Empathy, Intuition and the Development of Expertise in Teaching

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What makes for expertise in teaching? Most people would probably answer in terms that included reference to knowledge of the curriculum, mastery of pedagogic techniques and strategies, and to an understanding of at least some of the theories of learning proposed by psychologists. I do not agree. Each of these underpinning aspects of teaching may contribute to the development of competence as a teacher. However, none - whether singly or together - and in however great a quantity, can allow a teacher to develop expertise, in the absence of other attributes which in my view, are essential. In this paper I propose to say something about these attributes and the ways in which they contribute to expertise not only in teaching, but in other areas.

Much of what I have to say is focused on education at primary (elementary) school level and draws on my experience in the education of teachers for this age group. However, I believe that expertise in teaching is the same whatever the age of the students, and whatever the topic, and what I have to say has relevance for teachers of students at all ages and levels from pre-school age through to postgraduate level. This is not to say that I believe that someone who has developed expertise in one area will necessarily be able to apply that expertise in another, because other factors may prevent her from doing so, including the ability or desire to relate to groups other than the one in relation to which she has developed her expertise.

Some of the experiences that have influenced my developing views have come from outside primary teaching. Indeed some of what I have to say derives from contact with areas outside education. For example, I have been influenced in what I think about expertise in teaching by observing the work of both children's entertainers and physiotherapists. It may seem odd to refer to these areas as having influenced the development of my ideas about expertise in teaching. And so, before you read further you may care to reflect a little on my claim that when they are successful, children's entertainers and physiotherapists exhibit characteristics that overlap with what is necessary for expertise in teaching at any level, perhaps especially an exceptional ability to understand and communicate with others.

Think firstly about the children's entertainer. Consider the good children's magician or puppeteer, the juggler or clown, who manages somehow to hold his audience, however large, however diverse in age, completely spellbound, to control their behaviour and their emotions, to engage their imaginations, their vocal chords and the movements of their bodies, without effort. What is it that he is doing when he performs so magically, so engagingly, so expertly? Could teachers learn anything from what he does?

Think next about the physiotherapist. I think all student teachers should spend some time watching expert physiotherapists at work, because they have much to teach us. I first formed this idea when my wife had a serious debilitating illness some years ago, following which she received intensive physiotherapy to help her to learn to walk again. She received her therapy in a large room where several other physiotherapists were also working and I found myself intrigued and charmed by many of the things that I saw. What I found particularly interesting was the way in which for each patient, the physiotherapists seemed to be able to devise a task or tasks which fitted not only with his physiological needs but with his motivational profile, choosing in each case, tasks that would not only help the patient to make the physical efforts necessary for him, but tasks which would motivate him as an individual, helping to build his view of himself as well as his physical abilities. For example, while the physic, working with my wife engaged her in the attempt to walk elegantly on a very wobbly mattress, and conjured up images for her to attempt to emulate even as she stumbled from one shaky step to the next, another, who was working with rather a tough and macho-looking man with severe and unsightly scars from deep burning to his arms, worked with him on exercises that demanded little elegance but enormous strength, including rolling up a substantial gymnastic mat with his bare hands. Perhaps you have also had some experience of physiotherapy as a result of which you share my belief that teachers may have something to learn from the way in which physiotherapists make their decisions about how best to aid people on the road to physical development and recovery.

Expert teachers are relatively uncommon so that after more than twenty years in education, I know only a few. This is not to say that that I know very few good teachers, because I know many. But expertise is something different. Good teachers will nearly always have special knowledge of the curriculum and of teaching methods; expert teachers may have this, but they need not, and even if they do, this is not the source of their expertise.

My guess is that we will never produce expert teachers as the result of initial teacher education courses. On the other hand I have occasionally come across students who already show evidence of the development of expertise, usually as a result of identifiable previous experience. For example, such students have sometimes achieved high levels of attainment in specific skill areas such as music or sport, where they may have had contact with a teacher who displayed expertise as a teacher rather than simply as a musician or athlete, say; or they may have experienced the developed attributes that make for expertise in teaching in the home, through contact with a parent or carer, whether or not they are employed professionally as a teacher. Even in the case of students who do not already show such embryonic expertise as the result of earlier experiences, I believe we may realistically hope to produce teachers who show some signs of the development of expertise, especially if they have talent in understanding and communicating with children. Furthermore, and perhaps more contentiously, I think we can expect at least some students whose grasp of the curriculum is imperfect and whose toolbox of teaching techniques and strategies is relatively poorly developed, to achieve a degree of expertise as a teacher, provided that they are both motivated and able to develop the necessary attributes.

So I believe that what makes for expertise in teaching is not the adoption of a particular style of classroom management or pedagogy - the adoption, say, of an approach based on discovery, an emphasis on active rather than rote learning, on teachers as facilitators of learning through the orchestration of learning opportunities, rather than as fountains of knowledge and truth. And I want to say why. But I want, first, to say something about the idea of competence as applied to the skills and knowledge that are required for teaching. [1]

COMPETENCE

In the UK in the last few years, concern with competence (whatever that means and however it might be measured) has spread like a rash through the professional education not only of teachers but of other professionals including, for example, social workers. As a result those of us who are involved in teacher education were for a while, inundated with lists and revised lists and yet more lists of a range of areas in relation to which it was claimed that a person should be expected to demonstrate competence before she could be awarded a teaching qualification. You know the kind of thing I'm talking about:

- *knowledge of subject matter.* Clearly the competent teacher must know something about her subject because the transmission of knowledge is at least partly what education is about. In the case of primary school teachers this means that she must know something about a lot of subjects.
- *a range of abilities.* For example, in organising, planning and preparing work for pupils taking account of their individual needs and the requirements of the curriculum, [2] and of the need to assess and record children's progress.

With lists of the areas in relation to which students should be expected to demonstrate competence before being awarded a licence to teach supplied by government agencies, institutions of teacher education in the UK should be turning out newly qualified teachers (NQTs) who are competent in a wide range of such skills and knowledge. And barring mistakes or moral cowardice on the part of school-based mentors or college tutors who, for example, want to please students and be well thought of them so much that they are willing to award them pass grades that they do not deserve, no teacher entering the profession should be incompetent. Or at least there should be no danger of incompetent teachers entering the profession if the lists of competence with which we are supplied really do add up to competence as a teacher, and it really is possible to assess competence in relation to these various areas in an objective and reliable way.

Over the past few years teacher education in the UK has changed so that the supervision of students on teaching practice in schools is undertaken mostly by teachers in those schools, who act in the role of mentor to them, rather than by college tutors. This has caused a number of problems in ensuring fair assessment of students' ability to teach. One of the most significant of these has arisen from the need to ensure that school based mentors and college tutors make similar judgements about students' performance in schools. Given the emphasis on the idea of competence, another and perhaps even more important difficulty has arisen from the need to decide whether students might be allowed to balance performances in some areas that are ‘less than competent’, with per’ormances in others that are ‘more than competent’. My view, which would probably not be shared by many colleagues, is that if we want good teachers we should be willing to do this, at least in the case of those students who display the beginnings of expertise in some of their work as teachers and who demonstrate awareness of their weaknesses and eagerness to remedy them. It is also my view that where a student shows a lack of awareness of weaknesses, an unwillingness to have weaknesses drawn to her attention, or a lack of motivation to improve in areas where she is weak, her future in teaching is at best in crisis; however, my reason for believing this is related not to gaps in competence but the lack of ability or willingness to work at remedying weakness.

I do not intend to offer a detailed critique of the current obsession with competence in the UK, because I agree that there should be a level of basic competence below which a teacher should not fall. I recognise the importance of many of the areas that have appeared in lists of competence that I have been expected, as a teacher educator in the UK, to apply in my thinking about how well students have performed as teachers. However, I have some doubt about whether demonstrable competence in a number of discrete areas necessarily adds up to competence as a teacher. Certainly they do not add up to expertise. Lest my saying that I think there is a level of competence below which a teacher should not fall, might be taken as inconsistent, given my earlier implied claim not really to understand what is meant by ‘competence’ as applied to teachers, I should make clear the nature of my objection. It is not to the idea that there is a kind of global notion of competence against which we should consider teachers, but rather to the expectation that teacher educators should believe or act as if they believe, that it is possible to tell of a student in training whether, in relation to a number of discrete elements of competence, he or she is *competent enough.* This I think is highly questionable, though to admit as much in the UK at present would be a little like the challenge the boy in Hans Christian Anderson’s story would have realised he was facing, had he thought before pointing out that the Emperor was wearing no clothes.

Speaking as a parent of school age children, I’d rather my children were taught by hardworking, well meaning, sensitive, caring and enthusiastic teachers, aware of and anxious to remedy their weaknesses, who though they lack some areas of so-called ‘competence’, actually like children, than that they should be taught by competent layabouts who are arrogant about their skills and believe that because they have demonstrated their competence in the past, they no longer have to work at their teaching - at their preparation and planning, at updating their knowledge, and so on. I dare say those of us who are involved in teacher education have all known teachers of this kind - and perhaps even seen them developing into teachers of this kind while they were our students. And 1 dare say many of us have known students whose attitude towards the task and whose willingness to work hard, were as important as knowledge, and even to some extent *competence,* in the decisions we made about their performance, and about whether we would want to have them working in our schools or teaching our children. Perhaps if we are willing to admit it, we have all known students whose attitude to teaching was more of a deciding factor than their level of competence when we came to making a decision about whether to award them a pass grade in relation to their performance in teaching on school placements or hoped, rather, to find an excuse for failing them.

Most colleagues with whom I have discussed competence and its use in assessing the practical work of student teachers, have been rather evasive in answering questions about the fact that in reaching a global view of a student's performance during periods of teaching practice, they are expected first of all, to assess her in relation to a wide range of individual areas of competence as a teacher. The idea is that individual assessments in relation to aspects of teaching such as: the ability to 'teach in a clear and stimulating manner'; the ability to 'make use of appropriate subject related language to promote pupil's understanding'; the ability to 'identify and respond to relevant differences between pupils', and the ability to 'present content coherently, accurately and clearly', can somehow be added up to give a global picture of the student's performance which can be used to determine whether, as a student at a given stage her performance merits a pass grade.

Given the constraints of time and the fact that decisions have to be made across a range of teaching situations and in relation to a wide range of curriculum areas, I guess that most tutors and mentors who are expected to make such assessments do not assess students in relation to individual areas of competence and then somehow use these to arrive at a global assessment. Rather my hunch is that things flow in the opposite direction. In other words, I guess that most tutors and mentors make a global assessment of the student's performance and use this to make decisions about what grades to award in relation to the student's competence in identified areas. Acting like this perpetuates the myth that the assessment process is largely an objective matter.

Colleagues who recognise themselves in the scenario I describe or a near relation (perhaps a first cousin) of it, need not feel too threatened by my apparent accusation, because to the extent that it is an accusation, my professional work places me in the line of fire just as much as anyone else who is involved in the business of educating teachers. In any case, my purpose is not to accuse but merely to attest to the fact that I can see no useful purpose in pretending that we are not only able to make accurate global judgements about a teacher's or student's ability to teach which we can back up by reference to specific observations about a number of facets of her practice, but to do this on the basis of pseudo-scientific and pseudo-objective criteria. And this is what I fear often happens when we are pressurised into feeling unsure of ourselves - which at least in the UK, is all too common for those who, like me, spend their time in educating, training and assessing new entrants to the teaching profession.

And so I would be pleased to hear from colleagues who would want to argue that my hunch does not match up, at least in part, to what they do in practice, rather than to what they claim to do because they are involved in a corporate game of trying to look scientific and objective in the way they approach the assessment of practical aspects of teacher education. I have yet to hear from such a colleague. Perhaps you will be the first.

EXPERTISE

I have suggested that whatever makes for competence in teaching and whether such competence can be accurately assessed during periods of supervised teaching practice, expertise in teaching is at quite a different level. I want to suggest that it comes to teachers as to practitioners in other ‘people professions’,[3] as the result of the development of a number of attributes among which two are particularly important.

First, I believe that expertise as a teacher depends on the development of an ability to empathise with one’s students or pupils - with their lives; with their beliefs; with their aspirations; with their understandings and misunderstanding; with their hopes and fears.

Secondly, I think expertise as a teacher depends on the development of the ability to act in what I want to refer to as ‘intuitive’ ways, in order to facilitate learning. However, it is important to note that I do not conceive of intuition as most people do - as a spooky, otherwordly gift, something that emerges as the result of ‘gut feelings’ about situations and about people. Rather I view intuition in terms of skill in matching what one sees and hears - what one experiences in relationship with one’s students or pupils, and what one observes about them - with one’s previous experiences, and one’s acquired knowledge, which allow one to make helpful decisions about how best to act to ensure learning. Intuition as a teacher develops as a consequence of time spent in reflection on practice.

I shall say more about what I mean by empathy and intuition presently. For the moment let me acknowledge the close relationship between the two. One’s ability to empathise - to imagine oneself into the life and experiences of another person will inform one’s ‘intuitive’ responses to them. And one’s ability to empathise is partly underpinned by intuition - the ability to match what one sees and hears and experiences to one’s previous knowledge, experience and understanding.

Whatever our biases towards different styles of teaching or approaches to teaching in the classroom, I believe strongly that the answer to the question: «What makes for expertise in teachers?» is not a particular style of teaching or some kind of super-competence in skills and knowledge, that is, more of what most employable teachers already possess. Rather I believe that expertise depends upon the developed ability to empathise and to act intuitively, combined with a strong motivation to teach well which arises from an unusual degree of integrity and commitment, and good will towards one’s students or pupils. Expertise can go hand in hand with a number of teaching styles and it is, I think, important to recognise the foolishness of those who become so committed to one approach that sits well with their ideology and personal style, that they are unnable to recognise and learn from, the success of others .[4]

Whatever style a teacher adopts, if she is unable to empathise with the children with whom she is working she will never be an expert teacher, even though she may be expert in employing the teaching style that she embraces and the strategies and tactics that go with that style of teaching. And she will never be an expert teacher unless she is able to draw together elements of her knowledge and experience in order to produce solutions to a variety of problems, including:

- how best to communicate a wide range of ideas to children with a range of abilities and levels of knowledge.

- how best to engage, interest and motivate children with a range of interests and life experiences
- how best to organize a classroom so that maximum number of children can gain the maximum amount of benefit from any teaching sequence or activity, whether it is teacher or pupil centred.

While knowledge of the curriculum and of teaching methods is helpful in solving such problems, what is essential is an ability to make decisions as one proceeds with a lesson or teaching sequence. The ability to revise one's plans according to what happens - the way in which one's pupils respond and so on, is part of what I am thinking of as intuition; it depends upon the ability to draw on one's previous experience, one's knowledge of one's pupils or students and of ways of motivating, controlling and communicating with them.

So what do I mean by 'empathy'? And what do I mean by 'intuition'? And how do I think they are important for expertise in teaching? Let me say a little more about each in turn.

EMPATHY

In talking of empathy I am concerned to say something about aspects of human being that affect our interactions with others. Empathy is about understanding other human individuals and in suggesting that a developed ability to empathise is one of the attributes that distinguishes the expert teacher, I want to draw attention to some ways in which our responses to pupils as human beings like us, can affect both our beliefs about them and our actions towards them.

Most people see empathy as a skill or aptitude that allows us to understand others, to get close to them. We can empathise with others both in their joy and in their sadness, in their excitement and in their misery and distress. Empathy allows us to get alongside pupils when they are achieving and when they are failing to achieve; when they are understanding and when they are failing to understand; when they are interested and excited and when they are distracted, turned off, confused, worried or afraid. Sometimes empathy is described as the ability to see the world from another person's shoes. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1980)* defines it as:

> *The power* of *projecting one's personality into, and so* fully *understanding, the object of contemplation. (p648)*

In my view empathy is the developed ability to imagine what one might feel in a given situation. I think it is about the attempt to understand, to experience, to feel things as another human person might feel them. I think it is:

> The ability to imagine what another might feel like in a given situation, to imagine how this other person might experience this situation.

Thus I think empathy is about the attempt imaginatively to inhabit the other's world and to experience the situation in question as the other experiences it (given his earlier experiences, beliefs and knowledge) rather than about the attempt to imagine what one's own experiences - one's own perceptions and feelings would be were one to find oneself in such a world and in such a situation. Empathy is important in order to allow a teacher to manage, as well as is possible, to work out what she must do in order to interest, communicate with and teach, the children with whom she is working. To some extent this will involve knowledge of each child - his background, his interests, his fears and hopes, the things that will motivate him or turn him off; but it will also involve the ability to imagine a child's reaction to the experience of being a pupil in a particular place, confronted with a range of areas of knowledge, with a variety of tasks and demands, with a variety of problems and joys in learning.

Everyone who is aware of others has the ability to empathise to a certain extent; some degree of empathy is necessary for the everyday business of living in relationship to others as part of society. My claim is that the development of empathy can assist in the business of teaching and that expertise as a teacher depends upon a highly developed ability to empathise with others. By combining her knowledge of the curriculum and teaching methods, and her knowledge of the pupils in her class with the ability to imagine that is empathy, the expert teacher seems to decide in relation to each child the right thing to do at the right time. The moves an expert teacher makes often seem to come from nowhere and may link ideas that are apparently totally unrelated, in a way that kindles interest or understanding.

Empathy allows the teacher to know or to guess as well as is possible, both at what might be going on for a child who does not understand something that she is trying to teach, and what the possible repercussions might be of aspects of her behaviour, on such a child. How I wish Mrs Murray, my teacher when I was 9, had been able to empathise with my confusion when she thought that I was not attending as she first introduced us to decimal fractions. And how I wish she had understood the damage it might do to a child who loved music more than life itself, to giggle when, through the desire to do well, he sang out of tune during auditions for the main parts in the school Christmas play.

Empathy is necessary in order to allow a teacher to hear what a child is saying when he contributes something to discussion that seems unconnected to the lesson plan that she has made.

Often and often I have watched student teachers and experienced classroom teachers alike, failing to pick up on inspirational leaps that children have made to other related areas.

Every time that a child's idea is not heard (or not listened to even if physically it is heard), or is brushed aside as irrelevant, or ignored as being silly, or worse still results in a reprimand, brings more close the time that he or she will stop offering ideas into the public arena. And from that follows, almost inevitably, a move into less engagement with class activity in general, a lessening of interest and entry onto a spiral towards failure. What is most disturbing about this phenomenon is that often the children who are treated in this way are those who are most fired up with excitement about ideas and learning - that is until unimaginative and unempathic teachers stamp on their enthusiasm.

I'd like to share some anecdotal examples of the kind of thing I am talking about. The first comes from my own experience of supervising student teachers undertaking teaching experience as part of their initial training for primary school teaching. It occurred in a class of six and seven year olds

I was visiting a student who, as part of a sequence of work on forces -'pushes and pulls', had been looking at the way that wind can be used to produce movement. The children had been making windmills. You know the kind of thing - a square of paper cut and folded, then mounted on a stick using a pin that will allow it to turn freely when it is exposed to the wind (or to a child - or even an adult, blowing furiously). Towards the end of the lesson, the student was discussing the children's efforts with them as a preamble to carrying out a test to see which one would work the best.

Student: Whose windmill do you think will work best?

Darren: The yellow one.

Student: And why is that?

Darren: Because Amy made it.

At this point the student moved on to ask the next child. In a conversation with the student later, I confirmed my suspicion that she considered Darren's comments to be so 'off the mark' that they weren't worth considering seriously. Let me share with you, as I shared with her, the brief conversation I had with Darren afterwards when I asked what he meant when he said that the yellow windmill would work best because Amy made it. His reply is instructive:

> I said Amy's would be best because she's dead good at making things - because she cuts things out really good and folds dead good. Her stuff's always best.

In my view my student had wasted an opportunity to follow-up an interesting comment by a child - a comment, admittedly, that did not seem to make much sense; but one that she would have followed up, if she had been a little more sensitive to the fact that really Darren was trying to help in the investigation.[5]

In a conference paper that I heard a couple of years ago, Costello (1997) shared some examples of wasted opportunities that he had encountered while working with students in schools. In one case a student was working with children on the way in which media advertising uses catchy headlines to persuade. The student teacher had asked the children to try to come up with examples of such phrases and was inviting responses from the children. One of the children, invited to respond began, «Please Miss, my uncle...» but got no further. This was not what the student wanted or expected. As a result, the child was silenced by a gesture and a look that said «That's not relevant to what we're talking about» and was never allowed to share just what it was about her uncle that he considered interesting enough to want to contribute it to the class discussion. Of course his comment may have been unrelated to the topic under discussion and may thus have represented a distraction not only for herself but for the rest of the class. But perhaps it might have been focused on advertising and would have been a valuable contribution; and in any case by failing to allow the child the opportunity to say what he wanted to say, the student failed to reward him for his interest and this might make him less keen to speak in the future. Unless we take the trouble at least to hear what children are saying we may miss out on lots of interesting conversations and opportunities for teaching, learning and understanding. And unless we are able, imaginatively and intuitively, to enter into the child's world, using our knowledge of him on other occasions and in other circumstances, we are unlikely to be able to respond to his contributions to the lesson in hand in a way that facilitates his development as a human being. In general children who volunteer answers do so because they are motivated to contribute, want to learn, or are intersted in what is going on, and I believe that it is important to take their comments seriously even when they seem unhelpful or disconnected from the topic. The same is true of university students, especially those who are irritating in their ability to pick up on side issues just as we are realising that if we do not keep a tighter grip on things we will be unable to get through our scheduled teaching in the available time.

Costello's second example concerns a child who had been working with a student teacher on grouping shapes by colour and form. The student teacher then asked some question such as, «How many red squares can you see?» and the child answered, «All of them.» On this occasion Costello reports, the student moved straightaway to repeat the question to another child. You might like to reflect on ways in which the student could have made something positive of the child's answer, even if she believed, as she clearly did, that the child did not understand the question (and she was clearly right in this, if what she wanted to ask was how many red squares were present in the group of shapes at which she was pointing). For example, it seems to me that a sensible approach would have been to view the challenge of the child's apparently off-beat answer to a simple question, as an opportunity to explore her understanding (or lack of understanding) of the topic. Perhaps, for example, the student might have discovered that the child was merely giving what he took to be a truthful answer to a straightforward question, and that from where he was sitting he could see all of the red squares because none was hidden from view.

INTUITION

Turning now to my second characteristic of the expert teacher. What is intuition and how is it important for the expert teacher?

Most often intuition is thought of as rather a spooky gift - those who act on the basis of intuition, it is thought, act on the basis of what is known as 'gut feeling'; they somehow just know what to do; they act, and often enough, things turn out well. I do not wish to deny that intuitive action often feels like this for the protagonist; nor do I wish to deny what it looks like to observers. However, I do not believe that this is all that there is to it.

In general I think what passes for intuition involves complex matching, jigsawing and templating (that is, fitting things together), recognising similarities, organising and re-organising. It is about making coherent pictures from partial knowledge. It is about leaps in the dark based on as yet unspoken recognitions. It is intuition (conceived thus) that allows a nurse who walks onto a ward to make a guess (an expert guess) at what is needed for a patient whether, for example, this is to arrange for some change to his treatment regime, or merely to change his position. And while I quite like the fact that my students are often filled with admiration for the way in which, following a brief visit to a classroom, I can often identify and say something about some of the more problematic children in their class, despite never having spoken to those children, the fact is that such things as I can say are based entirely on observation of behaviour, responses to other children and to the student and so on.

The intuition that moves a nurse to act in an expert way results from the accumulated evidence that she has of occasions when other patients looked uncomfortable in the way that this patient does, the experience of having noted the way that patients with similar complaints, at similar points in their treatment look, and hold their head and seem able to concentrate and so on. Something similar is true of the expert teacher as she responds to needs and opportunities that present themselves - whether in relation to a class or group or in relation to an individual child. There is, in other words, a certain degree of overlap between the observations that expert nurses make when they are with patients, and those that a schoolteacher might make when she is with children. The work of skilled practitioners in both disciplines and in many others, depends upon their ability to observe and to match their observations to previous experience in such a way that, drawing on accumulated knowledge, they can come to an understanding of what seems to be going on for a person, which allows them to formulate action plans aimed at ensuring that person's flourishing. But though this process sounds complicated, skilled practitioners will often carry it out effortlessly and without conscious awareness that they have done so. As a result, it is only when they stop to think about why they have done something that they have done, that they will become aware that they did it for a reason or reasons.

In the sense in which I am using it then, intuition overlaps with the ordinary language notion of intuition because I am using it to label the faculty that people sometimes have to act intelligently for no apparent reason. The difference is that in using the word I want to point to the range of barely recognised reasons that underpin expert actions.

Rather than acting because they are moved by some mysterious and unknown faculty that experience brings apparently magically to those who wait, in the sense that I am using 'intuition', expert teachers act intuitively in their work, by continually drawing on their pool of accumulated knowledge and experience, creating solutions to problems with which they are faced. Those who seem intuitively to act in the right way do so because they are able to analyse and assimilate a wide range of experiences - both personal and vicarious (and not only relating to teaching), recording and utilising them to underpin their actions and responses in future teaching situations.

Not everyone who is highly experienced becomes an expert, though we may all develop a degree of expertise. At least part of what turns a novice into an expert or allows lesser mortals to develop some expertise, is the ability to think through her observations and experiences, comparing them to memories of similar situations and to the knowledge bank that she carries around without being conscious of its presence. It is important for the development of practice that we are and become, aware of the theories both formal and informal - both those that are accepted by our academic and professional groups, and those that are personal to us - that arise from and underpin the things that we do. Because of this there is an obvious need for practitioners to be encouraged and given the space to reflect on their practice and that of their peers, on a regular basis. I do not intend to pretend that I am intimately familiar with the rich literature that exists about ‘reflective practice’ because I am not, and to do so would thus be dishonest. It would also be inappropriate because rather than building on what others have said, this article is largely the result of reflection on my experience as a teacher and teacher educator and on the shared experiences of others, and on aspects of my life that have contributed to the pool of personal and shared experience on which I draw as a teacher. If reflection on practice is worthwhile, and I believe that it is, sharing the results of that reflection should also be worthwhile.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I should not draw to a close without being clear about one thing - the fact that I am aware that empathy and the ability to act intuitively will not, in themselves, make a teacher an expert teacher. Expert teachers will do what is best for their pupils and this requires additional attributes including kindness and positive regard. In other words expert teachers need not only to be empathic and intuitive; they need, in addition to be predisposed to use these attributes to good advantage, which involves liking children and being well motivated towards them; their enterprise must be filled not only with skill and understanding but with the good will to put this to positive use in ways that benefit their pupils. After all, empathy is not sympathy - empathy can help someone who is pre-disposed to unkindness and ways of acting towards others that are cruel and nasty, to be more efficient in his cruelty and unkindness.

Not only does the expert teacher have to be someone who likes children, she also has to be someone who is willing to be open to them. This is not a terribly popular idea. Many people believe that to be a professional is to be able to put a proper distance (whatever a proper distance is) between oneself and one’s clients, who in the case of the teacher, are her pupils. I disagree. I believe that professionalism as a teacher begins with the ability to be personal in one’s contact with one’s pupils while remaining aware of one’s responsibilities towards. The expert teacher is willing to share of herself with her pupils, to allow them to know her as a person, in order that she can get to know them as people. The expert teacher models the wonder of learning for her pupils, by being ready to own-up to her own lack of knowledge and understanding. She models, for her pupils, willingness to learn - by her own eagerness to learn from whatever source she can, including books and the children around her who will often have better knowledge than she has in some areas. By contrast poor teachers are likely to be afraid to risk showing themselves up in front of pupils by allowing any weaknesses in their knowledge and skills to show; and they are likely to maintain a veil of authoritative know how as a way of distancing themselves from their pupils. Of course, this phenomenon is every bit as common in other sectors of education, including higher education with adults.

If they are to demonstrate what I am calling expertise, teachers need to be able to make decisions about how best to respond to individual children in relation to their learning - to consider, for example, the best time to give them particular pieces of information or opportunities to attempt or to practice skills; when it is helpful to be a tough disciplinarian and when it is best to be understanding and soft in approaching breaches of classroom rules. An expert teacher knows just what to say and just when to say it. She knows at what level to pitch her explanations; she knows when to push and when to hold back, when to talk and when to listen, when to demand and when to allow a child space. She is both able and willing to hear what children are saying, interrogating the ideas and contributions that they offer, and she is willing to give them the right to display their thinking at its best[6] and to support them in doing so. An expert teacher is able to offer each child the right encouraging word, to give support for learning that is appropriate to his level of understanding, to his level of motivation and to his emotional state. She is able to take account not only of his intellectual level and of what he knows and can do, but of his own individual learning style.

If they are to develop expertise in helping children to develop as thinkers and questioners (and this is the role that I consider to be most important in teaching) it is essential that teachers should take the concerns of children seriously. To fail to do so is to contribute to a deadening of interest and enthusiasm. Yet it is in this area that I think most teachers fail to some extent. And it is perhaps in this area that the greatest difference can be pinpointed between expert and merely competent teachers.

The expert teacher is both willing and able to engage with children's interests with a level of understanding of their concerns that suggests the ability to remember what it is like to be a person whose knowledge and understanding and experience of the world is in most respects less rich than her current knowledge and understanding and experience; and she is able to guess at the level of knowledge and experience that a little person might have in a way and to an extent, that allows her to get alongside this little person in his experience as a child, of the world. The expert teacher will value all of a child's attempts honestly to understand and to engage with ideas. She will endeavour to make as much sense of their questions and their attempts at answering her questions, as possible. If we want to develop towards expertise we must beware of falling into the trap of thinking that just because a child offers a quaint answer to a question or asks a question that is apparently silly, there is nothing important behind what he is saying. One of the formative influences in my development as a teacher was a philosophy lecturer who gave straightforward didactic lectures (always without notes) and always with great clarity. Though he was always interesting and engaging he was rarely entertaining and for that reason some students found him rather boring. I didn't, but that is not the point of my story which concerns his ability to listen to and work with any comment made or question asked by a student in the discussions following his formal lecture, making sense out of the oddest misunderstandings. This man was a gifted teacher though he may not have known it. His gift focused on his ability and willingness to take us seriously, which he shared with all of the expert teachers that I know, most of whom work, not with undergraduates and postgraduates, but with little children.

I hope I have said enough to persuade you that the development of expertise in teaching depends on the development *of* empathy and the ability to act intuitively. I believe that the attempt to develop these attributes should take a central place in programmes *of* initial teacher education. Despite my pessimism about the possibility that such programmes might produce expert teachers, I think that they are the place to begin the process *of* the development *of* expertise by helping students to develop attitudes and habits and disciplines that will enable them to make the best use *of* the experiences they have as they live and grow in their careers. For example, it is on such programmes that we can teach students about the importance *of* honesty in reflecting on their practice, looking for ways *of* improving it, rather than *of* ways *of* justifying what they have done, even when they have failed. It *is* on such programmes that we can encourage tomorrow's teachers to listen carefully to what their pupils say, treating their contributions seriously even when they seem seriously misguided. And it is on such programmes that we can encourage students to develop attitudes *of* generous collegiality that can lead to a predisposition both to enhance their colleagues' work by sharing their own successes and failures and to benefit from the work *of* their colleagues. By sharing in the stories colleagues tell about their work with children, we can expand vicariously the range *of* experiences on which we can draw in in the future and thus our possibilities for intuitive action. And by taking on, even in imagination, the experience *of* others who inhabit the stories with which we come in contact, we can learn to empathise better with the children with whom we come in contact as we teach. Both are necessary *if* we aspire to expertise in teaching.

NOTES

1. It is important to note that the points I want to make about competence are about a way of thinking, rather than about the use of a particular word. Thus, for example, the points I make would be the same if ‘competence ’was replaced by another word, whatever word it was. My objection is to the idea that it is both possible and realistic, to compartmentalise the various skills and areas of knowledge that we expect of those who teach children, in a way that will allow us to go through a ‘tick list’ of areas deciding whether the student has reached a sufficiently high standard to licence our setting her free on the world to teach, assured that in relation to that minute part of practice at least, what she does will be good enough.

2. In Wales where I work but do not live, and in England where I live but do not work, the curriculum has, for a number of years, been prescribed in detail by the British government and their agents in the form of a ‘National Curriculum’ which all children in state schools are entitled to receive and to which all are subjected. This prescribed diet for pupils has changed over the years.

3. By the ‘people professions’ I mean those professions in which what is primarily at stake is individual human flourishing and where at least part of what goes on focuses on the needs and abilities and wishes of human persons as individuals. The people professions include education, nursing, medicine, social work counselling and psychotherapy.

4. I have always been intrigued by the way in which some students are willing to be somewhat dismissive of teachers with whom they are required to work during teaching practice, on the grounds that their approach to the organisation of classrooms or of children, the teaching methods and strategies they employ, and the activities in which they engage with children, are old fashioned and out of date (for ‘old fashioned’ read ‘not trendy’ or in line with the latest educational bandwagon). Usually this dismissiveness is made manifest before the student has taken the time and the trouble to observe what goes on in the classroom with a view to gauging its success - the degree to which the teacher in question engages children and nurtures them whatever approach they use to do so, and the degree of success the teacher has in ensuring that children learn and feel secure in doing so. I am intrigued and surprised

because in my view, while attempting to offer student teachers the widest range possible of successful ways of communicating with children and of achieving success in ensuring their learning, teacher educators should reject a dismissive attitude to colleagues just because their teaching approaches are different from ours, because what matters is how successful they are an not the methods they adopt.

5. Interestingly, this story relates very closely to another experience I have had of students working with small children and windmills which I have written about elsewhere (Fairbairn and Fairbairn, 1994). On that occasion the students (there were two of them) in question did not even think to ask the question about whose windmill would work best, on the grounds that such small children would not know the answer - as if that makes the question not worth askin .

6. My use of the expression 'right to display' is drawn from Rom Harre's interesting chapter «Rights to display» (Harre, 1987).

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