers might be working towards?

If you debated these questions in a group, we hope you had an interesting discussion. This is what happened in discussion with Peter's group:

*'Well, there's no mention of goals in the Christie and Potterton reading,' says Fana.*

*'That's true,' I reply. 'But in the next section of their research report (not in the reading), which deals with leadership in the schools they found to be "resilient", they note that, no matter how different the management styles and abilities of the principals they encountered, "all the principals could articulate a vision for their schools". Remember that these schools were selected for the study after a survey found that they were all flourishing when the schools around them were in crisis. What about Christie and Potterton's suggestion that acting rather than reacting helps make a school resilient?'*

*'I think the way they use the word "reacting" here means that your actions are a response to things that happen as a result of forces beyond your control,' says Shahieda.*

*'Yes, and "acting" here means taking the initiative, setting processes in motion yourself, rather than responding to things that have already happened,' adds Peter.*

*'And the "impetus towards resilience" part?' I ask.*

*'That means,' replies Peter, 'that even if you don't succeed completely when you strive to do something, you'll at least feel good that you set things in motion. It's a bit like "taking the game to the opposition" in some ball sports, rather than just playing a defensive game. Even small amounts of self-esteem can accumulate to build up your confidence.'*

*'I like what you said about "taking the game to the opposition",' said Gillian. 'There's a strong risk that your move may not be successful, but you can't play a game, let alone win one, without taking risks.'*

*'And taking risks, and succeeding sometimes, becomes a bit like a habit,' says Shahieda, getting warmed up. 'Just as Christie and Potterton say that being passive can easily lead to more passivity, a fatalistic attitude – just going through the motions.'*

*'So vision, goals and a sense of purpose are necessary for "making a difference",' says Lerato. 'But where do I get these from if I'm a teacher who hasn't got them to start with? And by the way, what do we mean by "making a difference"?''*

*'Yes, and I've just thought of something else: aren't we being a little naïve here? What about all those structured constraints and inequalities that Heather Jacklin described in Reading 3?' asked Fana.*

*'Whoa, that's three questions we need to answer,' I say. 'But you're right to raise them, because I have a feeling that the answers to all of them are closely related.'*

To **articulate** an idea is to put it into words.

**Fatalistic** people accept whatever happens to them because they believe that events are decided by fate or by forces beyond their control.

Goals and a sense of purpose or vision are necessary for 'making a difference', as Lerato realizes. The questions that she and Fana raise are important for our study of 'extended professionalism', and will occupy us for the remainder of this section:

- How does one acquire an educational goal?
- What does it mean to 'make a difference'? How can an individual teacher contribute to educational transformation?
- How can teachers 'make a difference' when many obstacles and social inequalities are embedded in the very language we use to think, and in the organization and practice of education?

If social structures *did* have **determinist** powers, this would mean that our actions and thinking would be shaped by the underlying patterns and values that are dominant in society.

## Taking constraints seriously

*'Maybe we should start with your point about constraints and inequalities, Fana,' I suggest. 'Christie and Potterton also ask this question, because they point out that social patterns or structures should not be thought of as having determinist powers. The whole force of their argument is that "some schools at least [are] able to retain or develop the power to act for themselves, in small as well as big ways"'*

*'Okay,' said Fana, 'but those schools are exceptions that really just prove the rule. The rule is that schools in South Africa are very unequal, and that in heavily disadvantaged schools, changes are going to be pretty small, and won't affect the majority of learners.'*

*'Small they may be, but it doesn't follow as a logical necessity that such changes are doomed to have no effect on the majority,' I argue. 'Think of how the world's major religions started – most of them with a single figure and a few followers. Even when the Education Department wants to introduce something new into the curriculum, if it is sensible it chooses a small number of pilot schools where it hopes the innovation may succeed.'*

*'Maybe,' Fana acknowledges, 'but a sense of vision would have come easily to the followers of a Buddha, Christ or Mohammed. But the influences that many teachers experience today leave them feeling that they have little scope for making choices that will "make a difference"'*

*'Look at it this way,' I try. 'Teachers aren't robots, programmed to act in just one way. Even when schools lack resources or when an authoritarian principal makes it difficult to make any changes – teachers still have options. There is a range of choices that includes:*

- *giving up in the face of difficulties, and taking on whatever identity is forced on one by authorities or circumstances;*
- *resisting a fatalistic attitude, and gradually winning space to act in ways that are not in conflict with one's values; or sometimes even*
- *choosing to work elsewhere if there seems to be no chance of resisting.'*

## From constraints to goals

*'Earlier you implied that a lack of teaching goals and a vague understanding of what "making a difference" means was related to the notion of constraints. What did you mean?' asks Gillian.*

*'I mean that we are surrounded by challenges in teaching: the demands of a new curriculum; the inequality of school provision; the lack of "a culture of learning" in some schools and so on. But most of these constraints in fact provide us with ready-made goals to strive for – what Christie and Potterton call "a move from passivity and victimhood to active agency".'*

*For every teacher there is the goal of mastering outcomes-based education, and using it to devise more exciting and professionally accountable forms of teaching and learning. For teachers who have larger classes than they are used to, there is the goal of providing a stimulating and democratic yet orderly learning environment.*

*There are goals implicit in the constraints of inadequate provision and the slack attitudes that are the legacy of apartheid in many schools. There are goals in the attitudes of racism and sexism that permeate our society and manifest themselves in our classrooms. There are goals of teaching learners to think critically, to question the values of consumer culture. And there are goals like simply training oneself to listen more attentively to what learners are trying to say in class instead of lapsing*

into teacher-talk.

To achieve successes in any of these goals would be to make a significant difference, in one's professional practice, in the lives of the learners, and in the impact they will make in society. Pursuing any one of these goals involves a struggle with constraints from our past. But it's because these constraints are **not** totally determining, that teaching is a vocation and a profession.'

**ACTIVITY 43: GOALS FROM CONSTRAINTS**

Divide a page in your workbook into two columns, and head the left-hand one 'Constraints', and the other one 'Goals'. Now list three or four constraints such as the ones we have discussed above (or any others you might have on your mind) on the left. Next to each, in the right-hand column, try to formulate an appropriate goal (or goals) towards which a concerned teacher might strive. The first item in your list may look something like this, for example:



You will need about 20 minutes for this activity..

Constraints	Goals
1. Twice a week my Grade 12 English class is timetabled for 12.30. This means that I see most of my class only three times a week (if there are no disruptions) and their final exams are approaching!	1. My goals are: a) to ensure that my 12.30 lessons are incredibly interesting, and involve as much learner participation and discovery as possible; b) to structure the classwork so that learners cannot make progress on the other days unless they are present on the 12.30 days; and c) to work towards the learners consciously taking on the responsibility for their own learning and success.
2.	2.

'Now we're getting somewhere,' says Lerato, 'but there's something I've been wanting to ask ever since you brought up the Christie and Potterton reading. Towards the end of their article they link a lack of agency on the part of many schools to apartheid and apartheid education. That set me thinking: does "agency" – making a difference – always mean fighting an enemy? If it does, then who are the enemies? Under apartheid, that question was easier to answer.'

**Does agency always involve a struggle?**

'Well,' I say, 'under the apartheid government, some teachers clearly saw "agency" as a struggle against apartheid and its effects – in education, daily life and the political sphere. For other teachers, who didn't see themselves as part of the "struggle business", it probably meant something like doing their jobs as well as they could, even if this meant becoming a tool of apartheid education.'

'I rather think that being an "agent" unavoidably involves a teacher in some sort of opposition or struggle, often with impersonal forces like bureaucracy or a lack of financial resources – which usually turn out to be human in origin, even if it's inappropriate to call those responsible "the enemy", I add.

'Someone has written about this. I'll try and find the article I'm thinking of,' says Shahieda.





You will need about 45 minutes for the reading and about 10 minutes to answer the question.

#### ACTIVITY 44: THE VOCATION OF TEACHING REVISITED

Shahieda is referring to 'The vocation of teaching' (Reading 20 on page 138 of the Reader) by American educationist Dwayne Huebner, which touches on many of the key points we have made in different parts of this module. Read the extract from this essay and then answer the following question.

**Huebner discusses the struggle of teachers to maintain the life-enhancing qualities of traditional knowledge which they teach to young learners. From your reading of the essay, what would you say are the 'enemies' in this struggle?**

*Gillian finds the key sentences in the Huebner extract and reads them aloud:*

We become bored and tired, dull and unresponsive when we are not part of the struggle to maintain the life-enhancing qualities of [the] traditions [we teach]. If teaching becomes routinized and we do not participate in the ongoing struggle to maintain these sources of beauty, truth and freedom, then we no longer constructively take part in the unfolding and making of human history ... The vocation of teaching does not permit fixed meanings or values. If a teacher becomes fixed and stereotypical, the struggle for meaning and living has ended. In all probability, someone else is then "using" the teacher to shape and control the living of others.



If a teacher gets caught in dull routines, the struggle for meaning and purpose is over.

*'That last sentence says a lot,' says Peter. 'If we're content to stay as we are and not risk change, or if we try to remain neutral, we'll just end up making way for the most powerful forces and prejudices in society to prevail.'*



*'Yes, so the teacher has to have a sense of purpose,' I agree. 'If we allow what we teach to become routine, or if we get used to accepting the unacceptable, we become passive "accomplices" – of everything from consumer culture to racism. Listen to what Jean McNiff says about the reflective teacher (1988: 50):'*

Being committed suggests a thinking awareness. If I am committed, then I am acutely aware and I question. If I do not question, I accept the *status quo*, and I go along with established [...] attitudes without interfering. I am a servant of the status quo, and I service it through my passivity.

[But the reflective teacher is] tenacious, and above all curious. He (sic) will not be satisfied with a given system if he sees elements of the system as unsatisfactory. He will seek to change it. In so doing, he refuses to be a servant, but becomes an acting agent. He rises above the role of skilled technician and becomes an educator. And *this* qualifies him to [...] make autonomous and independent judgements within his own professional sphere.

*Peter takes the argument further: 'It seems to me that the challenge of being a professional teacher may not involve an external human "enemy", but "making a difference" must involve the teacher in change, and therefore a teacher's efforts to meet such a challenge will almost inevitably involve obstacles. If this doesn't happen, the teacher is probably avoiding the crucial issues.'*

*'That may sound harsh,' I say, 'but I think you are right. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who fought the Nazis as a member of the French underground during World War II, wrote that one can achieve freedom only in a resistant world. Listen carefully to what Maxine Greene has to say about this (Greene in Bolin and Falk, 1987: 185):'*

For [Sartre] the human being is characterized by a need to go *beyond* a situation – and by what that person succeeds in making of (himself or herself). He knew as well as anyone that we are indeed determined, conditioned in a multiplicity of ways, and that what determines and conditions [us] must in some way be *transcended* if we are to achieve ourselves and be able to act on our freedom. The determinate, the given, the objectness of the world are what stand in our way and require resistance, if we ourselves are not to be made into *acquiescent* beings, mere things.

One way of resisting is by means of a *project*, identifying something we want to bring into being; the practice we undertake in order to achieve it involves a flight and a leap ahead, a refusal and a realization. This means a recognition that there is some lack or deficiency that must be identified and refused, a lack that becomes visible only when we imagine what is possible. But it must be a lack that is subjectively experienced as a personal deprivation or loss, and that can then be transformed into an objective problem [one that can be dealt with].

In these times, teachers are likely to create their teaching as a project only if they can first reject the apparent *inexorability* of the system.

*'Greene goes on to say that rejecting the seeming "unchangeability" of things we encounter in schools means questioning the assumptions people share so readily, especially the assumption that nothing can be done to change the situation. It means coming to a critical understanding of how these 'realities' originate with human beings and tend to*

The **status quo** is the existing state of affairs.

To **transcend** something is to rise above it.

**Acquiescent** simply means 'ready to agree', but here Greene uses it to mean 'compliant, puppet-like, not having the courage to match our beliefs'.

If something is **inexorable**, it cannot be prevented.

serve particular interests (as we saw in Section 5.4). And it means refusing the “givenness” of things and seeing things as if they could be otherwise. If the taken-for-granted “school culture” in a particular school stifles the creative approaches of teachers or learners, it needs to be questioned. If the disorder that prevails at some schools has come to be accepted as “the way things are”, this needs to be questioned.’

We now have a clearer understanding of what is required to ‘make a difference’ in our schools. It is likely to pit us against obstacles opposed to change. But resisting such forces ‘as a project’ makes us participants in the building of history. For McNiff, the professional educator is not just a skilled technician, but someone curious and tenacious, someone dissatisfied to see elements of the system that are unacceptable, someone bent on making a difference. For Greene, this requires a vision of things as they *could* be. As we will see below, turning teaching into a ‘project’ also builds us up as persons.

“  
The self is not  
something ready-  
made, but something  
in continuous  
formation through  
choice of action.  
”

Greene is quoting from Dewey,  
1966: 408.

## Achieving ourselves

‘These philosophers have some challenging things to say,’ broke in Lerato, ‘and it’s all the more interesting if they’ve done things like Sartre did during the war. What else do you know about Maxine Greene?’

‘Maxine Greene is an American philosopher of education who’s had a wide influence over the past couple of decades,’ I answer. ‘Her ideas about agency, freedom and teaching as a “project” are central to our debate.’

‘I’d like to hear more about her idea of teaching as a project, but some of what she says is a bit difficult to understand. What do you think she means by “achieving ourselves”?’ asks Fana.

‘I think I can help you with that. It raises an important issue. Elsewhere in her article, Greene quotes another American philosopher, John Dewey: “The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action.” Greene explains this as follows: “To speak of action is to have the taking of initiatives in mind; it is to think in terms of futuring, of reaching forward toward what is not yet.” Dewey’s notion of the self is formed in constant interaction with others (very much like Ubuntu). It’s in constant formation. In fact, human beings can seldom say, “I am this, or that”, but should rather say, “I am becoming this or that”.’

‘So by “achieving ourselves”, Greene means just that – we don’t just happen; we actually “construct” ourselves as we go?’ says Lerato.

‘That’s right. But as Dewey implies, the way to develop the self as an “agent” is through “choice of action”, not through passively accepting everything just as it is. If you think about it, “choice” and “action” are key ideas underlying much of our discussion in this module, from the reasons that people choose to become teachers, to the reasons they choose to become “part of the solution”.’

‘It’s interesting how all these ideas are starting to connect up,’ says Fana. ‘Dewey seems to imply that “forming ourselves continuously through choice of action” is very open-ended, quite a risky business. Remember what Dwayne Huebner says about risk?’

## ACTIVITY 45: TAKING RISKS: KNOWING THINGS CAN GO WRONG

**The second half of the Huebner article (Reading 20 on page 141 of the Reader) deals not only with teaching and learning as journeys and as stories in the making, but also with the ‘vulnerability’ and risk attached to these journeys. You may need to refer to the reading again, but spend five minutes just thinking about the role of *risk* in teaching. Try jotting your ideas down in your workbook, and see what ideas and connections the idea of risk leads you to.**



You should spend about 15 minutes on this activity.

## Risk in teaching

A lot of our efforts in modern life are geared towards reducing risk. Security measures, and the standard procedures, rules, and regulations in bureaucratic organizations – all of these are risk-avoidance strategies. Not surprisingly, we find risk-avoidance in teaching, where it may take on many different appearances. For instance, the technical approach to teaching (see pages 45 to 47) is a risk-avoidance strategy.

Fortunately, there is a side of human beings that *needs* to take risks – in many of today’s sports, in business, and so on. It’s almost as if we have to test ourselves. Putting yourself ‘at risk’ by exposing what happens in your classroom to questioning and reflection (your own and others’), often leads to improvement in your teaching.

When you reflected on risk, you probably thought about your own teaching situation. The situations in which students teach do vary, but in South Africa today, there is a need to make choices that involve risk and an opportunity, to accept risk as one of the challenges that make up our vocation.

*‘I’m still a bit mystified,’ says Gillian. ‘Nothing in our training as teachers supported risk-taking; in fact, one of the unspoken principles underlying almost everything we learnt about teaching was, “Don’t take risks”. We were warned about the teacher being “in loco parentis”, and all that implied. We quickly learnt, at least in some schools, that to take risks in how one dressed was to court disaster. And in the time of the old “panel inspections”, taking risks in one’s teaching methods was usually frowned on. Even if it wasn’t, it seemed better to “play it safe” if one knew that the inspector or subject adviser was due for a visit. But I notice you don’t even add a word like “cautious” or “calculated” before you speak of risks, so you must be serious about this idea.’*

*‘Risk-taking is a serious business,’ I reply. ‘I did think about using a word like “cautious” or “informed” before “risks”. But it seemed that, in order to make the teaching point I wanted, I had to risk appearing incautious, or even mistaken. I don’t mean that one should be reckless – taking risks for the sake of taking risks. That would be unprofessional, because we are accountable as professionals for the decisions we make, and “reckless” means “taking no heed” or “not caring about consequences” – the very opposite of being a professional.’*

*‘So in leaving out words like “cautious”, you were in fact taking a calculated risk yourself?’ asks Peter.*

*‘Exactly, it was just a small example of the kind of risk-taking we’re talking about. But let’s get back to the opportunities and needs for risk in South Africa. Rather than get into a generalized discussion about this, I’ll take two examples from the same copy of a teacher’s newspaper that make the point better. One is from a review of a book about outcomes-based teaching (The Teacher, March 1998: 16):*

“  
The insecurity of teaching is what makes teaching a vocation. We cannot take on a calling without risk. We cannot respond to the calls of the young, or to tradition unless we accept our vulnerability and fallibility.

”

This sudden autonomy is a cause of anxiety about OBE. For so many years teachers have been told what to do. Now they are allowed to

“  
 More venturesome  
 teachers are finding  
 that good, vital  
 teaching involves not  
 just coping with  
 uncertainty and the  
 unexpected, but  
 making the  
 unexpected happen.”

use independent judgement and do not know where to start.

*'I think this expresses quite vividly the "space" created by OBE and the new curriculum, which set up desired outcomes, and suggest, but do not prescribe how the teacher should help learners to achieve those outcomes. This can produce the anxiety the bookreviewer mentions. But teachers are beginning to experiment, to make active choices. It's often a slow process, because, as the writer of this review says, we've been told what to do for so long that we're not used to this amount of choosing.*

*However, the more venturesome teachers are finding that good, vital teaching involves not just coping with uncertainty and the unexpected, but making the unexpected happen – taking risks. To make this point even more vividly, let's read a story in "The Teacher", about a school and a principal on the Cape Flats, who, in order to cope with a severe gangster problem, have "taken the game to the opposition".*

## Going places despite the odds

It is located in the heart of one of the most brutal battle zones of the Cape Flats. Yet Excelsior High School in Belhar has somehow managed to remain an island of calm in the sea of gangster violence engulfing the Cape Flats. It has also succeeded in setting academic and sporting examples for the rest of the province. And this has been an inside job, often under appalling circumstances, with little more than a team of committed teachers, and without reliance on government largesse. It wasn't always like this. During the early 1990s Excelsior was virtually under siege from gangs who appropriated the school grounds, threatening and assaulting teachers who questioned their presence. So terrified were staff that they refused to remain at school after 2 p.m. and often had to be escorted out of the premises by armed security officers. But a few years ago, principal Graham Jenneker decided to confront the gang leaders on their own turf, if not terms.

'I told them a few truths and let them know that Excelsior was not a gang hang-out but a place of activity and a haven. I spoke to them as people and let them know that if

they wanted to see someone at the school, they should inform me. And maybe they'd get a cup of tea in the process. They gave me their word.'

But although the gangs have kept it, Jenneker knew that Excelsior had to be mobilized from within. Teachers willingly patrolled the grounds, checking for drugs in co-operation with student leaders and often doubling up as counselors for problem pupils. Jenneker also held meetings with the Belhar community to get them involved in the school activities. The problems in education in the Cape Flats go beyond gangsterism. It is essential to instil in our pupils a sense of achievement in the face of often dismal circumstances and to provide them with positive role models. We have many ex-pupils who are now doctors and lawyers. We tell our pupils: 'You can also be'. Excelsior also focuses on extramural outlets, nurturing sporting and communication skills. Resources that white schools might take for granted, like computer facilities, are some of the luxuries Excelsior can boast due to donations from parents, and fund-raising initiatives and small business incentives.

Excelsior is also renowned as

one of the top sporting schools in the Cape Flats and also achieved an 87% matric pass rate in 1997. In addition, it provides one of the more successful examples of racial integration in an area characterized by racial tension. Presently, 450 children from Khayelitsha are bussed into Excelsior on a daily basis. We were expecting fireworks, but there has been little racial conflict and the students are steadily learning about cultural integration. The inter-racial experiment might soon be stopped, however. The government's cutbacks in public service will mean the curtailing of public transport expenditure. And Jenneker also admits that if the gangs so desired, they could create chaos in the classrooms. Excelsior falls into the turf of the Sexy Boys, one of the less belligerent gangs, which specializes in soft core activities like protection money for taxis and mandrax merchandising. Young siblings of the Sexy Boys attend Excelsior High. It is, therefore, protected turf. But that didn't prevent the gang-related murder of two Excelsior pupils in December.

*The Teacher, March 1998, p. 8*

*'Gangsterism is a serious threat to many of our schools, but the problems in schools demand initiatives that are equally bold. They call for people like the teachers at Excelsior, who are well aware of the constraints, the dangers of things going wrong, the probability of negative criticism, but who nevertheless make the unexpected happen,' says Fana.*

*'I want to emphasize something that isn't mentioned in that report, says Gillian. 'It's the effect that the teachers' efforts must have on the learners. It's understandable that teachers are intimidated by armed gangsters, but there are many other reasons that have prompted teachers to "give up" and adopt some form of escape mechanism in order to cope. What example does that provide for their learners? Whereas the example of teachers who have taken a leap beyond their difficulties may in the end be of greater value than good exam results and sporting achievements.'*

*'Maxine Greene would certainly agree with you,' I say. 'This is a good example of teachers experiencing some rather frightening constraints, but combining to express their freedom to create a safe and effective environment for their learners. Greene has said that teachers cannot expect to stir others to define themselves as persons, as subjects in the world, if they themselves are content to be defined by others.'*



What do you think Maxine Greene means by learners being stirred to 'define themselves', and teachers being content to 'be defined' by others?

# 7.4

## Conclusion

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We have come to the end of this exploration of what teachers require if they are to teach in South Africa today, especially if they want to gain the sense of satisfaction that comes from performing a worthy task well.

In each step of this exploration, we have asked you to examine:

- what choices you have as a teacher;
- why some of those choices make more sense than others; and
- what practical challenges these choices present.

The first step in Section Two was to examine the reasons why people choose teaching as a career. We saw that intrinsic or extrinsic rewards that motivate teachers are likely to affect their whole approach to teaching, and to the challenges that they will face in South African schools. In particular, we argued that the intrinsic rewards associated with a 'calling' or vocation are likely to carry teachers further 'when the going gets tough'. We also examined the various contexts in which we teach today, and suggested that each of these contexts provides a challenge for you to make a difference and become part of the solution rather than adopt a victim position.

The next step in Section Three was to ask whether the practice of professionalism in teaching could help teachers to become part of the solution. We argued that there are good reasons for teachers collectively to pursue some of the aims of professionalization such as building professional accountability and self-regulation. But we also argued that teachers (collectively and as individuals) should prioritize professional development ahead of the status-building aspects of professionalization in the interests of the learners and learning. We examined various forms of accountability, and found that formal measures such as a professional code of conduct, minimum qualification and appraisal need to be accompanied by responsibility, a more internal and individual commitment to the interests of learners.

In Sections Four to Six we examined what professionalism demands of the teacher in the roles of managing the learning environment, teaching knowledge and skills, and influencing the learners' values.

Section Four we explored the question of how teachers can regain, or establish, their professional authority in the learning environment. But we argued that this authority has to be earned, not assumed as a traditional source of power. We explored the 'in authority' role of teachers with respect to managing the learning environment in a democratic way, and saw that discipline and control are indeed compatible with democracy.

In Section Five, we turned our attention to the other key source of a teacher's professional authority: the role of the teacher as 'an authority'. We saw that a number of factors had contributed to teachers' confusion about their role as 'knowledge-workers'. We re-examined the human need for teaching, and the specialized nature of teachers' work and school knowledge. We then identified three key 'knowledge-worker' sub-roles: imparter of knowledge, facilitator of active learning and learner self-development, and developer of skills. Pointing out the limitations of each of these roles, we showed that teachers need to integrate all three into a wide repertoire of teaching strategies and to draw from these according to the circumstances.

In the process we demonstrated that human knowing is provisional, situated, and linked closely to questions of power, and we identified the implications of these characteristics for teaching. We also argued that the three forms of knowing (knowing that, knowing how, and knowing to), like the three roles of teachers as knowledge-workers, need to be integrated in the teaching process. Finally, we explored a fourth role for teachers: mediators of learning, which to a large extent combines and integrates the strengths of the other three roles.

Section Six attempted to provide some 'tools' with which to meet the moral and value-related challenges in today's schools. We explored what we might mean by the terms 'values' and 'moral values' and we demonstrated that the arguments of subjectivism and cultural relativism can be misleading. We also explored the argument that moral values have an absolute claim on us, and the contrasting argument that in making moral decisions, we should weigh up the consequences. We realized that these positions can in practice complement rather than contradict each other. We concluded that moral values indeed have a place in teaching, and provided guidelines for identifying sound values for the learning environment.

Finally, in Section Seven we explored how you can *extend* your professionalism by becoming a reflective practitioner, by seeing yourself as a goal-orientated agent, and by adopting an experimental approach in which you take risks in the interests of improved teaching and learning.

Throughout the module, the focus has been on teachers achieving the competence needed to 'make a difference' to education in South Africa. We have presented the choices and challenges teachers face and we have identified opportunities and strategies for meeting these challenges. We hope you have enjoyed the process, and that it will help you to teach with added confidence and vigour.

## Key learning points

1. Various writers have distinguished between what might be called 'basic professionalism' and 'extended professionalism' in teaching. We focus on three of the characteristics associated with extended professionalism:
  - engaging in self-reflection;
  - experimenting and risk-taking; and
  - identifying oneself as an agent.
2. Learning, growing and being enriched by our experience (including our mistakes) does not automatically follow on experience. What enables us to learn from experience is our ability to stand back and reflect on that experience.
3. The routine nature of much of our teaching experience tends to prevent us from learning from experience. We easily become habituated to routine and risk becoming dull.
4. By contrast, reflective action involves standing back from the flow of experience, and weighing up beliefs and taken-for-granted knowledge in the light of practice.
5. Classroom practitioner research means:
  - collaborating with colleagues who share some of your goals in professional development;
  - planning together, and trying to foresee likely problems;
  - enacting these plans in class, keeping notes of any observed changes in your own and the pupils' responses, of any problems or successes;
  - getting together regularly to discuss frankly and reflect on what has been happening in class;
  - attempting to modify your approach based on these observations and discussions; and
  - taking your professionalism into your own hands: thinking critically about your own practice as a matter of choice and not waiting for others to evaluate you.
6. An important aspect of teaching as a vocation is that teachers need to see themselves as agents – as able to make a difference, either by opening up the riches of some subject to a new generation of learners and supporting them in their growth and development, or by having some impact on the society of the future.
7. Social patterns or structures should therefore not be thought of as being finally determining. Some schools and teachers, even in adverse circum-

- stances, manage to develop a power to find options.
8. In the field of teaching in a democratic South Africa, this effort perhaps requires less of a battle against an enemy than a concerted, energetic and passionate effort to transform our schooling into a system that will deliver a vibrant culture of teaching and learning.
  9. This effort at transformation will need to be sustained by a strong sense of purpose. Many teachers and schools have only vague educational goals, and few strategies for achieving them, yet research has shown the importance of having a clear vision for schools.
  10. There are challenges all around us in the context of our teaching. To achieve successes in any of these goals would be to make a significant difference. Meeting these challenges as an agent is bound to involve a teacher in some sort of opposition. However, if we are not part of such a struggle, we are likely to become servants of the status quo.
  11. One way to be part of this struggle is to make teaching a project – not accept things as they are but imagine how they might be, and in striving to achieve such goals, form ourselves by our choice of action.
  12. Teaching as a project involves being prepared to take risks both by exposing your teaching to questioning and reflection and by making full use of the opportunities presented by the new curriculum for experimentation and new approaches.



## Tutor-marked assignment 5

### **As a teacher, what would you wish to have achieved in three years' time?**

- 1** Your assignment essay should focus mainly on your own professional development and the improvement of your practice as a teacher, or on the improvement of the learning environment in which you teach or plan to teach (classroom, school or other institution). It may be that your personal goals include obtaining a further diploma or degree. If this is the case, include this in your essay, but write about how you would see this contributing to the improvement of your professional practice as a teacher.
- 2** Write sections on:
  - your vision and goals (try to be as specific as possible);
  - constraints and difficulties that you are likely to face in achieving your goals;
  - steps you could take to overcome these (if possible, draw on ideas you have encountered in this or other modules, including systematic reflection on your practice); and
  - whatever is on your side? (what advantages/allies/strengths will you be able to call on to help you overcome difficulties in achieving your goals?)

## Further reading

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### Being a teacher in South Africa

Bolin, F. and Falk, J. 1987. *Teacher Renewal: Professional Issues, Personal Choices*. New York: Teachers College Press.

An excellent and unusual collection of essays and articles to get you thinking about teaching as a vocation and profession.

Bullough, R., Knowles, J., and Crow, N. 1991. *Emerging as a Teacher*. London: Routledge.

For teachers entering the profession, this book, based on six actual case studies of newly-qualified teachers, is one of the best introductions to the experience of the first years on the job.

Kohl, H. 1967. *36 Children*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Education.

The story of how Kohl gained the confidence of a class of unteachable 12-year-olds in New York's Harlem ghetto, and in the process gained a new sense of himself as a teacher and as a person.

Kohl, H. 1986. *On Becoming a Teacher*. London: Methuen.

An inspiring and easy-to-read account of Kohl's own teaching experiences and wisdom

Lortie, D. 1975. *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

This classic was probably the first serious study of teaching as a career.

### Teaching as a profession

Hoyle, E. and John, P. 1995. *Professional Knowledge and Professional Practice*. London: Cassell.

A useful study of teaching as a profession, constructed around the concepts of professional knowledge, professional autonomy, and professional responsibility.

Reeves, C. 1994. *The Struggle to Teach*. Cape Town: SACHED/Maskew Miller Longman.

An easy-to-read account of the history of teachers' struggles in South Africa, which draws on scores of interviews conducted throughout the country.

Stones, E. 1994. *Quality Teaching: A Sample of Cases*. London: Routledge.

A practical guide to developing professional competence, with case studies of teachers using the approaches advocated in the text. This book also contains some refreshing ideas on professionalism in teaching, although it does refer to the British education system.

On fundamental pedagogics:

Beard, T. and Morrow, W. (eds). 1981. *Problems of Pedagogics: Pedagogics and the Study of Education in South Africa*. Durban; Woburn, Mass: Butterworth.

Enslin, P. 1984. 'The role of fundamental pedagogics in the foundation of education policy in South Africa', in P. Kallaway (ed.) *Apartheid and Education*. Johannesburg: Raven.

Morrow, W. 1989. *Chains of Thought*. Johannesburg: Southern. Chapters 3–6.

## The teacher's authority: sustaining an effective learning environment

Morrow, W. 1989. 'Education for Democratic Participation' in W. Morrow, *Chains of Thought*. Johannesburg: Southern.

A discussion of the two positions, education *for* democracy and education *through* democratic participation, this essay ends by arguing against the notion that the roles of teachers and learners should be equal.

Many books on general teaching methodology include good chapters on how to achieve good classroom organization and order, one being:

Kyriacou, C. 1991. *Essential Teaching Skills*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

In addition, a number of books focus specifically on such issues. One that has stood the test of time is:

Dreikurs, R. and Cassel P. 1990. *Discipline without Tears*. New York: Plume.

## Teachers as knowledge-workers

Gardner, H. 1993. *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*. London: Fontana.

One of the most thought-provoking books of the nineties on teaching and learning.

Janks, H. (Series Editor) 1993. *Critical Language Awareness Series*. Johannesburg: Hodder & Stoughton and University of Witwatersrand Press.

An excellent series of short teachers' books filled with practical ideas, many of which are based on popular media, for teaching critical thinking.

Mercer, N. 1995. *The Guided Construction of Knowledge: Talk Amongst Teachers and Learners*. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.

An easy-to-read introduction to the Vygotskian view of learning.

North, R. 1986. *The Real Cost*. London: Chatto and Windus.

A guide to the damage caused by what has come to be called 'consumer culture', this carefully researched book presents the *real* price that is paid, in terms of the exploitation of human beings, animals, and the environment, to produce the everyday objects we use or consume without thinking (for instance, a packet of coffee, a hamburger, or a pair of jeans.)

Shor, I. 1980. *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

An excellent introduction to the practice of teaching towards critical thinking.

Shor, I. and Freire, P. 1987. *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Recorded discussions between two key figures in the field of educational transformation. Deals frankly with some very fundamental issues in the lives of teachers.

Taylor, N. and Vinjevold, P. (eds). 1999. *Getting Learning Right: Report of the President's Education Initiative Research Project*. Johannesburg: Joint Education Trust.

A wide-ranging research project on the state of teaching and learning in South Africa. The project involved scores of researchers visiting classrooms throughout the country. All teachers should read Chapters 5 to 9.

## Teachers, values and society

Beck, C. 1990. *Better Schools: A Values Perspective*. London: The Falmer Press.

Argues that there is an important place for values in all schooling. Interesting chapters on race, class, gender, religious and ethnic bias in schools.

Jarrett, J. 1991. *The Teaching of Values*. London: Routledge.

Another good general discussion of values education.

Rachels, J. 1995. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

A very readable general introduction to the field of moral values.

Shutte, A. 1995. *Philosophy for Africa*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.

Not very many books on African philosophy are readily available. This book provides a brief, readable account of the key principles of *seriti* and *ubuntu*.

Strike, R. and Soltis, J. 1985. *The Ethics of Teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Another very good introduction to this field, this book makes use of many useful dilemma situations and case studies.

## Making a difference

Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. 1981. *The Action-research Planner*. Victoria: Deakin University Press.

A brief, practical handbook on how to go about researching your own classroom practice.

McNiff, J. 1988. *Action Research: Principles and Practice*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.

An easy-to-read general introduction to the field of reflective classroom practice.

Winter, R. 1989. *Learning from Experience: Principles and Practice in Action Research*. London: The Falmer Press.

Includes an interesting short section on risk in teaching.

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- Lieberman, A. and Miller, L. 1984. *Teachers, Their World and Their Work*. Washington D.C.: The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
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