

## CHAPTER 2

# Teaching Stories

### THE INNER LANDSCAPE OF A TEACHER'S LIFE

This chapter emphasizes the following:

- Teachers come from many different backgrounds and have various reasons for choosing the profession. Nevertheless, good teachers share an important characteristic: They are *reflective practitioners* who consistently think about events in their classrooms and modify their teaching practices accordingly.
- Teaching is an organized profession. Teachers are represented by national organizations that offer collective bargaining representation, publish ethical standards for the profession, and provide resources for professional development.
- In an important sense, teaching is *more* than a profession, because the teacher's personality and authentic self shine through the techniques and strategies she or he employs.

### GOALS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

After reading and analyzing this chapter, students should be able to do the following:

1. Understand the meaning of “goodness of fit” as it applies to personal attributes that are relevant for a teaching career.
2. Connect their own ideas to the ideas expressed by teachers in the chapter. This does not imply agreement, but rather the ability to make connections between the teachers' stories presented in the text and conventional wisdom and/or practice as well as their own experiences as students and as future teachers.
3. Recognize some of the challenges of the first year of teaching, and then identify some of the challenges that affect teachers and not other professionals.
4. Discuss the meaning of the statement “We teach who we are” by exploring the ways in which teaching reflects an individual's personality, perspective, and philosophy.
5. Give examples of the hidden curriculum in their own schooling from their earliest memory to the present.
6. Begin the education journal that documents their reflections on the course material and class discussions and personalizes the experience of being in the field (if school placement is required).
7. Analyze their own interview of a classroom teacher by exploring their reactions to the discourse, their perspectives, and what they have learned from the exchange. (Emphasize to students that their analysis should be sensitive to those who believe and act differently from themselves, and that their perspective should be recognized as one of many possible perspectives.)

## STRATEGIES FOR DISCUSSING THE CHAPTER

This chapter is meant to help students explore teachers' experiences in terms of the best and worst features of teaching, the need for professional development, and the reasons for pursuing the career. Students need to be encouraged to articulate their own vision of their lives as teachers. Using the Writing and Reflection sections in Chapter 2, you can prompt your students to articulate their tacitly held beliefs. They need to realize that, on this journey of becoming a teacher, new ideas will often challenge them to reconsider longstanding beliefs.

- Begin by dividing the class into groups, and ask each group to identify the attributes of the teaching profession that do not exist in other professions.
- The phrase *lifelong learner* is a hackneyed one, yet still relevant to the life of a teacher. Explore the following attributes of lifelong learners, and ask students in what ways they can relate to these descriptions.
  - Lifelong learners are personally reflective about their goals, their work, and their accomplishments.
  - Lifelong learners actively assess their performance.
  - Lifelong learners are able to assess new information in light of their own beliefs, remaining open to others' views and new evidence.
  - Lifelong learners demonstrate respect for other people's ideas and consciously work to break down barriers that might prevent them from understanding another's perspective.
  - Lifelong learners keep an open mind, recognize that differences are inevitable and do not need to be negative, and do not assume they know before they listen.
  - Lifelong learners allow others to state their points, and ask questions to clarify their understanding.
  - Lifelong learners seek courses and workshops that help them expand their understanding of topics integral to their teaching careers.
- Introduce the hidden curriculum by sharing a personal story that has a hidden message concerning your beliefs about teaching and learning. Ask students what the message is and why this is an example of your implementation of the hidden curriculum. Relate this to students' lives and interests, and ask them to consider the ways in which their own special interests will become visible in the classroom. Connect this discussion to Ms. Outerbridge's experience with dance, as described in the text.
- In the context of the hidden curriculum and school culture, ask students to examine the rules that govern plagiarism and cheating in your college and university.
- Support groups are often important structures for new teachers, and they may be started while students are preparing for their careers. Members of a support group (usually three to four people) read each other's journals, listen to each other's stories, and offer additional ideas and perspectives. Assess your classroom climate for your students' receptivity to forming support groups. If many students are working and have limited access to others between classes, you may be able to set aside class time on a weekly basis. Support groups can also meet online.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Divide the class into small groups. In each, have students identify the outside groups to which they belong that help define who they are and what their interests include. Compare commonalities and differences among class members, and discuss how special interests are expressed in the classroom, both by students and by teachers.
2. Engage students in an exploration of ways to avoid teacher burnout. This condition usually occurs in new teachers when their expectations and experiences prove to be very different from each other. Ask students to reflect on how they will prevent burnout by using their education journals. Or ask them to write about the connection between the prevention of burnout and what Amanda in the text calls a “learning life.”
3. With the class, watch the video “The First Year of Teaching: One Colleague’s Story,” accessible from the *TEACH* website and mentioned in chapter two. In this video a teacher, Will Starner, discusses his initial year in a classroom. “I’ve had a lot of situations that I really didn’t know would come up,” he says. In the Bonus Video “Mr. Starner Reflects on the First Year of Teaching,” he mentions that he had “all these different theories running through my head,” and he found it difficult to find the best approach for a particular classroom context. After viewing the video, ask the students to reflect on his advice and decide which portions they find most useful.
4. Ask students to explore mentor teaching programs in the school district and communities neighboring your college or university. Ask a mentoring program administrator or participant to visit with the students and discuss the role of a mentor. For new teachers, mentoring programs can make the transition from the college classroom much smoother.
5. Ask students to write down, anonymously, their greatest concern about the first year of teaching. Collect the responses and prepare a summary chart to share with the class. Discuss which concerns can and cannot be addressed by this course.
6. Prepare students to interview a teacher by having one of the students interview you for the class, using the list of questions located under “Learning Projects” on the Instructor Prep cards.. Encourage the students to come up with their own questions as well.

## CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES

This chapter gives your students a glimpse into the lives of practicing teachers and the variety of ways in which they feel satisfied, supported, or frustrated. Students’ own tacitly held beliefs about teaching need to be made visible to them as they learn more about the ways in which their ideas and interests are revealed in the classroom.

Encourage your students to express their fears and concerns as well as their excitement about becoming a teacher. Be sure they continue their education journal and complete the Writing and Reflection exercise in the chapter.

## **WEBSITES TO CONSULT**

- **The Teaching Company**

<http://www.teach12.com/>

The Teaching Company brings courses to its users through DVDs, CDs, and other formats. It is designed for anyone who is interested in expanding her or his knowledge on a wide variety of topics. In other words, it is for lifelong learners.

- **The Teacher Spot**

<http://www.theteacherspot.com/>

This is a good resource for new teachers, offering information on a wide variety of topics.