

**Reaching Students: teachers' ways of knowing**

VIVIENNE COLLINSON, 1996

Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press/Sage

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Vivienne Collinson has written up her doctoral work on exemplary teachers, first through *Teachers as Learners: exemplary teachers' perceptions of personal and professional renewal* (1994) and now as *Teaching Students: teachers' ways of knowing*. This is particularly pertinent now that in the United Kingdom government and the current General Teaching Council are strongly advocating the role of teachers as reflective researchers.

This book addresses a critical issue that serves as knowledge in educational research. There is a perception among teachers that research is what you do in the library and is not particularly relevant to their needs – not that they, through action research and reflective practice, might be producing new knowledge. Collinson identifies a 'triad of knowledge':

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- professional knowledge (curriculum and pedagogy);
- inter-personal knowledge (relationships and community);
- intra-personal knowledge (reflection, ethics and dispositions).

The work of Gardner on multiple intelligences is to the fore. An exemplary teacher operates within a network of pupils, colleagues, parents, multiagency workers and the local community. Exemplary teachers know pupils and their world in ways that should stimulate learning. She feels that trainee and new teachers particularly need the messages of getting to know pupils as individuals and, hence, 'developing teachers, not just techniques'. Such teachers exhibit and promote caring, respect, personal understanding, giving and receiving, and course (= 'an ethic of care'); pride of effort, perseverance, doing one's best (= 'a work ethic'); and curiosity, creativity, risk taking, problem solving, responsibility and flexibility (= 'a disposition towards continuous learning'). These categories and this model were drawn from interviews with exemplary teachers.

In-service education tends to focus on 'how to' (new curriculum, new techniques), whilst questions of coherence and impact on learning are an overarching importance – how this new knowledge can augment the learning discipline. A collaborative classroom encourages pupils to develop supportive relationships. The relationship between teacher and pupils should encourage risk taking, to push the boundaries of learning: it will aim to trust and continually develop trust.

Parents are pupils' 'long term teachers'; they can support teachers and provide invaluable information. The notion of partnership with parents requires real respect. A blame culture is unhelpful; difficult pupils in particular need the school and the parents to be working closely together. This has generally been easier in secondary schools. Equally, not all parents (and for that matter not all teachers) are easy to get on with.

With intra-personal knowledge she defines reflection as a six-step process:

1. Recognition of a problem.
2. Proposal of hypotheses.
3. Gathering information.
4. Reasoning and analysis.
5. Conclusion (resolving the problem).
6. Evaluation of the process.

Compassion, respect, personal understanding, giving and receiving, and moral courage may need to be modelled in the learning process. Pupils need to learn not to be deflected from a reasoned and moral stance by

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peer pressure. Her chapter on 'Learning to Think' is particularly good advice for the new teacher.

This is a simple message, which hides an ideal very hard to achieve – that the main thing about teaching is the ability to motivate pupils through a positive learning relationship. This is as important a message to experienced (and hardbitten) teachers as to new teachers. Ensure that your teaching is motivating; and empower pupils to learn autonomously. Drawing on the perspectives of experienced teachers, it is a message with its feet on the ground – an education ideal that *can* be achieved.

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