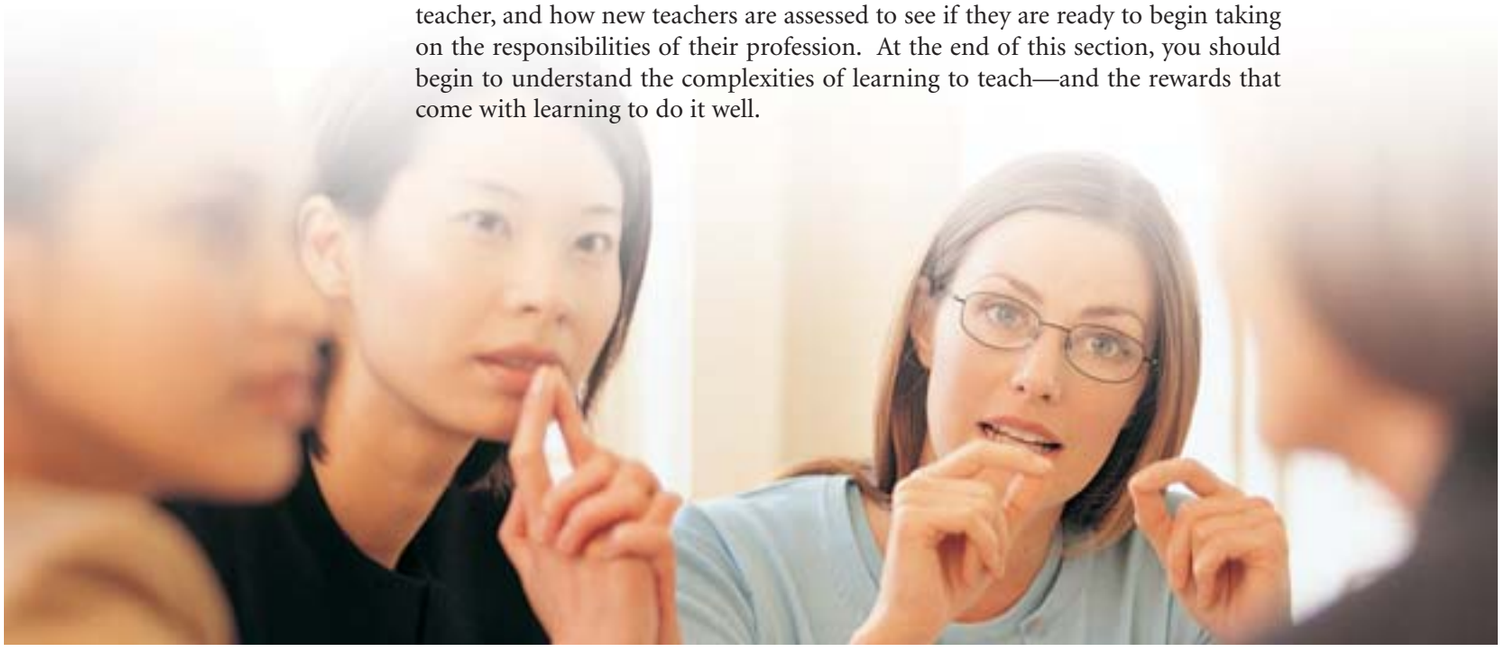
COMMITMENT # 1

LEARNING FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

Teachers are exposed to many different ideas and sources of information about how to teach. They learn about teaching from their personal background and experience, from their professional preparation, from their teaching experience, from ideas others have about teaching, from scholarly work on teaching, and from programs of professional development, to name a few. These various sources of knowledge about teaching can pose a dilemma for teachers, especially if they lack a good strategy for figuring out why some kinds of knowledge may be more useful than others. As you begin to learn about teaching, you too will face a great deal of "information input." How will you make sense of all this knowledge and information? Which ideas should you keep, which might need rethinking, and which should you discard—and why? What strategies will you use to make sure these competing sources of knowledge work in complementary ways?

In this section of the book, you will be asked to think about the challenge of competing sources of knowledge about teaching and how these various kinds of information and experience affect learning to teach. In Chapter 2, you will explore the influence of the information, knowledge, and beliefs you already have about teaching even before you begin your professional preparation program. You will reflect on what you already know about teaching and what you have yet to learn. In Chapter 3, you will become familiar with how teachers are prepared today, what the profession of teaching values as important knowledge and skills for every teacher, and how new teachers are assessed to see if they are ready to begin taking on the responsibilities of their profession. At the end of this section, you should begin to understand the complexities of learning to teach—and the rewards that come with learning to do it well.



Putting What You Already Know about Teaching into Perspective

2

Kayla Jones-Martin has just been accepted into the teacher education program at the state university she attends. She has always wanted to be a sixth grade teacher, and she is thrilled that next year, as a junior, she can really begin her professional journey. A good family friend, Martha Frazier, has been an elementary school principal for 10 years, so Kayla called her to share the news.

"Martha, I made it into the program. It's really going to happen—I'm going to be a teacher! I've been planning for this for so long—I can't wait."

Martha replied, "Kayla, that's great news. I'm so happy for you. And my school is always open to you."

"I'll probably do that—I'm sure I'll need to be visiting schools for my classes. Thanks."

"Kayla, I know how excited you are and that you have a lot of terrific ideas about teaching. But remember, you haven't actually been a teacher yet. I think you'll find that even though you have a lot of great ideas already, you'll need to learn more to become a really good teacher. Things are likely to be a little more complicated than they might seem right now. So hold onto those good ideas, but remember to keep an open mind about what it means to be a teacher. I'm still learning things all the time myself."

"I never thought about it that way. And I know that's good advice. But I still can't wait to have my own classroom!"

Teachers should … be grounded in their own life stories but not be prisoners of their own experiences.

Kathy Carter and Walter Doyle, 1996, p. 136

You have decided to become a teacher. Now, as you consider entering a professional preparation program, you expect to learn all that you need to be effective in the classroom. But like Kayla, you are not entering this early phase of your career with a blank slate. You are already familiar with schools, and you already have many ideas about teaching. This *prior knowledge* about teaching comes from a variety of experiences you have had with schools. And although you may not be aware of it, these experiences have already influenced how you think about teaching—sometimes in profound ways.

Susan Florio-Ruane, who studies classrooms and teaching, observed that "to become a professional teacher requires reexamination and transformation of what is already known about schooling" (1989, p. 164). In this chapter, we will explore five different kinds of experiences you may have had and how these experiences may influence what you already know—and what you think you know—about teaching. Then we will suggest some strategies for using this knowledge wisely in your preparation to teach. Finally, we will introduce some critical tools that will help you develop new sources of knowledge for your teaching—namely, observing in classrooms and interviewing teachers—and help you get the most out of the observations and interviews you will conduct.

Five Kinds of Experience That Create Prior Knowledge about Teaching

At least five kinds of experiences can influence how you think about teaching. They include:

- Your experience as a student in schools
- Your autobiography
- Your beliefs
- Your experience working in schools
- Views of teaching you have encountered in the media

We know you're anxious to get out there and teach now that you've made the decision to do so. But first it's a good idea to take some time to reflect on the **prior knowledge** you bring to your professional training as a result of your life experiences. It will make both your past and upcoming experiences much more valuable as you prepare in earnest to become a teacher.

Critical term

Prior knowledge. Knowledge about teaching that you already have before you enter your formal preparation, which affects how you think about teaching and what you learn about teaching as a profession.

Knowledge about Teaching from Your Own Experience of Schooling

What goes on in nearly every profession other than teaching is something of a mystery to most of us. But those of us who want to teach already have an unusual amount of experience with teachers. By the time we enter professional preparation for teaching, nearly all of us have spent at least 12 years in schools watching teachers teach. Dan Lortie, a sociologist who has studied the work of teachers, coined the term **apprenticeship of observation** to describe the knowledge we attain about teaching during the years we watch our own teachers from kindergarten to high school graduation. He believed that in many ways those school years were like "serving an apprenticeship in teaching" (1975, p. 61). But unlike a traditional apprenticeship, which usually pairs one novice with one master craftsperson for

Critical term

Apprenticeship of observation. The knowledge you have about teaching from the 12 years you spent in classrooms as a student—a term coined in 1975 by the sociologist Dan Lortie.

several years, as students we watch many teachers teach. Some are wonderful models, but unfortunately others are not. Yet all of them, good and bad alike, can influence the way we think about teaching. For some of us, the image of a favorite teacher is the primary motivation for wanting to become a teacher ourselves. Perhaps this is the way you always saw yourself—just like Mrs. Evans, for example, your high school social studies teacher. In contrast, for others of us, being as different as possible from a least favorite teacher is the primary motivation for teaching and our concern is that no student has to go through what we went through in that teacher's classroom.

Our experiences in school also leave us with ideas about classroom procedures and routines. We have ideas about what teachers look like when they stand in front of a classroom, how different subjects are taught, what teachers do while students are in their seats, how teachers develop relationships with their students, and perhaps even what the role of a teacher's aide might be. Often it is these very images of teaching that we pick up almost unconsciously and try to imitate once we are in the classroom as teachers ourselves. These images may lead us to try out some good, effective teaching practices—or they may lead us to try out some ineffective ones.

As a result of the 12 years they have spent in schools watching teachers teach, students can get a false sense of confidence about what goes into good teaching. (PhotoDisc, Inc./Getty Images)

Because we are all so familiar with schools, we all have opinions about teaching, and we often believe that we know everything there is to know about the work of being a teacher. Whether the ideas have credibility in the profession of teaching, we may believe that we have the answers to education. Were we to prepare to enter almost any other profession, we would not presume to know how to do the work. But this is not so with teaching.

The real danger from this long apprenticeship and the familiarity it provides is that we may have developed inaccurate or incomplete ideas about what it means to teach. We may believe, for example, that it is a relatively easy job. After all, how hard can it be to stand up in front of a classroom and talk to a bunch of students? Even if we had wonderful teachers as role models, we may not realize that knowledge about good teaching changes and develops over time (for example, consider the emerging role of technology in teaching). These developments constantly pose new challenges for teachers—challenges that may have been unimaginable in their own past educational experiences. In other words, we may easily confuse the side of teaching we see as students with what is clearly a more complex set of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities that exist behind the scenes. Watching teaching and knowing what it means to teach "from the other side of the desk," as Lortie put it (1975, p. 61), are two entirely different things. Or, as Susan Florio-Ruane (1989) states, the challenge is that "the beginning teacher must try to assume a new—but familiar—role in a familiar setting" (1989, p. 167).

As students in classrooms, for example, we do not usually think about the long hours teachers may put in during the evenings and on weekends preparing lessons. We probably never even see a teacher's lesson plans. We may not realize that each week for a whole academic year a certain teacher has attended a class to learn more effective ways of teaching writing. We may not appreciate the years it may have taken for a teacher to perfect a set of routines, for example, for teaching a

complex interdisciplinary unit on the history of the community in which the school is located. We may not understand that working with a small group of students in one part of the classroom, and still knowing and effectively managing what is going on in another, is an explicit skill that needs to be learned. We may never stop to think about the hours teachers may spend after the bell rings keeping in touch with their students' families. Now is the time to view teaching from the other side of the desk.

All students bring prior knowledge to whatever concepts a teacher may be teaching—whether they are teaching education students like yourselves or students in preschool–grade 12 (P–12) classrooms. And all teachers are more effective once they understand the prior knowledge and ideas that students possess so that they can better connect new learning to those ideas. As you begin your formal study of teaching, one way you and your instructors can begin to understand the images and ideas that you already associate with teaching from your prior experience is for you to create a **concept map**.

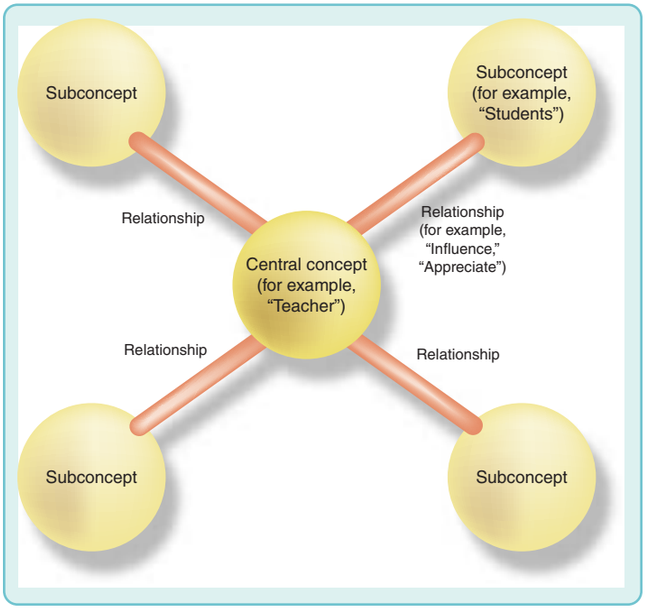
Critical term

Concept map. A visual tool teachers can use to show an individual's ideas about a particular concept and how they relate to one another; concept maps can be used as a starting point for teaching new knowledge about that concept.

A concept map is a drawing that represents the relationships among several ideas that an individual associates with a specific central concept, or big idea (Novak & Gowin, 1984). Figure 2-1 illustrates how a concept map works. If you were to use the term *teacher* as the central concept, you would place that in the center of your map. From there you would include several subconcepts or related ideas (for example, *students*) on your map. You would then connect the terms *teachers* and *students* with a verb that shows how you are thinking about the relationship between teachers and students. You might use a word like *appreciate* or a word like *influence*. As a result, one part of your concept map might show that in your image of teaching, teachers influence students, or students influence teachers, or they influence each other.

Figure 2-1 A Visual Tool

A concept map is a drawing that allows you to display your view of the relationships between an important, central concept, for example, *teaching*, and other subconcepts that you believe are related to teaching. Concept maps are one way to show your prior understanding of a concept you are studying.



Your turn…

Create a concept map depicting your images of "teacher." Include at least six subconcepts that are connected to the concept "teacher" and the relationship between them. How does your concept map compare to those of your peers?

Autobiographical Knowledge about Teaching

In addition to the knowledge you have accumulated as a result of your own schooling, you also know about teaching from your own personal life experiences. Your autobiography directly affects your decision to teach and the way you think about teaching. Two major influences from your autobiography are *family* and *personal commitments*.

Family. Prospective teachers come from many different kinds of families. Some may come from a family of teachers and if so, may bring a different kind of understanding of the work of teachers than does someone whose only exposure to teaching has been as a student. For example, you may have seen a parent grading papers each night, or planning lessons, or talking to students' parents. Your family may be very supportive of your choice to follow in the footsteps of your mother or father and may also see itself as "a family of teachers," not only with a mother or father who teaches, but aunts, uncles, siblings, and even grandparents. It may be called "the family business." You may have spent a lot of time in the classroom of a relative, watching him or her teach or helping out. "Teacher talk" may have been common at your dinner table.

Or you may come from a family that is puzzled by your decision to become a teacher. They may think that you are considering a field that is beneath you. Or they may believe that teaching is an easy job, one that does not require a deep understanding of more than the content of the lesson you are teaching the next day. You may hear comments like "Anyone can teach." Family friends may reinforce this attitude. Or you may hear the unfortunate and absolutely inaccurate cliché, "Those who can, do. Those who cannot, teach." You may feel defensive about your choice to teach, even though you are aware that teaching is a demanding profession.

Your family may think teaching is a good career choice simply because they believe it is less stressful than other, "real" jobs. They may see it as a good career because you will be finished with your work in the midafternoon each day and will have summers off or as being more compatible with family life than other career options. This, too, is an inaccurate picture of your chosen field. If this is your motivation, it is important to understand that this is not a realistic view of teaching.

A significant life event within your family may also influence how you think about teaching. For example, you may have a sibling who has a disability. This provides you with a different perspective on the teacher's role than someone without this family experience and may lead you to a career in special education.

You may be the parent, aunt, or uncle of a school-aged child. Their experiences with their own teachers form a sort of secondhand apprenticeship of observation for you because they introduce you to another set of teachers. If you have grown children, you may recall significant events from their education that have influenced your thinking about teaching.

Finally, you may be a career switcher, perhaps with a family that is ready to support you through the next year or two of your preparation. Your goal is to do

something more meaningful in your life; you may always have wanted to become a teacher but somehow took a different path earlier in your life.

Personal Commitments. Personal commitments can also affect how you think about teaching and what you know about it. These commitments form images of teaching and also constitute a form of prior knowledge.

Some people are committed to teaching as a way of giving back to the community. If, for example, you have struggled to be able to attend college and are the first in your family to become a teacher, your primary commitment may be to teaching as a way of helping children in the next generation improve their life opportunities. This commitment may come about because it was challenging for you to realize your own opportunities. If you are a member of a racial, ethnic, or cultural group that is underrepresented in today's teaching force, your commitment may also be tied to the desire to become a role model for the next generation of students whose race, ethnicity, or language you share.

Many people come to teaching following a lifelong interest in becoming a teacher. You may have been the one in your neighborhood to bring together all the younger children and "play school" (and your school was probably set up a lot like the classrooms you yourself were attending). You may have been the neighborhood babysitter, and your love of children may be at the root of your desire to teach. You may have an image of yourself as a teacher, standing up in front of a classroom, or reading to students, or teaching and holding a coaching position after school.

In reality, however, you have probably never had full responsibility for a class of 25 students all day long, five days a week. The actual responsibilities of a teacher are likely to differ greatly from your early views of them. However, the distance between your initial images of teaching and the realities of the work does not diminish the importance of your initial commitment to the profession. It just means that you will need to make the transition from your love of children as a basis for teaching to your love of teaching a class of children or youth every day—and doing all the things that being a classroom teacher entails beyond the enjoyment you derive from being with young people.

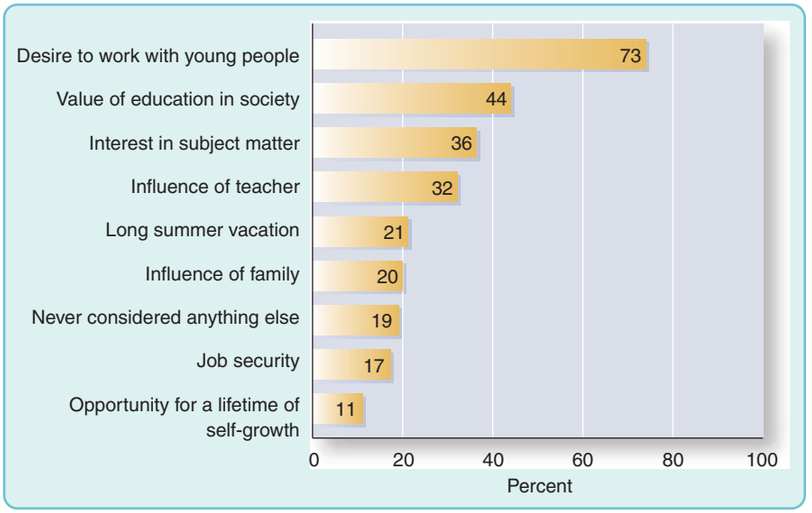
Experiences with children in non-school settings may help you make your decision about a career in teaching, but the demands of teaching can differ in important ways from the demands of other jobs you may have held with children. (Digital Vision)

During your own apprenticeship of observation, you learned not only what teachers do; you also had specific experiences as a student that may have provided the motivation for you to teach. Both can be very strong motivators for teaching and provide strong images of what you hope to accomplish as a teacher. You may be committed to being the kind of teacher your favorite teacher was and returning to your hometown to teach, even in one of your own former schools. You may have idyllic views of what that teacher did to make your year with him or her so memorable.

Or you may be committed to moving to an urban community that is in need of teachers. This commitment may stem from your interest in fostering equity and social justice. You may view teaching as a direct way of empowering children with the skills they will need to make improve-

Figure 2-2 Why Teach?

Teachers choose to enter the profession for many reasons, but their chief motivation is the desire to work with children and youth.



Source: National Education Association, *Status of the American public school teacher 2000-2001*: Highlights, Figure 5. Why Teachers Originally Decided to Enter the Profession, 2001 (page 3). Retrieved from http://www.nea.org/edstats/images/statushighlights.pdf and reprinted with permission of the National Education Association © 2003. All rights reserved.

ments in their own communities and within their own cultural or ethnic groups. Your family may have misconceptions about what it means to teach in urban schools. If they do not understand your commitment, they may try to dissuade you from this decision. Especially if you did not grow up in a large city, your friends may also question your decision. This questioning might strengthen your commitment, or it may cause you to rethink it.

Whatever your personal autobiography may be, it has undoubtedly influenced your decision to consider a career in teaching. Each year the **National Education Association**, the largest teachers' organization in the United States, conducts a report on the status of American teachers, including an analysis of why teachers go into teaching. Figure 2-2 illustrates the various reasons today's teachers have for choosing teaching. The case that follows shows how one student from a family of teachers dealt with her own doubts about becoming a teacher and finally resolved them.

Critical term

National Education Association. The largest teachers' organization in the United States, with approximately 2.7 million members.

A CASE IN POINT
Natalie's Story

I was a major in elementary education and Spanish. I always wanted to teach, and there are a lot of teachers in my family. But because of that I thought that maybe I should be doing something else. I wasn't so sure I wanted to fall into that family pattern. But when I was younger I was always easy with kids, I had an easy way, I did all the things that someone who wanted to teach might do. I babysat, taught Sunday school. I attended a state school, and I went to college as an education major.

Those who are drawn to a career in teaching do so for a wide variety of reasons, but the most important reason cited is the wish to work with young people. (Media Bakery)

But after one semester I found myself asking: Do I really want to do this? I needed to make peace with the fact that this was what **I** wanted to do—not because of my family and their expectations. So I shifted my major several times. I thought about psychology and natural resources. I always continued on with my Spanish. Then one day when I still hadn't declared a major, my stepmother sat me down and said, "You've always been interested in teaching. What's wrong with having that be your major? You can use your Spanish, you can be creative. And you can have summers off." [At this point Natalie laughs because for the past several summers she has always worked for her school district.] Also, I had a lot of work experience before I decided to go into teaching. I worked in a family restaurant, doing all of the jobs there. I worked in an electronics factory putting together transformer boards. I knew these were not things I wanted to do for the long haul. But in my teacher education program the mindset that this was actually a career—not just a job—was not communicated clearly. I was looking for a career.

Once I got into the classroom during my program, and I had that experience, I was hooked. "So this is what it can be," I said. My first field experience was in a fifth grade with a wonderful cooperating teacher. He gave me just enough guidance to get me going. I found a tremendous amount of joy in what I did.

What it is about teaching that has always drawn me is that you can't give someone knowledge, but you can help them discover it. You can take an idea, move it around, and have it fit for the kids. You have to shape it. There is a sense of comfort in that it is a profession where you help kids move forward.

It is true that you need to find your passion in teaching, and you have to hold onto that passion and let that carry you through the rougher times, the times that challenge you in the classroom—because they happen too. Some days it's that passion for teaching—whether it's for mathematics, for building a family in the classroom, for helping a new teacher along—that you bring to your work and that lets you recommit yourself to teaching and remember why you are doing this important work.

Your autobiography and personal commitments constitute an important set of experiences that have influenced not only your decision to teach but also how you think about the work of teaching. These experiences may be sources of support for you, or as in Natalie's case, they may impose overt or subtle pressures on you as you move into your professional program. And like the powerful images you may have of teaching from your own experience, family and personal commitments may need to be put into perspective as you learn more about what it means to teach.

Knowledge about Teaching from Working in Schools

You gain a different kind of knowledge from actually having worked in schools before you become a teacher. Some of you may have volunteered in schools as a tutor. Others may have worked in after-school recreation programs attached to

schools. And yet others of you may have worked, for example, as paraprofessionals, assisting a teacher in the classroom. Through this experience, you not only bring your own images of teaching; you also bring knowledge from inside the classroom gained as an adult. Paraprofessionals or other school employees who are not teachers may have a wide range of responsibilities and experiences in schools, all of which contribute to beliefs about and images of teaching.

Let's consider the case of paraprofessionals, since they probably have the most sustained classroom experience among nonteaching personnel in schools. Although most paraprofessionals work in classrooms under the direct supervision of a certified teacher, some are independently in charge of special parts of a school, such as the school library or the computer lab. In some schools every teacher may be assigned a paraprofessional for some or all of the school day. This means that paraprofessionals who have direct classroom assignments may have worked in the classrooms of excellent teacher role models or, conversely, in the classrooms of teachers who were not good role models.

As a paraprofessional, your experience will differ not only depending on the kind of situation to which you have been assigned, but also on the roles you have been asked to play. Within the classroom, for example, your major task may have been to provide support to your teacher by preparing materials, carrying out routines (e.g., attendance, lunch count, accompanying students to various special classrooms in elementary schools), or assisting students with word processing and other computer-related skills. You may also have been called on regularly to manage the classroom when the teacher was called to meetings. As a paraprofessional in special education, you may have provided specific, individually tailored supports to students with special health or physical needs under the direction of a special education teacher.

Alternatively, you may have played more of an instructional role. For example, if your class was divided into small groups for learning in certain subject areas, you may have had full responsibility for one of those groups. While the teacher provided information and direction to the whole group, you may have assisted by walking around the room and providing individual explanations, or helping to keep students engaged in their work. You have probably assisted with required standardized testing.

You may have been in a situation where the teacher with whom you worked provided you with extensive explanations and instructions for why he or she made certain decisions about teaching and even asked you to watch while he or she taught—specifically so you could learn at a higher level. Then, after you had a chance to teach your own group in a similar way, you may have had the opportunity to sit down together and review what occurred during your own experience.

Paraprofessionals who decide to become teachers can draw on a much greater base of practical classroom experience than is available to other teacher education students. They may know more about how schools are run, they are more likely to be familiar with curriculum materials, they may have helped complete report cards or they may have talked extensively with parents about student behavior.

Yet, one of the biggest challenges facing paraprofessionals is to recognize the limitations of their knowledge. Their experience represents a kind of apprenticeship through which they work in classrooms every day and may actually carry out instructional responsibilities. Therefore, they have been more than observers. Even so, typically they do not carry out the full range of a teacher's responsibilities. They do not perform the same level of planning that teachers do, nor do they typically have extensive knowledge about how children develop, for example, as readers, writers, mathematicians, or scientists. Although they may be

familiar with teaching methods, they may not be able to determine, based on professional expertise, whether other methods might be more effective. And those paraprofessionals who work with teachers who are not good professional role models may not learn good teaching practices. In contrast, those lucky enough to work with a gifted teacher may acquire a tremendous amount of knowledge about good teaching.

So those who work in schools, as paraprofessionals, as substitute teachers, or even as volunteers probably have more knowledge about teaching and a definite perspective on what the work entails. All the same, they will have to think critically about their prior experience and how their acquired classroom habits will influence them as they move into a full teaching position.

A CASE IN POINT
From Paraprofessional to Teacher

Kathy Edwards is an African American woman who worked as a paraprofessional in an urban middle school for five years before deciding to complete her undergraduate education and become a teacher. Her story provides an important perspective both on her transition and on the role of paraprofessionals in the classroom.

When I decided to become a paraprofessional I didn't look at the specific duties required for this position. I was just excited to work with a diverse group of students and share my passion for mathematics. Being a paraprofessional was a job that involved instructional responsibilities without complete control over—and responsibility for—the classroom. But it also meant serving as a critical support to helping students achieve.

As a paraprofessional, I learned a lot about what type of commitment is needed for being a teacher. I also developed a deep understanding of learning and academic achievement. The students I worked with taught me a lot about how to help them succeed. For them, the most important thing was knowing that the adults in the classroom understood them as individuals. So as I observed the successes and failures of the different teachers I worked with, I saw how important it was to get to know your students—and what happens when teachers aren't good at doing that. Of course, teaching sometimes presents barriers that make it hard for teachers to get to know the students they work with. As a paraprofessional, I made sure that I had the time to speak to my students on a personal level so that they could trust me not just as an educator concerned about their academic success, but also as someone who cared about them as people.

As a paraprofessional, it was my duty to make sure all the students were on the right task, make sure behavior problems were redirected, make sure all the teachers' grades were completed, and pinch-hit as a substitute teacher when needed. Because of the rapport that I built with the students, I was able to work successfully with many students who were often labeled as "difficult." Despite my hard work, the success of these students was not often attributed to the paraprofessional. Since it was usually

Paraprofessionals who have worked in classrooms before becoming teachers bring valuable experience to their new position, but often discover that being the teacher of record is more challenging than it first appears. (Will Hart/PhotoEdit)

the teacher who was solely recognized for the success of the classroom, I decided that when I became a teacher, I would give recognition where it was due and make sure that those who served in a support staff capacity got the respect and recognition they deserved. That was certainly one reason for making the transition. But the most important reason to become a teacher was the students.

As I made up my mind to become a teacher, I had to face two big obstacles. First, I struggled to pass the required examination for admission to the teacher education program. I wasn't confident in my academic skills and it showed. Math—my academic love—was not a problem. I found a lot of support at my university and made myself take advantage of it to make sure my reading and language skills were up to par. The next obstacle was figuring out how I was going to pay the bills. As a paraprofessional, my financial situation was very limited. At times, especially during the summer, my bills tended to pile up. I was lucky to find a program that provided scholarships for paraprofessionals like me who wanted to climb the career ladder and become teachers. Without the stress of not knowing if my bills were going to be paid each month, I was able to focus more on school and the students I worked with every day.

On the whole, being a paraprofessional helped me excel in my teacher education program. I had a lot of classroom experience coming in, and this gave me an advantage. But I couldn't slack off on my university requirements—I needed what my courses offered to add to what I knew from the classroom—and to prepare me to take on all of the responsibilities of a teacher. It was time consuming, and I had to learn to balance my work, my schooling, and my family. But now that it's over, and I'm about to take on my own middle school mathematics classroom in the fall, I would have to say that my journey to becoming a teacher has been a positive one. I'm anxious to get started on my own, I'm ready, and I can't wait to have my own classroom and watch my students grow.

Knowledge about Teaching from Images in the Media

In recent years, news about education has featured prominently in the media. Portrayals of schools and teachers have been notable in movies, television, and in print. But how realistic are these portrayals? How do they help or hinder your own development as a prospective teacher?

Your turn…

What images do you have about teachers and teaching from movies or television? In a small group, identify specific movies or shows and describe the images you have from watching them. Which aspects of the teachers' roles, responsibilities, and relationships seem realistic, and which seem sensationalized? Why?

Images of Teaching from Movies and Television. Teachers and teaching are a relatively common theme in the movies. In her book *The Hollywood Curriculum*, Mary Dalton (1999) lists over 50 movies about teachers that were released between 1936 and 1998. These films appear in Figure 2-3 and can generally be divided into three categories.

In the first category, we see the heroic, mythical teacher who bucks the odds in challenging situations and emerges with the students victorious. Often, but not always, these heroic teachers are working in urban schools with students who are members of lower socioeconomic classes and are often members of minority

Figure 2-3 Hollywood Images of Teaching

Movies provide an incomplete or partial view of what teachers really do.

Films about Teachers, 1936–1998

Back to School. Dir. Alan Metter. 1986.
Blackboard Jungle. Dir. Richard Brooks. 1955.
The Breakfast Club. Dir. John Hughes. 1985.
Bright Road. Dir. Gerald Mayer. 1953. From "The Magill Movie Guide." Prodigy, 1993.
Carrie. Dir. Brian De Palma. 1976.
Children of a Lesser God. Dir. Randa Haines. 1986.
The Children's Hour. Dir. William Wyler. 1962.
Class of 1999: *The Substitute*. Dir. Mark L. Lester. 1990.
Class of 1999 II. Dir. Spiro Ratazos. 1993.
Class of Nuke 'Em High. Dirs. Richard W. Haines and Samuel Weil. 1986.
Clueless. Dir. Amy Heckerling. 1995
Conrack. Dir. Martin Ritt. 1974.
Cooley High. Dir. Michael Schultz. 1975.
The Corn Is Green. Dir. Irving Rapper. 1945.
Dangerous Minds. Dir. John N. Smith. 1995.
Dazed and Confused. Dir. Richard Linklater. 1993.
Dead Poets Society. Dir. Peter Weir. 1989.
Educating Rita. Dir. Lewis Gilbert. 1983.
Fame. Dir. Alan Parker. 1980.
Fast Times at Ridgemont High. Dir. Amy Heckerling. 1982.
Ferris Bueller's Day Off. Dir. John Hughes. 1986.
Goodbye, Mr. Chips. Dir. Sam Wood. 1939.
Good Morning, Miss Dove. Dir. Henry Koster. 1955. From "The Magill Movie Guide." Prodigy: 1993.
Good Will Hunting. Dir. Gus VanSant. 1998.
Grease. Dir. Randal Weiser. 1978.
Grease 2. Dir. Patricia Birch. 1982.
Higher Learning. Dir. John Singleton. 1995.
Hoosiers. Dir. David Anspaugh. 1986.
Kindergarten Cop. Dir. Ivan Reitman. 1990.
The King and I. Dir. Walter Lang. 1956.
Lean on Me. Dir. John G. Avildsen. 1989.
Little Man Tate. Dir. Jodie Foster. 1991.
Looking for Mr. Goodbar. Dir. Richard Brooks. 1977.
The Man Without a Face. Dir. Mel Gibson. 1993.
The Miracle Worker. Dir. Arthur Penn. 1962.
Mr. Holland's Opus. Dir. Stephen Herek. 1995.
187. Dir. Kevin Reynolds. 1997.
Only the Strong. Dir. Sheldon Lettich. 1993.
The Paper Chase. Dir. James Bridges. 1973.
PCU. Dir. Hart Bochner. 1994.
Porky's. Dir. Bob Clark. 1981.
Pump Up the Volume. Dir. Allan Moyle. 1990.
The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. Dir. Ronald Neame. 1969.
Rachel, Rachel. Dir. Paul Newman. 1968.
Real Genius. Dir. Martha Coolidge. 1985.
Renaissance Man. Dir. Penny Marshall. 1994.
Rock 'n' Roll High School. Dir. Allan Arkush. 1979.
Ryan's Daughter. Dir. David Lean. 1970.
Sarafina! Dir. Darrell James Roodt. 1992.
School Ties. Dir. Robert Mandel. 1992.
Stand and Deliver. Dir. Ramon Menendez. 1987.
The Substitute. Dir. Robert Mandel. 1996.
Summer School. Dir. Carl Reiner. 1987.
Teachers. Dir. Arthur Hiller. 1984.
These Three. Dir. William Wyler. 1936.
To Sir, With Love. Dir. James Clavell. 1967.
Up the Down Staircase. Dir. Robert Mulligan. 1967.
With Honors. Dir. Alek Keshishian. 1994.

Source: Dalton, M. M. (1999). *The Hollywood curriculum: Teachers and teaching in the movies*. New York: Peter Lang.

groups. These teachers seem to perform brilliantly in the face of negative stereotypes about the potential of their students. Examples of this portrayal include the teacher Jaime Escalante in *Stand and Deliver* and Meryl Streep's character in *The Music Teacher*. In the case of Jaime Escalante, the Latino students in his calculus class show their abilities on the Advanced Placement calculus test, and in the case of Meryl Streep's character, elementary school students in low income urban schools display their talents playing violin.

Dalton (1999) portrays the teachers in these films as "outsiders" who fight both societal viewpoints and often their own school administrators. In contrast to the beliefs of those in the surrounding society, these teachers hold the highest expectations for their students' accomplishments and work with them, prod them, and do whatever it takes to help them accomplish their goals. These films create images of teachers as highly committed individuals who will let nothing stop them or get in the way of meeting their students' needs, as well as the extraordinary hard work it can take to help students achieve their goals. For prospective teachers, one important point conveyed by these films is that the students in the schools portrayed are bright and can learn challenging subjects well. The students face many obstacles, often put in place by the educational system, but they can reach their goals with the extraordinary help provided by unusually dedicated teachers. To do so, **teacher expectations** must be high, and teachers must do whatever they need to do to make sure students can meet those high expectations.

Critical term

Teacher expectations. The expectations teachers set for what their students are capable of doing and achieving in the classroom. Teachers can treat students for whom they have set higher or lower expectations differently, often presenting lesser challenges for those whom they believe cannot achieve at high levels.

A second category of teacher in the movies demonstrates hard work, commitment, and compassion but may not necessarily succeed with students. This teacher is dedicated to his or her students' learning, and often in these films the story focuses on an individual teacher's relationship with one or two special students. In *Dead Poets Society*, for example, the teacher played by Robin Williams works tirelessly to motivate his advantaged prep school students and to make the curriculum relevant to their lives, but ultimately he cannot protect his students from their own pain. In *Conrack*, the teacher Conroy is on an individual mission to expand the lives and dreams of his rural students on the Georgia Sea Islands, but ultimately he is not successful either. Another film in this genre is *Up the Down Staircase*.

A far less common portrayal—but perhaps the most realistic—is the teacher as the unsung hero who is not readily recognized for the influence he or she has had on students. An example of this portrayal is *Mr. Holland's Opus*, in which the cumulative impact of a teacher's work is honored collectively only when generations of his students return to celebrate the end of his career. Another example of this category is the classic 1939 film *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. This message is not tied to any particular kind of school; it is a universal message about teachers and the potential reach of their work.

Historical Note

Catharine Beecher's Image of Teachers

In the nineteenth century, Catharine Beecher (1800–1878) made a major contribution to changing the image of teachers. Her well-known, influential family included, among others, her father Lyman Beecher, a highly regarded minister, and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. At a time when most teachers were men and higher education for women barely existed, Catharine Beecher argued that women should be well educated and become teachers.

Beecher based her arguments for women's education on two main ideas. First, she believed that as the primary educators of children and as the caretakers of the home, women should be well prepared for these crucial tasks—not just in the how-to's of domestic life but in a serious intellectual education as well (Dykeman, 2001). Second, she believed that both working-class and upper-class women were being held back intellectually—working-class women because they were relegated to jobs in factories or as household domestics, and upper-class women because their daily activities, such as shopping, entertaining, and light reading, were considered inconsequential (Sklar, 1973). Teaching presented an option for women that combined education with a socially useful career, which had the potential of elevating women's position in society (Hoffman, 1981). A common focus on teaching as a career could also close the gap between women in different economic classes (Dykeman, 2001; Sklar, 1973). Underlying both of these roles in the home and in schools was the need for women to have access to high-quality, rigorous, and intellectually stimulating education. As a young woman, Beecher founded the Hartford Female Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut, a school devoted to providing a serious education for women.

To accomplish her goals in the 1840s, Beecher began a campaign to raise funds to train teachers for the West—which at that time was today's Midwest. First through the Board of National Popular Education, and then through normal schools for teachers (see Chapter 3) that she helped establish in Ohio, Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin, women were prepared to teach in the "West." Thousands made the trek under the auspices of Beecher's campaign (Hoffman, 1981). She raised funds for her cause through public speaking tours throughout the Northeast, primarily in churches (Sklar, 1973).

Through her efforts, the number of women teachers in elementary schools tripled between 1840 and 1880 (Hoffman, 1981). While today Beecher is sometimes viewed as being responsible for the feminization of teaching, or for teaching being viewed pejoratively as "women's work," she was actually a staunch advocate of women's rights and raising the image of the profession of teaching.

Teaching has also featured prominently in television shows. Notable among these is the series, *Welcome Back, Kotter*, which was a comic portrayal of the ups and down of the relationship between a high school teacher and a class of students with an array of behavior and emotional difficulties. Always cutting through the comedy was the theme that Kotter cared about his students. A more current show, *Boston Public*, centers on a challenging urban high school whose teachers and administrators struggle to meet the wide-ranging needs of their students.

Portrayals of teachers in the visual media provide powerful images of what teaching can entail. In nearly every case, however, these images are incomplete and often sensationalize teaching in challenging schools and circumstances rather than portraying the regularities of teaching. As sources of knowledge about teaching, movies and television generally portray the extreme—and not the commonplace—challenges of teaching. In their often stereotypical portrayals of the most challenging high schools, they may, in fact, do more harm than good.

Print Media. If you read the newspaper regularly, you will inevitably come across articles about education. Newspaper staffs typically include education

reporters who cover the "school beat." In small towns, local newspapers rely on the schools as a steady source of news. In addition to covering school sports events, local papers often include descriptions of special projects, print lists of students who make school honor rolls, and spotlight teachers who are doing something unusual in their classes or during the summer months. Special teacher workshops and teacher retirements, in particular stories about beloved teachers who have had long, successful careers, are also regularly reported. Teachers are a fundamental and enduring part of every community, and typically these stories create images of teachers as sources of local pride.

Other kinds of reporting, can also send strong messages about the image of teachers in individual communities. In many locales, a school's scores on annual standardized tests are published in the newspapers. The variation in scores across districts is often interpreted as a measure of the quality of the teachers in a district—although no information about specific teachers accompanies such reports. Reporting of scores has intensified under current federal legislation with the **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**, which requires annual testing for all schools that receive certain kinds of federal funding.

Critical term

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Federal legislation applying to all schools that receive certain categories of federal funding, which increases accountability for the quality of teaching and learning through annual testing of students and which has sanctions for schools that do not perform adequately each year.

Individuals often believe that little good teaching may be taking place in urban or rural schools whose scores are low and that no bad teaching takes place in well-funded suburban schools. These images can be powerful influences on a community's beliefs about schools in the area. If a local paper is not particularly friendly to the public schools, this can create negative and sometimes very inaccurate images about teachers and the quality of the schools. Having read accounts of the schools in local newspapers, you may have biases about the quality of teaching in schools situated in different communities. These beliefs may or may not hold up once you observe the schools for yourself—and may require rethinking once you are there.

The media can also create a set of images about what constitutes best teaching practice by popularizing a particular method of teaching. For example, reporters may be biased toward a certain approach as the "best" way to teach young students to read or learn mathematics. Their stories may therefore influence the kinds of questions parents ask teachers and principals about the instructional methods used in their child's school. Even though the public may judge the quality of teaching based on partial information, this may have powerful implications for how people ultimately view what makes a good teacher, a good school, and a good school district.

In addition to the news media, stories of teachers are often the subject of literature and popular writing. Biographies and autobiographies of teachers have been the sources for many movies about teaching (e.g., *Conrack, Dangerous Minds, The Miracle Worker*); a fictional representation of teaching is exemplified by *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* by James Hilton.

Stereotypes about teaching and schools can also be found in children's picture books. Stories about the "good teacher" Miss Nelson, and her nemesis, the terrible substitute teacher Ms. Viola Swamp, are found in *Miss Nelson Is Missing* by Harry Allard. In another picture book, *Miss Malarkey Doesn't Live in Room 10*, by Judy Finchler and Kevin O'Malley, students begin to understand the lives of their teachers outside the classroom. While works of literature for adults and children create images of teaching, in today's multimedia environment they vie with the visual media. Overall, however, it seems clear that the media are better at creating stereotypes than portraying the real everyday lives of teachers and their concerns about their teaching practices.

Digging Deeper
Is Teaching a Science or an Art?

One of the most important things to think about as you consider a career in teaching is what you will actually do in the classroom. How will you decide what to do during a particular lesson or in a particular subject area? How will you organize the classroom and manage the students? Often the question of how teachers carry out their profession in the classroom is talked about in terms of whether teaching is a *science* or an *art*.

Pro and Con: Viewing teaching as a science implies that fixed rules and procedures guide teachers in their work and that following these rules will lead to student learning (Murray, 1989). In theory, these rules are clearly stated and come from a fixed body of professional, scientific knowledge that all teachers should master. This is sometimes referred to as "outside knowledge" from experts, which can then be applied in the classroom. If you learn this body of professional knowledge, and you know how to apply it and do so consistently, the argument goes, you should be able to be a successful teacher. When teaching is viewed as a science, teachers can be thought of as technicians who carry out methods in the classroom that are thought to represent best practice. Viewing teaching as a science, teachers can learn all the procedures they need to be successful.

In contrast, viewing teaching as an art means that what a teacher does in the classroom is not guided by a formal set of procedures and rules. The steps to success are not this clearly spelled out. Viewed as practitioners of an art, teachers have an intuition about what needs to happen. They are committed to their students and passionate about their work, and it is this moral commitment to children that drives the performance of their art—sometimes called their "craft"—in the classroom (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992). Teaching is less about learning the technical skills and procedures of the profession, and more about doing what seems to "feel right" in the absence of a well-reasoned, logical explanation (Yinger, 1987). In this view of teaching, teachers are born, not made.

The Nuances: Most good teachers do not simply follow a book of rules (for example, the teacher's manual) or implement theories and techniques of education that others have studied. Nor do they simply "wing it" in the classroom, trying out any idea that feels right intuitively. Instead, the work of accomplished, experienced teachers, which appears so effortless when you watch them at work, can be regarded of as a combination of highly skilled patterns of teaching behaviors that teachers have perfected over time. For example, teachers may draw on their professional knowledge to perfect routines for discussing stories, for writing stories, for working on mathematics problems, or for sharing current events—and then they combine these patterns into a complex "performance" in the classroom (Yinger, 1987). Over the years, good teachers can develop a whole range of highly skilled patterns in various subject areas and in classroom organization based on sound professional knowledge. So rather than plan every single step of the procedures they will use (as might be the case if teaching were pure "science"), teachers can scope out the situation, identify what is needed, combine the patterns they have mastered so skillfully, and draw on them confidently—with what may appear to an observer to be minimal planning—to respond to their students' needs. This is much different, as you can see, from just doing whatever comes to mind.

Instead of calling teaching either a science or an art, teaching can be thought of as improvisation (Sawyer, 2004; Yinger, 1987). Good improvisation builds on a broad range of patterns actors have perfected and can draw on almost at will to meet the demands of the specific performance, and this is much like what good teachers do. But the sequence and the specifics, as well as the connections between the patterns, cannot be planned out perfectly in advance, so teaching requires the flexibility that is inherent in improvisation (Sawyer, 2004).

Rethinking the Issue: Teaching is neither pure science nor pure art. Teachers must perfect their technical skills, but they must also be able to put those technical skill patterns together in many different ways across many different subjects to respond to their students. The complexity of the classroom demands that teachers be able to figure out rather quickly whether the methods they are using are working well, and to make changes as needed.

Knowledge from Your Own Beliefs about Teaching

Your own experience as a student, your autobiography, your personal commitments, your experience working in schools, and your contact with the media all combine and interact to form the set of beliefs you hold about teaching. Inevitably, these beliefs about teaching will influence the choices you make when you become a fully certified teacher.

For example, as an early childhood teacher, do you believe that young children should sit at a desk formally learning the alphabet or numbers during kindergarten? How much playtime should young children have during school, and why? How should science, social studies, reading, writing, and mathematics be taught? Are these disciplines always to be taught as separate subjects, or do you believe they can be combined effectively? As a prospective secondary science teacher, do you think you should correct students' writing when they hand in reports of their experiments, or is that solely the job of the English teacher? On the basis of your own experience, you may hold strong beliefs about the importance of every child completing, say, at least two hours of homework every evening starting in fourth grade. You may also believe that every student in the first grade needs to have extensive instruction in phonics every single day and cannot learn to read otherwise.

As a future middle school teacher, you may believe that the most appropriate way to manage a class of middle-schoolers is to set up a system of rewards and punishments based on earning points for good behavior and taking points away for bad behavior. You may also hold strong beliefs about the best way to teach students whose first language is not English. These beliefs come from a combination of your experiences and personal commitments. Whether a particular position is defensible may be less important to you right now than the fact that you believe it to be true and effective and as a result, you wish to practice it in your own classroom.

Your turn…

What are the three most powerful beliefs you have about teaching? Share them with your peers. On what basis do you justify these beliefs? How are these beliefs likely to help or hinder you as you study to become a teacher?

Critical term

Misconceptions. Ideas you may have about teaching that are not accurate but that may represent strongly held beliefs about teaching and so may be difficult for you to discard or replace.

The Role of Misconceptions. The images of teaching you construct out of your own beliefs, conceptions, and experiences are very durable ones. While some of these beliefs about teaching may be well founded, others may really be **misconceptions**. One goal of teacher education is to address your potential misconceptions and prepare you to justify your positions about teaching based on professional knowledge and reflection on professional experience. If you are going to learn to teach effectively, it will be important to question some of the beliefs you now hold about teaching and see if they hold up under the scrutiny of your own greater reflection and new knowledge.

Let's revisit some of the examples above. If you believe that all children should complete two hours of homework a night starting in fourth grade, have you given thought to what that homework would actually be? How would the homework you assign further your students' understanding of the concepts you would like them to learn? What if some of your students completed their homework in one hour? Would you force them to find something else to do for another hour? These are the kinds of questions you might reflect on with regard to your beliefs about teaching.

In the case of secondary science, you may believe that as a science teacher it is not your responsibility to correct students' writing. However, the school in which you work may expect teachers in every subject area to be involved in teaching writing as it relates to their subject. Your principal may have ample data to suggest that writing across the curriculum is a valid approach that results in better thinking and writing skills for the students in your school. Will you defend your position, or will you give yourself the opportunity to rethink it? Will you take the initiative to learn more about national projects underway that support writing in all content areas, for example, the National Writing Project (**http://www.writingproject.org/**)?

As a teacher education student, observing in the classroom allows you to step back from your pre-conceived notions of teaching and ask new questions about what it means to teach.
(Frank Siteman/PhotoEdit)

With regard to your entering beliefs and images, you should identify them and make them a public part of your teacher education experience. Then, as you begin to learn more in your classes and through your experiences in classrooms, you can begin to reflect on your entering beliefs—but now from the perspective of a teacher. As you learn new concepts and new ways of thinking about teaching, consider how they compare with "what you've always imagined teaching to be."

Which of your conceptions hold true and which are you finding to be misconceptions about teaching? Some of your beliefs may be well supported by what you are learning in your professional program; others you may find conflict with some of your long-held beliefs. If this is the case, what do you think is the cause of the conflict? And, more importantly, what will you do about it? If some of your beliefs conflict with what you are learning both in schools and in the university, it will be important to question yourself—and your instructors—about them. Throughout the process of learning to teach, you need to look for evidence that will support or negate your beliefs. Are you tenaciously holding on to a belief in the absence of any substantial evidence? If you are, you might want to explore why. Certainly, it is not possible to find agreement about everything that should happen in classrooms and schools, but as a professional your responsibility is to justify your actions in a reasoned manner, and not just because they feel right.

As you spend more time studying teaching in the university and in classrooms, you should begin to reflect on how a change in your own decisions and actions may more positively affect your students. As you begin to make real teaching choices, you will need to be able to justify your teaching decisions. A solid, robust justification should be based on your knowledge of the students, the context, the curriculum, and your goals for teaching.

Philosophical Note

The Role of a Philosophy of Teaching

Teacher education students are often asked to write about their developing philosophy of teaching or interview practicing teachers about their philosophy of teaching. But what exactly is a philosophy of teaching, and what is its role in the daily work of a classroom?

A philosophy of teaching is a central principle that helps guide teachers' basic choices about their students, what they teach, and how they teach it. Whether or not teachers enact their philosophy consciously and whether or not they put their philosophy into words, this basic philosophy will influence the kinds of classrooms teachers create for their students. For example, if your philosophy is based on the belief that students will learn best when what they do in school is connected to topics that interest them and experiences they have had, you will have to engage students regularly in conversation and discussion about what they know as part of planning and carrying out instruction. If your philosophy of teaching is that students should learn what is in the curriculum regardless of whether they see its connection to their lives, such discussions are less likely to take center stage in your classroom.

A philosophy of teaching is not necessarily a lofty statement about what you believe. If you are really committed to your philosophy, any observer who walks into your classroom should be able to identify your philosophy in your actions in the classroom and see it in your everyday teaching practice. If you state a philosophy but it is not evident anywhere in how your classroom operates, it is not really a philosophy. As you learn to teach, then, you will have to focus on how to connect your philosophy directly to your choices and actions—that is, how to put your philosophy into practice.

A philosophy of teaching may not drive every single choice a teacher makes. After all, teachers make hundreds of choices every day. In addition, because teachers work with such a wide range of individual students, they may use practices from more than one philosophical approach to meet their students' particular needs at any given time. But making the choice to draw on more than one philosophy temporarily to meet a specific individual need is not the same as adopting that philosophy as an overall approach to the classroom, or as the "big idea" that sets the tone for your classroom. Your philosophy of teaching should be visible, and you should be able to explain it, justify it, and provide examples of what it looks like in the classroom to anyone who asks.

As a teacher education student, you bring certain beliefs to your preparation. As you gain professional knowledge and experience, these beliefs may change. As a result, your philosophy of teaching is, appropriately, likely to evolve and develop.

Throughout this text, we will introduce some of the classic philosophies of education as a way of helping you gauge the direction your philosophy is taking. By the time you complete your professional preparation, you should be able to articulate your current philosophy of education and how you have carried it out. When you are ready to interview for a teaching position, you might think of your philosophy of teaching in terms of what a school staff can count on you to be committed to if they hire you. What kind of philosophy will your teaching express, and what will that look like in your classroom?

Observation and Interviewing: "Making the Familiar Strange"

It is completely natural at this point in your development as a teacher to draw on your prior experience with teaching—and the knowledge that has resulted from this experience. Your familiarity with teaching is in many ways the lens through which you are likely to view what you will now begin to learn about teaching. But your prior knowledge may leave you with the impression that teaching is easy. As Munby, Russell, and Martin (2001) observe, it is probably not as easy as it seems:

> As many have noted, intending teachers' prior experience of teaching is severely restricted. Although they have observed thousands of hours of teaching behavior, they have not been privy to the profound and extensive knowledge and thinking that underlies this behavior. As with any good performance, good teaching looks easy. When we witness a near-perfect performance in, say, the long program of a figure skating competition, we recognize the many hours of intensive work that lie behind the apparent ease of execution under demanding circumstances. But we typically do not do this of teaching. (p. 895)

Starting now, an important part of your job as a prospective teacher is to begin to understand what exactly goes into a teacher's flawless performance. This is your opportunity to step back and look at teaching from the other side of the desk. As you begin your professional preparation for teaching, your job is to learn about teaching anew, and to do that, you will need to temporarily suspend what you already know about teaching and observe teaching with a clean slate, so to speak, as a learner about teaching. How exactly *did* a particular teacher make it look so effortless?

In this section, we will explore two methods, or tools, for putting some distance between your prior knowledge and the realities of teaching: *observation* and *interviewing*. These two methods will help you to adopt the learner's stance, to look at teaching from a new vantage point, and to put your prior knowledge about teaching into perspective. Observation and interviewing will help you *make the familiar strange*.

Critical term

Making the familiar strange. Looking at the familiar procedures, events, and interactions in the classroom from a more objective viewpoint and treating them as something you do not fully understand. This is a way of helping you begin to analyze and ask questions about why things happen the way they do in classrooms.

Making the Familiar Strange through Formal Classroom Observation

Making the familiar strange is an idea that was developed by the educational researcher Frederick Erickson (1986). This term is used in educational anthropology to refer to taking a fresh, objective look at a situation that is familiar to you in order to learn something new about it. *Making the familiar strange* also means temporarily leaving behind any preconceived ideas you may have about the situation

you are observing—in this case, teaching. Close observation is important, he states, because of "*the invisibility of everyday life*. 'What is happening here?' may seem a trivial question at first glance. It is not trivial since everyday life is largely invisible to us (because of its familiarity and because of its contradictions, which people may not want to face)" (Erickson, 1986, p. 121).

Here Erickson is reminding us that because we are so familiar with teaching, unless we observe it purposefully and with some distance we may not be able to see what is actually there. But if we do observe carefully, Erickson states, "the commonplace becomes problematic" (p. 121), and it then becomes something we can begin to ask questions about and learn from. The commonplace, in this case, is made up of all the things we already know about teaching—the things we take for granted without questioning them.

The *commonplace* knowledge we have about teaching can only become *problematic*—and by that we mean something we can ask questions about and wonder about and reflect on and learn from—if we can step away from our everyday, casual style of observation. The goal is to become deliberate and systematic in making observations (Evertson & Green, 1986), allowing us to observe closely and carefully. In this way, we can begin to question what seems so familiar about teaching in the first place and see it from a new perspective—that of a future teacher. As Erickson noted, sometimes such careful, close observation contradicts what you think you already know. When that happens, it provides an important opportunity for professional growth and new learning through reflection.

But making what is invisible *visible* is only one purpose of close, deliberate observation. Another important purpose is to document "concrete details of practice" (Erickson, 1986, p. 121). As an observer of teaching, you will be able to identify carefully many of the specific ways teachers carry out their work. Instead of making a general statement like "The teacher conducted a lesson on multiplication," you can document exactly what is going on during that lesson, in all of its particulars. For example, when you observe deliberately and systematically, you can focus on particulars such as how teachers:

- Start the day.
- Interact with students.
- Begin the lesson.
- Motivate students to learn.
- Distribute materials.
- Handle misbehavior.
- Keep students engaged in the lesson.
- Involve many students in discussions.
- Use specific strategies for teaching reading, writing, mathematics, science, or social studies.
- Work with a team teaching partner.
- Implement classroom routines and patterns.
- Include students who have disabilities.
- Manage the whole group when working with a small group.
- Integrate technology into instruction.
- Make the transition from one activity to another, or from one location to another.

Critical term

Classroom as a culture. The customs, practices, and traditions within a classroom that distinguish it from other organizations.

Finally, observing in the classroom gives you the opportunity to watch the **classroom as a culture**—in much the same way that an anthropologist observes distant cultures to understand them. Studying a culture includes studying customs, practices, and traditions—in this case, the customs, practices, and traditions in the classroom (Florio-Ruane, 1989).

Once you begin close observation, things should begin to look different from how they looked when you were a student. You can begin to think about why teachers do things in specific ways and how you would do them yourself. As a result of your observations, you should begin to ask questions about teaching that you probably would not have asked before. And you should begin to consider your prior beliefs in relationship to the new aspects of teaching that your observations are showing you to be so important.

Critical term

Anecdotal recording. Observing and recording the specific events that occur in a defined timeframe in the classroom, without making judgments or interpreting those events.

Begin Observing with a Map.

When researchers observe classrooms, the first thing they may do is to draw a map. All classrooms may look somewhat alike to you, but in fact teachers usually have a great deal of control over how they set up their classrooms (within the constraints of available furniture and supplies). Drawing a map of the classroom allows you to ask questions about how the classroom setup influences the kind of instruction and classroom community and culture that can be developed. Questions you ask might include: What are the consequences of setting up the room in a certain way for patterns of student interaction? What would happen to movement in the classroom if the teacher arranged the furniture differently?

When you draw a classroom map, you should include and label furniture, supplies, curriculum materials, teacher's work area, various sections of the room and their purpose, windows, doors, computer stations, any other unusual or important things that are present (for example, an elementary school classroom's pet hamster or lab equipment in a high school science room), and even the location of the pencil sharpener. Once you have the physical layout down, begin to look for patterns, such as traffic patterns, where the teacher is located, and whether he or she moves around the room (Glesne, 2006). After the map is drawn, consider what kind of "message" the classroom setup sends about teaching and learning.

Interviewing practicing teachers is an important way to learn about the profession. (Davis Young-Wolff/PhotoEdit)

If you are assigned to observe the same classroom over a long period of time, you might want to draw another map at the midpoint of your assignment. Then compare the two maps to see whether the physical layout and patterns have changed. If they have, how did this change affect what you observed in the classroom in terms of teacher-student and student-student interaction?

Conducting a Systematic Observation.

Your goal in recording what you see during an observation is to describe in detail, in your own words, what you are seeing. You set a time frame in which you will observe, let's say, for 30 minutes, and then you begin writing. This is sometimes called **anecdotal recording**.

Deliberate, systematic observation differs from everyday, casual observation in one important way. To be a systematic observer, you will need to separate the *description*

of what you see from your own judgment of it and your reactions to it. Your job is to describe what is going on, not to judge or interpret it. Separating your description of what you are seeing from your interpretation of it helps you get some distance from your commonplace knowledge about teaching. The more we can be descriptive and objective, the more we can try to understand what is going on not only from our own perspective, but from the perspective of the teachers you are observing and the knowledge these teachers have about the classroom. In summarizing the process of observation, Glesne (2006) stresses the importance of recording in detail the situations you observe and analyzing what you observe in terms of its meaning.

Your turn…

Write a description of your instructor. Then share that description with a partner. Evaluate how similar or different your observations are and whether you were objective or whether judgments and interpretations were included in your observational notes. What might account for your different descriptions?

Writing objective descriptions can be harder than it sounds. As you can see from this brief exercise, each of you probably observed your instructor differently and used different words in your description. To help you become more objective when you are observing, here are some guidelines suggested by Glesne (2006):

- Use concrete terms to describe what you are observing; for example, instead of *disrespectful*, provide specific examples of what the students were actually doing that made you conclude they were being disrespectful.
- Avoid vague adjectives such as *a few* or *a lot*; give exact numbers instead.
- Avoid words that imply a judgment on your part, for example, *great*, *terrific*, *terrible*, *boring*, *challenging*; aim for specific descriptions instead.
- Whenever possible, note specific dialogues between teacher and student or student and student to capture exactly what was going on between them.

Another way to help ensure that your observations are descriptive is to use a two-column format. Divide the pages into two columns: a wider column on the left (about two-thirds of the page) and a narrower column on the right (about one-third of the page). In the left-hand column write your descriptions, in chronological order. In the right-hand column write your personal comments, reactions, and questions about what you observed. This way you can consciously begin to train yourself to observe more objectively and separate your precise, detailed descriptions from your comments, reactions, and questions about those descriptions. In this way you can take the stance of being someone who is looking at the classroom objectively to learn about its specific "culture."

In Figure 2-4 you can begin to see the difference between an observation that does and does not include a lot of interpretation. In the left part of the figure is Yolanda's first attempt at a classroom observation in a middle school language arts class. You can easily pick out the terms that show her interpretations and judgments. They include terms such as *interesting* and *excited*, which are judgments about the kind of work the students were doing and how they were feeling about it—with no real knowledge about whether or not that was an accurate judgment. There are terms such as *I assumed* and *this seemed more like*, which are also interpretations and are not based on the facts of the observation. In the right-hand portion of the figure you

Figure 2-4 Becoming an Objective Observer

A comparison of Yolanda's reports of a classroom observation for seventh grade language arts. How does the observation with and without her interpretations change your view of what is going on in this classroom?

Report #1:

The children were in their seats when I arrived in the room at 8:45 AM. The desks were organized in a really interesting way, much different than anything I had seen before. There was a horseshoe, and inside the horseshoe were four sets of two desks each. I really liked this arrangement. All of the students were writing in journals when I got there, and they were all busy and interested in what they were writing. The teacher called individual students up to her desk and talked with them for a few minutes each while the rest of the class worked in their journals. I didn't see any directions or topics for writing, so I assumed the students could choose whatever topic they wanted.

At 9:00 the teacher asked the students to put away their journals. Then she started to talk about the class writing project they were working on—oral histories of elderly people in their community who had been living in the Great Depression. This seemed more like Social Studies than Language Arts. Two students reported on their interview with Mrs. Astin, who was living in a nearby nursing home. They were excited and had a lot to say, especially about how hard it was for Mrs. Astin's father to find work and how that affected their living conditions. Several students asked questions and the teacher and the students who had interviewed Mrs. Astin all responded to the questions. After that report, the teacher asked the students to get out their materials and get to work. Some students took out a tape recorder, others went to the computer stations, and others began working in pairs to edit drafts of their reports. Most of the students were busy, but one pair was not doing what the teacher wanted. The teacher went from group to group, but spent extra time with the two students who were not doing their work. This work period continued until 10:00, when it was time for me to leave.

Report #2: 8:45 AM

Observation

There were 24 students in the classroom, 15 girls and 9 boys. The room was arranged in a horseshoe shape, with eight desks inside of the horseshoe in pairs. When I arrived the students were writing in journals. The teacher sat at her desk. As the students wrote, the teacher called up individual students and spent about 10 minutes with each student. The only materials that were out when they talked were the students' journals. The classroom was quiet, and the students were all writing during journal time.

At 9:15 the teacher asked the students to put away their journals. All of the students did so within a few minutes. She told the students that until 10 AM they would be working on their oral history projects about the Great Depression. She talked about the progress they had made so far and said that seven teams were done interviewing and that two more had interviews scheduled. She asked two students to report briefly on their interview from the week before with Mrs. Astin, who was living in a nearby nursing home. They talked in animated voices about the interview, emphasizing how hard it was for Mrs. Astin's father to find work and how that affected their living conditions. One student asked if Mrs. Astin had brothers or sisters. Another asked if they had trouble interviewing because they knew that Mrs. Astin's hearing was going. A third student asked if the family ever had to beg for food. After the report, the teacher asked all of the students to get out their materials and get to work. Three students took out a tape recorder to listen to their interview and took written notes on a laptop. About half of the other students went to computer stations. The rest of the class worked in pairs and seemed to be editing each other's work. During this time, one pair of students was talking about a sports event in voices that were loud enough for the rest of the class to hear. The teacher went over to them and asked them about their report. She stayed with them until they had gotten started on editing, which took about five minutes. Then she circulated around the room until 10:00 AM.

Observer comments

Nice room arrangement—I've never seen this before.

Are they always so quiet during journal time?

Does the teacher give a prompt or do the students write about whatever they want?

Oral histories on the Depression seem like social studies to me—I wonder if the social studies teacher is working with this teacher on the project?

How did she arrange the interviews?

Are the same two students always acting out, or is this unusual today?

can see a more objective version of Yolanda's observation, which includes more descriptive terms and fewer interpretations. In this version you can also see the comments and questions she posed as she took notes—but on the far right-hand side of the observation record, clearly separated from the description itself.

Observing is a skill you will use throughout your career as a teacher. For example, you will rely on your observational skills to informally assess your students' progress. You may take informal notes to remind yourself about specific things you observe as you walk around the classroom when students are working. This kind of ongoing observation allows you to ask yourself a critical question: *How well is my teaching helping my students learn?* Teachers who observe their students regularly are always checking to see whether the students are "getting it," and they make midcourse corrections if students are having a great deal of difficulty. Practicing the skill of observation now will help you use it well in the future to benefit your students.

The Etiquette of Observing. As you move through your professional program, you are likely to be asked to observe in several different kinds of classrooms. The immediate goal is to refamiliarize yourself with classrooms from the perspective of a professional teacher. But eventually you will probably be asked to observe a particular student or group of students to determine their learning patterns and responses to teacher instruction. You may also be asked to observe specific teacher behaviors—for example, how a teacher adjusts his or her instruction for students whose first language is not English, or how a teacher makes the transition from one activity to another or from one subject to another, or what kind of routine a teacher uses to begin the day or the class. In each case, you will be asked to separate description from your own interpretation and judgment.

When you conduct an observation, remember that you are always a guest in another teacher's classroom. A few simple rules of etiquette apply:

- Be sure the teacher knows when you are coming.
- Upon arriving at the school, check in at the office.
- Sign in and get a visitors' identification tag if this is required.
- When you arrive, be sure to introduce yourself to the teacher and remind him or her of the purpose of your observation. (Teachers are busy people; they might not remember the exact details of the class and assignment for which you are there.)
- Ask the teacher where you should sit.
- Find out if the teacher plans to introduce you to the class so that students know why you are in the room that day. If so, how would you like to be introduced?
- If you intend to take notes on a laptop, ask the teacher if he or she minds. (If you need to plug in your computer, bring along an extension cord. Don't ask the teacher to use valuable teaching time to help you set up.)
- If you have an observation scheduled but cannot make it, let the teacher know by leaving a message in the school office. (If you have already spoken directly with the teacher and can contact him or her directly, do so.)
- Ask the teacher how he or she would like you to respond to the situation if students come up to talk to you during the observation.
- If you think you might complete the observation while the teacher is involved with students, let the teacher know approximately when you will be leaving.
- Convey your thanks personally or in writing.

Making the Familiar Strange through Interviewing

Another strategy for making the familiar strange is to conduct interviews with practicing teachers. Interviewing gives you the opportunity to ask teachers to share their philosophy, to break down what they are doing, to make sense for you of what appears to be automatic, and to learn how teachers think about particular events or aspects of their work. Much as is true of observing, in a sense we engage in casual interview-like behavior all the time. We have conversations, we ask questions, we listen. But an informal, unfocused conversation is not the same as an interview. Although you may adopt a casual tone during the interview itself, you will approach it in a much more deliberate way than you would a casual conversation.

To prepare for interviewing a teacher, consider the following:

- Have six to eight questions ready to ask the person you are interviewing.
- If you have observed in the classroom of the teacher you are interviewing, pick a few issues that arose from your observation and ask questions about them.
- Come prepared with a notebook. If the teacher is willing, you might choose to tape-record the interview.
- Since teachers are very busy and often have little time during the day, schedule a time in advance.
- Teachers' days are often unpredictable, so be flexible if the teacher has to cancel. Above all, don't take it personally; it's probably not under his or her control.

Constructing Interview Questions. Your interview will only be as successful as the preparation you put into it. First, consider how much time you have. If you are talking with a teacher during his or her planning time, the period is probably no more than 45 minutes long. If you are scheduled before school, a teacher's time is limited as well. If you are meeting after school, the teacher may be willing to stay for a longer period of time. The number of questions you will be able to ask depends on the amount of time you have scheduled.

Second, make sure you have a focus for your interview. What is your purpose? Is it to get information about this teacher's experience or a more complete biography? Is the purpose to follow up with questions based on a previous classroom observation? Are you trying to find out what the teacher believes about current controversies in education? Are you asking questions about teaching at a particular grade level or a particular content area? The focus of your interview helps narrow the types of questions you may wish to ask.

Third, you can get the most from an interview if you take the time to construct good questions. As you do so, be sure to avoid questions that can be answered with a simple *yes* or *no*. The purpose of the interview is to get detailed information from the teacher to inform your knowledge about the profession. Since *yes*/*no* questions automatically limit the kind of information you will get, be sure to ask questions that encourage the teacher to talk in some depth about the issue you are raising. For example, don't ask: *Do you like your job*? Instead say: *Could you tell me three things you like about your job, and why?* Don't ask: *Do you always split the students up into small working groups?* Instead, ask: *Can you tell me the advantages of having the students work in small groups? If there are any disadvantages, what are they?*

Fourth, as you develop the questions, think about how you might probe a little deeper for more information and then jot down some possible followup questions. For example, let's say you plan to ask the teacher: *How do you develop good working relationships with the families of your students?* If the teacher answers that he or she sends a letter home at the start of the year, be prepared to follow-up with something like: *What are some other ways you connect with parents?* Or: *Can you tell me about a time you've had to work especially hard to build a relationship with a parent?*

The Etiquette of Conducting an Interview. Just as there is an etiquette for observing in the classroom, there is also an etiquette for conducting an interview. Some of the guidelines parallel what you should do when conducting a classroom observation, but others differ significantly.

- Be sure the teacher knows when you are coming.
- Upon arriving at the school, check in at the office.
- If you haven't already met the teacher, be sure to introduce yourself.
- Ask the teacher where he or she would like the two of you to sit.
- If you are planning to tape-record the interview, make sure you get the teacher's permission first. If the teacher does not wish to be taped, you will have to be satisfied with taking written notes. If you have any plans to tape the interview, make sure your tape recorder is working, and bring along an extra set of batteries, an extension cord, and an extra cassette.
- If you are taking notes on a laptop, make sure that you are located where there is an outlet or that the battery is fully charged.
- Prepare two copies of the list of questions so that you can give one to the teacher during the interview. That way you will not have to repeat questions.
- In the course of answering one question, the teacher may also answer some of the upcoming questions before you have come to them on your list. If this occurs, there is no need, of course, to repeat the question.
- If the teacher says something that is not clear to you, ask him or her to clarify the response. Say something like: *Let me make sure I understand what you mean* (and then repeat how you understand the response). Or: *Can you repeat that? Can you tell me more about it?* Don't be afraid to show your curiosity.
- Keep track of the time. The teacher may be giving you much longer responses than are necessary. If this occurs, say something like: *Perhaps we can move onto the next question*. If the teacher is giving you a long but important response, you will have to decide whether to ask fewer questions and try to schedule a follow-up meeting.
- If you have an interview scheduled but cannot make it, let the teacher know.
- Convey your thanks personally or in writing.

Final Pointers on Observation and Interviewing

Observation and interviewing give you an opportunity to dig deeper into teaching. If you are genuinely curious about your chosen profession, time in classrooms allows you the luxury of stepping back and considering what it really means to be a teacher. Your curiosity should lead you to want to ask many questions, to delve into how and why the things that are taking place are meaningful for students and teachers alike. Observation and interviewing are excellent ways to begin being *reflective* about teaching—a stance we noted in Chapter 1 as critical to good teaching.

Next, whether you are visiting a school to conduct an observation or to interview a teacher, remember that the teachers and staff are looking at you as a potential teacher. Although you may only be starting your teacher education program, you are already being sized up in terms of your overall professionalism and demeanor as you enter the building and interact with staff and students. Pay attention to the way others perceive you and your commitment to teaching.

Finally, although you may think you know the level at which you would like to teach, now is the time to keep an open mind about this important decision. Each level of teaching has its own benefits and limitations. You can use your opportunities to observe and interview teachers to broaden your understanding of the various age and grade levels and the rewards of working at each one. As a prospective

teacher, you may begin your professional program set on being a high school English teacher, for example, but end up observing in an early childhood classroom and finding you love it, or vice versa. Although you may be fairly certain of the level in which you are interested, do not shut out other possibilities too early. You may be surprised at how much you like a working with a particular age group that you never considered working with before.

WHY IT COUNTS

As this chapter demonstrates, prior experience and your entering beliefs about teaching almost always provide only a partial view of what teaching entails. The dilemma is figuring out how to treat your experience as a *source of knowledge instead of treating it inflexibly as* the *source of knowledge. It is crucial to acknowledge both what you know and what you do not know about teaching. Only then can you begin to clarify what you need to learn in order to become a successful teacher.*

The pull of your prior experience is strong. The influences of your own schooling and your own life experiences are significant, and they are often hard to shed. Your own years of experience in schools, and the common but inaccurate societal view that teaching is an "easy" career, may lead you to fall into the trap of believing that you know more than you actually do about the real work of teaching. If your beliefs and prior experience interact to weaken your curiosity about teaching, you will be hampered from gaining a fuller understanding of the profession. When confronted with something new, you may devalue it because you already have a set way of thinking about it. When you have the opportunity to observe and interview teachers, you may inadvertently fail to push yourself to ask important questions or to grasp the meaning of important details you may have observed. In this way, observation and interviewing can become weak sources of new information about teaching for you rather than strong opportunities for new learning. You may find that you fail to make the familiar strange because you lack genuine curiosity about teaching—not because you don't care but because you are already so familiar with it.

If you think about other professions, you quickly realize that you would probably not make as many assumptions about how to carry out your responsibilities as you might about teaching. You would not assume that you are ready to try a case in court, or help someone who has serious mental health problems, or diagnose an illness simply based on your personal experience with the law, or therapy, or medicine. But because everyone has been to school, experience can be a pitfall (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985) as much as it can be a benefit.

The opening quote of this chapter reminds us that experience constitutes something of a dilemma for those who wish to teach. Your own experience without question forms a critical and valuable basis for your teaching; your life story is what enables you to infuse your teaching with your personal style and your personal commitments. As an individual you bring a unique perspective, idiosyncratic talents, and special areas of expertise to your work as a teacher. But as you learn to teach, your life story expands and should be enriched by the new experiences you will have in your formal preparation. Using your experience as a starting point, you can grow in your understanding of what it means to teach. As Carter and Doyle (1996) imply, your life story and experiences can be limiting, even imprisoning. On the other hand, if your life story and experiences form a solid foundation for your commitment to caring about teaching and children, you can build on them skillfully and complement this foundation by formal knowledge about—and new experience with—both the science and *the art of teaching.*

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Five Kinds of Experience That Create Prior Knowledge about Teaching

Knowledge about Teaching from Your Own Experience of Schooling. Teaching is the only profession for which almost everyone has at least 12 years of experience. But this experience is incomplete because it only provides a student's view of teaching—not a teacher's. This experience can provide models of good teachers and good teaching, but it can also provide negative experiences about teaching. As you move from student to teacher, you should begin to take a different perspective on what you have learned from your years of experience in classrooms.

Autobiographical Knowledge about Teaching. Each person brings his or her own family and personal experiences to the work of teaching. These experiences provide prospective teachers with different views about teaching and different personal commitments to teaching. For example, prospective teachers whose parents were teachers are likely to have a different perspective from those who grew up with no connections to schools other than their own experience in classrooms. Having always wanted to be a teacher gives you a different perspective than that of someone who is changing careers. Your family and personal experiences are a form of prior knowledge that affect how you understand the profession of teaching.

Knowledge about Teaching from Working in Schools. Some prospective teachers have classroom experience beyond their own years as students. Those who have held positions as paraprofessionals or have been volunteers attain a perspective on teaching that is derived more from the teacher's side of the desk than from the student's. Many paraprofessionals are assigned to classrooms with teachers who are positive role models; others are not. In the first case, paraprofessionals may bring important knowledge to their teacher preparation; in the second, years of practicing less than optimal teaching methods can be deeply ingrained. In these cases, the prospective teacher has the job of both unlearning poor practice and learning good practice. Generally, however, the paraprofessional's classroom experience provides a helpful perspective. But in most cases, paraprofessionals still have not had the responsibility of preparing for teaching on a daily basis and all that this entails.

Knowledge about Teaching from Images in the Media. The media provide powerful images of teaching. Images from film can include heroic teachers working in challenging schools, individual teachers demonstrating their commitment to students who have special needs or require serious mentoring, or teachers not being recognized for the tremendous impact they have had. The print media have another kind of influence, chiefly by presenting data about school performance that can be translated into beliefs about the quality of teachers in a particular school district. Publications can also sway opinion by promoting a specific teaching method. In general, media accounts of teaching are problematic because they provide only a partial view of the real work teachers do.

Knowledge from Your Own Beliefs about Teaching. Your own experiences in P–12 classrooms, your family experiences and your personal commitments,

your working experience in schools (should you have it), and the images of teaching you absorb from the media all interact to form a set of personal beliefs about teaching. These may include beliefs about teachers' work, the role of certain methods in teaching, what you determine is "right" or "wrong" for students, or the role of teachers in relationship to students' personal lives, to name a few. Personal beliefs about teaching are extremely durable, and they form a powerful lens through which you are likely to view—and judge—all the new things you are learning about teaching. Some of your entering conceptions may be accurate, and others may be misconceptions. How you address these misconceptions is critical to your development as a teacher. If you persist in teaching based on misconceptions, this stance is likely to hamper you from developing fully as a teacher.

Observation and Interviewing: "Making the Familiar Strange"

Making the Familiar Strange through Formal Classroom Observation. Classroom observation provides you with the opportunity to begin to study the seemingly effortless performance of good teachers. Observation usually begins with drawing a classroom map and asking questions about the way the classroom is structured physically. When you conduct an observation, it's wise to choose a few things to focus on each time you are there. For example, you may focus on the relationship between the teacher and the students, or among the students themselves. Observation puts you in the position of becoming a student of teaching—someone who is now learning about teaching from the perspective of a professional.

Making the Familiar Strange through Interviewing. Interviewing practicing teachers is another opportunity to learn about teaching. Good interviewing requires you to prepare good questions beforehand, take notes or tape-record the interview, and probe the teacher you are interviewing for more information, especially if you are not clear about the meaning of a particular response.

Final pointers on observation and interviewing. When you are observing or interviewing in a school, the school staff (including the school secretary and the building engineer) immediately begin to size you up as a potential member of the school. They are looking to see whether you act professionally even in these early encounters. Do you arrive on time? If you have to cancel, do you call to let the teacher know? Are you pleasant in your interactions? Are you prepared with all the materials you need to conduct the observation or interview? The initial impression you make can make the difference in whether or not teachers and administrators in that building will welcome you back in your subsequent clinical experiences.

LIST OF CRITICAL TERMS

Prior knowledge (*20*)
Apprenticeship of observation (*20*)
Concept map (*22*)
National Education Association (*25*)
Teacher expectations (*31*)
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (*33*)
Misconceptions (*36*)
Making the familiar strange (*38*)
Classroom as a culture (*40*)
Anecdotal recording (*40*)

EXPLORING YOUR COMMITMENT

1. ***on your own...*** Write a brief autobiography focused on your decision to become a teacher. Include reflections on your own apprenticeship of observation, your family experiences, any experiences you may have working in schools or with children, and your personal commitments and beliefs. Which of these experiences has resulted in the most powerful images and beliefs you hold about teaching? Explore these beliefs in your paper. How will your prior knowledge about teaching help you in becoming a teacher? If it might hinder you in any way, what might that be?
2. ***on your own...*** After you complete your autobiography, interview one of your peers to see how their prior experiences and knowledge are similar to and different from your own.
3. ***on your own...*** For a week, read your local newspaper with the goal of identifying all articles on education. What kinds of stories are reported? What kind of images does the reporting create? What is not reported? What kind of effect would this reporting have on someone who has school-aged children and is considering moving to the community?
4. ***on your own...*** Consider the following quotation: "Wise teachers understand the legitimacy and limitations of the diverse sources that inform teaching and they continuously draw upon them to enrich their teaching" (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Proposition 4). Make a table that includes the sources of knowledge we discussed in this chapter: (1) experience as a student, (2) family influences, (3) personal commitments, (4) experience working in schools, (5) media influences, and (6) personal beliefs. For each of these knowledge sources, note why they are legitimate for you and why they may be limitations for you as you begin your professional work learning to teach. How might you overcome any limitations you identify?
5. ***in the field...*** Using the guidelines in this chapter, conduct an observation in the classroom of a teacher who is neither a member of your family nor a family friend. After you have conducted the observation, see what kinds of questions the observation raises for you. Be open to Erickson's warning that some things you see may contradict what you believe. Conduct a short follow-up discussion with the teacher to gain a better understanding of what you observed. How did this observation help you understand what goes into a teacher's daily performance in the classroom?
6. ***on your own...*** With a small group from your class, develop a set of interview questions to ask an experienced teacher. Include questions about his or her career choice, what makes it satisfying, what makes it challenging, and what keeps him or her going and committed to teaching.
7. ***in the field...*** Use the interview questions you developed as a basis for preparing to conduct an interview with a practicing classroom teacher. Add other questions that might be appropriate for the specific grade level or subject for the teacher you will be interviewing. Select a teacher who is not a family friend or relative—someone you do not know already. Prepare a report on the interview, including specific comments on how this experience helped

you gain a deeper appreciation for what it means to be a teacher and what questions or concerns the interview raised for you.

8. ***on the Web...*** Use a search engine to identify two websites related to teaching that you believe can help you in your transition from being a student to being a prospective teacher—sites that can help you "make the familiar strange." Consider the following descriptors: P–12 teaching, learning to teach, teacher education, teaching as a profession, etc. One of the sites might be a personal website of a practicing teacher. Describe the two sites, or if possible, link up to the Internet during class and share the sites with your peers and instructor. Be prepared to explain the degree to which these two sites would be helpful in your goal of becoming a teacher.
9. ***on the Web...*** Visit the website for Recruiting New Teachers, an organization that, according to its website, "works to raise esteem for teaching, expand the pool of qualified teachers, and promote strategies for effective teacher recruitment, development, and retention" (**http://www.recruitingteachers.org**). What information on this website did you find most helpful? least helpful?
10. ***in the research...*** Read the 2002 article "Demystifying Reflection: A Study of Pedagogical Strategies That Encourage Reflective Journal Writing" by Elizabeth Spalding and Angene Wilson (*Teachers College Record*, October 2002, Vol. 104, No. 7, pp. 1393–1421). What questions about reflective journal writing does this article raise for you?

GUIDELINES FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS

1. When you seek advice from other teachers in your building, make sure they are teachers who can give you good reasons for teaching the way they do. Teachers who can explain their choices have probably given them a lot of thought. "I've always done it that way," or "It's a good activity that the children like" may be an indication that a teacher has not thought much about why he or she is doing things a certain way.
2. Share enough personal information about yourself with your students so they know you are a "real person" and have a "real life" outside of school.
3. Consider keeping a journal of your early days of teaching. It can provide you with a place to air your concerns and frustrations and also record your successes. When you are feeling stressed, make sure to read about your successes.
4. If you are working with an educational aide or paraprofessional, make sure this individual is clear about your expectations. Demonstrate how you want things done and explain why it is important to do things in that way. Make sure this person feels like a fully valued member of your classroom's instructional team.
5. Make a list of your fundamental philosophical commitments as a teacher. Keep this list in an accessible place and review it periodically throughout your first year to see how closely your teaching reflects these commitments. If you are keeping close to your commitments, what is supporting you? If you are not, what is making you move away from them?

THE INTASC CONNECTION

The INTASC standard that most directly addresses issues regarding your professional growth as a teacher is Standard 9. It states: *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.* In this chapter, we have emphasized the need for teachers—especially beginning teachers—to be aware of the need to grow professionally, especially in relationship to ideas they may have from their own experiences as students. Selected indicators associated with INTASC Standard 9 that are relevant include the following:

- The teacher values critical thinking and self-directed learning as habits of mind.
- The teacher is committed to reflection, assessment, and learning as an ongoing process.
- The teacher recognizes his/her professional responsibility for engaging in and supporting appropriate professional practices for self and colleagues.
- The teacher understands methods of inquiry that provide him/her with a variety of self-assessment and problem-solving strategies for reflecting on his/her practice, its influences on students' growth and learning, and the complex interactions between them.
- The teacher uses classroom observation, information about students, and research for evaluating the outcomes of teaching and learning and as a basis for experimenting with, reflecting on, and revising practice.

READING ON...

Kohl, H. (1984). *Growing minds: On becoming a teacher*. New York: Harper and Row. Kohl reflects on what it meant for him personally to learn to teach and what he holds as most important about teaching.

Nieto, S. (2003). *What keeps teachers going?* New York: Teachers College Press. Experienced teachers reflect on what keeps them committed to their work.

Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. How teachers move between their love of teaching and the challenges of teaching, and retain their commitment to what is most important about the profession.

Weber, L. (1997). (Beth Alberty, Ed.). *Looking back and thinking forward: Reexaminations of teaching and schooling*. New York: Teachers College Press. An early childhood educator, Lillian Weber was a passionate advocate for open education and for teachers as vibrant, intellectual professionals.