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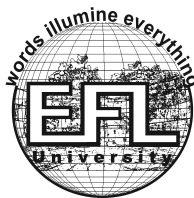
Post-Graduate Certificate in the  
Teaching of English

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# PRACTICE TEACHING

## BLOCK I

What Makes For Good Teaching?



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# **PRACTICE TEACHING**

## **BLOCK I**

### **WHAT MAKES FOR GOOD TEACHING?**

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE BLOCK

When we talk about "good teaching", we seem to think that the term is self-evident and that we are all referring to the same phenomenon. However this is not always so and people's perceptions might often differ radically about what constitutes good teaching.

We have therefore devoted Block I of the **Practice Teaching** course to the discussion of different aspects of what goes into "good teaching". Block I has three units. Unit 1 will focus on what the characteristics of a good teacher are. Is the good teacher, like the unicorn, a mythical beast? However, we all cherish memories of good, even excellent teachers, whose classes live on in our minds. So good teachers do exist. Can we then provide a commonly-arrived-at definition of a good teacher? Even if we can't right now, by the end of Unit 1, **Who is a Good Teacher?** I hope *you* will have arrived at your own definition of a good teacher, by clarifying your perception of what good teaching is.

In Unit 2, **The Role of the Teacher**, we will go a little deeper into classroom practice and what constitutes good teaching. We shall look at some common teacher behaviours/teaching practices and see if we can, through these, describe what the role of the teacher is vis a vis the learner, the textbook, the exams etc.

In Unit 3 we shall examine the types of decisions the teacher has to make in order to function effectively. Effective teaching, as we see it, is describable only in the context of successful learning. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator of learning. To help students learn, the teacher has to create the right learning environment for them. This entails his/her making a set of decisions. Unit 3, **The Teacher as Decision Maker**, will examine the types of decisions the teacher has to make prior to the lesson, while teaching the lesson, and after teaching the lesson.



## **Unit 1**

### **WHO IS A GOOD TEACHER?**

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# Unit 1

## WHO IS A GOOD TEACHER?

### 1.0 Introduction

In this unit we ask you to describe who, according to you, a good teacher is, and to ponder over the question: Can one learn to be a good teacher? Is the ability to teach an innate, inborn ability, or is it an ability that can be acquired? It is in the light of your own understanding of who a good teacher is that we ask you to review the objectives of the course in **Practice Teaching** and to see how far your objectives for doing the course match our aims for offering it.

### 1.1 The characteristics of a good teacher

There may be several reasons that can be given for offering a course in **Practice Teaching**, but one reason given by all teacher trainers is to make one a good teacher. Who is a "good teacher"? Is your perception of a good teacher the same as mine, or is the term "good teacher" open to as many interpretations as there are people?

As you begin this course, I'd like you to do the activity given below. You don't have to read any book to do it. Like me, you too have a model in your head of a good teacher. I would like you to activate this mental model and to list the first ten qualities/characteristics of a good teacher that come to your mind. It shouldn't take you more than 5-10 minutes to do it.

---

#### Activity A

Complete the following statement by writing ten words/phrases/points that occur to you to describe a good teacher. Start now.

A good teacher is one who...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

#### Discussion

As you wrote the qualities you consider desirable in good teachers, you were probably drawing on your own experience of being taught and the qualities you valued in your teachers. If you are a practising teacher you will probably also have drawn on what the "folklore", or popular belief, about good teachers is.



I gave the same activity you performed to a group of trainee teachers (some with a few years of teaching experience, while others were fresh out of the university). I've collated some of their responses and given them below. You'll perhaps find some of the qualities you wrote in response to Activity A listed by this group. As you read their responses, you will notice the *range* of qualities people consider desirable in good, effective teachers. How do you rate them? Are all of them equally important to you?

### Activity B

Given below is a list of qualities of a "good" teacher. Indicate how important *you* consider each one of them to be, by rating it on a 3-point scale.

Write    0 if not important at all  
           2 if quite important/desirable  
           4 if very important/essential

<u>Quality</u>	<u>Your rating</u>
	(write 0/2/4 as appropriate)

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1. Has a good knowledge of his/her subject                          | [   ] |
| 2. Is well informed about modern techniques of teaching             | [   ] |
| 3. Takes pride in his/her profession                                | [   ] |
| 4. Uses various methods in his/her teaching                         | [   ] |
| 5. Experiments while teaching                                       | [   ] |
| 6. Is a good classroom manager                                      | [   ] |
| 7. Is confident and calm  | [   ] |
| 8. Is a model for his/her students                                  | [   ] |
| 9. Understands students and sees them as people s/he can learn from | [   ] |
| 10. Prepares students to face the exams                             | [   ] |
| 11. Is innovative and is able to motivate students                  | [   ] |
| 12. Explains concepts well and illustrates them with examples       | [   ] |
| 13. Is tolerant of errors   | [   ] |
| 14. Guides students and monitors their progress                     | [   ] |
| 15. Is patient and encouraging in his/her attitude                  | [   ] |
| 16. Prepares and plans for each class                               | [   ] |
| 17. Builds up a good rapport with his/her students                  | [   ] |
| 18. Builds up the students' confidence                              | [   ] |
| 19. Is witty and has a good sense of humour                         | [   ] |

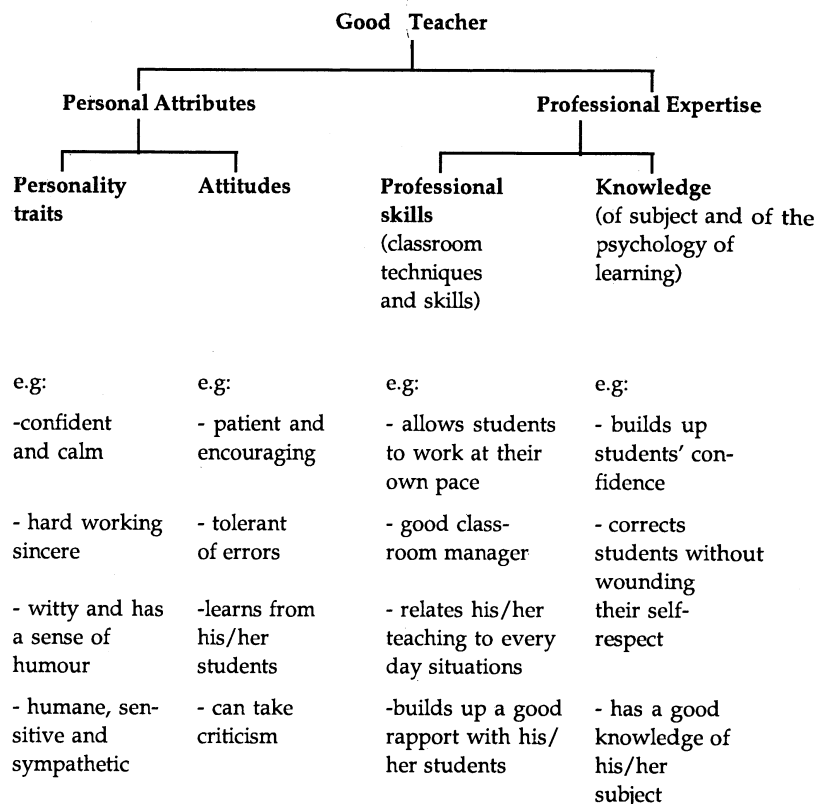
- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| 20. Helps students relate their learning to their real life needs         | [ ] |
| 21. Can take criticism in a positive manner                               | [ ] |
| 22. Is hardworking and sincere  | [ ] |
| 23. Paces his/her class well  | [ ] |
| 24. Is humane, sensitive and sympathetic                                  | [ ] |
| 25. Structures his/her lessons but not too rigidly                        | [ ] |
| 26. Makes use of audio-visual aids  | [ ] |
| 27. Allows students to work at their own pace                             | [ ] |
| 28. Evaluates his/her own performance periodically                        | [ ] |
| 29. Realises that teaching is successful only when learning is successful | [ ] |
| 30. Learns from his/her students  | [ ] |
| 31. Relates his/her teaching to everyday situations                       | [ ] |
| 32. Encourages students to interact with one another                      | [ ] |
| 33. Uses jokes and riddles to mix fun with learning                       | [ ] |
| 34. Corrects students without wounding their self-respect                 | [ ] |
| 35. Pays more attention to the weaker students                            | [ ] |

#### **Discussion**

Descriptions such as these are based on people's beliefs and judgements on who a good teacher, or what effective teaching, is. How are such judgements made? These statements reflect people's *criteria* of good teaching. These criteria can be broadly classified under two heads: *Personal Attributes* and *Professional Expertise*.

These two can be sub-classified further. When talking of *Personal Attributes* we can look at teachers' *Personality traits* and their *Attitudes*. When examining *Professional Expertise* we can again look at the *Professional skills* or classroom techniques they use and very importantly at their *Knowledge* of their subject and of the psychology of learning i.e. of how people learn.

These criteria have been presented diagrammatically with a few examples as illustrations.



While it is relatively easy to classify some characteristics under one of the 4 heads, in the case of others like "tolerant of errors" there is an overlap between *attitudes* and *classroom practice* because our classroom practice is coloured by our personality and attitude to the learner and the subject.

Perhaps you can try to classify the thirty-five qualities listed in **Activity B** under the four heads given above, and see which qualities you think can be classified under more than one category. Compare your categorisation with that done by a friend, colleague, or member of your family. Has s/he categorised them in the same way as you? Which characteristics do you not agree about?

What we have done so far is to try and give impressionistic and subjective judgements/criteria for describing good/effective teaching. Having listed a set of criteria, is it possible to arrive at ways of establishing the validity of these criteria and secondly, of identifying them in actual teaching practice? Most of the criteria are difficult to assess: how can attitudes and personal traits be established? Secondly, how can we establish the learning outcomes/effects of classroom practice?

Can we describe any "best" teaching method? Even if it does not exist, in looking for criteria for describing the ideal, we can, and do, become aware of the range of methodological options that are open to us to choose from.

## 1.2 Can good teaching be learnt?

If good teaching is such an elusive and variable concept, one would naturally ask the question: Can good teaching be learnt? The question addresses the basic debate whether one can become a good teacher through training or whether it is

an innate ability which cannot be acquired through training (i.e. good teachers are born, not made).

If training means simply prescribing a set of skills/techniques for a teacher to use, a good teacher cannot be produced through training. As I see it, the function of training is not to *prescribe* a method or approach but to *sensitize* a teacher to the interplay of various factors that constitute a teaching/learning setting. Every teaching situation involves the interaction between a given teaching method, the students, and the wider sociocultural context in which the learning takes place. Learning will not be effective if the interaction among these three is not good. A teaching method will be meaningful only if it is chosen keeping in mind the experience, personality and expectations of the students involved. Understanding students will involve understanding not only the sociocultural context in which they learn, but accepting them as psychologically complex individuals.

The function of a **Practice Teaching** course should not be to prescribe any given method or set of methods but to help one acquire a wider range of teaching skills as a result of *reflection on real teaching situations*. Teaching is a *personal skill* and every teacher has to work out for himself/herself a personal style and what s/he considers the best way of achieving a particular aim.

Regarding the view that the ability to teach is innate or inborn and that therefore not everyone can be a good teacher, you will agree that if we reflect on our everyday experiences, we will find instances where we teach others. If you are a parent you will have experience of teaching your children something - no matter how small - everyday. We can all teach, though we may not have experience of having taught in a classroom setting. Certain people have certain personality traits which people say are necessary for teachers, for example, patience. But patience is a quality we all have in lesser or greater degree and not every patient person need be a good teacher anyway. Statements like "A good teacher must be an extrovert", "A good teacher must be lively" belong to what I have called the folklore of teaching. Most good teachers will tell you that they have learnt through experience and that the experience of the classroom is invaluable for learning how to teach. If a training programme provides experience of the classroom and if it uses the experience of the classroom to help one reflect and use reflection to arrive at one's own theory and practice of teaching, then teaching *can* be learnt.

At this point I would like you to take some time to do the following activity. I would like you to reflect on your own reasons for doing the course and your expectations of it.

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### Activity C

How can a course in **Practice Teaching** help you? To answer this I would like you to list below:

- a. Your traits/qualities which you feel can be assets as a teacher.
- b. Your expectations of the **Practice Teaching** course i.e. what you hope to get out of it.

Your Strengths

Your expectations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

### Discussion

The kind of activity you have engaged in just now was designed to make you begin the process of reflection. As you start the course, it is good to take stock of your own traits and expectations. If you are a practising teacher you will have reflected on your own classroom experience and how you can add to your repertoire of skills. If you are not yet a teacher you will also have reflected on your own motivation for doing the course. Do you plan to become a teacher? At what level? What do you think teaching entails? Do you have the necessary "skills" to be a successful teacher? How many of these can you learn through training? If you are not a teacher and don't plan to become one either, you will have to think of your motivation for doing the PGCTE. Of the seven courses, i.e. **Grammar, Spoken English** etc. which ones are going to be more meaningful to you? How is **Practice Teaching** going to be personally meaningful to you?

It is necessary to be aware of your own motivations for doing this course. No doubt, as you progress through each of the seven courses of the PGCTE, you will find your perceptions and expectations changing. But modification of these perceptions is an inevitable part of learning.

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Now that you have listed what your goals or expectations are, let us look at what a training programme can realistically offer and how it can be organised.

### **1.3 How can teaching be learnt?**

Having made the statement that one can learn how to teach, it becomes necessary to examine the ways in which one can be taught how to teach.

Teacher training programmes have traditionally been designed for "novices" or people being initiated into the "art" or practice of teaching. Secondly, teacher training programmes have also been aimed at school teachers. Seldom does one find programmes that train one to teach at the undergraduate or post-graduate level.

I would like to begin by asking you to examine both these views.

Should training be restricted only to people who do not have prior experience of teaching? The difference between pre-service (or initial) training and in-service training has been assumed to lie in the fact that teachers who have no experience of teaching don't know how to teach and need to be taught by a "master teacher". On the other hand, it is assumed that teachers with prior experience of teaching have already acquired some skills which need to be sharpened (rather like the tools of the primitive hunter!) periodically. However, while the value of experience cannot be discounted, I'm sure you will agree that each one of us has his/her own perception of how to teach effectively. Training can therefore be beneficial both for practising teachers and for those yet to start teaching because training is a process of *sensitization* to the factors that contribute to the learning/teaching environment or process.

To come to the second view, the school level is not the only level at which one can be taught skills to function effectively. A person with a masters' degree in his/her subject does not automatically become a good teacher or exponent of the subject. What the degree certifies is one's knowledge of the subject, not how to transmit knowledge effectively. And I'm sure you will agree that, even at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels, teaching is not simply a matter of transmitting information: a lot more is involved which the MA did not prepare one for. So training need not be restricted only to the school level.

Traditional training methods have looked at training rather as a kind of craft apprenticeship: by working with or observing an experienced teacher one can acquire the "skills" of teaching. Such traditional approaches have three basic assumptions. The first is that trainees don't know how to teach and have no views of their own on how learning can best be effected in the classroom. Secondly, they need a master teacher, an expert or experienced teacher to show them how teaching can be done effectively, teaching being rather like the mechanical skills which can be picked up by factory workers. Lastly, learning to teach is perceived largely as an imitative process: to acquire the skill of teaching one has simply to imitate the master teacher.

Put in such bald terms the whole approach seems rather naive to us today, but I'm sure if you have experience of going through any teacher training programme, you will find that some (though not all) trainers do subscribe to this view.

Conventional training programmes also leave it to the trainee to bridge the gap between theory and practice i.e., it is the trainee's job to apply the theory s/he has learnt to real classroom teaching in the teaching practice sessions. Here s/he has to teach under real classroom conditions, in the presence of a tutor who both evaluates and gives useful advice. The student teacher is thrown in at the deep end and has to find immediate applications of the theory s/he has learnt. In such a deep end strategy the trainee teacher survives only if s/he has the makings of a good teacher. Such an approach focusses more on the success of teaching rather than on providing the trainee with an opportunity to gradually move into the process. Since teaching practice is linked with evaluation, it often overlooks the feelings of the trainee and his/her own responses/perceptions of the *process* of teaching. Since each lesson is evaluated, so many things must go right for the lesson to be completely successful. In a period of 40 to 45 minutes the trainee teacher is expected to display several kinds of skills/techniques. When the focus is on teacher performance rather than the learning process, often trainees fail to realise, why, or how, a particular step or technique was unproductive. However, if teaching practice is seen as being exploratory rather than evaluative, much of the tension and trauma of teaching can be eased and teaching can become an enjoyable process of give and take between learners and teachers.

*The assumptions underlying this course in Practice Teaching* are slightly different from those of conventional teacher training programmes. We believe:

- *everyone can teach* provided s/he is given the right exposure and opportunity;
- *everyone has his/her own perceptions of how to teach effectively.* Also, what succeeds at one level or in one context does not necessarily constitute/make for good teaching/learning in another;
- there is *no one stereotype of a "perfect" way of teaching* to be copied. Every teacher must adopt a style to suit his/her own personality or teaching style: skills can be sharpened/made more effective by making the trainee analyse teaching situations, rather than by making him/her copy another teacher's style;
- *a good teacher has to be flexible* and adapt his/her teaching style to suit the needs of the situation. Teaching is creating the right conditions for learning to take place: the success of teaching depends on how effectively these conditions for learning are created and used. Training is therefore the *beginning* of a process of sensitization to the interplay of factors that go into a learning experience. Rather than equipping the teacher with a bag of tricks to use at appropriate moments, training sensitizes trainees to the fact that each learning situation is unique and cannot be handled in any formulaic method;

- we don't know what a master teacher looks like but we are all familiar with what real teachers and real teaching situations are like. Training must *equip the teacher to function effectively in these real everyday situations* rather than bring him/her to a teaching situation which is either artificial (as most training situations have inevitably to be, to some extent) or very different from the one in which the trainee will actually be required to teach, or does teach.

The premise on which this course is based is that though some people have inherent in them the traits and skills necessary for *good* teaching, it is possible to increase any teacher's effectiveness in the classroom if we can :

- a. make him/her more aware of the classroom environment;
- b. make him/her more flexible in his/her teaching style as a result of this increased awareness;
- c. allow him/her to experiment with alternative techniques to what s/he has been using; and
- d. make the teacher keep up the process of growth as a result of classroom experience.

The nature of each learning episode is a unique combination of factors contributed by learners, the learning material, the learning situation and the teacher. The teacher may not always be, or choose to be, in control of all these factors.

#### 1.4 The objectives of this course

We asked you in **Activity C** to list what your expectations of the course were: in doing so you wrote what your aims/goals were for doing the course. Now it is my turn to list what *our* goals or objectives are for offering the course.

1. We hope that by the end of this course, you will have acquired *an understanding of the classroom situation*. What do we mean by this and how will it be achieved? We would like you to observe actual classes in the institutions you are familiar with : this observation should be used not for you to observe classes of experts but your own colleagues so that you have a heightened perception of the factors that affect the classroom. The teacher is only one factor. You should use the observation sessions to help you discriminate between the interplay of these factors and how they affect the success of the learning endeavour. We will be dealing with how observation can be used to heighten one's understanding of teaching and learning in detail in Block II of this course. Even if you are a teacher with several years of experience I'm sure it is not often that you have observed a colleague's class or invited him/her to observe yours. As a result of systematic observation, what was more an unconscious understanding of the teaching/learning situation can become more clearly focussed.
2. By observing your colleagues' classes and by allowing colleagues to observe yours, you will no doubt become less self-conscious of yourself as a performer (rather like an actor in a play) and *more open to ideas and criticism from others*. You will, as a consequence, become more open in your attitude to the whole process of teaching, as you gradually realise that a successful class does not hinge so much on teacher performance as people are wont to believe.
3. While I said that you should become less self-conscious, I hope this course will make you *more* self-conscious and aware of yourself in another way. What do I mean by this? The ability to distance yourself from yourself and your "performance" in class and therefore to *develop the ability to*

*assess yourself*. Growth and change are both on-going processes and to be meaningful they must be self-generated - just as you have on occasion to objectively evaluate the effect of your actions/words in your day-to-day life and to change the course of your actions as a consequence of this evaluation, so in your course in **Practice Teaching**. As you learn to evaluate yourself, you are well on your way to growth and self-development.

4. Connected to the idea of self-evaluation as a prerequisite for self-development is the one that follows. No one can teach you how to teach. Just as you have your own philosophy of life which is based both on your own experience, and your reading of what others' views on life are, I hope you will as a result of your going through the **Practice Teaching** course, in conjunction with the other six courses of the PGCTE, arrive at *your own theory of teaching*. Generally training programmes have two components given separately - a theoretical component and a practical component where one is required to put the theory into practice. In this course you will not be asked to apply any given theory or method, rather to arrive at your own theory in the light of what your experience tells you is feasible and possible. So instead of having *one* readymade theory which you have to try to apply to your given situation, you will have the opportunity to "shop around": to read about and experiment with what different theories of language teaching/learning have to offer and come up with your own theory, which you feel is suitable for your needs and your situation. As your needs and situation (and your understanding of it) change, you will find your perceptions changing too.
5. As you arrive at your theory of teaching, you will, as an outcome of reflection, have become more sensitive to the classroom situation. As you develop an eclectic approach you will have learnt how to experiment, how to develop your own resourcefulness and how to structure the classroom situation to maximise learning opportunities - to fall into the role of *facilitator of learning* rather than controller of the learning act.
6. To effectively become a facilitator of learning rather than a dispenser of information/knowledge will require you to *plan* your classes and to implement these plans in such a way as to enable learning to take place. It may even require you to abandon your original plan, as you develop your willingness/ability to adapt, to innovate and to take risks.

Growing as a teacher means growing with the job, growing through experience, and by reflecting on experience, to explore alternative methods and approaches: growing means creative problem solving and that's what good teaching is about, isn't it?

You may have some misgivings about the claims I have made, and about the success of a practical course like **Practice Teaching** through the distance mode. You may wonder how we will compensate for the physical absence of a tutor. I can always give you the clichéd and self-evident reply that the teacher is built into the materials, the units: the unit is the teacher talking to you. But more important is the point I'd like to make, that rather than the presence of a teacher, what is more important is the presence of a set of ideas which you have constantly to relate to your own experience. Good learning is more important than good teaching: our role is to raise the right questions which will help you find the right answers.

You will be receiving guidance (and information) through the printed units. You will also be given feedback and an opportunity to discuss your ideas through the assignments. But our belief is that the tutor's role is to bring out what is latent in you. Secondly, by allowing you to study the units at your own place of work



we are giving you an immediate opportunity to try out or apply what we suggest and to see whether it works or not, and why and how it does or doesn't. Given the diversity of English language and literature teaching in our country there can be no one set of rules applicable all over the country. You can examine your own teaching situation, or a situation you are familiar with, and look for solutions that will work in your situation.

By asking you to hold up a mirror to your own teaching practice or the practice of English teaching in your own familiar setting, (rather than prescribing a set of do's and don't's) we hope that, as you study and analyse this situation, you will be increasing your sensitivity to the contributing factors and to solutions that current theories of learning, language learning and language teaching have to offer.

## **1.5 Summary**

We began this unit by asking you to identify the characteristics of a good teacher in Section 1.1 and then we considered the question whether one can learn to be a good teacher in Section 1.2. We then considered, in Section 1.3, how training can make one a good teacher, and in the last section, Section 1.4, we discussed the objectives of this course in **Practice Teaching**.