

THINKING ABOUT TEACHING

Making the Decision

PART

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BECOMING A TEACHER

Looking Forward and Backward at the Same Time

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- 1.1 Reflect on your own educational history and how it can affect the type of teacher you become; examine the importance of reflection, metacognition, and “knowing yourself”
- 1.2 Examine the “goodness of fit” between your own personal qualities and the demands of teaching
- 1.3 Explain the effect that a committed teacher has on the climate and culture within a school
- 1.4 Consider how the era of testing and standardization in the 21st century has affected the way contemporary schools function

InTASC Standards

- Standard 3: Learning Environments
- Standard 9: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice

Introduction

This book invites you on a personal journey of reflection about education—your own education, the education of people you know, and the education of children who will become the future of the United States. It is a journey of self-exploration during which you will look inside your mind and heart and consider what it takes, emotionally, intellectually, and culturally, to become a teacher who experiences joy and satisfaction through service to others.

We have been living through a time of unprecedented disruption as the Covid-19 pandemic unleashed a drastic change in how we pursued our daily lives. We are living through a time of racial justice, women's rights, health justice, LGBTQ rights, and other human rights movements converging at the same time. We acquired facility with digital tools that, for some of us, were brand new. We found ways to communicate along virtual platforms and to connect with others as we often remained alone in real life. Our computers, phones, and tablets became the gateway to belonging to a community, and for those among us without those devices or the broadband to support digital connectivity, the world was lonely, and education was rarely possible. We also learned how desperately we needed the efforts of teachers who reached out to students across the country trying to connect in any way possible as schools shut down. I could not have been prouder of America's teachers or more aware of how important it is to fill the pipeline for tomorrow's teachers.

As a result of what we are learning from the close of schools during the pandemic and the advancements in digital technology, we are finding new ways to evaluate an individual's “readiness” to teach.

For many years, people have been seeking a fair and standard way to evaluate the potential effectiveness of a new teacher. It is a tricky process because teaching and learning are personal human activities that reflect the inner worlds of the students and teachers. *Teach 5e* will help you to think about good teaching practices and consider what they may look like in the classroom. Beyond those practices, there is much more to discover, including who *you* are, your hopes and dreams, and your goals for your students.

Any plan to improve educational outcomes is dependent on the teachers who carry it out and on the abilities of those attracted to the field. In this book, you will have the opportunity to explore some of the attributes that can help to make you a successful classroom teacher.

We will examine the specific challenges of becoming a teacher in today's social and political context, including testing, subject matter national standards, racial and economic diversity, and the effect of digital technology on the lives of your future students.

Although much about teaching and learning remains the same year after year, access to digital technology has significantly changed the ways students communicate, learn, and spend their time

inside and outside of school. As we go forward in the third decade of the 21st century, we must consider these compelling truths about our world:

- Teachers make a difference. The quality of the teacher in the classroom is one of the most important influences on student achievement.
- The world is rapidly changing and is a far different place than it was only 10 years ago.
- The global economy and the technological innovations of the past several decades demand a well-educated citizenry.
- The best teachers grow and change with rapidly shifting social and cultural conditions and, thereby, become lifelong learners.
- Equity, access, diversity, and inclusion are embedded conditions of excellent teaching and supportive learning.
- Online education was normalized during the pandemic and remains a significant presence in K–12 schools all over the country.
- Social media occupies a great deal of time for students of all ages.
- Every single student has the ability to learn. Becoming a teacher means accepting the daily responsibility to help all students learn at whatever level and place in their lives they may be.
- Education provides students with the opportunity to become productive and contributing members of society.
- Teachers make a difference. The quality of the teacher in the classroom is one of the most important influences on student achievement.
- Preparing to teach involves personal reflection and a commitment to understanding yourself and the world around you.
- You will need to demonstrate through your written work and classroom performance videos that you are ready to teach.

While this book is about schools and schooling, teachers and teaching, learners and the process of learning, it is also about you. What do you already know about classrooms, and how can you apply that knowledge to the complex experience of being a classroom teacher? Your answers to these questions will play a big role in deciding the kind of teacher you will become. Research has shown that out of all the factors that contribute to a student's school day, the single most important one in improving students' performance is the effectiveness of the teacher. Yes, the teacher makes all the difference.

You have within you everything you need to become the kind of teacher you want to be. You will be challenged to identify the attitudes, skills, and dispositions that teaching requires. You will need to make a commitment to becoming a lifelong learner—that is, expanding your ideas by what you learn from your students, your research, and your own personal growth. Donald Schön (1983), an educational researcher, used the term **reflective practitioner** to refer to a teacher who consistently and consciously modifies his or her own teaching practice based on the active consideration of events in his or her classroom. That expression has stood the test of time, and reflection is essential for being an effective teacher who creates fair and equitable learning environments for all students. You are invited to conceptualize teaching as a personal activity requiring a large capacity for reflective thought and deliberate action and experimentation.

Teaching, which requires a heightened sense of self and a commitment to the social good, demands nothing less of its professionals than an ongoing examination of their authentic motives for teaching. Hence, in addition to *knowledge* about schools, curriculum, and instruction, this text provides a *venue* through which you can actively consider your skills, attitudes, and dispositions as they relate to becoming a teacher.

We begin by examining your interest in education. This chapter will encourage you to reflect on your own educational background as you explore the possibility of forging a career as a teacher.

LOOKING BACKWARD: TALKING ABOUT TEACHING

Everyone thinks they can teach . . . largely—that is because they have spent at least 12 years and often more than 16 years in classrooms. Feeling familiar with a working environment however does not qualify you to do the work! Being on the proverbial *other side of the desk* is a huge responsibility that also has the potential to garner many rewards. To get there, however, requires dedication, selflessness, seriousness of purpose, and the capacity for introspection.

I recently asked several new teachers what made them decide to enter teaching; some of them remarked that they had always loved school. School was, for them, the happiest place to be. But several others shared not-so-glorious stories about their experiences. They decided to go into teaching to make a difference, to teach others in ways they wish they themselves had been taught. Still, others had no specific personal calling to teach. They “fell into” teaching because they needed a job. And some are trying to figure out if teaching is for them. Whichever of these categories you feel aligned, this book can help you to discover if teaching is for you.

Laura and Sharyn pursued teaching careers because they loved school and loved learning. Laura explained that from her earliest years in school, she was excited when the school year began and sad when it ended. School was her happiest place, so she decided to pursue a career that would keep her there. Sharyn described similar feelings:

She remembered how, as a child, she could not wait for summer camp to be over because she wanted to go back to school. In high school, she was part of a peer tutoring program and also privately tutored friends and classmates. When they did well, she was actually happier than when she did well because she knew she had helped her friends to succeed. Sharyn’s love for school and learning, combined with the joy she felt when her friends (whom she tutored) succeeded, led her to teaching. Sharyn wanted to enable children to love learning as much as she did.

A third teacher, Derrick, told me that most of his teachers were female. Not until sixth grade did he experience his first male teacher—the music teacher. He gained an appreciation of music from this teacher and started to imagine that he might teach as well. He played school with his younger brother and began to consider a career in education. Later, a male history teacher encouraged him to study that subject, and he majored in history in college while also pursuing a professional program in elementary education. A kindergarten teacher today, Derrick is firmly convinced that men are needed in early-childhood education so children can see that men are able caretakers.

Are you like Laura, Sharyn, or Derrick in your conviction that teaching is a career you want to pursue? Or are you more ambivalent? The “Writing & Reflection” activity will help you think about ways in which your educational past and your thoughts and feelings about it may influence your future career.

Your Educational Autobiography

What was school like for you? What kind of a student were you? When you think of teaching, which teacher or teachers do you conjure up?

You may think questions like these are irrelevant at this stage of your life. But examining your early experiences as a student is an important task:

Who you are as a person, the kinds of experiences you had inside and outside of school, your values, beliefs and aspirations shape what you will be as a teacher and how you will teach and how you will respond to the changing contexts of teaching. (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 45)

WRITING & REFLECTION

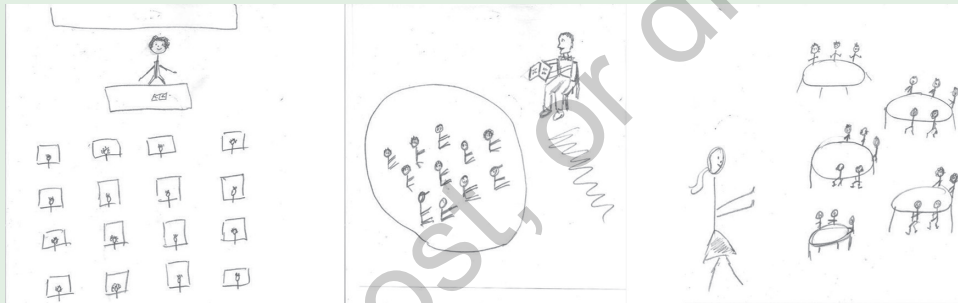
Draw Yourself as a Teacher

These samples show how three teacher candidates responded to the challenge to draw a teacher. What ideas about teaching do the drawings suggest?

Draw a picture of yourself teaching a lesson. You do not have to be an artist; stick figures are fine. Just imagine yourself in a classroom. Be sure to include the students! This is a way to explore your images of teaching. Close the book while you work. When you finish your drawing, return to this section.

As you analyze your drawing, you may want to reflect on the following questions:

- How is your classroom arranged?
- Are desks in rows? Or are tables grouped around the room?
- What are you doing? What are your students doing?
- Are you standing in front? In the middle? To the side?
- Are students raising their hands?
- Judging from your drawing, what mental models do you have of yourself as a teacher?



Thinking about your own story and then telling it is an important step in looking backward. An **educational autobiography** is your story of your life as a student. It has no definite length but usually responds to the following questions:

- What do you think of when you think of school?
- Where did you attend school?
- When you walked into the building, did you have a sense of comfort? Fear? Anxiety?
- Close your eyes and imagine you are back in elementary, middle, or high school. What was school like for you? Do you remember what school *smells* like? *Sounds* like?
- Try to imagine specific teachers. What grades did they teach? Who were your friends in those grades?

My story begins with kindergarten:

I remember starting kindergarten at the age of 4 years and 6 months. Arbitrary calendar cut-off dates, typical of many public school districts, allowed me to enter school well before my fifth birthday. Neighbors would say, “She made the year.” That referred to being allowed to commence kindergarten prior to turning 5. Other children, born 4 weeks later, had “missed the year” and began kindergarten after their fifth birthday. They would be the oldest in the grade, whereas I was the youngest. In those days, nursery schools and pre-kindergartens were uncommon, so this would be my first separation from home.

I remember being frightened and throwing up every day for the first 2 months of kindergarten. But I also recall my kindergarten teachers accepting and welcoming me each day, regardless of

my physiological reaction to my separation from home. I was a “young” 4-and-a-half-year-old and would probably have been better served by “missing the year.” How patient and kind my two kindergarten teachers were! They saw me coming and intuitively knew that I was not ready for school. After helping me get over being sick each morning (they had a pail ready), they guided me gently to my seat. Their understanding that I had to become comfortable at my own pace enabled me to make an adjustment without shame and embarrassment because they had no judgement, only patience.

I shall always remember their acceptance of me and my lack of readiness. How lucky I was to have these two teachers as I acclimated to being away from home.

Being a Teacher Is Like . . .

“Being a teacher feels like being a dentist—we are always pulling teeth,” a new teacher remarked to me recently. “Ouch,” I responded. “Is it that hard?”

“Well,” she replied, “when they don’t give me what I am looking for, I feel like that.”

Aha, I think—some comparison! One of the most important misconceptions about teaching is that it is a solitary activity—something you do *to have control over someone else*. In fact, teaching and learning is an interaction, a conversation, a collaborative process involving you, the teacher, and all of your students. Teaching is about the students, *their* needs, not *your* needs or even your needs for them. The teacher who feels like a dentist is focusing on what his or her needs are, not on the needs of the students.

It is true that sometimes we wish students would respond in certain ways and they just do not. Yet there are much better similes than pulling teeth. Much of the time teaching is like this:

- **Being a tour guide.** According to one teacher, a good tour guide takes travelers to new places, interprets experiences and sites, helps travelers understand and appreciate these new experiences, and develops a group atmosphere to maximize positive experiences for the travelers. A good tour guide has general goals in mind but is flexible and allows for exploration of ideas that arise from the group. Indeed, there are many times when teaching is like being a tour guide. The teacher sets the itinerary and takes the students through the lessons to many new places.



Tom Werner/DigitalVision/via Getty Images

- **Being a sailor.** Sometimes when you go sailing, you think you are going to reach a certain island. You set out for that destination, but you find it does not have a dock. The dock is simply not there. So you need to have an alternative plan. On other days, you have a destination in mind, but the wind is blowing in the wrong direction and the sailboat will not go there. Yes, on many days, teaching is like sailing, and the teacher changes course in midstream as he or she determines a better direction and a more feasible destination.



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- **Being a sculptor.** Sculptors are fond of saying that they do not “make” their art; they uncover what is already hidden in the material. Similarly, teachers uncover the ideas emerging in the minds of their students.



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- **Climbing a hill.** Another teacher explains that teaching is a constant process of ascending an incline. Every once in a while you stop, take a breather, make sure everyone is comfortable, and then you start climbing again. That sounds like you need a lot of strength.



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WRITING & REFLECTION

Teaching Is Like . . .

Think of one or more comparisons for teaching.

As you choose your comparisons, explain why you think each is a good description of teaching.

The “Writing & Reflection” activity will help you come up with your own simile or metaphor for teaching. There is an important reason for exploring these comparisons. It gets you started on developing your personal philosophy of teaching statement. A **philosophy of teaching statement** outlines your ideas about teaching and learning, sets out techniques for being reflective about your practice, and describes how you may teach. It may also include your goals for yourself as a teacher. If you decide to pursue a career in teaching, your philosophy of teaching statement could form an important part of your teaching portfolio. It can also be a baseline philosophical platform that changes over time with experience.

Your teaching philosophy should be backed up by evidence from research. For many decades, educators have studied how people learn and have compiled evidence about successful teaching strategies. As you read this text, you will encounter some of that research; the more you learn about it, the better prepared you will be to state your own teaching philosophy. But it is never too early to begin this kind of thinking. Take a few moments to think about your own teachers.

A Favorite Teacher

Does one teacher stand out in your mind as having influenced you in a positive way? How did this teacher make an impact, and what was the result of his or her connection to you? Answering these questions is another good way to reflect on your educational past. When I think about these questions, I remember junior high school.

I had a seventh-grade teacher, Mrs. Fisher, in JHS 117 in the Bronx in New York City. I was, as you read in the early part of my educational autobiography, really young for my grade; I was

11 years old. Mrs. Fisher was my science teacher, and in those days, much of general science revolved around learning how the internal combustion engine of an automobile worked.

I really liked science, but I was shy, young, and from a poor working class community. I had little self-confidence. Mrs. Fisher took me aside one day and said, “You know, Janice, you are very good in science; you should go to the Bronx High School of Science.” This high school is one of the specialized schools in New York City requiring that students pass an entrance exam. Mrs. Fisher gave me the application and helped me complete it.

I passed the exam, was admitted, and began attending the Bronx High School of Science at the age of 12. My experience at this distinctive high school changed the course of my future education and career. Years later, I went to visit Mrs. Fisher and thanked her for having taken an interest in me. I determined that one day I, too, would make a difference for students. Mrs. Fisher believed in me, and in return, I believed in myself. Very often, teachers do not even know how they affect the future decisions of their students. That is why Christa McAuliffe, the former teacher turned astronaut who perished in the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster in 1986, said famously, “I touch the future—I teach.” (Hohler, 1986)

What Qualities Make a Good Teacher?

After reflecting on your favorite teacher, you may want to compare the attributes of this teacher with a list of some general qualities of good teachers. (See “Qualities of Good Teachers,” p. 8). This list is not the final word on good teacher qualities, but it is a start. I call it the “5 Cs.” How do these qualities match up with the ones your favorite teacher had?

In making this comparison, think about to what extent you possess these qualities. As we proceed, we will often return to the concept of **goodness of fit**. This term refers to how good a match there may be between your personal qualities and the demands of teaching.

Do not seek a perfect match between yourself and the characteristics listed. You are always growing and changing as a person, and you certainly may develop qualities you do not possess now. When you begin to think about a career in teaching, one of your responsibilities is to analyze your own strengths and weaknesses. Realizing your strengths allows you to use them to the fullest potential, whereas identifying your weaknesses allows you to work toward improving or overcoming them.

QUALITIES OF GOOD TEACHERS: “5 CS”

A good teacher needs to be:

Committed Good teachers have a commitment to their own ongoing education as well as the learning experiences of the young people in their charge. They are committed to fostering a love of learning in their students.

Caring Teachers demonstrate their hopes for their students through the ways they nurture their development, encouraging students to achieve and supporting them as they reach new heights of understanding. They also demonstrate their “caring” by how prepared they are as they begin the school day.

Courageous It requires courage to maintain a commitment over time, persisting in working on behalf of every student, regardless of ability.

Conscious Good teachers are consistently aware of their interactions with their students. They consciously function to ensure respectful and meaningful discourse. They do not casually “shoot from the hip” when engaging with their students. They are deliberate and considered.

Centered Good teachers have a centered presence in the classroom. They command the students’ attention by their own personal comfort with being at the center of responsibility. They communicate, through their body language and speech, their own readiness to work with their students.

LOOKING FORWARD: THE PROFESSION

Now it is time to begin looking forward. What is special about teaching as a career? What do you need to know about the profession you are considering?

An Essential Profession

How we think about and voice the purpose of school matters. It affects the way we think about students— all students—about intelligence, achievement, human development, teaching and learning, opportunity and obligation. (Rose, 2009, p. 169)

In a U.S. Department of Education report, *Promising Practices: New Ways to Improve Teacher Quality* (1998), teaching is referred to as “the essential profession, the one that makes all other professions possible.” What do you think that means? The report further declares that without well-qualified, caring, and committed teachers, neither improved curricula and assessments nor safe schools—not even the highest standards in the world—will ensure that our children are prepared for the challenges and opportunities in this century. Despite being more than 20 years old, this report has stood the test of time. Teaching is the essential profession. More than ever before in our history, education will make the difference between those who prosper in the new economy and those who are left behind. Teaching shapes education and therefore shapes the future of the United States—molding the skills of the future workforce and laying the foundation for good citizenship and full participation in community and civic life.

Hence, it is the teacher who will bring to life the ideals, attitudes, learning experiences, and joy that are possible in a classroom. The curriculum, which we will explore later in this text, is a lifeless document in itself. It is the classroom teacher who enables the curriculum materials to have personal meaning for each learner.

Does this sound like a tall order? It is! Because what teachers know and are able to do has such a profound impact on the future of education, you need to understand how people learn. You need to become familiar with different contexts for teaching and the diversity of students in schools.

We would not expect that a future doctor would be able to examine a patient or perform surgery with just a few months of training. Yet we often expect students to become teachers after a short period of in-classroom training. This is why many teacher education programs (and yours may be one) require early field experiences, during which you observe and participate in the life of a classroom at the grade level you are thinking about teaching.

The National Education Association

The **National Education Association (NEA)** is the nation’s largest professional employee organization. It has over three million members who work in educational settings from preschools to universities. With affiliate organizations in all 50 states and in more than 14,000 U.S. communities, the NEA



Cheriss May/Alamy Stock Photo

provides local services such as workshops and collective bargaining for teachers. On state and national scales, it acts as a lobbying group for educational issues.

Chapter 2 will have much more to say about professional organizations for teachers. I bring up the NEA here because, as far back as 1929, members adopted a code of ethics for the profession. The preamble to the NEA Code of Ethics (1975) begins, “The educator, believing in the worth and dignity of each human being, recognizes the supreme importance of the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, and the nurture of democratic principles” (NEA, 2022). This statement refers to a teacher’s commitment to all of his or her students. A teacher’s authentic desire to make a connection with every student and to consider each individual’s needs is the essence of good teaching.

This statement’s meaning probably requires even more careful thought today than it did in the past. We are living in an age of a digital technology revolution when the amount of information available to teachers and their students is exploding, accessible on devices that we carry in our pockets. Teachers must encourage students to embrace the value of examining multiple viewpoints on a topic but also teach them how to evaluate the validity of information. Hence, our commitment might better be stated as recognizing the importance of *multiple* truths and *multiple expressions* of excellence. This phrase also reminds us to honor democratic principles such as individual expression, capitalizing on special student interests, and expanding students’ abilities to explore and critique multiple ideas and values.

The NEA Code of Ethics includes principles of commitment to the student and to the profession. It includes the responsibility to adhere to the highest ethical standards: “Your ethical responsibility as a teacher goes beyond telling the truth. Your responsibility is to place the needs of students at the center of your work and to give them priority over your own needs”.

Hence, your constant question should be, “What is in the best interests of my students?” This is important as you consider a career in teaching. Many people enter the profession and discover that it is difficult to be as generous of spirit as the profession demands. That would not make you a bad person, but you need to consider how it relates to the goodness of fit between this profession and your personal attributes.

An Organized Profession

Overall, teaching is a highly organized profession. In addition to the NEA, the **American Federation of Teachers (AFT)**, created in 1916 and affiliated with the U.S. labor movement, has more than 1.7 million members and more than 3,000 local affiliates. Both the NEA and the AFT provide legal services and collective bargaining representation as well as a network of support for teachers, including professional development resources for your growth as a teacher. These large groups also wield a great deal of political influence on behalf of educators and schools.

When you enter the teaching profession, you may decide to join one or both of these organizations. We will visit them again in this book’s final chapter, but it is not too early to think about these communities of teachers.

Starting Early

The **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** is the nation’s largest early learning professional organization. Early childhood education is the most critical stage for preparing future learners. The NAEYC has standards for creating the first step in the “cradle-to-career” educational pipeline. High-quality early learning programs are the foundation for future success in schools. The NAEYC focuses on the quality of education for all children, birth through age 8. A look at the position statement on student diversity developed by the NAEYC (see “Honoring Diversity: Position Statement”) provides insight into the ways in which teaching very young children could never be considered an afterthought! We will explore the role of early education in leveling the playing field for young children of poverty in Chapter 6.



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HONORING DIVERSITY: POSITION STATEMENT

Young children and their families reflect a great and rapidly increasing diversity of language and culture. The NAEYC recommendations emphasize that early childhood programs are responsible for creating a welcoming environment that respects diversity, supports children's ties to their families and community, and promotes both second language acquisition and preservation of children's home languages and cultural identities. Linguistic and cultural diversity is an asset, not a deficit, for young children.

Recommendations for Working With Families

- *Actively involve families in the early learning program.* Links between school, home, and community are important for all young children, but forging them can be challenging when families and program staff differ in culture and language. Ties to the community, respectful relationships with families, and encouragement of active, culturally meaningful family involvement are essential.
- *Help all families realize the cognitive advantages of a child knowing more than one language and provide them with strategies to support, maintain, and preserve home-language learning.* Families may think that speaking to their children only in English will help them learn the language faster. But home-language preservation benefits children's cognitive development, and families with limited English proficiency provide stronger language models when they emphasize their home language.
- *Convince families that their home's cultural values and norms are honored.* Continuity between home and the early childhood setting supports children's social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. Though not always identical, practices at home and in school should be complementary.

Recommendations for Working With Young Children

- *Ensure that children remain cognitively, linguistically, and emotionally connected to their home language and culture.* Children's positive development requires maintaining close ties to their family and community. If home language and culture are supported, children, families, and communities stay securely connected.
- *Encourage home language and literacy development, knowing that this contributes to children's ability to acquire English language proficiency.* Research confirms that bilingualism is an asset and an educational achievement. When children become proficient and literate in their home language, they transfer those skills to a second language.

- *Help develop essential concepts in the children's first language and within cultural contexts that they understand.* Although some children can seem superficially fluent in their second language, most children find it easier to learn new, complex concepts in a familiar language and cultural framework. Once established, these concepts readily transfer into a second language and contribute to later academic mastery.

Respect for diversity must become part of every classroom teacher's agenda, regardless of grade level, subject matter, and of whether the teacher looks and sounds like his or her students. Viewing diversity as a gift is one of the central tenets of becoming a good teacher. You need to ask yourself, "What can I learn from my students, and how can I grow with this new understanding?"

Honoring diversity means accepting that we are all products of our own culture, our own biases, and our own beliefs. You must constantly ask: "Who are my students? What are their lives like? What are their stories? . . . and knowing these things, how can I help them learn?" This is all part of respecting the learner and ultimately respecting ourselves as learners. Chapter 5 addresses the issue of the wide diversity of students in today's schools and its implications for teaching and learning. If we think of diversity as an opportunity, we will grow from the challenge and become better teachers.

A National Board

In 1987, the **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)** was created to set forth a vision for what accomplished teachers might "look like." These principles were developed in response to the report *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986). National Board Certification was designed to develop, retain, and recognize accomplished teachers and to generate ongoing improvement in schools nationwide. It is the most respected professional certification available in K–12 education. Created by teachers for teachers, these standards represent a consensus among educators about what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. Board certification is available in 25 areas spanning 16 disciplines from pre-K through 12th grade. Besides being an advocacy organization, the NBPTS offers a national system to certify teachers who meet these standards. National Board Certification is voluntary and represents a higher form of accreditation beyond state certification.

This certification is a symbol of professional teaching excellence. State licensing systems for teachers set entry-level standards, but NBPTS certification requires more advanced standards. There are now over 125,000 National Board-certified teachers in all 50 states. This represents over 3% of all teachers. In Chapter 10, we will review the standards set forth by the NBPTS as well as some of the components of the certification test. For now, the board and its work is yet another indication of the professionalism of teaching and the exciting prospects you have in entering the field.

More Than a Profession

We have been talking about teaching as a profession, but is that all it is? Carl Jung, the noted Swiss psychiatrist, said:

An understanding heart is everything in a teacher. One looks back with appreciation at the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feeling. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child. (McGuire, 1954, para. 249)

So much is said about the skills and knowledge that are needed for teaching. The unspoken requirement, however, has to do with your disposition—your own ability to understand your students and to connect with them in ways that help them become better learners.

More than in most other professions, your personality and your belief in yourself shine through the techniques and strategies you employ. Your authentic self—that part of you that wants to make a contribution to the social good—is evident in the way you address the students, in your smile, in your level of preparedness for class, in the questions you ask, and in the respect you demonstrate for students as individuals. As you work with this text, be sure to explore your innermost hopes and dreams and keep asking yourself, "Is teaching really for me?"

THE WORKPLACE: SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SCHOOL CULTURE

The day-to-day workings of a school influence how you enact your philosophy of teaching. Schools are constantly in flux, depending on student enrolment, collaboration among colleagues, pressures from the local community, and the vision of the school leader. They are especially subject to change as they adapt to the ever-changing health environment resulting from the pandemic. As we will see, some schools closed, others went hybrid, and still others were fully remote. The following workplace descriptions relate to schools that are fully open with students learning face-to-face with each other and their teachers.



Some classroom climates can be experienced even by a casual observer.

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CAN YOU FEEL THE SCHOOL CLIMATE?

Frequently, you can tell if a school's climate is nurturing by the feeling you get in the halls—if the principal and other administrators are readily visible and if teachers smile and greet students by name. In such a school, students are treated as individuals.

At the other extreme, in a school with an authoritarian climate, the halls are very quiet, there are strict "no talking" rules, doors are closed tight, and there is a feeling of tension in the air.

Teaching practices, student and teacher diversity, and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students all contribute to school climate.

Although no single, universally accepted definition of school culture has been established, there is general agreement that it involves deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions formed over the course of the school's history (Deal & Peterson, 1999). A school culture may have, for instance, a reputation for being very academic. My high school did. The culture of my high school could be described as academically driven, college preparatory, nonathletic, and cerebral. We were thought of as geeks because we attended this serious-minded high school whose culture had been forged since its inception. Other high schools in my area had a culture that was more social, athletic, and active in the community, though also academic.

A school's culture is evident in its shared values, heroes, rituals, ceremonies, stories, and cultural networks. For example, if a school's leaders believe that motivation and academic achievement are a definitive part of the school's culture, they communicate and celebrate those values in as many ways as possible. A strong school culture flourishes with a clear set of values and norms that actively guide the way the school functions. In my high school, students were made to feel proud of the academic productivity of their classmates. Achievement was rewarded in the school newspaper and in organized assemblies.

When you think back to the ways in which the schools you attended functioned, how would you describe the school culture of your elementary, middle, and high schools? What did the schools stand for? How was that communicated?

As you think about applying a teacher's professional commitments and values in a particular school setting, there are two terms you should know: **school climate and school culture**. These phrases refer to “the sum of the values, cultures, safety practices, and organizational structures within a school that cause it to function and react in particular ways” (McBrien & Brandt, 1997, p. 87).

Often, the two terms, school climate and school culture, are used interchangeably, but some educators make a distinction between them: *school climate* refers to the way students experience the school, and *school culture* means the way teachers and administrators interact and collaborate.

Still other educators think about school climate as the general social atmosphere or environment in a school. This is my preferred way of using the term. The social environment in this sense includes the relationships among students, between students and teachers, among teachers themselves, and between teachers and administrators. Students experience their environment differently depending on the rules and protocols set up by school administrators and teachers. School climate also includes the “orderliness of the environment, the clarity of the rules, and the strictness of the teachers in enforcing the rules” (Moos, 1979, p. 96).

Think back to your educational autobiography. According to the definition of school climate as the general social atmosphere, how would you describe the climate of your elementary school, middle school, and high school? A school climate may be described as nurturing, authoritarian, or somewhere in between. For example, I experienced my high school as simultaneously nurturing and strict, caring and rigorous. We can also ask whether a school has a healthy climate, one in which students are made aware of expectations for their behavior toward one another and their teachers. In your own elementary school, middle school, and high school, was the student body diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, and social class, and if so, was there evidence of prejudice or racism? How was that expressed? What did school officials do to make students feel like valued members of the educational community?

AN ERA OF TESTING AND STANDARDIZATION

In 2002, the federal law No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed. Among other provisions, it required public schools to test every student in Grades 3 through 8 in reading and mathematics. It is safe to say that the decades that followed its passage are considered the **era of testing** and standardization in education.

In December 2015, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) standardized tests in each state to measure basic skills and rote learning. Many of you reading this text may have taken these same tests in your pre-college education. These tests are often referred to as *standards-based assessments*, referring to assessments that compare student accomplishment to preestablished achievement goals rather than to the achievement of other students. The standard is supposed to be absolute, independent of the students who meet it. By contrast, norm-referenced tests describe what students can do relative to other students. The fact that a student scores at the 60th percentile in mathematics in a norm-referenced test, for example, tells us only that she fares as well as or better than 60% of her peers—not how many mathematical skills she has mastered.

Education standards in content areas are designed to define what students should know and be able to do in that area of learning. The standards-based assessments measure students' progress based on their test performance. Teachers all over the country have been trained to help students meet the expectations of these tests, and this has strongly influenced the daily life of the classroom.

The ESSA replaced the NCLB Act while maintaining many provisions of the NCLB. ESSA provides for more flexibility in standardized testing to be determined by the states. It is important to note that both laws were reauthorizations of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which asserted that full educational opportunity should be our nation's top priority. As you will see in Chapter 3, education is federally funded and locally implemented. ESSA goes a long way in providing states with more local control and flexibility than did NCLB. While the subject of many disparaging views, NCLB highlighted educational inequality in this country, known as the *achievement gap*.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Ideas about teaching are often oversimplified. Our memories of our teachers are sometimes selective and misleading. However, the interpersonal nature of teaching demands that those interested in the profession take stock of their own attributes and dispositions, their personal school experiences, and their future goals for themselves as teachers. It is never too soon to start reflecting on your decision to become a teacher.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Key Terms

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (p. 12)

educational autobiography (p. 6)

era of testing (p. 16)

goodness of fit (p. 10)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (p. 12)

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (p. 14)

National Education Association (NEA) (p. 11)

philosophy of teaching statement (p. 9)

reflective practitioner (p. 4)

school climate and school culture (p. 16)

REVIEW THE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Review each section of the chapter and answer the following:

- LO 1.1** What does your own educational history imply for your future as a teacher?
- LO 1.2** How do you assess your goodness of fit between your personal qualities and the demands of teaching?
- LO 1.3** Give an example of the effect a committed teacher may have on the school climate.
- LO 1.4** What do you think is the lasting effect of the era of testing?

InTASC STANDARDS

Review the InTASC Standards for the chapter and explain how the chapter addressed each one.

Standard 3: Learning Environment

Standard 9: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice

JOURNAL PROMPT

Compare the qualities of a good teacher as described by the 5 Cs with your own personal qualities. Are there some you do not have currently but could work to develop?