

Five Professional Commitments to Guide the Choices You Make

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The Rewards and Demands of Making a Commitment to Teaching

The Rewards of Teaching

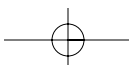
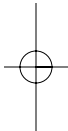
A Case in Point: Influencing the Lives of Students—A Teacher's Gift

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Teaching: A Career That Makes a Difference

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Years after they have left school, students may forget specific lessons, but they will remember their teachers. They remember their teachers' names either because their experience in those classrooms was good or, unfortunately, because their experience was bad. Sometimes a teacher who seemed strict and harsh at the time may, over the years, be recalled with respect and admiration. For some students, a teacher is remembered as someone who turned their lives around completely. Whatever the situation, the influence teachers have on their students is long lasting and frequently it is profound.

The premise of this book is a simple one: *Good teaching makes a difference in the lives of children.* Students spend six hours a day, five days a week, in classrooms with their teachers. It is within these classrooms that students are challenged and motivated, where they can believe in the possibilities of their futures, and where they gain the knowledge and skills to pursue their dreams. When teachers do their job well, students from all life circumstances, in every community, attain the potential to thrive and grow and *learn*. When teachers do not do their job well, students irrevocably lose the opportunity schools offer for positively impacting individual lives. The day-to-day choices and judgments teachers make directly affect the quality of learning that takes place and the very lives of their students. In other words, good teaching matters, and it matters a great deal.

It is precisely because teaching matters so much that your decision to choose teaching as a profession is so significant. Once you make the commitment to teach, you are, in essence, making the commitment to take responsibility for the quality of the experiences each of your students will have in your classroom over the life of your career.

What does it actually mean to *learn* to teach? What is it like to be in a classroom every day as the teacher, and how do you go about the hard work of making every day count for your students? What are you expected to know and be able to do as a beginning teacher, at the start of your career? How will you develop your abilities as a teacher so that you can assume your professional responsibilities with self-assurance and ensure that your students are growing and learning? What kinds of choices are you expected to make as a teacher, and what will guide you as you make these choices? The purpose of this book is to help you begin to understand what it means to learn to teach. In so doing, you will have the opportunity to learn more about your chosen profession,

The purpose of education, as many have seen it, is to open the way, as the young become empowered with the skills they need and the sensitivities they require in order to be human—to create themselves and to survive.

Maxine Greene, 1978, p. 85.

consider some of the most fundamental issues that confront the field today, and make a more informed decision about your career. More importantly, this book is designed to help you think about the real situations teachers encounter every day, the real choices teachers make, and the real consequences for students.

Five Professional Commitments to Guide the Choices You Make

The concept of making choices as a teacher and taking responsibility for the consequences of those choices is a central theme of this book. Teachers certainly do not have complete control over what happens in school or to their students outside of school. Nor do they have control over certain requirements that must be met. But all teachers do have a great deal of control over what happens every day in their individual classrooms and the kind of role they themselves play within the school, the district, and the community. Teachers make deliberate choices about the kind of classroom they will create and the kind of experience their students will have. The choices *you* make regarding your students, your classroom, and your place in the larger school, district, and community all have implications for the kind of teacher you will become—and for how you will be remembered.

This book is organized around five professional commitments that, taken together, are essential if teaching is going to make a difference in the lives of students. Within each of these commitments (see in Table 1-1), teachers make choices that affect the students they teach. These are enduring issues for teachers, and if you become a teacher you will be making choices about various aspects of these five commitments throughout your career in the classroom.



As a teacher, what will you do to make a difference in the lives of your students?
(Media Bakery)

TABLE 1-1 Five Professional Commitments for Teaching

These five commitments represent career-long challenges for teachers and are areas for ongoing professional growth and learning.

Professional Commitment	Why It Matters
Learning from Multiple Sources of Knowledge	Teachers do not finish learning when they conclude their teacher education programs. They go on learning from their own practice and from working with other teachers, but only if they are open to learning and improvement as a career-long commitment.
Using the Curriculum Responsibly	The curriculum is not a static set of documents that teachers follow blindly. Within the curriculum documents that exist in any state or district to provide guidance to teachers, teachers themselves make choices about how they enact the curriculum to meet the needs of their own students.
Crossing Your Own Familiar Borders to Embrace Diversity	Teachers regularly teach students whose backgrounds differ from their own. Teachers are charged with creating classrooms where all students are welcomed, feel safe and secure in the classroom and school community, and are supported in learning.
Meeting the Needs of Individual Students in the Context of the Classroom and the School	Schools and classrooms are organized as group settings. Within these group settings teachers face the challenge of making sure they maintain attention to their individual students' needs.
Contributing Actively to the Profession	Teaching is not just a job where one clocks in and out at the beginning and end of the day. To keep the profession vital, teachers themselves need to contribute to and take responsibility for the profession.

Why is it so essential to think about these five commitments both as you begin your professional preparation and throughout your career? What are some of the important choices you will have to make regarding each of these commitments during your career?

Commitment #1: Learning from Multiple Sources of Knowledge

What you learn during your teacher education program should provide you with a sound and solid foundation for teaching—and the confidence to get started. But as is true of all professions, you cannot possibly learn everything there is to know about teaching from your formal program of teacher preparation. As in other professions, teachers are expected to begin with a certain level of competence in creating classrooms, planning instruction, and working with students to support their learning. To excel in the profession, to demonstrate that you take your work seriously, and to challenge yourself to higher levels of professional expertise, it is important to recognize that teaching is a continual learning experience over the entire course of your career. You have already learned something about teaching from your own experience as a student, but that experience is likely to look very different as you begin to view teaching from a professional perspective.

Your formal education for teaching represents only a starting point for a lifetime of professional growth and development. Highly skilled, experienced teachers know that learning how to teach did not come to an end when they completed their teacher education program. They know that they do not know everything and that working with many different students with many different needs presents ongoing challenges. To meet those challenges teachers need to continue to learn.

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Where do teachers turn for credible sources of knowledge about teaching, and how do they sort through all the new ideas for “fixing” education that will inevitably encounter during their careers? Does growing throughout one’s career mean shifting with every change that comes along? On what basis do strong teachers make decisions about what directions to take for their own new professional learning and development? In addition to continuing to learn from teacher educators, teachers also learn from their own teaching practice and from interacting with others about their teaching (Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino, 2000).

Teachers can attend classes, professional conferences, and workshops, as well as professional development activities sponsored by school districts themselves. These various sources of teaching knowledge can help teachers discover new ways of thinking about teaching. But they can also pose a dilemma for those teachers who have not developed a good strategy for figuring out why some kinds of knowledge are more useful than others or what benefits and limitations each kind of knowledge may bring. Your philosophical ideals about education—along with your professional knowledge—should help you form a set of ideas against which you judge these new sources of knowledge. So, for example, you will not adopt a new approach just because someone tells you it works, or is motivating, or is exciting. As a professional you will want to weigh new ideas against what you know about how students learn, who they are, and what will benefit them most.

The past 25 years have witnessed an explosion of research about what kinds of school environments best support lifelong professional learning and development for teachers. Teachers continue to learn when schools function as collaborative professional learning communities, when teaching is talked about regularly, when new learning among teachers is practiced, shared, and valued, and when teachers help each other learn (Hord, 2004; Fullan, 1993; Lieberman & Miller, 2004, Rosenholtz, 1989). In such an environment teachers can reflect on what they are learning from their teaching experience in collaboration with their colleagues. Understanding the ways teachers learn and the sources of new knowledge enables

As teachers make choices about how to organize their classrooms, they need to do so in a way that makes time for groups and for individual students. (Media Bakery)



you to make sound choices about how you will go on learning and improving your skills throughout your career.

What critical choices will you face regarding sources of knowledge for your own professional growth and development over the course of your career? First, teachers who view themselves as learners are ready to learn from their students. Students have much to teach teachers about their lives in and outside of school, about how they learn, about what their individual life circumstances are, and about how well teachers are teaching based on an understanding of their students' work. Second, teachers who view themselves as learners model the importance of learning for their students. Recognizing that there are significant new things to learn, that learning is to be valued, and that together with your students you may be trying out new approaches to teaching as a way of learning—all translate into the climate you create within your classroom. Finally, teachers make choices about what they are open to learning about in the first place. Is your interest in new learning focused on content only? Is it focused on new teaching methods? Are you willing to be flexible in what you will entertain as possible in your classroom—for example, a major shift to using technology? All of these issues are related to setting a course of learning throughout your career and drawing on multiple sources of knowledge to do so.

Commitment #2: Using the Curriculum Responsibly

There is no universal agreement on the purposes of schooling. Indeed, based on varying philosophies of education, competing purposes can operate simultaneously within a school or across schools. As teachers make choices about the kind of professionals they wish to be, they constantly navigate within these competing purposes. The curriculum is one of the most prominent places where the different purposes of schooling play out.

The issue of what to teach is more complex than it may first appear. As a teacher, you will have access to a formal curriculum, with formal instructional materials and textbooks to guide your work. But once you are handed these materials, you still have to make many choices about what and how you will teach. In other words, when you are handed curriculum materials you are not handed a recipe for teaching.

For example, what will you decide to cover in depth, and what will you relegate to the sidelines? How will you make the curriculum, which may seem overwhelming in breadth and depth, manageable? How comfortable are you with the content you are teaching? How will you make the curriculum interesting for your students so that they are motivated to learn in the first place? Will you expect your students to learn only facts and figures, or will you challenge them to understand complex issues and ideas that readily connect to them and their lives? What if at some point you are asked to adopt new curriculum materials that represent a different philosophy from the one upon which you have based your teaching? How will you respond in this situation? What knowledge and perspectives will you use to evaluate and respond to such changes in the curriculum?

A professional commitment to using the curriculum responsibly means that teachers not only know what is in the curriculum, but also actively think about the best way to teach that curriculum to *their* students as a means of helping them become independent, lifelong learners. Throughout their careers, teachers face the ever-present challenge of balancing curriculum content with teaching that empowers their students. Teachers are faced with choices about whether to simply “cover the curriculum” or do the work of connecting the curriculum to their students' lives, thereby giving meaning and reason for studying new and

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To be happy in their work, teachers must enjoy being with young people every day. (Media Bakery)



challenging topics and issues. Leaving the students out of the equation and opting for a focus on the content alone diminish the human nature of the teaching enterprise.

Commitment #3: Crossing Your Own Familiar Borders to Embrace Diversity

Today in the United States teachers, in unprecedented numbers and locations, are working with students whose life experiences may not mirror their own and so, must address the challenge of bridging those divides. When teachers are unfamiliar with the cultures and languages of their students, or when teachers live outside the communities in which they teach, they must bridge these cultural and socioeconomic contrasts not only with their students but also with their students' families.

It is not just cultural divisions that are of concern to teachers. They must also learn to work with students who have disabilities and students whose sexual orientation may differ from their own. Each of these diversities is unique, requiring teachers to step outside the comfort of their own life experiences, to challenge their own beliefs and potential biases, and to create classrooms where no student will be marginalized.

What choices do teachers make with regard to working in classroom and school environments that are characterized by these various diversities? Are they committed to learning about new cultures and communities? Do they view the array of differences among students and their families as assets that enrich the classroom? Do they respect and value the differences they encounter? Are they committed as teachers to believing in the potential of each of their students, to providing every student with a challenging school experience and the opportunity to grow, rather than favoring students from some backgrounds and not from others? As teachers make such choices, they can make the difference between a student's success or failure in school.

Commitment #4: Meeting the Needs of Individual Students in the Context of the Classroom and the School

Schools and classrooms in the United States are by design collective, large-group settings. Within their classrooms, however, teachers are constantly concerned about meeting the needs of individual students; they work at the intersection of meeting individual needs and group needs every day. Strategies for grouping students, moving students between groups, allocating time to provide individual attention to students who are struggling or who need advanced work, are all issues teachers face throughout their careers. These choices intersect with decisions teachers make about the curriculum itself, what is important to learn, and about what individual students and the group are interested in learning.

As part of this professional commitment, teachers must understand that teaching does not consist of just passively going into the classroom, opening the textbook, and reading the directions for the next activity in front of the whole class. Skilled, committed teachers actively work to figure out how to motivate and involve their students in learning. They deliberately seek out and implement teaching methods that will enable them to reach all of their students. This can often mean a judicious mix of whole class, small group, and individual work. Teaching only to the “average” student is not an option for teachers who are committed to meeting all of their students’ needs.

Rather than simply responding to their students, teachers who are serious about meeting their students’ needs actively advocate for them and make the choice to seek out resources and solutions to problems so that success becomes a real possibility. They are advocates not only for individual students, but also for their classrooms as a whole—advocating for resources, for experiences, and for opportunities that enable their students to deepen their learning.

Commitment #5: Contributing Actively to the Profession

Long gone are the days when teachers could just go into their classrooms and shut the door—essentially shutting out the need to work with other adults. Today teaching requires collaboration among its ranks to ensure that schools and classrooms are places where students can thrive and learn. For example, beginners may be overwhelmed with the tasks before them as they start their careers, and without the collaboration of other education professionals the work would be even more challenging.

Teachers can contribute to the profession in many different ways. Throughout the course of your career, you will need to make choices about the level of commitment you will make. Will you be a passive teacher who comes in every day, gets through the day, goes home, and collects a paycheck every month? Or will you be a teacher who actively participates in the professional, intellectual life of teaching to improve what takes place in classrooms and schools for the students? In what areas might you develop special expertise, and how might you then use that expertise to better reach students and to help other

One of the great rewards of teaching is the satisfaction of watching students learn and grow. (Media Bakery)



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teachers do the same? What kind of contribution will you make to the individual school in which you teach? Will you take on a leadership role at your local school site, for example, to build greater family participation in the school? Will you make a commitment to better state education policy or work in professional organizations devoted to improving teaching in particular subjects or specialty areas? At this point you probably do not have to answer these questions, but as you plan for a career in teaching, it is important to recognize that becoming a productive, active member of your profession is an important goal.



Your turn...

Consider each of these commitments and identify at least two questions you have about each one. How would you go about answering your questions?

The Role of Reflection and Action in the Choices You Make

To be a teacher who makes a difference is not to do the same thing year in and year out. A vital part of learning to teach is recognizing the role of teacher reflection on how to teach well. Teachers who are committed to their profession regularly reflect on and inquire into the quality of their work, asking themselves how much their teaching is helping students grow and learn. In this way, they work toward identifying areas of improvement and more effective practices.

Reflection also helps you to understand that teaching is not just doing what someone tells you to do or what the textbook tells you to do. As a prospective teacher, it is important to begin by asking challenging questions about what it means to teach. In so doing, you must be willing to look critically at yourself as a developing teacher—which is what reflection is about.

Teachers use reflection to inquire into all aspects of their teaching, including how to reach students who are struggling, how to teach academic subjects, how to manage relationships with students and their families, how to assess student learning, or how to integrate the arts into the academic subjects. Reflection creates a healthy tension between what a teacher knows and does well and what a teacher sets as new professional goals. It requires teachers to be actively engaged in setting goals for their own growth and development.

Asking questions and reflecting on the quality of your own teaching are not enough, however. *It is the action teachers take as a result of their reflection and inquiry that is the link to being a real professional.* As teachers ask such questions of themselves, they can begin to identify areas and issues for further learning and use these as a focus for their own professional growth and development. When they ask questions in the context of like-minded colleagues, the potential for improving teaching practice is even greater.

The Rewards and Demands of Making a Commitment to Teaching

Teaching is probably one of the most misunderstood professions—except by those who are teachers themselves. Uninformed, naive views of teaching are all too common: it is often said that teaching is easy, that all a teacher does is stand up in front

of a group of students and talk, that teachers don't work "real" hours, that it's a job anyone can do well. But ask any good teacher and you will get a *very* different answer. Good teachers know that their work is demanding, but they also know that the rewards can be even greater. Those who choose to teach make a commitment not only to getting satisfaction from the rewards the profession offers, but also to meeting its demands.

The Rewards of Teaching

Being with young people every day is one of the foremost benefits of teaching.

Teachers who are committed to their profession choose to spend their days with young people and often say that they can't imagine doing anything else. As a teacher you will spend your working days with students, and you will need to derive satisfaction from doing so. That is one of the essential foundations of your commitment to teaching—that you enjoy and want to spend time with young people. This is true for anyone who wants to become an effective teacher.

The greatest reward of teaching, however, is seeing your students grow and learn. As a teacher, you can take pride in helping your students make progress—in specific skills, in deep knowledge of a subject, in the ability to become independent and make choices about their futures, and in their use of what they have learned. At whatever grade you choose to teach or in whatever subject, you must derive great satisfaction in watching your students "get it," in watching the light bulbs go on in their minds, and in seeing how they learn to grasp new concepts and think in more complex ways. If you teach first grade, this often means you will have the satisfaction of teaching children to unlock the code of written language and learn to read. If you teach middle school mathematics, this can mean watching your students master algebra for the very first time. If you are a high school music teacher, it might mean listening to students play the first compositions they wrote for a class assignment—and finding a few gems among them. Such rewards should drive teachers at every level—from preschool to elementary to middle school to high school.



Managing multiple tasks at once is one of the demands of teaching. (Michelle Birdwell/PhotoEdit)

Your turn...

If you were asked to honor one of your teachers, whom would you select? Prepare a short statement for your class describing why this teacher deserves to be so honored. What is the connection between what you are saying about this teacher and your own motivation to consider a career in teaching?



Teachers can empower their students both as individuals and as members of a democratic society. Teachers can help students expand their views of what they can pursue and accomplish. If you teach high school, this might mean encouraging a student who may not have thought attending college was important or possible and then watching that student change his or her mind under your guidance. If you are an English teacher, it might mean seeing your students learn to write persuasive essays and then prepare letters based on those essays to a local official in the

interest of improving the community. It is for these rewards that many people choose to teach in the first place.

One of the often hidden rewards of teaching is that you do not always know how far your influence might reach. That is, sometimes the positive influence you have on your students is not apparent until years or decades later. For example, a student may visit you years after graduating and let you know that your class was decisive in making a career choice. Even though at least some of the gratification you receive from your work is delayed, when you do receive it, the wait will have been worthwhile.

Teaching can also be rewarding if you seek a career where not everything is predictable and where you must be flexible to do your work well. No matter how organized or prepared a teacher may be, no teacher can predict, for example, exactly what kind of mood the students will be in each morning when they enter the classroom. “Reading” your students and making changes based on that reading may make the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful day. Furthermore, you cannot predict how well your students will do in any given lesson. Teachers have to be prepared to “read” their students’ understanding while they are teaching and make adjustments to instruction along the way. Similarly, you cannot predict whether an interruption will occur that requires you to stop your teaching briefly, attend to the interruption, and pick up again—without missing a beat. Those who are comfortable with this level of unpredictability will find teaching a rewarding challenge.

Finally, teaching is rewarding because it allows you to be creative in your work—in the way you structure the semester or year, in the way you develop lessons, in how you use materials, and in the way you ask students to demonstrate what they have learned. Whereas some teachers choose to do the same thing every day, year after year, teaching offers you a regular opportunity to change your approach to the material you are teaching to better meet your students’ needs. You can experiment, see how the changes affect your students’ learning, and then try it again.

A CASE IN POINT

Influencing the Lives of Students—A Teacher’s Gift

A teacher’s work seldom gains public recognition. As already noted, students themselves may not recognize the positive influence a teacher has had until years after they have left the teacher’s classroom. In some instances, students reconnect with teachers who changed the direction of their lives. Russell Paterson, a twelfth grade student who attended elementary and middle school in a small rural community in Nebraska, moved to Chicago with his family when he entered high school. In his senior English class, students were asked to write a letter to an influential person in their lives. He chose to write to his fifth grade teacher, Eleanor Wilson.

Dear Ms. Wilson:

I’m not sure if you remember me, but I was a student in your fifth grade class not so long ago. My family moved to Chicago when I began high school. This year our English teacher asked us to choose a person who was very influential in our lives and write a letter to them, and as soon as he gave us this assignment I knew I had to write to you.

I wasn’t exactly a model student in elementary school. In fact, I was a pretty rowdy kid. Looking back on it, I worked hard at doing everything I could *not* to be a good student. I was more interested in cutting up and being the class clown than I was in what we were doing in class. I didn’t do my homework and I didn’t like to participate in class. I also didn’t have a lot of help at home. The summer before fifth

grade my father was laid off and things were pretty tense around my house. None of this helped my attitude.

But there you were every morning with a smile on your face, saying hello to me like I was the best student who had ever walked into your classroom. Every day you asked me how I was doing. I didn't always answer you as nicely as you asked, but you still treated me like I was someone who mattered to you. Sometime later in the fall when I was falling further behind, you began having a bunch of kids stay in for lunch with you and you always asked us about what we were interested in. At one of those lunches I must have mentioned that I always wondered about what life was like on the other planets.

After that you began bringing books and magazines for me to read about outer space, the other planets, and NASA. You let me do some special assignments about those things when other kids were doing the regular subjects. I had a little corner in your room where you kept all of those books and magazines for me. You told the rest of the class that I was the resident expert on the planets, so if anyone had questions they should come and ask me. I still wasn't a star student, but I always had something to do. It was around that time that you said to me, in a casual way, "You know, Russell, when you grow up there is a way to make a living being an expert on the planets."

At the time I didn't realize how much those words made an impression on me. I don't remember all the details about the rest of fifth grade, but I do know that I managed to get into less trouble that year, passed, moved on to middle school, and did pretty well in science all along. Now I realize that in the back of my mind I could hear you telling me much more than that I might make a living being smart about planets. What you were really saying is that I had something I could do well, that there was a way to use what I was interested in, and that what happened to me in the future was important to you. That also made it important to me.

So here I am in my senior year of high school, and next year I will be attending the state university to study astronomy. I've kept up my interest in the planets and space, and last year my counselor connected me with some people from the Museum of Science and Industry who work with high school students. I was able to get a summer job there working with the younger kids. So I'm writing to thank you for a lot of things. Thank you for not giving up on me when I was a handful, thank you for taking the time to learn about me and what I was interested in, and thank you for planting a big idea in my mind. You were a great teacher and I was very lucky to be in your class.

Sincerely,
Russell Paterson



When students enter your classroom, what kind of experience will be in store for them? (Michelle Birdwell/PhotoEdit)

The Demands of Teaching

Along with the rewards of teaching come the demands of this profession. It takes a great deal of skill to plan and implement motivating lessons, for example, to assess how students are progressing, and to calibrate instruction to meet students' varying needs. Teachers who are successful don't just open up the textbook each day and teach. Instead, they prepare to teach by drawing on their knowledge of their students, the curriculum, and ways to instruct their students.

Teaching is also demanding because the classroom is a social environment unlike any other. Building a community that will promote learning requires a solid foundation of good social interaction among the students themselves as well as between students and teachers. Once that foundation is established, teachers must

focus on keeping the classroom community working well. This means knowing how to make sound judgments about what students need—as individuals and as learners—in the midst of a busy day, every day. No matter how good a job a teacher does creating a classroom that prevents problems from occurring in the first place, in a learning environment in which students get along well, all teachers need to maintain the community, minimize the chance of problems occurring, and manage problem behaviors when they do take place.

Being a teacher also demands multitasking skills, including managing the students, the curriculum, instructional groups, schoolwide activities, and unintended interruptions in the classroom. In fact, the term *multitasking* could have been coined expressly to describe teaching, and good teachers do it well. Have you ever wondered, for example, how a teacher manages to work with a small group, look up at just the right time to make sure the rest of the class is doing what it is supposed to be doing, and then go back to the small group and continue the lesson? Or how a teacher knows what is going on between two students in the back of the room when she is talking with a student at her desk at the front of the room?

Teaching is also demanding because it is an inherently human profession, with all of the challenges this entails. Students have complex lives, and those lives come into the classroom whether or not you expect it. Teachers must be prepared to meet their students' needs even when they don't know from day to day what those needs might be. This demand also means that it is not enough simply to know the content you will teach. Instead, you must be able to engage in the human interaction of teaching it to your students in ways that make sense to them. If your students can't connect with what you are teaching them, they probably won't be eager to participate in what you are planning.

Another demand placed on teachers comes from the public sector. The work teachers do is not independent of the mandates of local school boards, the state government, and the federal government. These mandates can constrain teachers' freedom to determine what they do within their classrooms. Today, for example, through passage of the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind Act, the federal government is playing a much greater role in education than ever before.

Finally, teaching is demanding because of the wide range of student needs in the classroom. Some students may be victims of abuse or neglect, some may not have anyone at home to help with homework, others may struggle because they live in poverty, and still others may have material wealth but little emotional support. When you make the commitment to teach, you are agreeing to teach all the children in your classroom and to work from the problems and challenges they present in a way that will lead to their learning. More importantly, you are agreeing to find the strengths your students bring to the classroom, even in the midst of the struggles they and their families may be facing.

Meeting Standards for Good Beginning Teachers

One way to help guide the choices you make as a beginning teacher is to study the national standards for beginning teachers, known as the INTASC standards. INTASC—the *Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium*—is part of an organization made up of the heads of education in every state, the Council of Chief State School Officers. The INTASC project was launched in the late 1980s to create a national consensus on what it means to be a well-prepared beginning teacher. From these deliberations, a set of 10 professional standards was developed. These 10 stan-

Figure 1-1 The 10 INTASC Standards for Beginning Teachers

The INTASC standards represent a national perspective on what beginning teachers should know and be able to do.

1. The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for students.
2. The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, and personal development.
3. The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.
4. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.
5. The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
6. The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.
7. The teacher plans and manages instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals.
8. The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner.
9. The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.
10. The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well being.

Source: The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and member states. Copies may be downloaded from the Council's website at <http://www.ccsso.org>. Council of Chief State School Officers (1992). *Model standards for beginning teacher licensing and development: A resource for state dialogue*. Washington, DC: Author.

standards, which appear in Figure 1-1, begin to represent a common agreement within the profession on what a well-prepared beginning teacher should know and be able to do.

Although no state is required to adopt the INTASC standards, many states use them voluntarily as the measure of new teachers' readiness for the classroom. Alternatively, some states have adopted other sets of standards that teacher education students must meet in order to be certified to teach. Teacher education that is based on standards requires not only that you complete courses and receive grades. You must also demonstrate, through various activities within your teacher education program, that you have the professional knowledge, skills, and personal dispositions required to teach and that you can translate that knowledge into the actions needed to perform your job well. You must perform the tasks that characterize a good teacher at a level that enables you to be recommended for certification in your state. The 10 INTASC standards set a high—but attainable—goal for what it means to be a good beginning teacher.

At the end of each chapter in this book, you will find the INTASC standards listed that are relevant to the issues within the chapter, as well as some of the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions developed by INTASC to define the standards. When a standard relates to issues in more than one chapter, you will find it repeated. This repetition illustrates the connections among the various issues addressed in the text and among the standards themselves and provides you with several opportunities to consider your own growth and development in relation to the INTASC standards.



Your turn...

Review the 10 INTASC standards. Which standards seem to be a match for your idea of teaching at this point? Which surprised you? Which do you think will be the most challenging for you to accomplish?

Teaching: Is It Really for You?

One of the most important purposes of this text is to help you answer the question: Is teaching really for you? Because teaching matters so much to each and every student you may teach in the future, now is the time to think about whether you can make the commitment to this profession. As you gain a deeper understanding of what teaching entails, as you obtain a more complete understanding of the dimensions of this career, and as we expose myths about the profession, you will be able to make a much more informed judgment about your career choice. If you are participating in an early field experience in a school concurrently with this course, you will have an even broader base of experience to draw upon in making your decision.

You are making the decision to become a teacher at a very exciting and challenging time in the development of the profession. The first few years of teaching, known formally as the period of *induction*, are now viewed as a time when teachers need and are increasingly receiving focused professional support. As a result, the position of the novice in the classroom is changing. No longer is a new teacher expected to be able to do everything at the same level as a skilled veteran teacher. A clear understanding is beginning to emerge that the profession needs to create ways to make sure that new teachers have support and do not feel isolated within their classrooms to sink or swim on their own. At the same time, the expectation is greater than ever before that every student in every community should have the benefit of a competent, caring, and qualified teacher (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

For many of you the decision to become a teacher is something you have thought about for a long time, whether teaching will be your first or your second career. Others of you may be considering the idea for the first time. In either case, it is critical at this point to match your initial conceptions of what it means to teach with the new experiences and knowledge you will gain about the profession. Even if you have always wanted to be a teacher, now is the time to think carefully about whether you are ready to make the commitment.

Teaching is not a profession for the faint of heart. Your commitment to your students and to their learning must be unequivocal. If you find that you are not enjoying the students as much as you thought you would, now is the time to consider how this will translate into spending every day in a classroom where the students are the focus of your attention and the source of your professional satisfaction. You may learn that you cannot handle the unique and complex demands of classroom life as readily as you thought you would when you first considered teaching as a career. Some of you may find yourselves unable to juggle the many tasks teachers carry out. If you cannot cope with these demands, you have an important decision to make—not only for yourself but for the students you may be teaching. If your commitment is strong, however, then you are ready to find that balance between the excitement of moving toward your professional goal and the challenge of getting there.

Your turn...

What are three things you are most excited about or motivated about when you think about teaching? What are your three greatest concerns right now about learning to teach? Why do you think these things hold such importance for you?



Making a Choice about the Kind of Teacher You Want to Be

As you think about the professional journey ahead of you—the journey to learn to teach—a good way to get started is to think about the kind of teacher you want to be. Every September, all over the country, families send their children to school. And every September many families are grateful that their children have been placed in the classrooms of wonderful, dedicated, caring, competent, and qualified teachers. Other families, unfortunately, are anxious or disappointed or worried because their children have been placed in the classrooms of mediocre or inferior teachers. These families realize that it will be a rough year ahead for their children.

As you envision yourself learning to teach over the next year or two, keep in mind the goal you are trying to achieve in becoming a teacher. Your future work as a teacher matters a great deal—to your students, to their families, to the school and the district in which you will teach, and to the profession itself. It is the expectations you set for yourself as a professional and the quality of the work you do as a teacher that will determine how parents and family members feel about their children being in your classroom. When you stand at the classroom door to greet your first class of students, do so with the certainty that you have made the right choice—for you and for your students.

