



Excerpt adapted from Taylor and Runté,
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'Introduction'

In an early episode of the TV series *Deep Space Nine*, the character Keiko is frustrated because, even though her spouse's transfer to this frontier outpost represents a significant promotion for him, there are no openings for her as a highly trained biologist. So she starts a one-room school instead.

As educators, we are gratified when the mass media at least occasionally portray schools and teachers in a positive light. But the implication that anyone with nothing better to do can become an effective teacher is very insulting. Unfortunately, like these Hollywood scriptwriters, the public at large—and even some aspiring teachers—often forget that there is much more to teaching than simply liking children and wanting to teach them.

To the uninformed observer, teaching must appear to be easy: the official workday over by 3:30 or 4:00 p.m., two months of summer vacation; lengthy Christmas and spring breaks, better than average salary. What is routinely overlooked are such realities as the extensive university preparation needed to qualify as a teacher; the nightly grind of lesson planning; the weekends lost to marking and grading; the mountains of "administrivia" generated by an increasingly centralized school bureaucracy; the broadening expectations held by these school authorities as well as members of the public; and the constant challenge of trying to interact with 30 or more individuals, each with unique needs and demands for personal attention. Teachers are on stage longer than the greatest Shakespearian actor and have to cope with more simultaneous demands

on their attention than an air traffic controller at a busy airport. They must be as caring and nurturing as the best of parents and they must have in-depth knowledge of the subject matter they teach.

But teaching requires even more than this. To be effective, teachers must have a thorough understanding of the prescribed curriculum. Equally important, they need a rich repertoire of pedagogical skills to ensure that their teaching is stimulating, vibrant, and effective. They must know developmental psychology to understand not only what students are capable of learning at each phase in their cognitive development, but also what guided learning experiences are needed to help take them to higher levels of performance. They require expertise in evaluation so they can chart their students' progress and provide them with fair and accurate feedback, not to mention monitor their own instructional effectiveness. They need a solid grounding in the history, philosophy, and sociology of education to formulate a sound theory of education that will direct their teaching as well as provide them with the skills to participate effectively in ongoing discussions and debates at the local, provincial, and national levels. *Deep Space Nine* notwithstanding, if she is to be successful in her newly established school, our mythical Star Fleet officer will need the same extensive and specialized preparation that you are receiving.

As you proceed through the Faculty of Education, you will find that your professional semesters devote considerable attention to the practical aspects of teaching. Emphasis on practical matters is intended to develop a repertoire of generic teaching skills that are necessary for student teaching and, indeed, for basic survival during your first few years in the classroom. You will no doubt appreciate modules that emphasize these practical teaching skills, since they are the most clearly and immediately relevant to the upcoming practicum.

Naturally, I am committed to the inclusion of such practical skills in your training and often teach the assessment modules, which I consider a vital component of teacher preparation (even though it is often missing in other programs). But as important as such modules are in providing the nuts and bolts of teaching, they cover only part of the story. Important as craft knowledge is, it cannot by itself provide a solid foundation for successful teaching. If teachers are to become true *educators*, they themselves must become *educated*. To be "educated," as I use the term, involves a great deal more than skill-centred, vocational preparation.

This broader conception of teacher preparation is, after all, the reason why the narrowly focused "normal schools" were supplanted by university-based faculties of education. Teacher preparation has been given over to universities precisely because there is widespread agreement in our society that teachers must have a well-rounded education. And this is not something that can be achieved simply by augmenting pedagogical technique with increased knowledge of subject matter. A sound knowledge of subject matter does not guarantee good teaching. It is a maxim of teaching that good teachers teach children, not subjects. The education of teachers, therefore, must encompass more than the "what" and the "how" of teaching. Fully educated teachers require liberal arts background that help us deepen our understanding of other people, of our inner selves, and of our social as well as physical environment. Consequently, one needs to reflect on the entire schooling process and the wider social context in which it occurs.

One mark of an educated teacher is a commitment to lifelong learning, and that implies a deep and abiding interest in knowing more about a kaleidoscope of subjects. To insist on immediate relevance to the practicum, therefore, would represent a form of intellectual laziness, a lack of willingness to learn skills or delve into complex ideas that offer no immediate or demonstrable payoff. How could anyone whose interests are tightly bound to practicalities even presume to be able to cultivate a passion for learning in young people? To nurture a love of learning, teachers must lead by example. Stimulating English teachers do not confine their interest in literary work to the classroom; often they are themselves writers who contribute to the local newspaper or to professional journals read by other teachers. Effective science teachers do not terminate their active involvement in scientific projects at the end of the day when they lock the school lab; they often hold active membership in organizations such as the local chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society, or they head for the outdoors to put their prototype of the ultimate model airplane through its initial test flight. And reading specialists can be found after school and on weekends in the local library, pouring through the stacks and checking out the new releases. My point here is that, if we want students who find learning exhilarating, we as significant role models must exhibit these very same qualities.

Finally, I do not mean to imply that knowledge of subject matter and instructional skills are unimportant to your preparation as a teacher. But they will not by themselves provide the wherewithal to maintain command over your job in the face of outside interests that seek relentlessly to set the agenda with respect to instructional approaches, curriculum, assessment, and even the more basic organizational arrangements under which you teach and your students learn. Therefore, in addition to developing your expertise with respect to the "what" and "how" of teaching, I believe that teacher education should help you achieve a critical awareness of how the work of teachers is shaped by the organizational setting of the school and, moreover, by the external social, political, and economic forces that impact on the schooling process. While this book of readings will not emphasize the basic aspects of teaching, it will begin the important task of sharpening your awareness and understanding. I leave to others the task of providing specific instructions about how to hold the chalk, how to draft a lesson plan, and how to design and orchestrate the learning experiences that will attain the objectives of that plan.

One major theme I will be emphasizing throughout is the need to be reflective in your approach to teaching. Just as "training" and "education" are far from the same thing, there are important differences between the "teacher as technician" and "teacher as professional." Teacher-technicians may indeed be competent pedagogues who are held in high regard by at least some of their colleagues and school administrators. (I say "some" because the vast majority of contemporary school principals expect a great deal more of their teaching staff than mere technical competence.) They may be considered "good" teachers because they ensure that their students maintain acceptable scores on mandated standardized tests; because they maintain order in their classroom, and because they willingly comply with their "superiors" and never make waves. But such teacher-technicians lack the commitment, understanding, and autonomy that would make them truly professional.

Professional teachers, in contrast, provide stimulating, safe, and well-managed learning environments. They do whatever it takes to help students realize their full potential - which is not measured only in terms of scores on a test. Their classrooms are alive with the sound and

laughter of students learning. They work co-operatively and collaboratively with their teaching colleagues. They demonstrate the capability to lead as well as to follow. They are willing to involve parents in their children's education in ways that are meaningful rather than symbolic. Because they themselves are well informed, they have little difficulty keeping parents abreast of current and emerging trends in education and youth culture. Rather than wait passively to be told what to do, they actively participate in the educational decision-making process, working alongside colleagues, administrators, parents, members of the local board of education, and provincial authorities.

Teacher-technicians are content with applying a technocratic approach to teaching in the pursuit of outcomes that are determined largely by others. They are often hard pressed to explain why they are teaching a particular lesson, other than because, according to the text or curriculum guide, it follows from the previous one. Since their approach to teaching involves heavy reliance on "recipes" and inflexible "how to" formulae, they seldom pause to seriously question either the official curriculum or the curriculum-in-use (e.g., "Why these particular skills?" or "Why this particular knowledge and not some other?"). Nor do they look critically at conventional instructional practices and prevailing, almost taken-for-granted modes of organizing students for instruction. Unwilling or intellectually unprepared to explore the implications of their actions beyond the classroom, they are understandably vulnerable to manipulation by external forces.

True professionals, in contrast, not only know what to do, but also why they are doing it. They have a clear sense of how the lesson they are teaching today takes into account and then extends their students' current understanding of the particular subject matter in question. And they are able to connect this material to other subject matter included in their students' program of study. They have a deep understanding and well thought out convictions about how the schooling process in general relates to the child's overall cognitive, emotional, and moral development. Before taking action, they carefully consider how any decision concerning curricular content, approaches to instruction, or assessment of performance will affect their students' opportunity to learn in school and, by implication, their future opportunities within the wider society.

Because teacher-technicians confine their concerns to the isolated context of the classroom, they are ill-equipped to anticipate, understand, and address issues that constantly encroach on them from the "outside." They often complain, for example, that they cannot understand "where their students are coming from," but they see this as the students' failing rather than their own. Truly professional educators, on the other hand, have a sharp awareness that classrooms do not operate in a social vacuum. Hence, they recognize that it is crucial to examine and understand the larger social context if we are to succeed as educators within the institutional setting of the school. How can we hope to have a positive impact on our students' development if we know little about the forces that influence their lives outside the classroom?

Truly professional educators, therefore, are not content with just getting the subject across to their students. They keep well informed about trends that are shaping society, the schools, and, in particular, their students, and they strive to formulate carefully measured responses to them. While their craft knowledge is as thorough as that of teacher-technicians, professionals reach beyond mere mastery of technique to participate actively in the broader and more fundamental task of goal setting. By steadfastly refusing to lose themselves in the day-to-day minutiae of the

classroom and by gaining sufficient understanding of the social environment in which schools operate, they can identify the real needs and motives of their students. Consequently, they are able to carve out a niche within which real education can occur.

Professional teachers, in other words, have both the disposition and the intellectual ability to reflect on their own teaching practices and on the trends, developments, and issues that are affecting the profession as a whole. This book of readings is intended as a starting point on this formidable but fascinating inquiry.

This introduction was written by Robert Runté, PhD, for Dr. Taylor's textbook for the introductory practicum course at the University of Alberta. Dr. Runté taught courses in the sociology of education and student evaluation in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge for over twenty years, before taking early retirement to become a full-time editor. He is now Senior Editor with Five Rivers Publishing, SFeditor.ca and Essential Edits.

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