

What else can a teacher do?

Review your career, reduce stress and
gain control of your life

David Hodgson



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Page 113: School leadership cycle © Tim Brighouse

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Introduction

As I watched another repeat of *QI* on Dave I remembered the quote attributed to Seneca: 'It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it.' Time is precious and limited. We owe it to ourselves to make the most of it. A common way to waste it is staying in the wrong job. The only way to live fully is to be in the right job for you.

I work in schools, colleges and universities across the UK and abroad with teachers and students. Every day I witness the unique exhilaration of the teacher's role. It really can be both the most rewarding and frustrating job in the world, bringing unexpected joy and unbearable agony, often in the same lesson.

I regularly meet teachers who are pondering their career options. Staying in any job is ultimately the wrong choice when your heart or head isn't in it. This is especially the case in teaching, where coasting or ploughing along is not a healthy option.

This book presents some other options. I meet so many teachers who have found ways to fulfil their potential and fully utilise their talents, some by making seemingly small adjustments, such as a change of school (sometimes in a different country), and others by taking a complete change of direction and never looking back. Some even leave and then return to teaching following a brief flirtation with the so-called real world, reinvigorated and bursting with relevant experiences to boost their teaching.

Whether or not you make small or major changes, I hope you'll find this book useful. I have spoken to many teachers who have been candid about their own journey, and have included some of their comments. Common themes include a passion and commitment for their chosen vocation, a slow erosion of this passion due to an unbearable workload or lack of support 'from above', an exploration of their options based on their contacts

or broader interests, and discovering a niche within or outside education. This book is not meant to be a survival guide or an escape manual. A survival guide implies you'll do just enough frenetic gasping and paddling to keep your head above the turbulent waves. But you deserve more. I've included plenty of suggestions in an effort to help you improve your current position. The right small change may be enough to get you through a difficult time and on to the next stage of your teaching journey. An escape manual is an equally dangerous proposition. It implies that change is easy. It is not. Some alternatives to teaching are laid out so you can take a peek with a dispassionate and critical eye if you are contemplating making a bigger change in your working life.

Advice from teachers



'Will I still be sitting in this chair thirty years from now?'

The government initiative Languages for All meant I went from living in France and studying French literature to teaching French to children on Tyneside, who hated the subject and culture as much as I loved it. It was so wearing. The lesson in which pupils role played buying a postage stamp in a French post office to send to Austria was a memorable low point. As I sat in the staffroom afterwards, I had an eerie premonition: will I still be sitting in this chair thirty years from now? I knew I needed a change, but wasn't sure *what* change. Counselling appealed to me, so I decided to do supply teaching part-time and train as a counsellor in the evenings. I soon realised I would be rubbish as a counsellor, because I didn't have the patience to listen to people's problems without jumping in with a solution. The only part of the course that gripped me was psychology, so I signed up for an Open University degree in psychology and studied for four years. At the same time, I was teaching part-time

in a school that was developing its sixth form. I was asked if I would like to set up a department and teach psychology. Three years later I moved to a sixth form college, where I still work. I enjoy the energy and commitment of the staff and students here. The subject still fascinates me, but we all work too hard and are swamped by constant change, which makes things more difficult. I never really planned my career properly, but moving around within teaching has been better for me than staying put.

Jane

Part 1 of this book lists some statements you need to consider as you decide whether or not to:

- stay in teaching
- tweak your role to move into a different educational position, or
- make a complete break and move in another direction completely.

After thinking about these statements and completing the activities, you will hopefully identify your best next step. No decision is irreversible. Many teachers return to the classroom later in their career, boosted by a new set of skills, experiences and confidence.

Part 2 of the book explores your options in and around teaching. There are at least thirty career moves you can make which all retain teaching at their core. Some are relatively straightforward, like teaching different classes or moving to a different school, and others are more exotic – teaching on film sets, in hospitals or creating teaching resources for the stage version of Disney's *The Lion King*. This includes a section for teachers relatively new to the profession, who could leave and compete for graduate-entry careers. Part 2 ends with a section highlighting options for senior teachers.

Part 3 presents some more dramatic options in the form of a list of around 120 careers. They are meant to show the wide range of jobs available. Some require minimal or no further training, while others demand a lengthy and expensive commitment. The jobs I have chosen all have some overlap with the skills and interests teachers develop in the classroom. In my role as a careers adviser, I worked with many teachers who decided to stay in education only after they had carefully examined and rejected the alternatives. Looking at Part 3 is not wasted time; it will help you to accurately compare your current position with some realistic career alternatives.

I worked as a careers adviser for over twenty years in County Durham. Secondary school teachers with a few years' experience were the most frequent visitors to the careers centres where I worked. They were often keen to sit down and explore their career options for an hour or two. Many other public sector workers were also curious to take a peek at their alternatives. I feel passionately that everyone should be supported to find a rewarding career that suits their unique mix of skills, qualities and experience, which is what prompted me to write this book. It is informed by the discussions I've had with teachers at various stages of their careers and the decisions they made; it addresses the most frequently asked questions that those teachers had as they searched for a clear career path that was right for them. I hope you'll find the answers you need here too.

Part 1

Where are you now?

In this section there are a number of statements to consider and checklists to complete. These will help you assess where you are now, and help you see where you're going more clearly. Write down your answers and any thoughts, either in the book or in a notepad. Do show all your working-out! As a teacher, you'll know how important it is to engage actively and reflect on the content rather than speed-read your way through it. You will not be externally assessed on your answers, but you will benefit from looking back over your responses to make sense of later sections.

In at the deep end?

Let's start by assessing where you are now.

Marilyn Clarke studied career patterns and identified four approaches adopted by staff facing a career transition.¹ Who are you?

Plodder: Focuses on present, loyal and hardworking. They pay little attention to personal career planning or networking.

Pragmatist: Focuses on a traditional career path within the prevailing organisational structure. They consider personal progression reactively as and when vacancies arise. Don't tend to update skills via additional training.

Visionary: Actively plan and execute their career plan and move employers to maintain control. Personally confident and proactive, undertaking additional training and opportunities.

Opportunist: Self-aware, they grasp opportunities and embrace change to continually develop new skills and knowledge. They demonstrate flexibility and are driven by their values.

Clarke concluded that adopting behaviours that promoted a future focus to career planning led to success. This book will help you develop these powerful habits through a series of steps starting with an exploration of your own strengths and values. You can then start to match these to the many career options available within and outside of teaching.

Successful teachers are likely to agree with most of the following twenty statements (pages 8–9). Have a look through them and see how you do. These beliefs can be developed, and this book will help embed these into your behaviour. If you're going to fill in the gaps, start with the lowest number first, as the list is in a logical order along the lines of: know yourself, develop a plan, then execute the plan. If you're competitive and want to

¹ Marilyn Clarke, Plodders, pragmatists, visionaries and opportunists: career patterns and employability, *Career Development International* (2009) 14(1): 8–28.

score top marks and tick all the beliefs, then you can do so, but remember this isn't a test. It's a continuous improvement loop for life and your career. Even if you respond with a tick, you can consider additional action for that statement. If you make changes across a half a dozen or more, you will begin to notice a positive impact. Don't worry if you think this list seems a bit pushy and self-indulgent; John McEnroe might have said everybody loves success, but they hate successful people. The way to avoid this phenomena is to look *out*, not just in. Help friends and colleagues work on their progress, not just on your own, and nobody will begrudge you success. Perhaps one of the traps of the self-improvement movement is the descent into self-absorption and a focus on personal entitlement without offering genuine interest and support to those around us.

According to an ATL survey, 83% of teachers have considered leaving the profession.²

40% of new teachers leave the profession within a year of qualifying.³

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- 2 ATL, Workload drives the teacher recruitment and retention crisis, new survey finds (4 April 2016). Available at: www.atl.org.uk/media-office/2016/workload-drives-the-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-crisis.asp.
 - 3 Sally Wheale, Four in 10 new teachers quit within a year, *The Guardian* (31 March 2015). Available at: www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/31/four-in-10-new-teachers-quit-within-a-year.

List of beliefs

1 I know my skills and what I'm good at.

.....

2 I know the skills I need to develop.

.....

3 I can do an elevator pitch (a thirty-second summary of my skills and best achievements to date, showcasing what I can add to an organisation or team).

.....

4 I keep a record of all my major achievements at work.

.....

5 I seek regular feedback on my performance from colleagues and students.

.....

6 I share my ideas with other professionals.

.....

7 I take on new roles, projects or research at work to enhance my skills and experience.

.....

8 I feel good about myself at work.

.....

9 I know what opportunities for progression are available in my current school.

.....

10 I'm aware of the politics, tensions and 'characters' in my current school.

.....

- 11 I'm aware of the career options available to teachers in the UK and abroad.
-
- 12 I'm aware of the job options available outside teaching, and the entry routes for these options.
-
- 13 I have a pretty clear idea of my career direction, and what/where I'd like to be in three years' time.
-
- 14 I have discussed my career plan with important people in my life.
-
- 15 I'm content with my life outside work.
-
- 16 I have a life outside work.
-
- 17 I have mentors.
-
- 18 I am articulate and assertive.
-
- 19 I keep up to date with what's going on by reading articles, blogs, journals, newspapers and books about education and my subject specialism.
-
- 20 I review and reflect on my progress.
-

Thinking more about where you are now

- 1 **I know my skills and what I'm good at.** You can learn how to develop these further. You can show that you have these qualities. The first part of this book will help you identify or clarify your main skills and strengths. This is how many teachers spot a new niche within the classroom or a different kind of space.
.....
- 2 **I know the skills I need to develop.** You can develop a plan to help improve or gain these skills. Being able to learn from things that didn't go as well as we'd expected is fundamental to progress in life. We need to ask ourselves: what have I learned? What would I do differently? What can I do to make sure I do better next time? Can I find examples of this working well? Teachers encourage pupils to develop these meta-cognition and self-reflection skills, and they're just as important for adults. We all need to actively develop our strengths and skills to thrive.
.....
- 3 **I can do an elevator pitch.** This is a thirty-second summary of your top skills and achievements to date, showcasing what you can add to an organisation or team. This is a good way to check that you are aware of who you are, what you have achieved and what you can contribute.
.....
- 4 **I keep a record of all my major achievements at work.** This will help you create a strong CV, prepare for interviews and feel positive. It's human nature to forget the good stuff and dwell on the negative. However, try

Some teachers reach a point where they question their role in the classroom.

They want to consider something different, but don't know where to start.

What else can a teacher do? David Hodgson has the answers ...

Whether you're tentatively weighing up career alternatives, actively planning your route out of the school environment, or simply assessing where you are in teaching – possibly eyeing a change of class, key stage, sector, working hours, or even country – this practical handbook talks you through your options.

In *What Else Can a Teacher Do?* David Hodgson combines expert guidance with a carefully compiled list of over one hundred job profiles in order to help you find clarity on your career path, and presents numerous case studies of teachers and education professionals who have already successfully done so.

Essential reading for teachers who are 'stuck in a rut' and want to explore other options.

What Else Can a Teacher Do? should be read not only by all teachers who want a change, but also by all school leavers – including my 17-year-old daughter!

Kate Marnoch, Head Teacher, Kingsdown Nursery School,
founding member, Lincolnshire Nursery Schools Partnership (LNSP)

Ideal for teachers feeling a bit dissatisfied with life and wondering where to start to change it.

Gordon Collins, owner, Gordon Collins Careers and Education Services

An interesting and reassuring book which considers the common issues that teachers (and other people) face during their careers.

Paul Clifton, careers adviser

David Hodgson is a training consultant and author who works with teachers and students across the UK and abroad. He has written a number of books to help teachers and students thrive in the classroom and beyond.



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Education Careers Guidance