

# Experienced teachers' practical knowledge as part of teacher education

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## SUMMARY

Insight into the content and nature of teachers' practical knowledge contributes to a better understanding of the complexities of teaching and, as such, helps student teachers to develop knowledge about the relationship between educational theories and teaching practice. For this reason, teachers' practical knowledge is an indispensable part of the knowledge base for teaching. However, research on teachers' practical knowledge shows enormous variety in what experienced teachers know. As a result, the question of how this type of knowledge can be included in teacher education is not easily answered. Simply placing student teachers under the care of practicing teachers is not automatically enough. The first question addressed in this article is whether there is an agreed-upon knowledge base that can – at least partly – be derived from the content of what experienced teachers know, and which can contribute to further enhancing beginning teachers' teaching practice. The second question is how this might be done.

First, this article describes the nature of teacher practical knowledge as: personal, contextual, based on (reflections on) experience, underlying teaching practice, mainly tacit, related to teaching practice, but also to research-generated knowledge, and content-related. Second, the content of teachers' practical knowledge is described as a combination of: content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational ends (e.g. Shulman, 1987). Reviewing the results of studies on teachers' practical knowledge show common features in this type of knowledge, but also substantive differences, reflecting that this type of knowledge is idiosyncratic by nature. This variety and idiosyncrasy may pose problems as well as challenges in the search for practical knowledge underlying teaching, particularly when the aim is to incorporate this type of knowledge into teacher education. There is no one straightforward way to

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do so when the idiosyncratic nature of teachers' practical knowledge is taken into account.

Given these characteristics and problems, this article outlines three ways in which teacher education institutions in general attempt to deal with this. These are (a) using cases, (b) having student teachers investigate experienced teachers' practical knowledge, and (c) having experienced teachers and student teachers teach collaboratively to share their practical knowledge. In all these pedagogies, involving experienced teachers' practical knowledge is seen as crucial. First, using cases allows student teachers to gain access to experienced teachers' practical knowledge that has been examined by others and, for example, written down in (multiple) case studies or typologies. Second, student teachers might investigate experienced teachers' practical knowledge themselves by following interview procedures in dialogue with their mentor teacher. And third, „co-teaching” involving a mentor teacher and the student teacher is described as a potentially powerful means of sharing practical knowledge. This article describes these three ways of including teachers' practical knowledge in teacher education in more detail.

The article concludes that to be of explicit value, student teachers need to relate this type of knowledge to other research-generated knowledge, their own knowledge and their future actions. Examining and sharing experienced teachers' practical knowledge provides student teachers with opportunities to better understand other teachers' teaching and their own teaching by (a) experiencing the relationship between a teacher's practical knowledge and his or her teaching, (b) exploring the relationship between (experienced) teachers' practical knowledge and more theoretical notions they learn about in teacher education, and (c) learning about the relationship between other teachers' practical knowledge and their own (developing) practical knowledge. Such an understanding can help student teachers develop their own teaching in a more conscious way, as they learn to underpin the choices they make in their teaching more thoughtfully.

One of the most essential components of the process of learning to teach is learning how to learn in and from practice. Linking theory and practice is vital. Student teachers need to learn various strategies for linking theory and practice. This article described how experienced teachers' practical knowledge may only be one resource, but it is an extremely valuable resource in this process.

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