University of Southampton

The Principles of Practice

underpinning Initial Teacher Education (ITE)



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Introduction

Learning to teach is a complex, intellectually demanding, and deeply human endeavour. It involves far more than acquiring a set of classroom techniques or learning how to deliver a lesson. Beginning teachers develop through a combination of study, observation, practice, reflection, dialogue, and experience. Throughout this process, they learn not only what teachers do, but how teachers think, act, and contribute to the lives of learners and to society more broadly.

These Principles of Practice outline the foundations of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at the University of Southampton and are intended for all members of the partnership: beginning teachers, mentors, school leaders, and university tutors.

The principles are informed by the work Shulman (2005) who argued that professions develop characteristic ways of preparing newcomers for practice. He referred to these as signature pedagogies: the distinctive approaches through which professions induct new members into their ways of thinking, acting, and understanding their responsibilities. In medicine, for example, clinical rounds help students learn how doctors think and make decisions. In law, case discussions help students learn how lawyers reason. In teaching, beginning teachers learn through observing practice, engaging with theory and research, teaching lessons, receiving feedback, reflecting on their practice, considering evidence and working alongside experienced colleagues.

Shulman (2005) argued that professional education should develop three interconnected dimensions of practice: the capacity to think professionally, to perform professionally, and to act with integrity and responsibility. He described these as the development of habits of mind, hand, and heart.

Habits of the mind concern how teachers think. They include professional knowledge, critical thinking, evidence-informed decision-making, and the ability to exercise sound judgement in complex situations. Teachers continually interpret information, analyse learning, evaluate evidence, and make decisions that affect learners.

Habits of the hand concern how teachers act. They include the practical skills, strategies, and professional capabilities required to translate knowledge into effective classroom practice. They also encompass the processes through which teachers continue to develop their expertise through enquiry, reflection, collaboration, and experience.

Habits of the heart concern what teachers value and who they are becoming as professionals. They include relationships, moral purpose, commitment to learners and an understanding of education in society. Habits of the heart shape the ethical and relational dimensions of teaching and help teachers remain focused on the success of all learners.

These habits are sometimes referred to as the apprenticeships of the mind, hand and heart and are not too dissimilar from Rouse's (2008) dimensions of knowing, doing and believing. Supporting beginning teacher development needs to bear in mind his claim that:

> … if two of the three aspects of development (knowing, doing and believing) are in place, then it is likely that other aspects will follow.

(Rouse, 2008, p.15)

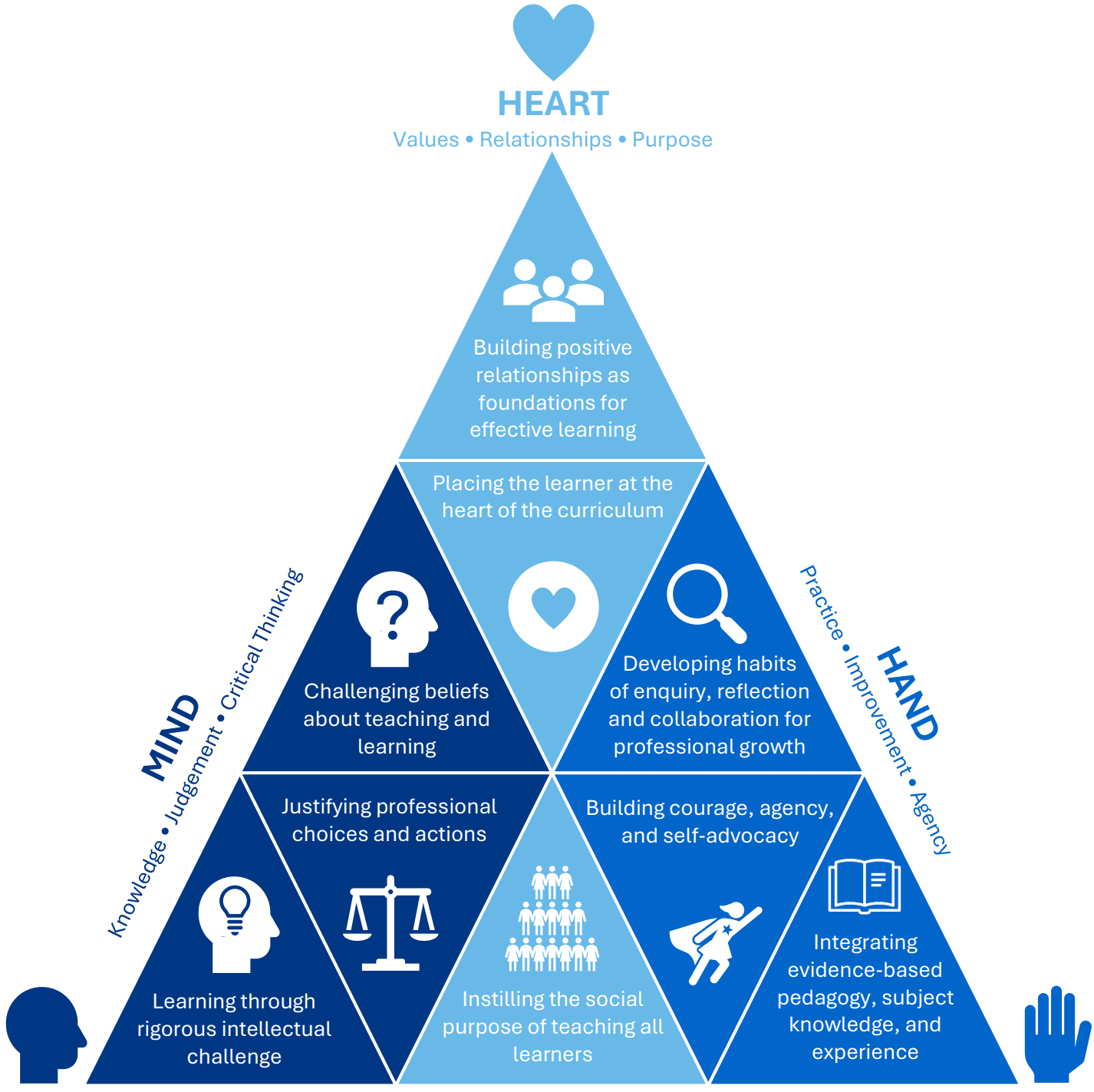
The foundation of these habits is ethical professionalism, grounded in integrity, responsibility, and commitment. Ethical professionalism underpins the decisions teachers make, the relationships they build, and the responsibilities they hold towards learners, colleagues, schools, communities, and society.

In essence, the framework recognises that becoming a teacher involves learning to:

- Think wisely. Develop the knowledge, judgement, and critical thinking needed to make informed professional decisions.
- Teach skilfully. Develop the practices, expertise, and agency needed to support learning effectively.
- Act responsibly. Develop the values, relationships, and sense of purpose needed to serve learners and society ethically and professionally.

Our nine Principles of Practice, organised around the habits of mind, hand, and heart, provide a coherent framework for supporting beginning teachers to develop the knowledge, values, practices, and professional judgement required for the profession. They also provide a shared language for the partnership, helping mentors, tutors, and beginning teachers work collaboratively towards a common vision of excellent teaching and learning.

The Principles of Practice Pyramid



Think Wisely | Teach Skilfully | Act Responsibly

The Principles at a Glance

Habits of the Heart

These principles focus on who teachers are becoming as professionals through adopting and maintaining values, developing relationships and embracing the social purpose of teaching all learners.

Building positive relationships as foundations for effective learning

What is it?	Why is it important?	What does it look like?
Positive relationships are the foundation of successful learning. Learners are more likely to engage, participate and succeed when they feel respected, valued and supported. This principle also applies to relationships between beginning teachers, mentors and tutors.	Learning is fundamentally relational. Strong relationships create trust, encourage participation and support personal and academic growth.	A beginning teacher notices that one learner rarely contributes during lessons. Rather than assuming a lack of motivation, the teacher takes time to get to know the learner, regularly checks understanding and provides opportunities for success. Over time the learner becomes more confident and begins participating more actively in lessons.

Placing the learner at the heart of the curriculum

What is it?	Why is it important?	What does it look like?
This means making decisions about teaching, curriculum and assessment based on learners' needs, interests and potential.	Teaching should never become a process of simply delivering content. Teachers are responsible for helping learners make sense of ideas, develop understanding and make progress over time.	A lesson plan is adapted because assessment evidence shows that learners have not yet grasped a key concept. Rather than moving on according to the scheme of work, the teacher revisits the concept using a different approach.

Instilling the social purpose of teaching all learners

What is it?	Why is it important?	What does it look like?
Teaching has an important role in promoting equity, inclusion and opportunity. Teachers help shape learners' futures and contribute to wider society.	Every learner deserves access to high-quality education regardless of background, circumstance or starting point.	A teacher notices that some learners are consistently excluded from classroom discussion. The teacher adapts questioning strategies and classroom routines to ensure that all learners have opportunities to participate and succeed.

Habits of the Mind

These principles focus on how teachers think as professionals. They are about developing knowledge, engaging in critical thinking and exercising sound professional judgement.

Challenging beliefs about teaching and learning

What is it?	Why is it important?	What does it look like?
Everyone enters teacher education with existing beliefs based on their own experiences as learners. This principle encourages beginning teachers to examine those beliefs critically.	Some assumptions may help professional growth, while others may limit it. Effective teachers are willing to reconsider their thinking in the light of evidence and experience.	A beginning teacher initially believes that silent classrooms are always signs of effective learning. Through observation and discussion, they begin to recognise the value of collaborative discussion and exploratory talk.

Justifying professional choices and actions

What is it?	Why is it important?	What does it look like?
Teachers should be able to explain why they make particular decisions and how those decisions support learning.	Professional judgement should be informed by evidence, knowledge and understanding rather than habit, preference or compliance.	During a mentor meeting, a beginning teacher explains why they used retrieval practice at the start of a lesson, referring to previous learning, assessment information and research evidence.

Learning through rigorous intellectual challenge

What is it?	Why is it important?	What does it look like?
Beginning teachers learn through questioning, analysing, evaluating and engaging critically with ideas and evidence.	Professional learning is strengthened when individuals are challenged to think deeply rather than simply accept information.	Instead of adopting a teaching strategy because "it works", a beginning teacher explores why it works, for whom it works and in which circumstances it may be less effective.

Habits of the Hand

These principles focus on how beginning teachers develop their practice through consistent improvement and developing professional agency.

Developing habits of enquiry, reflection and collaboration for professional growth

What is it?	Why is it important?	What does it look like?
Professional learning involves asking questions, investigating practice, reflecting on evidence and working with others.	Teaching expertise develops through continual learning rather than through experience alone.	A beginning teacher notices that participation is uneven during lessons. Working with their mentor, they collect evidence, trial new questioning techniques and reflect on the impact. They then refine their approach based on what they have learned.

Building courage, agency and self-advocacy

What is it?	Why is it important?	What does it look like?
Teachers regularly face competing demands and difficult decisions. This principle focuses on developing confidence, resilience and professional agency.	Beginning teachers need to learn how to seek support, make informed decisions and maintain professional boundaries.	A beginning teacher feels overwhelmed by workload demands. Rather than struggling in isolation, they discuss priorities with their mentor, seek advice and develop strategies that enable them to work more sustainably.

Integrating evidence-based pedagogy, subject knowledge and experience

What is it?	Why is it important?	What does it look like?
Effective teaching draws together research evidence, subject expertise and practical classroom experience.	None of these sources of knowledge is sufficient on its own. Effective teaching depends on combining all three thoughtfully.	A beginning teacher uses subject knowledge to identify a likely misconception, research evidence to plan a strategy for addressing it, and classroom experience to adapt the approach when learners respond differently than expected.

Ethical Professionalism

Ethical professionalism underpins all that teachers think, do and become. Grounded in integrity, responsibility and commitment, it shapes the decisions teachers make, the relationships they build and the responsibilities they hold towards learners, colleagues and society.

Professional teachers:

- act with honesty and integrity;
- take responsibility for their decisions and actions;
- remain committed to the success and wellbeing of all learners;
- contribute positively to their schools, communities and profession.

Conclusion

The habits of mind, hand and heart are not separate. Effective teachers draw upon all three every day. When teachers:

✓ Think Wisely they draw upon knowledge, evidence and professional judgement.
✓ Teach Skilfully they apply and refine their practice through action, enquiry and experience.
✓ Act Responsibly they demonstrate ethical commitment to learners, colleagues and society.

Together, these habits provide a framework for becoming the kind of teacher who can help all learners flourish.

Think Wisely. Teach Skilfully. Act Responsibly.

The Principles in Detail

Habits of the Heart: Developing Values, Relationships and Purpose

HABITS OF THE HEART
What teachers value
These principles are about developing values and relationships, and maintaining a commitment to learners and the wider society.

Building positive relationships as foundations for effective learning

What is it?

Positive relationships are the foundation of effective learning and professional growth. For beginning teachers, the ability to build positive relationships with learners is essential for creating the conditions in which respectful behaviour, engagement, confidence and meaningful progress can occur. These relationships are grounded in trust, consistency, professionalism, high expectations and genuine regard for each learner's identity, needs and potential.

This principle also recognises that learning to teach is a relational process. Beginning teachers develop through the professional relationships they build with mentors, university tutors, colleagues and peers. Across the ITE partnership, relationships provide opportunities for dialogue, support, challenge, reflection and collaborative learning.

Positive relationships therefore extend beyond individual classrooms. They are central to the learning and development of everyone involved in the partnership and help create a shared commitment to the success of both beginning teachers and learners.

Why is it important?

Learning is fundamentally relational.

Positive relationships help to create the conditions in which learning, development and professional growth can flourish. They enable teachers to understand learners more deeply and help learners feel safe, valued and capable of succeeding.

Positive relationships are important because they:

- support learner engagement, participation and achievement;
- promote trust, belonging and emotional safety;

- help teachers understand and respond to learners' needs;
- encourage learners to take risks, ask questions and persevere through challenge;
- create opportunities for meaningful feedback and dialogue;
- strengthen collaboration across the classroom, school and wider partnership.

For beginning teachers, positive professional relationships also provide the foundation for effective mentoring and professional learning. Strong relationships enable beginning teachers to:

- discuss uncertainties openly;
- seek guidance and support when needed;
- receive constructive feedback;
- engage in professional dialogue;
- learn from the expertise of mentors, tutors and colleagues;
- develop confidence and professional identity.

Strong relationships across schools and universities contribute to coherent and effective ITE programmes, ensuring that beginning teachers experience consistent support, challenge and opportunities for growth.

Ultimately, relationships are not an additional aspect of teaching. They are one of the essential conditions that make learning and professional development possible.

What does it look like?

A beginning teacher notices that one learner rarely contributes during lessons and tends to avoid participating in discussions. Rather than assuming the learner lacks motivation, the teacher takes time to understand the learner's circumstances and learning needs. They use regular encouragement, positive interactions and carefully structured opportunities for success to build confidence. Over time, the learner becomes increasingly willing to participate and engage in learning.

At the same time, the beginning teacher is developing professional relationships within the ITE partnership. Following a lesson observation, the mentor and university tutor discuss the lesson with the beginning teacher. The conversation includes both encouragement and constructive challenge. The beginning teacher feels able to discuss uncertainties, ask questions and reflect honestly on aspects of the lesson that were less successful.

Through these interactions, all members of the partnership contribute to a culture of trust, learning and continual improvement. The quality of the relationships supports the quality of the professional learning.

Similar examples can be seen when mentors create supportive environments for professional dialogue, when beginning teachers collaborate with colleagues to solve professional problems, or when schools and universities work together to ensure coherent support for trainee development.

Key Message

Positive relationships are the foundation of effective learning and professional growth. They enable learners to flourish, support beginning teachers to develop professionally, and help schools and universities work together as a collaborative partnership committed to improving outcomes for all.

Placing the learner at the heart of the curriculum

What is it?

Putting the learner at the heart of the curriculum means ensuring that decisions about planning, teaching, assessment and curriculum design are guided by learners' needs, experiences, prior knowledge and potential. It involves seeing teaching as more than delivering content or completing a scheme of work. Instead, teaching becomes the deliberate design of meaningful learning experiences that enable all learners to make progress.

This principle encourages beginning teachers to focus not simply on what they are teaching, but on what learners are learning. It requires teachers to think carefully about how learners engage with new knowledge, how they develop understanding and how they can be supported to succeed.

Why is it important?

The curriculum is ultimately for learners. While subject content and curriculum goals are important, they only have value if learners can access, understand and build upon them.

A learner-centred approach helps teachers to:

- understand learners' starting points and build on prior knowledge;
- identify and respond to misconceptions;
- adapt teaching to support progress;
- make informed decisions about assessment and feedback;
- ensure all learners can participate, achieve and flourish.

When teachers place learners at the centre of their thinking, they are more likely to make purposeful decisions that support learning rather than simply delivering activities or covering content. This principle also reinforces the professional responsibility teachers have to ensure that every learner is seen, valued and supported.

What does it look like?

A beginning teacher plans a lesson on fractions and intends to move on to more challenging problems by the end of the lesson. However, during questioning and discussion, it becomes clear that many learners are struggling with the basic concept of equivalent fractions.

Rather than continuing with the original plan simply because it appears in the scheme of work, the teacher adapts the lesson. They provide additional examples, use visual representations and give learners more opportunities to practise and discuss their understanding. The teacher then reviews learning before deciding on the next steps.

In this example, the curriculum remains important, but decisions about teaching are driven by learners' understanding rather than by a predetermined timetable. The teacher is thinking about what learners need in order to make progress, not simply what content needs to be covered.

Key Message

Putting the learner at the heart of the curriculum means making professional decisions based on learners' needs, understanding and potential, ensuring that teaching supports meaningful learning and progress for all.



Instilling the social purpose of teaching all learners

What is it?

Teaching is more than the delivery of curriculum content. It is a profession that has the power to influence learners' life chances, sense of belonging, aspirations, and participation in society. This principle recognises that education serves an important social purpose: helping all learners to flourish, regardless of their background, circumstances, or starting points.

Beginning teachers are encouraged to see themselves not only as subject specialists or classroom practitioners, but also as professionals who contribute to creating a more equitable and inclusive

society. This means recognising and responding to barriers to learning, promoting high expectations for all, and ensuring that every learner has opportunities to participate, succeed and achieve.

Why is it important?

Every decision a teacher makes has the potential to affect learners' experiences, confidence, opportunities and future outcomes. Teaching therefore carries both professional and ethical responsibilities.

This principle helps beginning teachers to understand that education is not simply about helping learners pass examinations or complete qualifications. It is also about helping young people develop the knowledge, skills, confidence and sense of belonging needed to participate fully in their communities and wider society.

Recognising the social purpose of teaching encourages teachers to:

- maintain high expectations for all learners;
- promote inclusion and equity;
- challenge barriers that prevent learners from succeeding;
- value diversity and difference;
- ensure that all learners are seen, heard and supported;
- understand the broader impact that education can have on individuals and society.

Mentors and tutors play an important role in modelling this commitment and helping beginning teachers understand the wider responsibilities of the profession.

What does it look like?

A beginning teacher notices that a small number of learners rarely volunteer answers during whole-class discussions. On closer reflection, the teacher realises that the same learners are often overlooked while a small group of confident learners dominate participation.

Working with their mentor, the teacher introduces strategies such as think-pair-share, targeted questioning and increased wait time to ensure more learners have opportunities to contribute. They monitor participation over time and adapt their approach to support those learners who may previously have been excluded from classroom dialogue.

In this example, the teacher is not simply delivering the curriculum. They are actively working to ensure that all learners can participate in learning and experience success. Their decisions are guided by a commitment to inclusion and the belief that every learner deserves the opportunity to thrive.

A similar commitment can be seen when teachers adapt resources to improve accessibility, advocate for learners who need additional support, challenge low expectations, or work collaboratively with colleagues and families to promote positive outcomes.

Key Message

Instilling the social purpose of teaching all learners means recognising that teaching is both an educational and a moral endeavour. It involves creating opportunities for every learner to participate, progress and flourish, while contributing positively to a more equitable and inclusive society.

Habits of the Mind: Developing Knowledge, Judgement and Critical Thinking

HABITS OF THE MIND
How teachers think
These principles involve developing professional knowledge, being able to think critically and make sound judgements.

Challenging beliefs about teaching and learning

What is it?

Beginning teachers enter Initial Teacher Education with deeply held beliefs about teaching and learning. These beliefs are often shaped by their own experiences as learners during many years spent observing teachers in classrooms. Educational sociologist Dan Lortie described this as the "apprenticeship of observation"; the idea that future teachers develop impressions of teaching long before they begin formal teacher education.

While these experiences are valuable, they provide only a partial view of professional practice. Learners see what teachers do, but they do not always see the planning, decision-making, curriculum thinking, assessment, adaptation, and professional judgement that underpin effective teaching.

This principle is not about replacing existing beliefs or telling beginning teachers what they should think. Instead, it is about creating opportunities to explore, question and refine those beliefs through engagement with research, professional dialogue, observation, reflection, and classroom experience.

Why is it important?

Teaching is a complex profession that requires teachers to make informed decisions in a wide range of contexts. If beginning teachers rely solely on their previous experiences as learners, they may overlook alternative approaches or fail to recognise the complexity of effective practice.

By examining assumptions and considering different perspectives, beginning teachers develop a deeper understanding of how learning happens and why teachers make particular decisions. They learn to evaluate ideas critically rather than accepting practices simply because they are familiar or because they have always been done in a particular way.

This process helps beginning teachers develop adaptive expertise: the ability to draw on knowledge, evidence and professional judgement to respond thoughtfully to different learners, subjects and

situations. It also encourages a more nuanced understanding of teaching as an intellectual, relational and ethical profession.

Mentors and tutors play a crucial role in this process by providing constructive challenge, encouraging reflection and helping beginning teachers engage with alternative viewpoints and evidence-informed approaches.

What does it look like?

A beginning teacher believes that effective classrooms are always quiet and that silence is the clearest indicator of learning. This belief is based on their own experiences as a pupil, where well-managed lessons often appeared calm and orderly.

During the programme, however, the beginning teacher observes several experienced colleagues teaching the same topic in different ways. In one lesson, learners work collaboratively to discuss ideas, question one another and solve problems together. Although the classroom is busy and purposeful, learners demonstrate a deep understanding of the content.

Through discussions with their mentor, engagement with research, and reflection on the evidence of learning, the beginning teacher begins to reconsider their original assumption. Rather than viewing quietness as the sole indicator of learning, they develop a more sophisticated understanding of the different ways learners can engage productively.

In this example, the beginning teacher has not been told that their original belief was wrong. Instead, they have been supported to test their assumptions against evidence, experience and professional dialogue.

Key Message

Beginning teachers bring valuable experiences and beliefs to the programme, but effective professional learning requires a willingness to question assumptions, consider alternative perspectives, and refine thinking in light of evidence, reflection and experience.

Justifying professional choices and actions

What is it?

Teaching involves making hundreds of decisions before, during and after lessons. Some decisions are carefully planned in advance, while others are made in response to what happens in the classroom. This principle is about developing the ability to explain and justify those decisions clearly and professionally.

Beginning teachers learn to move beyond simply describing what they did to explaining why they did it. This involves drawing on professional knowledge, research, evidence, reflection, subject expertise and an understanding of their learners.

Rather than acting out of habit, preference, or passive compliance, teachers learn to make principled decisions that are informed by evidence and grounded in a clear understanding of their intended impact on learning.

Why is it important?

Effective teaching is not simply a collection of techniques. Similar teaching approaches can be more or less effective depending on the learners, subject, context and purpose. Teachers therefore need to be able to make informed decisions and explain the reasoning behind them.

The ability to justify professional choices helps beginning teachers to:

- make decisions with greater confidence and purpose;
- evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches;
- adapt teaching in response to evidence of learning;
- engage meaningfully in professional dialogue with mentors and colleagues;
- avoid relying solely on habit, routine, or "what has always been done".

Being able to justify choices also supports professional growth. When teachers can explain the reasoning behind their decisions, those decisions can be discussed, challenged, refined and improved.

Mentors and tutors contribute to this process by making their own thinking visible. Through professional dialogue, they help beginning teachers understand not only what experienced teachers do, but why they do it.

What does it look like?

A beginning teacher starts a lesson with a short retrieval activity that asks learners to recall key knowledge from a previous topic.

During a review meeting, the mentor asks, "why did you choose to begin the lesson in that way?" Rather than replying that it was simply part of the school's routine, the beginning teacher explains that the activity was designed to help learners revisit prior knowledge, identify any gaps in understanding and strengthen long-term retention. They also refer to evidence from previous lessons which suggested that some learners needed additional opportunities to recall key concepts before moving on to new learning.

The discussion then explores alternative approaches, their potential advantages and disadvantages, and how the activity might be refined in future lessons.

In this example, the beginning teacher is not simply describing what happened. They are demonstrating professional judgement by explaining the reasoning behind their decision and considering how evidence can inform future practice.

A similar process occurs when teachers justify decisions about questioning, behaviour management, assessment, grouping learners, curriculum sequencing or adapting teaching for individual needs.

Key Message

Professional teachers do not simply make decisions; they can explain and justify them. Beginning teachers develop professional judgement by learning to draw on evidence, knowledge, experience and reflection to make informed choices that support learners' learning and development.



Learning through rigorous intellectual challenge

What is it?

Meaningful professional learning requires active engagement, intellectual effort and a willingness to grapple with complex ideas. Beginning teachers develop their understanding by questioning, analysing, evaluating and making informed judgements about the theories, evidence and experiences they encounter throughout the programme.

Rigorous intellectual challenge is not about criticism or confrontation. Rather, it involves being encouraged to think deeply, explore alternative perspectives and engage critically with ideas. Mentors and tutors support this process by posing challenging questions, encouraging discussion, modelling professional reasoning and helping beginning teachers navigate uncertainty.

This principle recognises that learning to teach is an intellectually demanding process. Effective teachers are not simply users of techniques; they are professionals who continually think, question, evaluate and refine their understanding.

Why is it important?

Classrooms are complex environments and there are rarely simple answers to professional questions. Beginning teachers need to develop the ability to engage critically with research, evidence, curriculum knowledge, classroom experiences and professional dialogue.

Intellectual challenge helps beginning teachers to:

- develop deeper understanding rather than superficial knowledge;
- evaluate competing ideas and approaches;
- make informed professional judgements;
- deal confidently with uncertainty and complexity;
- become reflective and adaptive practitioners.

This principle also influences how beginning teachers work with their own learners. As they experience intellectually challenging professional learning themselves, they become better equipped to create learning experiences that promote curiosity, critical thinking and deeper understanding in the classroom.

Rigorous challenge therefore supports both professional growth and effective teaching.

What does it look like?

A beginning teacher observes an experienced colleague using a particular questioning strategy and initially assumes that it is effective because learners appear engaged and are answering questions confidently.

During a mentor discussion, however, the mentor asks a series of probing questions:

- How do you know all learners understood the concept?
- What evidence suggests learners were thinking deeply rather than recalling information?

- What alternative approaches might have been used?

The beginning teacher reviews pupils' work, reflects on the lesson and considers relevant research and theory. Through this process, they begin to look beyond surface impressions and think more carefully about the relationship between teaching approaches and learning outcomes.

The mentor is not providing answers or criticising the observation. Instead, the mentor is encouraging the beginning teacher to analyse evidence, evaluate different possibilities and develop a more sophisticated understanding of teaching and learning.

A similar process occurs in university sessions where beginning teachers are encouraged to examine research critically, debate different perspectives and justify their conclusions using evidence.

Key Message

Learning to teach requires more than acquiring knowledge. It requires intellectual curiosity, critical thinking and a willingness to engage with complex ideas, evidence and professional questions. Rigorous challenge helps beginning teachers develop the knowledge, judgement and understanding needed for thoughtful and effective practice.

Habits of the Hand: Developing Practice, Improvement and Agency

HABITS OF THE HAND
How teachers act
These principles are about developing professional practice and agency, and maintaining continuous improvement in action.

Developing habits of enquiry, reflection and collaboration for professional growth

What is it?

Learning to teach is a career-long process of professional growth and development. Effective teachers continually seek to understand their practice more deeply, learn from experience, and work with others to improve outcomes for learners. This principle encourages beginning teachers to develop habits of enquiry, reflection and collaboration that will support them throughout their careers.

Enquiry involves asking questions about practice, exploring evidence, and seeking to understand what is happening in classrooms and why. It is a way of approaching professional learning with curiosity and openness rather than simply accepting assumptions or routines.

Reflection involves thinking critically about experiences, decisions and outcomes. It means considering what has been learned, what has been successful, what challenges have emerged, and how practice might be refined in the future.

Collaboration involves learning with and from others. Teaching is not a solitary profession. Beginning teachers learn through conversations with mentors, university tutors, colleagues and peers, as well as through observing others and sharing ideas and experiences.

Together, these habits help teachers become active participants in their own professional development rather than passive recipients of knowledge or advice.

Why is it important?

Experience alone does not necessarily lead to improvement. Professional growth occurs when teachers actively engage with their experiences, examine evidence, seek feedback and learn from others.

Developing habits of enquiry, reflection and collaboration helps beginning teachers to:

- become more thoughtful and self-aware practitioners;
- learn from both successes and challenges;
- engage critically with research and evidence;
- identify areas for improvement and development;
- benefit from the expertise and perspectives of others;
- develop the confidence to evaluate and refine their practice over time.

These habits also support the development of adaptive expertise. As classrooms, curricula and learners change, teachers need the ability to learn continuously and respond effectively to new situations and challenges.

Mentors and tutors play an important role in modelling these habits by asking thoughtful questions, encouraging reflection, sharing expertise and creating opportunities for professional dialogue.

What does it look like?

A beginning teacher notices that although most learners are engaged during whole-class questioning, the same small group of learners regularly contribute while others remain silent.

Rather than simply accepting this as typical classroom behaviour, the beginning teacher begins an enquiry into participation. With the support of their mentor, they collect evidence by observing participation patterns, reviewing lesson recordings and discussing possible reasons for the imbalance.

The beginning teacher explores research-informed approaches such as think-pair-share, increased wait time and targeted questioning. After trialling these strategies, they reflect on the impact, discuss the results with their mentor and consider what further adaptations might be needed.

Through this process, the beginning teacher is not merely applying a technique. They are using enquiry to investigate a professional question, reflecting on evidence to inform future decisions and collaborating with others to improve practice.

Similar habits are developed when beginning teachers discuss lesson observations with mentors, analyse pupils' work, engage with research, observe experienced colleagues, or participate in professional learning conversations with peers and tutors.

Key Message

Developing habits of enquiry, reflection and collaboration means approaching teaching as a process of continual learning and improvement. By asking questions, examining evidence, reflecting critically

and learning with others, beginning teachers develop the professional habits that support growth throughout their careers.



Building courage, agency, and self-advocacy

What is it?

Learning to teach involves much more than developing knowledge and classroom skills. Beginning teachers must also learn how to navigate the many competing and sometimes conflicting demands of the profession. This requires courage, agency and self-advocacy.

Courage involves being willing to try new approaches, engage with challenge, accept feedback and persevere when things do not go as planned.

Agency refers to the capacity to make informed professional decisions rather than relying solely on routines, instructions or the opinions of others. As beginning teachers develop their knowledge and experience, they learn to take increasing responsibility for their professional choices and actions.

Self-advocacy involves recognising when support is needed and being able to communicate needs, concerns and professional viewpoints appropriately. It also includes developing healthy professional boundaries and strategies for managing workload and wellbeing.

Together, these qualities help beginning teachers become confident, resilient and reflective professionals who are able to balance the demands of a complex profession.

Why is it important?

Teaching is a rewarding profession, but it is also demanding. Teachers regularly encounter situations where there is no single correct answer and where they must balance competing priorities, responsibilities and expectations.

Beginning teachers may need to:

- adapt plans when learning does not progress as expected;
- respond to feedback and professional challenge;
- manage competing demands on their time and attention;
- seek support when faced with difficulties;
- make professional decisions in unfamiliar situations;

- maintain wellbeing whilst remaining committed to learners.

Developing courage, agency and self-advocacy helps beginning teachers build the confidence to engage with these challenges constructively rather than becoming overwhelmed by them.

Mentors and tutors play an important role by creating supportive environments where beginning teachers can take risks, make mistakes, learn from experience and gradually become more independent practitioners.

Over time, these qualities contribute to the development of professional resilience and adaptive expertise, enabling teachers to respond thoughtfully and effectively to new situations throughout their careers.

What does it look like?

A beginning teacher has planned a lesson that they believe will be highly engaging. During the lesson, however, learners struggle to understand the task and several activities do not work as intended.

Following the lesson, the beginning teacher feels disappointed and initially considers the lesson a failure. During a discussion with their mentor, they reflect on what happened, identify what learners did and did not understand, and consider how the lesson might be adapted.

Rather than becoming discouraged, the beginning teacher uses the feedback and evidence from the lesson to plan improvements and reteach parts of the topic in a different way.

At the same time, the beginning teacher recognises that workload is becoming difficult to manage. They discuss this openly with their mentor, seek guidance on prioritising tasks and develop more sustainable ways of planning and organising their work.

In this example, the beginning teacher demonstrates courage by engaging honestly with challenge, agency by making informed decisions about future practice, and self-advocacy by seeking appropriate support when needed.

Key Message

Beginning teachers develop courage, agency and self-advocacy by engaging with challenge, making informed professional decisions and seeking support when needed. These qualities help teachers manage complexity, continue growing professionally and sustain a successful career in education.

Integrating evidence-based pedagogy, subject knowledge, and experience

What is it?

High-quality teaching emerges from the integration, not the separation, of evidence-based pedagogy, subject knowledge, and practical experience. Effective teachers draw on all three when making professional decisions.

Evidence-based pedagogy provides teachers with research-informed approaches to teaching and learning. It helps teachers understand how different strategies can support learners' progress.

Subject knowledge enables teachers to understand the content they teach, anticipate misconceptions, explain concepts clearly, and help learners make meaningful connections between ideas.

Experience allows teachers to apply knowledge in real classrooms, evaluate its impact, and refine their practice over time.

This principle recognises that none of these forms of knowledge is sufficient on its own. Professional expertise develops when teachers learn to bring them together to make informed and responsive decisions that support learning.

Why is it important?

Beginning teachers can sometimes experience university learning and school-based learning as separate worlds. Research is discussed in university sessions, while teaching is experienced in classrooms. However, effective teaching depends on connecting these experiences rather than treating them as independent sources of knowledge.

Teachers need to understand:

- what research and evidence suggest about effective learning;
- how the curriculum and subject content are structured;
- how learners respond in real classroom situations;
- how teaching approaches may need to be adapted for different contexts and learners.

By integrating evidence, subject knowledge and experience, beginning teachers develop the professional judgement needed to make thoughtful and informed decisions. They become more able to respond to learners' needs, adapt to unexpected situations and refine their practice over time.

Mentors and tutors play an important role in helping beginning teachers make these connections explicit. Through observation, professional dialogue, feedback and reflection, they support beginning teachers in linking theory, evidence and practice.

What does it look like?

A beginning teacher is preparing to teach a lesson on fractions. Drawing on their subject knowledge, they recognise that learners commonly struggle to understand equivalent fractions and may develop misconceptions about the size of different fractions.

The beginning teacher reviews evidence-informed approaches to teaching mathematical concepts and plans to use visual representations and carefully sequenced examples to support understanding.

During the lesson, however, several learners demonstrate unexpected misconceptions. The beginning teacher adapts their explanation, provides additional examples and uses questioning to check understanding before moving on.

After the lesson, the beginning teacher discusses the lesson with their mentor. Together they examine evidence from learners' work, consider which teaching approaches were most effective and identify how the lesson might be refined in the future.

In this example:

- subject knowledge helped the teacher anticipate potential difficulties;
- evidence-based pedagogy informed the choice of teaching approaches;
- experience enabled the teacher to adapt in response to learners' needs.

The teacher's decisions were strengthened because all three sources of professional knowledge were brought together.

A similar process takes place whenever beginning teachers observe experienced colleagues, connect university learning to placement experiences, draw on research to inform planning, or use evidence from learners to refine their practice.

Key Message

Effective teaching develops when evidence-based pedagogy, subject knowledge and experience are brought together. Beginning teachers learn to connect what they know, what research suggests and what they learn from practice, developing the professional judgement needed to make informed and adaptive decisions for learners.

Conclusion

Learning to teach is a complex and intellectually demanding professional journey. It involves far more than learning routines, following procedures, or acquiring isolated skills. Beginning teachers develop through a combination of study, observation, practice, reflection, dialogue and experience. As they do so, they learn not only how to teach, but how to think, act and grow as professionals.

The Principles of Practice provide a shared framework for this journey. Organised around Shulman's habits of the heart, mind and hand, they highlight the interconnected values, knowledge, skills and professional behaviours that underpin effective teaching.

Through the Habits of the Heart, beginning teachers develop the values, relationships and sense of purpose that place learners at the centre of their work and remind them of the wider social purpose of education.

Through the Habits of the Mind, beginning teachers develop professional knowledge, critical thinking and sound judgement. They learn to engage with evidence, challenge assumptions, justify decisions and navigate the complexity of teaching with increasing confidence and expertise.

Through the Habits of the Hand, beginning teachers develop the practical capabilities, professional agency and commitment to continuous improvement that enable them to translate knowledge into effective practice. They learn from enquiry, reflection, collaboration and experience, continually refining their teaching to meet the needs of their learners.

At the centre of these habits is ethical professionalism. Grounded in integrity, responsibility and commitment, ethical professionalism shapes the decisions teachers make, the relationships they build and the responsibilities they hold towards learners, colleagues, schools and society.

These principles are not intended to be viewed as separate or sequential. Effective teaching emerges through their integration. Every day, teachers draw upon their habits of heart, mind and hand as they make decisions, build relationships, respond to challenges and support learning. Throughout the programme, beginning teachers will grow through:

- observing expert colleagues, noticing the nuances of practice that enable effective learning;
- unpicking and analysing classroom practice with mentors and tutors, exploring the reasoning behind pedagogical decisions;
- practising and refining their skills in safe, supportive environments, where experimentation and reflection are encouraged;

- developing strong habits of enquiry, collaboration, and ethical judgement that sustain them throughout their careers.

Throughout the programme, beginning teachers will be encouraged to:

- Think wisely by developing knowledge, judgement and critical thinking;
- Teach skilfully by developing practice, improvement and agency;
- Act responsibly by developing values, relationships and purpose.

Together, these Principles of Practice provide a common language for beginning teachers, mentors and university tutors. They support a shared vision of professional learning and help ensure that everyone within the partnership is working towards the same goal: developing thoughtful, skilful and ethical teachers who can enable all learners to flourish.

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