



THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A TEACHER

LEARNER OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you should:

- » understand the complexity of theoretical knowledge informing teaching practice
- » know how theory and practice work together in teacher preparation
- » understand that theory incorporates understanding about teaching and learning.

KEY TERMS

development theories

effective practice

learning theories

practicum placement

socio-cultural issues

theoretical knowledge

CRITICAL SIGNPOSTS

1. What makes an effective teacher? If you were able to design a pre-service teacher education program, what would be the core content areas?
2. Why do teachers need theoretical knowledge?
3. Which component of teacher education is more important: theoretical knowledge or practical experience?
4. What are the differences between learning theories and development theories?

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER WARM-UP: A SCHOOL-BASED EXAMPLE

You have just completed two semesters of study in your pre-service teacher education program. Next week you begin your first teaching practicum. You have been placed in a large, metropolitan school where you will be teaching for four weeks. You have been allocated a mentor teacher who has been teaching for almost twenty years—they meet you at the front office on your first day and together you walk to the staffroom. This isn't the first time you have met; you came to the school in the previous week to meet the deputy principal and your mentor teacher, but you haven't had a chance yet to talk to them about the classes you will be teaching. On the walk to the classroom your mentor teacher suggests that today you should focus on observing them teach and make notes about what you see—paying particular attention to the theoretical approaches and strategies they use. You are hoping you will be able to correctly identify these approaches and use the right names or terms. You make a space for yourself towards the back of the room and prepare to take notes on what you observe during the lesson.

- » How would you go about identifying and recording what you observe?
- » What specifically would you be looking for during the lesson and why?

This chapter is the opening of the first section focused on the beginning teacher. It will explore how the theoretical knowledge acquired in pre-service teacher programs, combined with the practical experience from teaching practicums, starts the process of becoming a teacher. There are many areas that are covered on the journey to becoming a teacher, but the types of experiences you will engage in can be broadly grouped into two parts: the core theoretical knowledge you acquire during your studies and the practical experience you gain on teaching practicums. This chapter examines how we can put these two aspects together, and explores the process of becoming an effective teacher. Importantly, this

chapter will present an overview and some details of practicum placements, such as the roles of the pre-service teacher, the school and the mentor teacher.

This first section of the book is comprised of two chapters, which introduce some of the key ideas that will be explored later in greater detail. In Chapter 2, the idea of how to develop an effective pedagogy will be explored. Pedagogy is a term that collectively represents the approach to teaching and the strategies an individual teacher may use. Throughout this chapter you will encounter many real-life case studies and illustrations of how theory and practice can be used in a classroom setting.

BECOMING A TEACHER: THEORY AND PRACTICE

The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.

William Arthur Ward

The above quote could be a summary of the journey we begin when we start our studies to become a teacher. We are certainly inexperienced when we first step into the classroom: full of theories and content knowledge, but with very little practical experience. But quickly during this first practicum we shift into the role of teaching. The theories all make sense, the readings you have completed as part of your studies start becoming more relevant, and your enthusiasm as you start doing what you have been studying to do—actually teach—takes you over the hurdles and mistakes you make. The process of becoming a teacher is a complex experience (Eraut, 2006; Killen, 2013). George Bernard Shaw has famously been quoted as saying ‘those who can, do, and those who can’t, teach’. It is something you will hear often during your teaching career. But it should be remembered that not everyone can teach. It is one of the most complex and challenging professions. You have a vast range of content knowledge to acquire, and many discipline areas also require practical skills. You also have a vast range of pedagogical knowledge to acquire and become expert in such as **learning theories**, developmental theories and curriculum frameworks. Then there are practical skills to develop and master, such as teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, communication skills and developing a professional demeanour. Embarking on the journey to become a teacher is complex and challenging, but also immensely rewarding.

Are some people more suited to becoming a teacher than others? Possibly some individuals may start their training with an advantage, such as having a personality that is suited to teaching, or coming from a background that brings a set of skills that helps

learning theories: Ideas based upon research that explain how an individual learns. Includes theories that explain brain development, memory, understanding and acquiring knowledge.

with teaching. There are many personal qualities and skills that make someone a good teacher. These include:

- » being good at explaining things
- » being a people person and enjoying working with a wide range of people
- » enthusiasm
- » having strong knowledge in particular subject areas
- » being a good time manager
- » the ability to work in a team as well as being able to use your own initiative
- » keeping your cool under pressure
- » having patience and a good sense of humour
- » being fair-minded
- » coping well with change
- » enjoying a challenge.

Source: Queensland Government, 2014b

Becoming a teacher requires commitment: commitment to your students and to the profession. Your pre-service qualification is only the start of your learning journey; throughout your career you should seek opportunities to update and extend your professional knowledge. Effective communication is the key skill of an effective teacher. Teachers should be able to communicate in two ways: to communicate their lessons but also to *listen* to communication coming from their students, from students' parents and carers, and from other stakeholders (Churchill et al., 2013). Teachers need to be compassionate, they should have empathy and care about others, they should be perceptive, and they should be able to respond to and help others (Cohen et al., 2010). Teachers should be creative, flexible and motivational (Cruickshank et al., 2012). Organisation is a key trait, as teachers are responsible for planning, delivering and assessing the learning outcomes for their students. These outcomes will decide future pathways and choices for students, so a good teacher understands the responsibility of the decisions they make regarding the learning outcomes of their students. Finally, a good teacher is humorous. Learning should be enjoyable for all participants, so being able to reduce tension, laugh at oneself and create lighter moments during a teaching day is an important skill. These are just a few of the characteristics an effective teacher needs to possess. Here is a comprehensive list:

- » **Committed** Demonstrates commitment to students and the profession
- » **Communicative** Encourages effective two-way communication

- » **Compassionate** Caring, empathetic and able to respond to people
- » **Creative** Versatile, innovative and open to new ideas
- » **Dependable** Honest and authentic in working with others
- » **Flexible** Willing to alter plans and directions that assist people in moving toward their goals
- » **Humorous** Knows how to take the tension out of tight situations
- » **Individually perceptive** Sees each student as a unique and valuable individual
- » **Knowledgeable** Is on a constant quest for knowledge
- » **Motivational** Enthusiastic with standards and expectations for students and self
- » **Organised** Makes efficient use of time
- » **Patient** Is deliberate in coming to conclusions
- » **Personable** Establishes and maintains positive mutual working relationships
- » **Positive** Thinks positively and enthusiastically about people and what they are capable of becoming
- » **Value based** Focuses upon the worth and dignity of human beings

Source: La Trobe University, 2014

As you will have realised from the studies you are currently engaged in, there is a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge to master. This chapter will explore these two aspects of becoming a teacher in greater detail.

ASK

YOURSELF ...

1. In your own words define what it means to be an effective teacher. Is your definition based on a teacher you have been taught by in the past or a combination of several you have known?
2. Being a good communicator is an important trait of being a teacher—we need to be able to engage our students and deliver our message in an interesting and factual manner. Think about effective communicators you may have watched. What made them so successful? List their characteristics.

THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE INFORMING PRACTICE

The theoretical knowledge we acquire during the journey of becoming a teacher informs the decisions we make, the practices we adopt and our professionalism (Biesta et al., 2013). Theory is a broad term that encompasses many different areas. As defined by the Oxford dictionary it is a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained. Theories are based upon scientific research, hence they have a level of authority and expertise attached to their conclusions (Giddens et al., 2012). Theories are dynamic: as the field of research expands, new knowledge is acquired and new conclusions are reached, so theories can be redeveloped. Theories associated with education are quite broad, as there are many aspects that inform learning and teaching. There are theories about how we learn, about physical, emotional and social development, about how to set out classrooms, how to communicate and how to manage misbehaviour, and many others. These can be broadly grouped under two headings: theories about teaching and theories about learners.



See Chapters 2 and 8–13 for theories about teaching



See Chapters 3–7 for theories about learners

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

THEORIES AND PRACTICE

Theories form a sound basis upon which we base much of our practice and the decisions we make regarding our students. Keeping this in mind it is possible to imagine everyday examples of theory in action.

- » Imagine you have a class with behavioural issues—you might have persistent problems with two strong personalities who jockey for dominance and battle to take the class's attention away from you and learning. You might have tried some strategies as an attempt to remedy this situation, but there are theories that will help you understand the motives and causes of the behaviour, and other theories that will help you solve the problem. There are many behaviour modification theories that might help in this situation, and having a sound grounding in child development and psychosocial theories will also help you to select the appropriate solution.
- » Theories about teaching provide us with a framework to scaffold our teaching strategies on. Understanding different approaches such as cognitivist, constructivist or behaviourist, to name a few examples, allows us to select complementary teaching and learning strategies.

ACTIVITY

1. Have you ever considered the theoretical expertise that teachers require? What areas are you expecting to investigate and become knowledgeable in on your journey to become a teacher? List them and, if possible, compare your list with another person in your unit.
2. What do you think we mean when we say that theoretical knowledge provides teachers with authority and expertise? Explain this statement.

THEORIES ABOUT TEACHING

Theories about teaching are numerous (Biesta et al., 2013), but as it's a profession that is constantly changing and adopting new ways of learning, this should be expected. The theories that inform teaching can be arranged into three domains: those concerned with the context or setting of teaching; theories about the skills needed to be an effective teacher; and theories about teaching strategies.

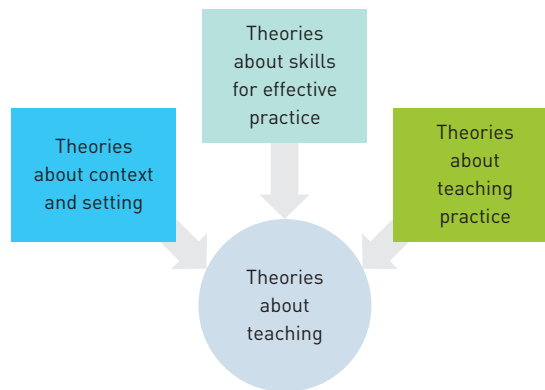


FIGURE 1.1 THEORIES ABOUT TEACHING

TELL ME

ABOUT ...

DO WE REALLY USE THEORIES IN PRACTICE?

When I was a pre-service teacher still at university, the majority of my units had theories or theoretical perspectives at their core. Often I would sit in class and mentally question how or when I would use these ideas, as many of them seemed to be outdated and impractical. Once I began teaching I wasn't really aware of them so much until I had key moments—like

parent-teacher nights when I was explaining what a particular child needed or what I had observed. These conversations were really grounded in my theoretical knowledge—I could explain that developmentally the child should be demonstrating X but in fact were still at stage Y, or I could discuss social problems they might be having or other issues. These conversations were full of theory. Where they really kicked in for me was when I was attending a professional learning workshop that was examining the different approaches to teaching and learning that would best support the new curriculum. The discussion in that room was great; we were talking about different approaches, styles, ways of learning and terms like ‘cognitive processes’ and ‘higher-order thinking’ were flying around the room—and I could understand it all and I could contribute. Times like that you really see clearly how complex our profession is and how much theoretical knowledge we need to be effective teachers. The conversations we have with parents and with our colleagues are different, but the theory we learnt at university provided a means for explaining and also gave me a sense of expertise.

NATHAN, PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

THEORIES ABOUT CONTEXT AND SETTING

It is important to understand the influence and impact a context or setting has on teaching and learning. Teaching does not occur in a vacuum—there is the immediate context of the classroom to consider, and also the wider context of the school (Whitton et al., 2010). Classrooms are complex entities and how they are set out, the arrangement of the desks and the position of the teacher’s desk all need to be carefully considered. There are many theories informing these decisions (Latham et al., 2008), and an effective teacher is aware of the impact different arrangements have on learning outcomes. Classrooms are of course part of the larger context of the school, and each school has a particular culture unique to its location (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2011). Teaching is a profession that requires individuals to work in teams, and being an effective team member requires some level of prior learning. Schools are increasingly self-managed, with management or leadership teams steering the school’s daily activities and enacting the vision of the school (Wilson & Kendall-Seatter, 2010).

These two aspects, classrooms and schools, are one part of the context of teaching and the theories associated with it. Sitting within this domain are other theoretical understandings important to pre-service teachers: understanding the phases of teaching that we progress through as we gain more experience in the profession; how to transition from pre-service to beginning teacher; and how your identity as a teacher develops.



See Chapter 9 for theories about the complexity of classrooms



See Chapters 8, 12 and 14 for theories about context and setting relating to schools and culture

ASK

YOURSELF ...

Linked to these topics are theories about how to plan your teaching career. So it should be clear that the theories associated with the context and setting of teaching are quite broad. Collectively they provide the backdrop upon which we conduct our teaching and our teaching career. Some aspects we have much control over, while others would be better described as existing systems within which we function. It is important to begin with these theories as they are an important collection of theoretical understandings to master—they are the context within which the other theories associated with teaching and learning are situated.

1. How complex are classrooms? List all of the influences and people that a typical classroom may have. Try to group these items into types; for example, physical features, people and strategies.
2. A school's culture can be positive or negative. What are the factors that influence a school's culture? Can you provide examples of schools that had a positive or negative school culture? What made them that way?

effective practice:

The incorporation of theoretical knowledge and expertise with practical strategies and skills. Collectively they result in effective practices in the classroom.

These theories are concerned with the development of skills for **effective practice** by the individual teacher. They include the important aspect of communication: teachers need to be effective communicators if they are to be effective teachers. Theories associated with effective communication explore different models of communication, the nature of communication, and specific aspects such as our interpersonal communication skills (Ewing et al., 2010). How we communicate with our students, their parents and our colleagues is very important, as it will display and support our professional demeanour and expertise. Communication style is also important as it directly influences our manner of teaching. There are many communication strategies that can be learnt and added to our repertoire, and different instructional strategies that can be supported by communicative approaches. So it is very important to have a clear understanding of this aspect and its theoretical underpinnings.

Developing a pedagogical repertoire requires detailed knowledge of the different pedagogical theories and approaches. Each of these is accompanied by theoretical perspectives and practical strategies. Understanding the differences between them and deciding which suit your context requires a detailed understanding and appreciation of pedagogy. Within this domain are topics such as teaching styles and types of lessons. As you will discover as you explore this area further, lessons should be detailed, well-planned and considered entities, underpinned by theoretical expertise. The theories

associated with pedagogy can belong to either behavioural, cognitive or constructivist theories (Cohen et al., 2010) and these theories are the basis upon which many of the pedagogical decisions you will make are built. It will also become clearer that simply adopting a theoretical approach is not sufficient to be an effective teacher—you must also consider the lesson objectives and the needs of the learners.

Part of this domain are the challenging topics of ethical and legal requirements for teachers (Killen, 2013). As a teacher you have legal responsibilities and you need to be clear about the parameters of this part of your job. Teachers have a duty of care towards the students they teach and are responsible for, and understanding what this means is vital if you are to undertake this responsibility correctly. An important part of the theoretical knowledge associated with these topics is knowing your rights and those of your students, and knowing what to do if you encounter children who are at risk from abuse or neglect. You will also encounter ethical dilemmas during your career, and you need theoretical frameworks to help you negotiate these aspects, both personally and with your students.

The final topic within this domain are the theories associated with professionalism. Teaching professionals are subject to codes of conduct and national standards, which must be understood and demonstrated in our daily practices. Part of being an effective teacher is engaging with the profession on a national and international level, by being aware of current policy initiatives, what is happening in our field in other countries, and predicting changes that may be coming.

As you will have realised, this domain is largely concerned with the development of the skills an effective teacher needs and the theoretical underpinnings that support these areas. Much of what we do, and the impact it has on learning outcomes and on our students personally, begins with our skills, expertise and abilities. Having a sound breadth of theoretical understandings to support decision-making and planning helps to create effective teachers whose pedagogical expertise is grounded in theory and who are defensible and well supported by research. This results in a more confident and more coherent practitioner.

TABLE 1.1 THEORIES ABOUT SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">models of communicationclassroom communicationinterpersonal communicationcommunication stylecommunication strategiesinstructional strategies	Chapter 10
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(Continued)

TABLE 1.1 THEORIES ABOUT SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE (Continued)

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• pedagogy• developing a repertoire• matching lesson objectives• teaching styles• types of lessons• phases of instruction• pedagogical approaches: behavioural, cognitive, constructivist• matching teaching with preferred learning styles and learner needs	Chapters 2, 11 and 12
ETHICAL AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF BEING A TEACHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• being an ethical teacher• ethical dilemmas• legal requirements of teachers• duty of care• the rights of teachers and students• children at risk	Chapter 15
THE EDUCATION PROFESSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers• policy agendas: national and state• international policies and their influence on Australia	Chapter 16

THEORIES ABOUT TEACHING PRACTICE

The final domain that is focused on theories about teaching covers theories that are concerned with teaching practices, such as the strategies we use in the classroom with our students. The area that causes the most anxiety in pre-service teachers is classroom management (Kozleski et al., 2013). This is an area that has attracted a large amount of research and accompanying theoretical perspectives (for example, see Churchill et al., 2013; Killen, 2013; Marsh, 2010; Mujs & Reynolds, 2010; Reigeluth, 2013). When exploring this topic, an examination of misbehaviour and its causes is important. The correct identification of the causes of misbehaviour allows a teacher to select a strategy

that best suits that problem and, so, is more likely to be an effective solution. Many theories about classroom management are grounded in approaches to learning (such as behaviourist and cognitivist) or approaches to teaching (such as constructivist) and have strategies that support those views. There have also been a number of theories focused on preventive and corrective strategies. The secret to classroom management is not to rely on a single approach, but to develop a personal classroom management plan that is flexible and comprised of multiple theoretical perspectives and strategies.

A key focus of this domain is planning. Principles of planning provide clarity to teachers when they first start to develop lesson plans and programs of work, and effective planning can make the difference between being an effective teacher and an ineffective teacher. This topic has attracted some very practical planning frameworks and taxonomies that help teachers to construct lesson objectives, identify learning styles and create lesson types that support objectives.

Assessment and reporting is a topic that has attracted much research because the question of how to assess learning still divides many educators (Brady & Kennedy, 2012; Ewing, 2013; McMillan, 2014; Readman & Allen, 2013). There has been a lot of change in Australian assessment practices in recent years, as many states have moved from outcomes-based education (OBE) to standards-based education (SBE) with the implementation of the new Australian Curriculum. The return to standardised testing in schools has been much debated, and there are theoretical positions that need to be explored and understood to fully comprehend the debate. There are many different types of assessment, each with practical contexts for use. Issues such as fairness, reliability and validity are also important. Currently popular is the move towards authentic assessment practices, self-assessment and peer assessment (McMillan, 2014; Readman & Allen, 2013). Thus you can appreciate that the topic of assessment has a range of theories underpinning its practices. Similarly with reporting: there are principles attached to reporting, and understanding the role and types of reporting that teachers engage in is important.

The final area within this domain focuses on the importance of teaching values and morals. Values and morals are personal systems of beliefs, and as teachers we have a responsibility to not preach our own belief systems but to support and facilitate the values and morals identified by the school or education system. To enable teachers to have a clear position and appreciate the role that values and morals have in schooling, clear theoretical perspectives are required—if only to explain in a coherent manner the approaches or strategies that might be utilised.

TABLE 1.2 THEORIES ABOUT TEACHING PRACTICE

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• understanding misbehaviour• causes of misbehaviour• neurological-based behaviours• learning difficulties• prevention and correction strategies• theoretical approaches to classroom management• classroom strategies• developing a personal classroom management plan	Chapter 11
PLANNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• principles of planning• planning frameworks• lesson plans• curriculum guidelines• learning outcomes• taxonomies to help with planning• learning style taxonomies• planning programs or units of work• long-term planning• influences on planning	Chapter 12
ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• principles of assessment• role of assessment• types of assessment• reliability and validity• fairness• authentic assessment• self-assessment and peer assessment• principles of reporting• the role of reporting• types of reporting	Chapter 13
TEACHING VALUES AND MORALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• values education• morals education	Chapter 15

SUMMARY

The theories concerned with teaching are comprised of three domains:

- » theories about context and setting
- » theories about skills for effective practice
- » theories about teaching practice.

The topics covered by this section are quite broad but they are complementary. Theories about context and setting are concerned with the place or location where teaching and learning occur, theories about skills for effective practice are concerned with the personal skills of the individual teacher and how these impact on teaching and learning, while theories about teaching practice are concerned with the strategies teachers use with their students. These three domains provide pre-service teachers with the theoretical basis to embark on teaching practicum. This professional knowledge will be reinforced, confirmed and consolidated as these teachers gain more experience in front of a class.

PEDAGOGICAL THEORIES

Many teachers identify themselves as having a particular pedagogical flavour or theoretical approach. I've never been that way as I guess I have dipped in and out of different approaches depending on the classes I am teaching. I like particular approaches; if I had to name one I would describe myself as a social constructivist—I like the idea that we learn best collaboratively and in groups and this works well in secondary school contexts. But I pick approaches to match the age, subject and needs of my intended audience. For example, I do take a pretty didactic approach and use direct instruction for core content lessons—I want the students to listen, watch and think about the content the first time I present it. Being a maths and science teacher I sometimes need to present chunks of information this way—then the second lesson or later in the same lesson I will switch approaches and have them use the information themselves either through guided participation or review it in small groups via strategies grounded in social constructivism. I tend to think that in today's world of teaching and focusing on learner needs, learning styles, engagement, it's hard to just adopt one approach and stick to it—but having a wide repertoire of approaches will be more effective. You do need theory, as you do need to understand the thinking and ideas behind the strategies you use. Teaching isn't just standing in front of a class and 'teach'; you need to be more informed and make decisions about your approach and the strategies you use and these need to come from some kind of expertise or knowledgeable base—theories provide us with that.

Zoe, secondary school teacher

IN SCHOOLS CASE STUDY

THEORIES ABOUT LEARNERS

Theories about learners are theoretical explanations that aid in our understanding of the students we teach. There are two domains within this section: socio-cultural issues, which is a broad heading for a range of different topics; and learning and **development theories**.

development theories:

Ideas based upon research that explain how an individual develops, including physical, social and emotional development.

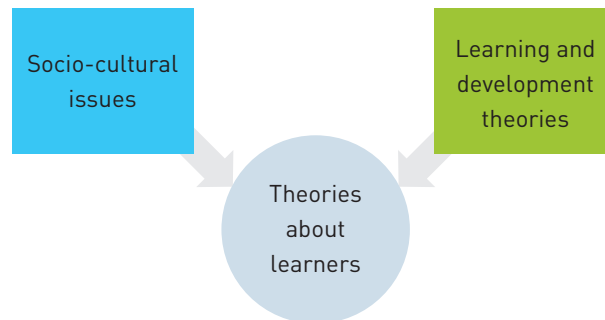


FIGURE 1.2 THEORIES ABOUT LEARNERS

THEORIES ABOUT SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES

socio-cultural issues:

Issues that are concerned with social or cultural aspects of our development and growth. They may be focused on our cultural background or context, or the social groups we belong to.

As stated above, the range of topics within this domain is very broad, but collectively they are concerned with **socio-cultural issues** that impact upon learners (Wu, 2011). They include theories informing our understanding of motivation, how important this aspect is on learners and how it is associated with the topic of engagement. These theories are important for teachers to understand, because if we design lessons that engage learners and cause them to feel motivated then the learning outcomes will be more positive (Cruickshank et al., 2012). The aim of all teachers is to create a positive learning environment, and understanding the impact that motivation and engagement play in learning is important.

Within this domain are two associated topics: diversity and inclusion. The principles behind inclusion are quite complex, and the move towards inclusive education is relatively recent, having begun in the early 1990s, so the educational research and theories associated with this topic have just begun to be challenged and tested (for example, see Coyne et al., 2011; Hyde et al., 2014). It is interesting to observe how the theoretical underpinnings of education for learners with special needs has evolved (Carrington & MacArthur, 2012). Understanding this evolution is important, as teachers often have to engage in professional dialogue with stakeholders to explain or justify decisions they make regarding diversity or inclusivity.

A final topic within this domain is gender. It might be surprising to many pre-service teachers how many assumptions they have regarding gender, learning differences between genders, and the extent to which the education system perpetuates gender stereotypes (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013). A detailed knowledge of this topic is necessary if we are to provide opportunities to students regardless of their gender.

THEORIES ABOUT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The final domain within this section is concerned with theories about learning and development. A sound theoretical knowledge of learning and development is a key characteristic of being a teacher (Giddens et al., 2012); teachers need to know the stages of physical, cognitive, emotional and social development in detail (Anderman & Corno, 2013). They should clearly know for a particular age what the expected level of development in any of these areas should be, and should plan their learning activities and teaching to support this stage of development. Teachers should know what stages their students have progressed through and which stages they have yet to complete (Eraut, 2006). Knowledge of these aspects will inform the planning of teaching and learning to support the students' level of development and helps them reach their potential. It should also help them negotiate any difficulties or challenges in these stages. Another reason that teachers need detailed knowledge in these areas is to be able to identify any differences or difficulties their students may have, and to develop interventions that help them. Learners who have difficulties do so for a reason, and a knowledgeable professional teacher will be able to identify the sources of these differences, whether they are physical, cognitive, emotional or social. The theorists that you will encounter within these domains are leading figures who have had influence in education and

TABLE 1.3 THEORIES ABOUT LEARNERS

SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • motivation • engagement • diversity • inclusion • gender 	Chapter 9
LEARNING THEORIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical and cognitive development • psychosocial development • behavioural views on development • learner differences 	Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

schooling for many years. You may be surprised at how relatively old some of this work appears to be, for example theories about physical and cognitive development, but other areas, such as emotional and social development, have seen more recent work.

THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE

theoretical knowledge:
A system of ideas intended to explain something, often based on a general principle. Theories are based on scientific research.

This overview of the **theoretical knowledge** that underpins our practice has demonstrated the breadth and range of the theories you will encounter as you prepare to become a teacher. Theoretical knowledge provides you with a sound basis for the decisions you make regarding your practice and teaching, but importantly it also develops professional expertise: you will become a teacher with a sound level of expertise in the areas of teaching and learning. While you might not initially agree with or see a value in these theoretical perspectives, once you have acquired practical classroom experience, you will see their usefulness. Remember, these form a basis on which to begin. The process of becoming a teacher does not end with your qualification. Your professional learning should continue throughout your career.

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PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE CONSOLIDATING THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS

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practicum placement:
A period of school-based experience and learning for pre-service teachers. May range in time from one to ten weeks depending upon the stage of the program of study.

The section above provided a detailed overview of the breadth of theoretical knowledge involved in becoming a teacher. The other major part of preparation to become a teacher is the practical component. You will undertake many days of teaching in your journey to become a teacher: an opportunity for you to test the theories and apply them to real contexts. This will reinforce the learning you have already completed, but it will also make sense of much that is covered. Embarking on a **practicum placement** is both an exciting and potentially stressful time. There are many strategies you can adopt that will make this process less stressful and turn it into a rich learning opportunity.

YOUR PLACEMENT SCHOOL

Once you have been assigned a school there are a number of things that you can reasonably expect. First, you will have a teacher-tutor or ‘mentor’ (the class teacher), with whom you should have regular contact. You should expect clear communication and cooperation between your higher education institution and your placement school.

This should include visitors from your institution who support you and observe your teaching at least once during your placement. If you are not provided with information about your school in advance of your arrival, get online and find out as much as possible.

When on placement, there should be opportunities to meet with other teachers, in particular other pre-service students and newly qualified teachers, whether formally, such as a get-to-know-you afternoon tea, or informal introductions. You should make the most of these opportunities and don't wait for the school or your mentor to set them up for you.

Assessment procedures and performance requirements from both the university and the school should be clearly presented to you. This will usually occur at a pre-prac briefing or within a unit the placement has been attached to within your program. Be very clear about the requirements, familiarise yourself with what forms need to be filled in and when, and be clear which aspects these forms focus on. Teachers are busy, so sometimes you need to remind your mentor teacher that progress reports or final reports need to be completed. Try to obtain copies of these forms for your own records.

Finally, you should expect a safe and harassment-free workplace and learning environment.

1. What do you need to do to be prepared for your prac placements? Write a list of all the documents you need and actions you will need to do in order to feel prepared.
2. Prac placements require a lot of organisation—they are opportunities for you to gain experience in planning, teaching and school-based activities, and they are opportunities for you to develop resources that you may use when you start teaching. How do you plan to organise all of these documents and materials? List some ideas.

ASK

YOURSELF ...

WHAT YOU SHOULD AND SHOULDN'T BE GIVEN

You should be placed in a school within reasonable travelling distance of your term time residence (unless it is part of a negotiated 'non-metro' or 'rural' placement experience). Though, be warned, it's increasingly difficult to obtain prac places, and pre-service teachers are finding that they need to travel longer distances. This is particularly a concern for secondary pre-service teachers whose subject combination makes allocation of places more difficult.

You should be offered an opportunity to visit the school in advance to liaise with staff. Telephone the school first to see if this is fine with them, as some schools like you to come and visit first, while others do not.

You should be given a copy of the school timetable with your classes identified, and you should have time within your timetable for consultation and review with your mentor. It is a good idea to set aside a particular time each week for this one-on-one time with your mentor: schedule it and make sure it happens.

You should be given a copy of the school's code of behaviour for pupils and details of the rewards and sanctions available.

You should not be given classes with exceptionally difficult pupils. However, be prepared for challenging classes. View these as opportunities to really test your skills, try out different classroom management strategies and hone your skills. You should also not be given classes outside the age range for which you are training, or classes for subject areas you have no knowledge about.

A PRELIMINARY VISIT TO YOUR SCHOOL

Check out the travelling time. It's always a good policy to do a practice run—stress and nerves can interfere with the best-laid plans, so make sure you know how to get there and where to park if you are driving, and make sure you are early. It is better to sit in your car for ten minutes or catch an early bus rather than be late.

When you are there, introduce yourself to the school principal, and meet with your mentor and other teachers you will be working with to discuss the program of work. Get to know the school layout and location of the staffroom. Ask where you will be placed—is there a particular room for prac students or will you be sharing a space with someone? Many schools have a staff handbook which provides a great deal of useful and essential information. Request a copy if you are not given one.

Find the location and availability of equipment and other resources. Learn how to use it, and who to contact if it does not work. Also, check the school's resource situation. It would not be appreciated if you were to consume a term's supply of paper during a two-week practice!

IN SCHOOLS CASE STUDY

VISITING YOUR PRAC SCHOOL

I would suggest that you go and physically visit your prac school before you start your placement. Many of my peers just rang the school and spoke to the prac coordinator and didn't go to the school until their first day of teaching. I was feeling a bit nervous for my first prac and decided to arrange a time to visit the school—when I rang them they were happy for me to come and visit and I made a time after school one day to

meet my supervising teacher and the prac coordinator, who was also the deputy principal. I made sure I was dressed professionally, I have a few outfits that I bought just for prac—nothing expensive, just a tailored skirt and a few different plain shirts—that way I don't need to think about my outfit during prac and can get dressed quickly and go. I arrived at school wearing one of these, I had a name badge already and signed in as a visitor when I arrived.

I met my teacher, we walked over to the classroom, I got to see where I would be based, the staffroom and, most importantly, speak with my supervising teacher and find out what they wanted me to teach, how they liked to arrange things (it's a good idea to ask them how they want to do things, such as lesson observations), did they want an exercise book they could write in and then we go over those notes together? How often to meet? When did they want to see my lesson plans? Make sure you have your questions written down and ask them—it shows you are organised, professional and thinking about the placement and how to be the best you can.

Going out to visit the school before prac calmed my nerves, I got to see where the school was, where to park my car, find out what facilities there were, where the toilets, tuck shop and coffee room was—all important things. Plus I think it makes a really good impression on the school and the supervising teacher.

Natalie, primary school teacher

TIPS FOR PRACTICUM PLACEMENTS

Here is some important advice regarding commonly expressed areas of concern from schools regarding pre-service teachers on practicum placements.

If you dress like a professional the students are much more likely to treat you—and your instruction—with respect. On the other hand, 'dress as if you're going to clean a garage' and, whether you know it or not, you'll build a climate of low expectations in your classroom. Body piercings, jewellery, haircut and/or colour, and tattoos are aspects of concern for schools because they have dress codes for students that they are trying to enforce. Teachers should support this by dressing within these parameters. A good guide is to have no obvious decorations—remove them for the duration of the school day. If you have visible tattoos, they should be hidden with clothing or consider cover-up makeup. You need to dress like a teacher, which might be more conservative than you normally would dress. A good idea is to have a prac wardrobe:

- » Females: trousers or knee-length skirts, shirts and comfortable shoes.
- » Males: trousers and shirts. Check with the school regarding tie and jackets.



Being constantly late to class or not turning up on time to meetings or playground duty will make you unpopular with your colleagues.

Be friendly with students but do not be their friend. This is an important distinction, as many pre-service teachers are recent school-leavers themselves and often do not see the importance of maintaining a friendly distance between themselves and their students. You are the professional adult, so you must maintain a professional demeanour. This is particularly important in secondary schools.

Mobile devices are not to be seen or used in classrooms. Keep them silent or turned off and keep their use to a minimum. It does not look good to be always on the phone or texting, whether you are in a staffroom or standing on a school veranda. Tell family and friends you will be unable to respond during school hours.

Do not 'friend' anyone from the school on social media—this means students and staff. Professional distance is the best strategy. Consider your social media pages (for example, Facebook)—are there images on there you do not want others to see? Consider making them private during prac placements, as students will be checking out your profiles and presence online. Consider changing your profile to a pseudonym to protect your anonymity. You cannot be too cautious. If you need convincing, try searching the internet for teachers who have run foul of social media ... there are many stories.

Observe staffroom etiquette by bringing your own coffee mug and water bottle. Also bring your own lunch and snacks until you have sorted out the tuck-shop opportunities at the school. It is a good idea to bring along your own food not just because it is cheaper, but also because you are probably going to be time-poor and you need to make sure you eat during the school day.

When prac placements start to go wrong

TEACHING TIPS

Sometimes the relationship you have with your supervising teacher starts to sour. This might happen for many different reasons and you need to rectify it quickly. This person will be completing your prac form, so it's important that you have as positive a relationship as possible. Try to calmly talk to them—naming the problem sometimes helps, for example, 'it seems like we don't have the most productive of relationships'. Listen to what they are saying, and do what you can to mend the relationship.

If the relationship is not mendable then you should contact your university prac office and see if you can be moved—your university visitor should be the first person you speak to about the problems you are having.

If you are having problems consider whether they are due to something you are doing. Have you not listened to the teacher's feedback or have you disagreed with the feedback they have given you? Often students on prac fail to appreciate opinions about their teaching that don't meet their expectations—it's hard to listen to negative feedback, but part of the journey of becoming a teacher is to receive all types of feedback and try to learn from it.

If your prac supervisor is a teacher who has a different approach or view than you it does not mean that they are wrong or that you should abandon your prac and not continue. It is unlikely that you will have supervisors who view things the same way as you—learn from each of these experiences, even if they are just to confirm that you do not like that particular approach or way of doing. Persist and learn from the experience.

These tips for practicum placements are just a guide, your own institutions will provide you with handbooks and briefing sessions.

YOUR MENTOR TEACHER

Your mentor teacher is there to guide you and provide you with opportunities to gain practical teaching experience. An important part of their role is to observe your performance (planning, teaching and behaviour) and provide you with constructive feedback. The feedback you receive should guide you towards improving your practice. Here are some suggested strategies for working with your mentor teacher.

Each lesson should be critically and objectively appraised. Be prepared to hear critical comments—they are not personal, they are aimed at your practice and how to improve it.

A practical suggestion for feedback is to provide your mentor teacher with a blank exercise book in which they can write notes and observations. This book can then be reviewed and you can add notes or comments. It is also a useful tool to use in your weekly review meetings. Keeping a book for each of your pracs provides a great record of your progress to revisit and reflect upon.

Even an unsatisfactory lesson is not totally wasted if you are able to identify the difficulties and recognise the steps that are necessary to correct them. Be prepared for when lessons go badly. Don't fall to pieces, it happens to everyone. Stop, reflect and modify your practices so that it won't happen again.

After each day's practice you should complete a brief critique of each lesson, noting the material prepared, the presentation, class reaction and learning and, of course, your own performance. A good idea is to do this on the back of your lesson plans. Keep these all together in a folder.

Ensure you read your successes not just your shortcomings. If a lesson went well, analyse the reasons for this success and build upon them. Neither excessive modesty nor over-confidence in one's teaching ability has a place in a teaching practice record.

On a regular basis speak with your classroom teacher/mentor on how they think you're going and what things need to be tightened up. And take the opportunity to observe experienced teachers in the classroom, especially those regarded by their colleagues as 'top teachers' or good with 'difficult' classes. Remember: always negotiate a suitable time with the teacher to observe a lesson—never arrive unannounced.

TEACHING TIPS

Mentor teachers

Your supervising teacher is performing this role voluntarily—any money they are paid is very tokenistic, so appreciate the time, effort and professional responsibility they are performing in order to supervise you.

Sometimes your mentor will have a very different approach to teaching than you do. Rather than criticise, try adopting their ways for the duration of the prac. View it as an opportunity to try something new or different.

Adopt the mentor teacher's ways of doing. If they have a particular lesson template they prefer to use, then use it. If they like to organise their lessons in a certain way, then follow them. This is an opportunity to learn different ways of doing.

Make sure you ask questions—don't wait for information to be volunteered. If you would like to receive feedback after each lesson, say so. If you would like them to make notes while you are teaching, say so. Be active in setting up the relationship and what you need to receive from them.

Your first meeting is an opportunity for you to ask your mentor how they would like to work with you. Would they like a planning meeting each week? Would they like to receive lesson plans the day before the lesson or earlier? Remember your prac is not limited to teaching—you should ask if you can join them on all of their duties such as yard duty and after school duties.

And make sure you thank your mentor teacher at the end of prac.

FIRST DAY OF A PRAC PLACEMENT

I was really conscious of a couple of things. First: first impressions cannot ever be redone, so make them count. And second: don't be late! These were drilled in to us at our prac briefing at university, so I was really mindful of them. I made sure I dressed the part—conservative but smart—I wore comfortable shoes, brought along food for the day, a coffee cup and a water bottle so I was pretty self-sufficient for the first day. I would also suggest taking a few tea bags or instant coffee with you as at one of the schools I was on prac the staff had to bring their own. I was early, so sat in my car down the street for ten minutes, then drove up to school exactly on time—it's better to be a little early, but not too early. My school started at 8.20am so I was there at 8am—I asked my teacher at the prelim visit and that was the time she suggested.

I was pretty nervous walking into my first class. I wasn't teaching, just observing for the first few days, but I wanted to make a good impression on the class—I didn't want them to see that I was nervous, but was calm and confident. I made sure I made eye contact with most of them during the lesson, kept a professional expression on my face, didn't fall for any of their jokes unless I saw the teacher laughing too—I basically took my cues from her. All I carried into class was a notebook and pen for writing down my observations. If there were handouts to pass around I made sure I did that, it gave me a chance to move around, informally chat to the students and generally feel a bit more at ease. When the students were quietly working, if the teacher was walking around, then I did too. It's better than passively sitting there and, worse, you don't want the teacher to come over and say 'why don't you move around and help anyone who needs it', so make sure you think ahead.

Leave all your personal things in the staffroom, make sure your phone is on silent, don't rush back every break to check. I told everyone I would not be checking my phone until after 4pm—of course I did check it, but I didn't want phone calls or text messages. One last hint: don't be the first to dash out the door once the bell has rung. Slowly clear your things away, spend some time chatting to the teacher and ask if there is anything they would like you to prepare for tomorrow.

ANTOINETTE, PRE-SERVICE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

TELL ME

ABOUT ...

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: THE JOURNEY OF BECOMING A TEACHER

It is useful to view your pre-service training as consisting of two interrelated components, the theoretical studies and the practicum placements. They are cyclical as what you learn in one will inform and modify the other. As you accumulate theoretical knowledge and can view it through the lens of school-based teaching experience, you will start identifying and modifying the aspects of your personal repertoire.

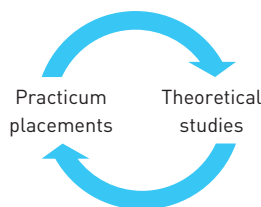


FIGURE 1.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

As practicum placements progress they become increasingly high-stakes. The final pracs or internships are often viewed as semi-formal job interviews. The prac forms that you collect during your placements are a vital part of future job interviews. Your university grades in theoretical units provide future employers with an excellent guide of your content knowledge and learning abilities, but it is your practicum reports that provide employers with a clear sense of your abilities and skills as a teacher. Mentor teachers play an important part in this journey as they are often the interface between your theoretical knowledge and your attempts to put this knowledge into practical use. A common mistake students make is to dismiss their mentor teachers as being old-fashioned or coming from a different perspective, or even in some instances being 'wrong'. Don't adopt these positions. Mentor teachers are going to be different than you, but you can learn from them, their experience and their wisdom. Even a mentor teacher who is everything you don't want to be can teach you something. Keep an open mind and remember that practicums are about gaining experience.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

THEORY + PRACTICE = BECOMING A TEACHER

The combination of theoretical knowledge, practical skills and experience are the basis of being an effective teacher. Keeping this in mind it is possible to imagine everyday examples of this combination in action.

- » Consider a student in your class who has particular learning needs—they may have some kind of learning difference such as being gifted, or might have been diagnosed with dyslexia or a hyperactivity disorder. Without a clear understanding of the nature of their difference, how this impacts on development and learning, and what the appropriate teaching strategy would be, meeting the needs of this student would be very difficult. Experience of teaching students with any kind of difference would also inform our decisions. For example, perhaps while on prac you have encountered students with these differences and have some ideas about the types of strategies you should use.
- » Imagine not having the theoretical knowledge to be able to recognise a difficulty that a student in class might be having. A child who persistently mispronounces certain letter combinations might have a learning difficulty—but if you are not aware or have not recognised a pattern in their difficulties, you will not be able to intervene and locate the assistance that child needs to be able to accommodate and overcome their problem. Your lack of theoretical knowledge actually makes their problem worse as the problem will continue and will impact on the child's learning outcomes.

ACTIVITY

1. Brainstorm specific examples where a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience are important. Consider the examples above to help you. List as many examples as you can and, if possible, share your ideas with a peer—discuss how these two aspects (theory and practice) work together.
2. Imagine your pre-service degree had no theoretical basis but was wholly practice-based. What would be the pros and cons of such a program? Could you acquire all of the necessary skills through time spent in the classroom teaching?

WHAT CONSTITUTES AN 'EFFECTIVE' TEACHER?

To answer this question, it is important to be clear about the meaning of the term 'effective'. With regard to teaching, effectiveness is a combination of theoretical, pedagogical and content expertise. Providing a single answer to this question is difficult as most people have an idea of what constitutes being an effective teacher but these ideas differ from person to person. A survey of each state in Australia demonstrates this point. For example, according to Queensland's Department of Education, being an effective teacher means:

- » being good at explaining things
- » being a people person and enjoying working with a wide range of people
- » having enthusiasm
- » having a strong knowledge in particular subject areas
- » being a good time manager
- » having the ability to work in a team as well as using your own initiative
- » keeping your cool under pressure
- » having patience and a good sense of humour
- » being fair-minded
- » coping well with change
- » enjoying a challenge.

While in New South Wales, the Department of Education defines quality teaching as:

- » pedagogy that is fundamentally based on promoting high levels of intellectual quality
- » pedagogy that is soundly based on promoting a quality learning environment
- » pedagogy that develops and makes explicit to students the significance of their work.

These two lists are expressed in very different language: the first is concerned with personal attributes while the second is concerned with pedagogical technique. While the characteristics of what makes a good teacher are difficult to agree upon, the impact good teachers have on students is less debatable. According to Hattie (2003) teaching is

the single most powerful influence on achievement. He says an effective teacher should do the following:

- » relate lesson content to prior lessons or other subjects (interconnectedness of content)
- » be flexible
- » incorporate the needs and interests of their students
- » provide detailed timely feedback
- » plan based on observations and reflection
- » create classroom climates that encourage risk taking
- » be concerned with enhancing and developing their students' self-concepts and self-efficacy
- » have expert content and pedagogical knowledge
- » be champions for learning
- » motivate and engage their students
- » be positive and enjoy their profession.

Source: Hattie, 2003

PLACING STUDENTS AT THE CENTRE OF YOUR PRACTICE

One of the reasons teachers should choose their profession is to be passionate advocates for children. You should believe that schooling provides opportunities for all learners to reach their potential, and that it should inspire and support them as they strive to achieve their goals. There are particular issues or characteristics for each of the three phases of schooling that may have drawn you to that phase.

EARLY YEARS

This phase is concerned with physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. The range of learning and development that occurs during this phase of schooling is the broadest and most complex. Teaching in this phase requires a detailed level of knowledge across a range of developmental areas. The strategies and skills you use set behaviours and habits in learners that carry through the rest of their schooling. The role of physical development in this phase should have attracted you, as the combination of

developing fine and gross motor skills in conjunction with other areas is a challenge you seek. The area of emerging literacy is also very attractive to you. At this stage, you will help students learn basic interpersonal skills—they are starting to be less focused on themselves and more aware of the impact their behaviour has on others.

PRIMARY

This is a phase that is characterised as being content-rich. A large amount of the learning occurring in this phase of schooling is content and skill-based. Students are acquiring vast amounts of knowledge across a range of subject areas. They are still refining their social skills and building on these, and physically they are also undergoing a lot of change. The attraction of this phase of schooling should be on the developing individual who is starting to emerge in this phase, and the mix of subject areas and the opportunity to make connections between them. Learners are motivated and engaged, they are very positive and generally respectful of adults.

IN SCHOOLS CASE STUDY

BEING AN EFFECTIVE EARLY YEARS TEACHER

Being an effective early years teacher is a tricky balance. Because of the age of your students, you need to strike a balance between fun play-based learning and curriculum imperatives. There has been a general feeling that we just play and have fun in this phase of schooling, but I was drawn to work with this age group because it really is the most complex of all the phases. The children in early years classes are developing

in so many different areas at the same time—acquiring language, physically their bodies are changing quickly, they are learning social skills, learning how to learn in school and how to remember information and make connections. I remember thinking when I was at university it was almost overwhelming how much they had to deal with! I'm conscious though that it should also be enjoyable and fun—they are younger learners, so we often have shorter days and we need to find a balance between physically doing things and not overly emphasising sitting at your desk or individual work. Everything we do in this phase



sets them up for their future—so if we teach them pronunciation or writing well, then they carry these skills forward with them into the following school years.

So what makes an effective early years teacher? I would say you need energy—lots of it; colour and volume in your voice, train your voice to be able to project, have different tones; facial expressions are important; an ability to develop lessons that are play-based but still grounded in core content; work in an environment that isn't really typical—I set my room up to have different learning stations, this requires a lot of coordination and eyes in the back of my head! A passion for this age group is necessary, you must love the children at this age and that includes all of their characteristics, such as the incessant question asking, the talking and giggling, the crying and tears. These are all challenges, but they are rewarding, most days!

Laura, early years teacher

SECONDARY

This is a phase when adolescence starts to impact on learning. Students are experiencing hormonal surges and become obsessed with their physical development and their social relationships. It is also a time when their individual personalities are starting to be more formalised, they are testing boundaries and expressing opinions. It is a rich learning phase as they are more embedded with the real world and authentic contexts, making links between school and the outside world. The attraction of this phase should be the opportunity to specialise in subject areas, and the types of learning activities you can develop with older learners, as well as the opportunities for debate, discussion, inquiry and problem-based learning, and helping refine opinions and emerging personalities.

COMMON TRAITS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

While there are general characteristics of being an effective teacher, each of the above phases of schooling require specific characteristics to be effective practitioners. An effective secondary teacher and the teaching strategies used in that context would not apply to an early years classroom and vice versa. Some general traits of good teaching across the phases are:

- » Having high expectations of your students—effective teachers strive to motivate and engage all their students in learning rather than simply accepting that some students cannot be engaged and are destined to do poorly.

- » Acknowledging individual differences—effective teachers personalise the learning for their students.
- » Using a range of pedagogies—effective teachers use techniques that best serve the learning needs of their students.
- » Encouraging student responsibility—effective teachers teach in a way that encourages students to take greater responsibility for their own learning.
- » Having mastery of their teaching content—effective teachers have a thorough knowledge of their subject content and skills.
- » Providing a safe environment—effective teachers provide a safe and orderly environment, both physically and emotionally, so students can achieve their potential.
- » Monitoring progress and providing feedback.
- » Building positive relationships with their students.

Source: Western Australia Department of Education, 2011

TEACHING TIPS

Being effective while on prac

During the time of your prac placement make sure you are a better version of yourself—this includes organisation, appearance, demeanour and professionalism.

Prioritise prac. This might mean putting any part-time jobs on hold and only working shifts on the weekend. It will be financially tough but necessary.

Prac is tiring so don't plan on a busy social life during this time. Plan your meals, make sure you eat breakfast, carry your lunch and snacks with you. Keep hydrated, and ensure you get enough sleep. It sounds over-cautious but ask students who have been on prac and they will tell you how tired you get and how exhausting teaching can be.

Comfortable footwear is vital. No heels and no new shoes—select sensible comfortable shoes that you can walk quickly in, stand in all day and that don't make loud clacking sounds when walking around.

If you can, invest in a prac wardrobe. Set aside some items that are just for teaching and have them ready to go on Sunday night so that you do not have to think about clothing choices in the morning. You do not need to be trendy or high fashion, you need to be professional.

These lists of the characteristics of effective teachers should be something you return to each year during your journey to become a teacher. Check your progress against them and use them to sharpen your focus and activities. A good strategy is to use them prior to practicum placements, so they can guide your behaviour and practices. Being a good teacher takes time, it will not be something that happens the first prac placement you undertake. Allow yourself time to develop the content knowledge, skills and strategies you require. Once you begin teaching, your first few years will be a rich and rewarding time, but also one where you are constantly adjusting and making sense of the profession, your performance and your students.

Many teachers often talk about a ‘click’ moment when all of the theoretical knowledge falls into place and they start feeling like a teacher—they stop being nervous or second-guessing their every move; it becomes more of a reflex and they feel like a confident practitioner. Remember, when you start teaching, particularly on your first prac, you will most likely feel like an imposter, waiting for someone to discover you shouldn’t be there! This is normal and actually a good sign because it means you are concerned about your actions and about the impact you have on your students. It’s a great starting point: if you are concerned and nervous, it means your motives are good—you want your lessons to have a positive impact on your students and you want your students to achieve the lesson objectives. A lack of concern or anxiety hints at arrogance.

At this stage in your journey to become a teacher you should be focused on developing your pedagogical skills. It’s an exciting stage, as everything is before you: the theoretical knowledge you are about to immerse yourself in and the practical placements you will undertake are the first steps on embarking into one of the most rewarding professions. Enjoy the journey!

SUMMARY

This chapter has explored how theory and practice combine in teacher preparation. Theoretical knowledge and understanding can be about either teaching or learning. Theoretical knowledge about teaching may focus on context and setting, the skills needed to be an effective teacher or understanding teaching practice itself. Theory informs much of what we do and lends an authority and expertise to the decisions we make. Our practices should be informed by theory and research. They should be well-thought-out decisions that are based on the needs of the content, our learners and our beliefs about teaching

and learning. Theory might also be focused on learning and, as we have seen in this chapter, might involve either socio-cultural issues or be theories concerned with learning and development. What is important to understand is that to produce effective teachers, pre-service teacher preparation programs need to combine theoretical knowledge and practical experience. This chapter has also explored the practicum placement and provided an overview of what to expect from these important experiences during your training to become a teacher. A practicum placement can be a time of great stress and anxiety, but it is also a time of putting into practice all of the theoretical knowledge and learning you have acquired during your studies. The process of becoming a teacher is one of consolidating theory into practice, learning what constitutes effective practice and what skills you need to acquire to become a good teacher.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. In small groups, share with your peers your experiences of practicum placements. Were they positive or negative experiences? Why? If you have not yet been on practicum, share with your peers any concerns or worries you might have. Problem-solve some of these so that you are less anxious about starting practicum.
2. You have explored how theoretical knowledge can be concerned with either teaching or learning. Which do you think is more important for beginning teachers? Or are they both equally important? Explain your ideas.

PRACTICUM TASK: APPLYING THEORIES TO YOUR TEACHING

While on practicum, try to explicitly identify theories in practice. For example, when observing your mentor teacher you might identify a particular strategy, such as constructivist approaches, or positive reinforcement, being used. Over the course of one week, collect this information and identify the types of theories used most commonly within the classroom setting. Write this up as a detailed observation and share it with your peers when you return from prac.

REFLECTING ON CRITICAL SIGNPOSTS

This chapter has presented an argument that to be an effective teacher you need a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience. The amount of theoretical knowledge and practical experience a pre-service teacher acquires can vary due to the different lengths of programs available.

1. How much focus should be on theory? How much on practice? Which one should have the most emphasis within a program and why?
2. There are different models for practicum experience. Two main approaches are: practicum blocks, such as three to six weeks based in a school; or spending one to two days per week in a school for an entire semester or academic year. Which of these models do you think would be more effective? Explain your opinion.

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VIDEO

Edgehill University Lecture Series: What Kind of Teacher Will You Be? www.youtube.com/watch?v=EO6LNQtas50

This video explores the elements that students bring to their pre-service program and what barriers they might possess that will influence the type of teacher you might develop into.

Teachers TV UK: Investigating Practice in Primary PE. www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G1V5zfph7Y

This video explores how pre-service teachers struggle to blend theory and practice when first starting teaching on prac placements. It provides some useful strategies to help you do this well.

WEBSITES

Education.com: Theories of Learning. www.education.com/reference/article/theories-of-learning

A useful site of information beyond simple theories—lots of key topics are presented on this website. The information is presented more as a journal article, but is easy to read and logically structured.

The Teachers Garden: Outline of Educational Learning Theories and Theorists. www.teachersgarden.com/professionalresources/learningtheorists.html

A good simple table that sets out the theory with the key theorist. A nice summary of key points is also provided which makes a useful tool for revision.