

BECOMING A

TEACHER

the legal, ethical and moral implications
of entering society's most fundamental profession

ALAN NEWLAND

An inspiring and motivating guide to embarking confidently on a career in teaching and, more importantly, to acquiring and developing the essential character traits and values to flourish in it.

Accessible and engaging, *Becoming a Teacher* draws on Alan Newland's decades of professional work and academic study in education to set out the key principles for developing and understanding the professional values essential to becoming a good teacher.

It features a constructive examination of the Teachers' Standards and shares a series of illustrative scenarios, exemplar strategies and practical resources that will equip trainee teachers with the know-how to deal with a range of contentious and sensitive issues that they are likely to encounter during the course of their career.

Alan's searching questions and astute insights will provoke thought, instil confidence, engender enthusiasm and inspire commitment in those new to the teaching profession.

Ideal for trainee teachers in all phases of teaching; for lecturers, tutors and course directors at initial teacher training (ITT) institutions; and for ITT and early career mentors and CPD leads in schools.

PRAISE FOR *BECOMING A TEACHER*

From students and trainees:

Becoming a Teacher is a wonderful read and a perfect 'new teacher' gift. Alan's personal reflections are not only funny but also comforting. He finds the funny side of the mishaps we all experience, from training year and beyond! The book is easy to navigate and covers a great range of topics too, yet there is no pressure to read the entire book – you can dip in and out of it regularly with ease. Its chapters are of a good length and when you get stuck in, you find yourself at the end of the chapter and wanting to read more.

Katarina Pillai, primary school ECT, LETTA Trust school

The introduction to this book is so powerful that it reminds me why I chose this profession. I love that its content isn't at all patronising and has a sense of humanity and relatability in its coverage of the topic of ethics. The message is that it's OK to make mistakes, as we are all human, and from mistakes comes great learning and character building – something we are not reassured of enough as new teachers. *Becoming a Teacher* is inspiring to read and it makes you want to be a better teacher.

Natasha Ryan, Secondary PGCE student, Middlesex University

The style in which the book is written is fantastic. Alan's stories of his own experience really grab the reader and he kept my attention throughout.

Michaela McCaugherty, Secondary PGCE student, University of Sunderland

This is an engaging and very thought-provoking book that would have been great to have had right at the beginning of my journey into teaching. Alan asks questions and encourages the reader to think for themselves, while also providing a genuine account of the experience of teaching. Absolutely brilliant.

Patricia Duncan, Secondary PGCE student, University of Worcester

I thoroughly enjoyed reading *Becoming a Teacher*. I'm even drawing on some of it in my job applications! But the best part for me is how Alan manages to connect all the guidelines, procedures and protocols around being a teacher with real-life stories. Some even brought a little tear to my eye! Alan's words remind me of the writing of James Herriot, in being very honest and showing teaching for what it is – and he also discusses topics not found on my PGCE course, such as how to manage criticism.

Michael Walker, PGCE student, University of Sunderland

There is so much in this book I wish I had been able to read before starting my training. *Becoming a Teacher* is an invaluable guide for trainees and teachers alike.

Maisey Hodges, Secondary PGCE trainee teacher, Northampton TTP

I love this book. It is a great and engaging read, and very relatable to the experiences of Scottish teachers. I have taken away a lot from it that I can apply to my practice and how I look at the teaching profession. Thank you!

Megan Turnbull, primary probationary teacher, East Renfrewshire

This is a really useful book as it gives an authentic insight into teaching, and not just the 'fluffy' stuff that we are often shown at university. It strikes a great balance between personal experiences and theory, and it's full of knowledge that would be really helpful for ECTs too.

Chris Griffiths, PGCE student, Cardiff University

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and was really inspired by the concept of a good teacher being recognised by the values they model. The historical perspective provided is very interesting too, and I also appreciate the reassurance that the challenges I will face as a teacher will build my character – this sends out a message of 'keep going' even if you feel you are not at your best at that particular time. I think the book inspires student teachers to uphold codes of practice and standards, not just as a professional prerequisite but also as a moral responsibility.

Eilidh Macpherson, Secondary PGDE student, University of Strathclyde

From lecturers and tutors:

In an environment where the teacher dropout rate is high, this thought-provoking book will offer much support to teachers during their early years. I certainly would have appreciated having it during my PGCE and ECT years. The format is perfect to guide discussions with mentors and also to enable ECTs to reflect on a variety of issues they will be confronted with. That said, I also think it would be a valuable read for more experienced teachers.

Maddy Fowler, ECT, London

I will be honest, when I first started reading this book I thought: 'What have I done? I can't possibly read an entire academic book.' Well, let me tell you that I was wrong! It is written very thoughtfully without lots of references or jargon, and I really enjoyed how Alan includes anecdotes from his teaching days and time as a head teacher. It really is thought-provoking but also very readable, so you can put it down and pick it back up again without losing your thread. I would highly recommend this book for those who are only just starting their teaching journey or halfway through it like me. *Becoming a Teacher* is a brilliant book and I think Alan's words, thoughts and pearls of wisdom will stay with me and support me throughout my career.

Hannah Mitchell, second-year student, Primary BA QTS, Edge Hill University

I very much enjoyed the interactivity throughout this book, where the reader is encouraged to reflect upon and consider a variety of issues as well as draw lessons from the personal experiences of Alan himself. This offers a personal touch and makes the book easy to relate to. Alan highlights the pressures of teaching, but not to the point that it would put off any aspiring trainees; if anything, it will give them a sense of purpose and an understanding of the challenges that lie ahead. Ultimately, we as teachers are role models – and that's something, as emphasised by this book, that I am proud to be a part of. I will certainly be keeping a copy for use in my career.

Daniel Strachan, primary school ECT, South Farnham School

Becoming a Teacher gripped me from the first page and at times I had to drag myself away from reading it. I love the personal stories that make your heart drop as you ask, 'What if I were put in that situation?' I found the 'Discuss and reflect' sections very helpful too – they made me think

about my own teaching and I found myself using the questions as talking points within my department at school. The discussions that ensued have helped me see teaching from the perspective of my more experienced colleagues.

Bryher Freight, secondary school ECT, Cornwall

I found this book extremely interesting. It is very easy to connect with Alan's writing, and his personal anecdotes are motivating, inspiring and moving in bringing the book to life. Alan covers broad themes and ethical conundrums related to building character, relating it to professional development and reminding us why we should take certain actions for the betterment of the pupils and communities we serve. The story concerning one of his students' attitude towards Anne Frank's diary resonated with me as I teach within an inner-city school in Greater Glasgow – and I'm all too often faced with sectarian views which can at times be difficult to confront. Alan reminded me that it is ethically and morally right to tackle controversial issues in a way that does not lead to further provocation. I think *Becoming a Teacher* is a fantastic book that could be described as a go-to guide for anyone joining the teaching profession.

Sarah-Jane Hamilton, fourth-year MEd student, University of Glasgow

At university we tend to focus on specifics with relatively little time for aspects such as ethics or morality, so this book helps to develop a teaching philosophy and to determine what defines you as a teacher. *Becoming a Teacher* is incredibly insightful for both ECTs and more experienced teachers, and will help develop wider perspectives on teaching.

Amelia Sowden, Primary BA QTS student, York St John University

Becoming a Teacher explores a variety of issues and provides direction on how to effectively navigate them. Alan gives indispensable support by sharing and examining his own teaching, but it is his reflections upon his own values that are so fascinating and relevant to anyone involved in education.

An excellent book that gives everyone food for thought, and an essential and invaluable resource for new and experienced teachers.

Aimee Lascelles, PGDE student, University of Dundee

I was hooked from the start – the tone, the way it sets out exactly what the book aims to do, how it is structured to enable the reader to dip in and out, and much more. There is great use of further and recommended reading per chapter too. I particularly enjoyed the section on teaching and theory, as I found myself drawn into the question of whether we are reliant on the theory to underpin practice. I also enjoyed reflecting on the incident of children climbing high up in the tree and what the teachers were trying to achieve. This engaged my whole household in an interesting discussion!

A thoroughly thought-provoking read and a pleasure to engage with.

Amelia Shimells, Primary BA QTS student, York St John University

While reading *Becoming a Teacher* I found myself reflecting on my own beliefs and politics, and I really liked this. Alan's honesty and transparency makes it easy to imagine oneself in the situations described in the book, and to consider what one's own reactions might be to similar situations – such as going on strike, which really challenged my thinking. I enjoyed the discussion and reflection sections too, as being confronted with specific questions was really

thought-provoking. The book is also helpful in relieving anxieties on how to handle situations in the classroom, and offers a perspective of teaching backed by a wealth of experience and honesty.

Nicole Larkins, primary school trainee teacher, South Farnham SCITT

What I love about this book is that everything is presented from authority and experience, not merely opinion. When Alan tells the story of the troubled child and the father who beat him in front of him, he doesn't waste time stating 'obviously, this was wrong' but instead allows us to process how we, as teachers, might respond in this situation. I was initially terrified of the numerous pages of appendices, but Alan clearly states how to approach them and why. I therefore enjoyed the debate on 'Britishness'. This was introduced during my secondary school days and I remember we hated how it was presented; however, Alan provides a very good argument for how 'British values' should be explored in schools – and now I will take his insights on board in my own teaching.

Nathan Alexander Kennedy, Secondary PGCE student, University of Sunderland

I highly recommend *Becoming a Teacher* as a core course text. It will be an invaluable companion for trainees throughout the PGCE year and support them during their ECT years too, and even for those contemplating a teaching career and preparing to apply.

Michelle Wormald, Programme Director – Secondary PGCE, University of Hull

What is appealing about Alan's book is that it encompasses so many crucial aspects of ITT. Not only does it relate to key legal elements of the role but has clear links to the Teachers' Standards and professional and personal attributes and values – essential for all teachers. We will be providing all of our trainees with a copy of the book at the start of our training programme.

Stuart Russell, Director of ITT, Kent and Medway Teacher Training

This book is much needed in the ITT sphere, where new teachers grapple with the complexities of what it means to be a teacher. We will definitely use *Becoming a Teacher* with our ITT students, adding it to the essential reading list for professional studies.

Professor Anna Lise Gordon, Director, Institute of Education, St Mary's University, Twickenham

Alan tackles a wide range of issues brilliantly in his book, with an extremely engaging style – covering topics that are of real significance and importance but are also very challenging.

Janet Limberg, Course Leader and Programme Manager, Somerset SCITT

Becoming a Teacher has tremendous merit and value, providing a key point of reference for students. Alan addresses sensitive issues in depth – issues that often cause confusion and uncertainty among trainees and ECTs. The book's format also aligns with the way we encourage trainee teachers to approach their studies, which is to critically analyse and evaluate their practice and search for ways to strengthen and confirm their evolving teacher identities – so it will also appeal to all early career teachers.

Suzanne Allies, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Worcester

I would encourage all trainee teachers to read this book. Alan draws on his own experience to highlight the practical implications of each topic, making it relevant to all teachers, not just trainees. It should be an essential text for all ITT courses.

John Taplin, Programme Facilitator, Northampton TTP

Alan's work has consistently been evaluated at a high level by our PGCE cohorts. We would certainly recommend his book to our PGCE trainees.

Harriet Rhodes, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

Alan Newland's sessions are challenging, relevant and important. They inspire our trainees to connect with the core purpose of being a teacher. His book will now be part of our core curriculum.

Ben Sperring, Director, LETTA Teaching School

The content Alan covers in *Becoming a Teacher* is key to enabling trainees to understand their responsibilities as teachers and providing an awareness of professional ethics and British values. Having scenarios for them to reflect upon engages them quickly and raises the key questions concerning them. I will include it in pre-course reading.

Eluned Pickup, Senior Teaching Fellow, PGCE Programme, University of Southampton

We very much endorse Alan's book and are really excited by it. The book's structure provides a great core text for our course and tutors. It is a critical discussion about professionalism – examining the legal, ethical and moral issues, as well as a positive understanding of the Teachers' Standards and fundamental British values, very much supporting the development of those new to the profession.

Davinder Dosanjh, Executive Director, Leicestershire Secondary SCITT

We will be including this book on our pre-course reading list.

Dr Bryony Black, Director of ITE, University of Sheffield

What Alan does in this book is nothing less than magic. With admirable empathy and calm he presents the most difficult and controversial but highly relevant topics, delivering key messages clearly, bravely and with tangible impact without ever sounding patronising, judgemental or confrontational. To have his wisdom on our bookshelf now will be invaluable both for me and my trainees.

Isabella Mora, ITE Programme Leader, 2Schools Consortium

Becoming a Teacher will without question be a core text for our teaching on professional knowledge and pedagogy.

Gareth Evers, Professional Studies Tutor for PGCE Programmes, Middlesex University

I certainly recommend this book for our pre-course reading list.

Juliet Pearce, Director, Hampshire SCITT

Becoming a Teacher really supports the work we do around professional values and teacher identity, and it will be a very useful addition to our reading lists across all of our programmes.

Keith Parker, Associate Head (Education), York St John University

The publication of this book is great news for all our ITE programmes and for our master's level modules.

**Kate Brimacombe, Programme Area Leader – Postgraduate Primary ITE,
Plymouth Marjon University**

I will most certainly be using this book on our courses. The narrative style is lively and refreshing, and portrays a frank and honest discussion of the challenges that teachers face through real-life and authentic anecdotes. It prompts reflection and debate on a number of issues, some of which move us from our comfort zone, but everything is grounded in the real world. I particularly like the reference to character and values and the implications this has for becoming a teacher. I also think its constructive look at fundamental British values and the Teachers' Standards is much needed and long overdue. There are few books that critically examine the profession in this way.

Alison Hales, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Greenwich

Alan delivers brilliant, thought-provoking sessions about professionalism. Our trainees always thoroughly enjoy hearing him speak, and I too always learn a lot from him. Now it's good to have his wisdom and experience packaged together in this book.

Louise Leigh, Director, King Edward's Consortium SCITT

There is very little on the market that covers the wide range of content that Alan covers in *Becoming a Teacher*. We fully support this book and recommend it as part of our professional studies, school placements and to all our professional mentors. It will be a core text and essential reading for those coming on to the PGCE course.

Edmund Boyle, Head of ITT Partnerships, St Mary's University, Twickenham

We are very happy to be adding this book onto our essential reading list. Professionalism and teacher identity is a crucial area for ITE courses, and yet it is one of the hardest areas to instil understanding. I look forward to using this book and signposting our trainees to it as an area of critical importance.

Dylan Gwyer-Roberts, PGCE Secondary Programme Leader, Bath Spa University

The quality of Alan's work is well thought through and presented – and, with the increasing use of online tutorials, a course reader like this will be a great stimulus for group discussions.

Sharon Chester, Director, Lincolnshire SCITT

We've always found Alan's visits and video lectures really useful, so to include his book on our ITE courses will be great.

Damienne Clarke, Deputy Course Leader, PGCE Primary, Birmingham City University

Full of both practical and philosophical advice that is really useful to student teachers, *Becoming a Teacher* is more than essential reading.

Alistair Ross, Emeritus Professor, London Metropolitan University

Alan's style of writing is very clear and engaging. I like the anecdotes he includes that help contextualise issues. The topics he covers delve into a variety of implications for a teacher's career and are an essential part of a teacher's training.

Kate Sida-Nicholls, Secondary PGCE Course Leader, Suffolk and Norfolk SCITT

This book is an exceptionally timely addition to the essential reading for anyone hoping to become a teacher and even for those moving from classroom teaching to senior management. Never has a book which addresses the fundamental questions of what it is to be a teacher been more apposite. I regard *Becoming a Teacher* as a must-read text.

Professor Ruth Merttens, Director, Hamilton Trust

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PREFACE

This book is about the values of teaching and the virtues of being a good teacher – what I call a teacher of character. In the last twenty-five years there has been a damaging over-emphasis on the skills and efficiency of teacher competence and an underemphasis on the values and virtues of good teaching. It has become more important to be able to *describe* a good teacher by their performance – of what a teacher teaches – than to *know* a good teacher by the values they model and demonstrate. In my view, this is a mistake. The role of being a teacher requires at least as much public trust (and probably much greater moral responsibility) than any other profession I can think of. In this book I will ask a series of questions: what roles and responsibilities must a good teacher accept? What kind of a person must a good teacher be? What kind of values must they subscribe to? What kinds of virtues must they display and demonstrate? What kind of character must they develop in themselves and their pupils? In other words, if you are a teacher, who are you?

You will be questioned and tested every day when you attempt to impart values to your pupils: every time you select or exclude topics to discuss; every time you insist on an accurate answer rather than a fantastical one; every time you correct a child's misbehaviour rather than tolerate disobedience and impertinence. The ethical and moral dimensions of what you do cannot be ignored or avoided, so it is better that we try to make them more transparent and therefore subject to conscious control.

In writing this book, I have included two preparatory chapters exploring fundamental characteristics of teaching as a practice and teaching's relationship to professionalism to lay the foundations for subsequent discussion, but my principal endeavour is this: firstly, I will explain the key elements of a teacher's legal responsibilities and how you can exercise that new-found authority with confidence. I am regularly struck by how often teachers (including those with experience) are confused and nervous about the exercise of their powers – what they think they can and cannot do; the extent of their disciplinary powers to punish; whether they are even allowed to touch children, let alone search them or use force or restraint where necessary. Chapter 3 on your legal responsibilities and powers will explain all this and reassure you.

Secondly, I will help you to develop an understanding of, and articulate a commitment to, a professional ethic that will inform your identity as a teacher. This begins in Chapter 4 and continues in other sections of the book. I will ask you to think about the key principles of teaching; to identify the characteristics of professional status and practice; to define a profession in your own terms; and to decide whether teaching actually fits within the definition you have given yourself. I will address ethical issues specifically related to the teaching profession – in particular, those that emerge as an

outcome of having an ethical code that straddles personal as well as professional values, including 'fundamental British values' and the complex issues teachers must face when dealing with the promotion of tolerance, free speech and identity.

Thirdly, as each new generation of children must be taught the difference between right and wrong, teachers play a key role as agents in cultivating moral understandings. Chapter 5 therefore discusses morality at some length. Teachers must enlist, persuade and secure young people's commitment to those moral standards and get them to believe that they are justified. I want to help you realise the nature of your own moral agency as a teacher by exploring the scope of your own private and public behaviours, and where and when they should be delineated. Where the boundaries lie between your personal and your professional life is a fascinating but complex discussion.

Finally, in Chapter 6 I want you to appreciate the extent to which the challenges of becoming a good teacher are, in themselves, character-building. Your own demonstration and modelling of virtues is part and parcel of becoming a teacher of character, but it is a process racked with ambiguity and challenge. The questions I raise in this chapter are intentional and self-conscious as a necessary part of the process for realising your character as a teacher and resulting in the ultimate acquisition of what Aristotle called 'practical wisdom'.

Don't be intimidated by the mention of Aristotle. This is not a book about Greek philosophy, nor is it even an academic book as such. I have included many activities and appendices which will help you to understand the ideas behind becoming a teacher of character, both in the sense of developing your character and of teaching character as a subject. Some of the appendices are quite extensive in that they allow the reader to explore some issues in much greater depth. For example, had I included all the discussion points related to fundamental British values in the chapters on ethics and morality they would have become very unwieldy; much better in my view to consider the essentials in the main text and examine deeper issues as advanced study later in the appendices.

The book is written in my voice. It is largely an account of personal professional experiences and in some ways could even be described as part-memoir. The style is very direct – addressing the reader in the first person in a deliberate way for reasons that are quite intentional. People have often asked me if all the anecdotes I use are true. Indeed they are. Their apparent implausibility to some is not that they are tall tales, but more a reflection of the dramatic changes in attitudes and values over time. If my tone occasionally sounds paternalistic or long in the tooth, implying that 'In my day, we did it like this ...' or 'Years ago, we could do this, that and the other ...' it is not to be inferred that I think things were better in former times. Quite the opposite. I merely want to illustrate and emphasise the contrast in values – both professional and societal – that I hope will inform the discussion and encourage you to reflect.

I therefore use a lot of anecdotes – unapologetically. I hope that some of them will motivate, inspire and sometimes move you. Aristotle believed that stories have the power to illuminate human motivation and morality in ways that scientific sources are not necessarily equipped to do. He believed that the development of emotion through story was crucial to the development of moral virtue. Besides, they are entertaining! However, I want the book to feel like it is a conversation with the reader. I want it to be accessible but intelligent and serious. Although I am addressing important professional issues – the fundamentals of this most fundamental of professions – I want to engage the reader in thought, reflection and discussion. I hope the informality of the tone does not grate with the seriousness of the content. I frequently, for example, refer to children as ‘kids’, which some might regard as unprofessional in itself. You may find that university lecturers or training tutors disapprove of you using the term in a professional context. I am not challenging that; I respect their view. But, for me, it is about the context of language usage. I leave it for others to judge whether my references to children as kids is ever demeaning or patronising. It is certainly not intended.

While I have used references, footnotes and citations, I have tried to minimise these so as not to clutter the text, including them where regard and acknowledgement is due to those who have written extensively about these issues and about whom you may be interested to read further. Above all, though, I want this book to flow like a story. The appendices are intended to provide a number of things: an opportunity for additional reflection on some extremely complex topics that are very high on the agenda of the teacher training requirements, yet find so little time devoted to them on courses or discussed critically with confidence; opportunities to provide practical help and resources for the teaching of fundamental British values through spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and the logical extension of this, virtues and character education; and, finally, an opportunity to compare and contrast the professional codes of other countries and help readers in those countries to situate the themes of this book within their own context.

The book is primarily targeted at trainee teachers – those on school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) courses or university-led undergraduate or postgraduate courses. As much as the principal audience for this book is trainee teachers, there are wider audiences who will doubtless be interested too – indeed, many very experienced teachers told me (on reading drafts of the manuscript) that it was ‘a book for all teachers.’

Tutors and lecturers will find it useful, perhaps, for initiating debate or posing questions in seminars and tutorials. I have therefore included dozens of activities – marked as ‘Discuss and reflect’ boxes – which can be used either as one-off discussions or as a series of related questions for seminars. These are best used by groups of trainees to initiate discussion, but if you are reading this book alone, then use them as points at which to pause and reflect.

Mentors inducting early career teachers will find the book very useful too. Senior leaders responsible for continuing professional development (CPD) in schools are another relevant audience. There is a lot for teachers of all ages and experience – especially the discussion scenarios, many of which address a range of fascinating issues related to legal, ethical and moral dilemmas in teaching.

The book is structured and formatted to allow the reader to dip in and out. If you choose, you don't even need to read the book from the beginning through to the end – although, of course, I hope you will read it all in due course. Instead, you may wish to read only one particular section and focus on that for now. Any chapter can be taken as an entity in itself for specific study or group discussion. I think the sequence of chapters dealing with legal, ethical and moral issues has some merit logically, although it is not necessary to read them in that order. For that reason, you will find that I make similar points more than once, but (I hope) from a variety of perspectives. This has been a conscious decision, either because I know the book will be read in parts or because the complexity and importance of the issues warrants examination or illustration from a number of different standpoints.

While the book has been written from the perspective of the teaching profession in England, teaching professions in most English-speaking countries are, although far from identical, very similar. For readers outside the UK, the book will provide a fascinating contrast and reflection on how the scope and extent of teaching professionalism emerges and evolves from a particular society's politics, history and culture.

One of my central aims, therefore, is to frame a debate about teaching's fundamental moral purpose. I will ask a lot of questions. I will challenge you personally to consider justifiable answers. I will help you to explore categories and characteristics that define teaching technically – referring to its legal and ethical codes – but go on to discuss how teachers must grapple with the personal and professional dilemmas of competing moral values. I will challenge you to define and apply the virtues shaped by your experience of working – day in, day out – in a classroom full of diverse and challenging young minds. Finally, I want you to imagine how such testing experiences will develop you into a teacher of character and, ultimately, one of practical wisdom too. I hope you enjoy the experience.

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Prologue:

THERE IS ALWAYS ONE ... THE MAXINE STORY

If you are going to become a teacher, you will soon have lots of great stories to tell. Let's start with one of mine – it is absolutely true. It begins in the first few weeks of my very first term, way back in September 1979. I lost a child on the London Underground. Beat that for a way to embark on your teaching career.

I had just finished my teacher training in London. I'd had a really good final teaching practice in a nice suburban school. I had taught a 'topic' – as we called it in those days – on dinosaurs. Kids love dinosaurs. Diplodocus, Pterodactyl, Tyrannosaurus rex and all that – terrifying and great fun. I had collected some nice resources – books, dinosaur models, posters and so on – and finished my teaching practice with a merit award. I was pleased with myself. When I got to my new school in Hackney, East London, I found that I had been given a lively Year 6 class (and we all know what it means when a class is described as lively, right?) and so I knew I had to get them onside pretty quickly. I thought it might be a good idea to repeat my dinosaur topic. After all, why reinvent the wheel? I had all these lovely resources and ideas. I could use them again and get off to a flying start with my new class. Then I had an even better idea: I would take them on a trip to see the amazing life-size exhibits of dinosaurs at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington. That would *really* get these kids on my side.

In those days, getting to the Natural History Museum from Hackney involved a bus ride to King's Cross followed by a Tube ride all the way across London. I don't know if you have ever been to King's Cross Underground station, but it has undergone a transformation in recent years. It needed it. Hundreds of thousands of people pass through that station every single day. It is an easy place for someone to get lost ...

Imagine the scene. There I was, about six weeks into teaching, with thirty 10- and 11-year-old kids. I was on my own (except for a mum who worked part-time at the school – known in those days as a 'lady helper!'). We are on a platform at King's Cross Underground. Everyone is excited. It is a day out for us all. The kids are chatting and laughing; their main focus is comparing what sandwiches they have brought for lunch. I spot that the first train coming is not going in our direction, so I am calling out to the kids: 'Stand back, everyone! It's not our train!' I am trying to make myself heard above the bustle of the commuters – it is still only 9.30am, for heaven's sake. I am disco-dancing up and down the platform trying to keep the kids back from the edge: 'This is not our train, everybody! Stand back! Stand back! It's not our train!' Just as I think I have got the situation under control ... I haven't.

There is always one, isn't there? It is Maxine. She is a lovely kid but she is not taking a blind bit of notice of me – she is on a day out with her friends and full of excitement. The train comes in, the doors open and she jumps on thinking everyone is going to follow her. The kids are shouting: 'Maxine! Get off, it's not our train!' She turns, but in the pushing and shoving of commuters getting on and off, it is too late. Before she can reach the doors, they close.

This incident happened over four decades ago, but I have never forgotten her face. Have you ever seen that painting by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch called *The Scream*? Well, her face looked just like that.

Now, I want you to pause for a moment with that image in your mind's eye. Do you think it is funny? You can be honest – I am big enough to take you laughing at me. Or perhaps you are thinking, 'My God, what a nightmare. I hope that never happens to me!' Whatever is going on in your mind, here is a question for you to contemplate: how do you think the kids reacted in that moment?

With horror? Shock? Panic? Maybe a few tears? Perhaps even one or two of them laugh nervously out of fear? If you think some reacted with laughter, then you are only half right. It wasn't just laughter. It was more like hysterical cackling – and it wasn't just some of them. It was all thirty kids screaming with raucous, uncontrolled hilarity. 'Maxine! You idiot!' they shouted, running after her, chasing the train down the platform for as long as possible before it disappeared into the darkened tunnels of the London Underground. I was the one petrified and in a state of horror, shock and panic – not least because I didn't even know where the train was going. These days there are information boards, regular announcements, bright lights, CCTV, help points and friendly people in blue uniforms everywhere. Back in 1979 there was nothing – London Underground stations were dark and dingy places. You had to go back up to street level to find someone to help.

While the kids were rolling about laughing, I was chasing back and forth trying to calm them down and gather them together. 'Mr Newland, what are you going to do now?' they roared hysterically. They thought it was great. Even my lady helper couldn't suppress her giggles, so she was no help at all. Finally, after a couple of minutes, I managed to settle the kids enough to leave them with her while I went to get some assistance. Just as I was about to set off, somebody walked round the corner and gave me one hell of a shock. A policeman? Wrong. The head teacher? Wrong again. Maxine's parents? Nope (although I will tell you about Maxine's mum in a minute).

Well, you may or may not be surprised to learn – it was Maxine. Now, before you think she has pulled off some kind of David Blaine-type optical illusion, the next stop along the line is Euston Square, only fifty seconds away. She had obviously jumped off the train there, ran over the footbridge, spotted there was a train coming back in the

opposite direction, got straight on it, no doubt with the balletic dexterity she did the first time, and – I kid you not – she was back with us in about three minutes. OK, four. Tops. She returned so quickly the other kids hadn't even finished laughing.

Phew! Was I relieved! Off we went to the Natural History Museum and had a great day. We ate our sandwiches. We saw Dippy the Diplodocus and got a fantastic tour of the dinosaur exhibits from the education staff. They drew some fabulous pictures. We learned so much about dinosaurs – it was amazing. Of course, when I got the kids back into class I asked them to write about 'all the wonderful things you've learned about dinosaurs from the Natural History Museum'.

What do you think they wrote about? Yeah, you guessed it. All they wrote about was Maxine getting on the wrong train. But I will tell you this – and this might surprise or even shock you – it didn't even enter my head to report the incident to the head teacher. I have often wondered why. You would think that losing a child on the London Underground is a fairly reportable incident, wouldn't you? Over the years, having reflected on it, I have concluded that in a funny sort of way nothing *really* happened. Yes, I know I lost a child; you don't need to remind me. But there was nothing much to report. Maxine wasn't hurt. She wasn't even upset. Maybe she was a little embarrassed for a few minutes because the other kids were laughing at her, but nobody, including the children, saw it as an issue.

Fast-forward twenty years. It is 1999 and I am now the head teacher of a primary school in Hackney. My Year 6 teacher is planning to take her twenty-four kids to the Natural History Museum because – yes, you have guessed it – she is doing a class topic on good old dinosaurs. How many adults do you think she is taking with her on this trip? Four? Five? Actually it is six. The school's health and safety policy (I hadn't even heard the phrase 'health and safety' back in 1979) required a minimum of four adults – and, of course, this time most of them are not lady helpers; they are trained and qualified teaching assistants. There are also two parents who won't let their children go on the trip unless they are in attendance.

The teacher – a fantastic young woman with bags of energy and ideas, who had already spent her weekend doing a reconnaissance visit to the museum, plus completing a risk assessment and insurance forms, collating permission slips and planning some lovely activities – sets off to the Natural History Museum with twenty-four kids and six other adults. She takes the bus down to King's Cross to get the Tube to South Kensington. They get onto the platform of the Underground ... and guess what happens? You think that this time maybe a teacher gets on the wrong train? No. One of the parents? Not that either. And no, before you say it, Maxine has not grown up to be one of the parents (I have heard that wisecrack a hundred times).

Believe it or not, exactly the same thing happens – only this time, it isn't *one* child, it's *four*! In spite of the fact that the kids are all in baseball caps and hi-vis vests and organised into groups with an adult standing next to them. When the train pulls in, the teacher is calling out: 'It's not our train, everybody! Stand back! Stand back!' But are they listening? Of course they aren't. They are on a day out with their mates and as excited as bees on a lavender bush. The train doors open, a group of girls jump on thinking everyone will follow them. The other kids are shouting: 'Get off! Get off! It's not our train!' Before they can, in the melee of pushing and shoving, the doors close and the train moves off.

What do you think the reaction of the other kids is this time? Laughter? No. Not even close. This time it is pandemonium. There is screaming, crying, hysteria – not just from the four on the train but also from the other twenty children on the platform, including half of the adults. There are no dinosaurs this time. Instead, there is a full-scale search and rescue operation because these four girls didn't do what Maxine did – jump off at the next stop and come straight back. Oh no, they were so freaked out that they stayed on the train until the end of the line. And this was the Metropolitan Line. It terminates thirty miles away in Buckinghamshire!

Meanwhile, I am at school. Mid-morning I get a telephone call. 'This is the station manager at Amersham. I've got four of your girls here. What do you want me to do with them?' I sent out a teacher in a taxi to bring them back. They return later that afternoon with no harm done. The next day I got those twenty-four kids together and asked them: 'How many of you have been on the London Underground before?' I was amazed. Out of twenty-four Hackney born-and-bred kids, only eight had ever been on the London Underground. Now, that is a change of lifestyle for you, isn't it? Twenty years previously, 10-year-old Maxine had taken herself off to school every day using buses and Tube trains without the slightest fear or hesitation. She had obviously gained knowledge of the system, developed a sense of direction and worldliness and, most importantly, the confidence to deal with a situation herself if something didn't quite go to plan. This group of kids – it isn't their fault and I am not blaming them – didn't have what Maxine had. Nearly all of them lived within three hundred yards of the school but their parents were regularly driving them to and from school every day. They weren't building up that worldliness, confidence and ability to assess risk – and deal with it – in the way Maxine clearly could.

The reason I relate this story is not because of the reaction of the children but because of the reaction of their parents. As I said earlier, I didn't mention the first incident to my head teacher – a wonderful man who had a huge influence on me and who would not have been censorious or judgemental even if I had. It is just that I never thought of it. I never thought of telling Maxine's mum either, although I remember Maxine's mum as well. She was about six foot two. A matriarchal Jamaican woman whose attitude to her kids and school was something like: 'You behave yourself in school and do what your

teacher tells you!' If I had told Maxine's mum, I think I know what her reaction would have been. She would have probably given Maxine the hairdryer treatment for 'not listening to your teacher'!

The parents of the second group of kids were very different. Within hours of the news getting out, I had about a dozen of them outside my office giving me earache. 'Why hadn't we done this, that and the other?' 'Why hadn't we organised a coach?' 'Why had we exposed the children to the hazards of the London Underground?' One by one, I calmed them down, explaining that the teacher had planned the trip perfectly well. Nobody was hurt, these things happen and so on.

Nevertheless, I went home that night feeling quite depressed. Here was a talented, hard-working and conscientious young teacher who had only been in the job for a year. She had planned a fantastic educational trip for her class and it went wrong through no fault of her own. Now the only thanks she seemed to be getting was criticism from people who I thought should know better – parents; people who you might think would understand that when you take kids on an outing, things don't always run smoothly. Reflecting on it later that evening, I realised that judgement was unfair. Why? Because these days we all do it – we are all much more ready to voice our thoughts and opinions than we once were. In many ways, that is a very good thing. I do it myself occasionally in restaurants, both when the food and service is excellent and when it isn't up to scratch. We should give feedback – positive as well as constructive. But the incident also made me reflect on the changing nature of the relationship between professional groups like teachers and their 'clients' – in our case, parents – and how that relationship has changed over the years and how it continues to change.

A transformation in ethical expectations has affected nearly all professional groups, not just teachers. In fact, a better illustration of this phenomenon is the medical profession. You may be too young to remember this, but I can tell you for a fact that twenty-five years ago doctors were treated almost like gods. Few people ever questioned the judgement of a doctor. In those days, most of us went to our GP, meekly reported our health issue, gratefully received our prescription (illegibly handwritten) and scurried off to the chemist to get our medicine. Now, when I see my doctor, I expect to be engaged in a conversation. I expect to ask questions and get some understandable answers in plain English about the issues affecting my health. I expect to be involved in the decisions and options about any treatment that might be required.

When I was a young man, the public were far more deferential to the likes of doctors, lawyers, accountants, architects, engineers and, believe it or not, teachers. These days we, the public, are still largely respectful to these professions, but we now expect, quite rightly, that professional people are accountable for their actions, especially when they take important decisions on our behalf. On reflection, I think that is what these parents at my school were doing – asking questions and making me, as the head teacher,

accountable for the decisions that had been taken on their behalf. It was a challenging episode, I grant you, but it was one that parents have a right to expect as part of their relationship with people like teachers.

The point here is not, I repeat not, to alarm you. This is not a story that should deter you from taking children out on school trips; quite the opposite, in fact. Take kids out as much as you can. They love educational visits and learn a lot from them, especially when they are well planned, focused and challenging. When children get a little older, you may be lucky enough to take them on a residential visit somewhere, perhaps to an outward-bound centre or on a geography field trip. I can assure you that they will come back different people. You will find your working relationship with them has changed too. Don't be deterred.

This story illustrates how society's expectations change. You are about to enter the teaching profession – a profession that will be a different place in ten or fifteen years' time, with different legal, ethical and moral expectations. It will be different again in twenty-five or thirty years. Change is inevitable. We have to accommodate change and, where we can, try to embrace it. So, I tell you this not as an ex-head teacher reminiscing about the long-lost good old days that, in reality, never were. I tell you because, as members of a well-regarded professional group – teachers – you will be the highly trained, highly educated experts who are best placed to inform the necessary changes that may be in the best interests of the children and their parents, whom we should think of as our clients – the people we are here to serve.

I want you to reflect on the Maxine story as you read through the rest of this book and I ask you a series of questions and engage you in some thinking and discussion about the nature and challenges of becoming a teacher. Not just any teacher, but a *teacher of character*. If you are in the profession for any length of time, you will experience an incident like the one I did with Maxine. When you do, you will be tested to make decisions – sometimes in the spur of the moment, sometimes under huge pressure, sometimes when there is more than one right answer and more than one justified response to resolve an issue. In such circumstances, your character both as a person and a teacher will be built. That character will also be the model you demonstrate to the children you teach.

WHAT IS TEACHING?

Our intelligent minds have evolved to target objects. From aiming spears while hunting animals in the forests and savannahs in prehistory through to launching projectiles and rockets at real or potential enemies today, we have needed to learn to target. We aim at metaphorical targets too: destinations on a map, dream jobs, or gods in their heavens. We need goals in our lives. Unless we keep track of where we are and how we intend to move from one place to the next in pursuit of our goals, we soon lose our ability to navigate.¹ Teachers (and loving parents) show us things we haven't seen before, point out new dimensions of the things we have, and present confusing stuff in understandable and manageable ways to help us learn some of the crucial skills that enable us to orientate ourselves towards a given goal. Eventually, we become more adept and gradually take over these skills to steer and pilot ourselves to reach these goals independently.

Another lesson from the London Underground

I was on a Tube train in London some years ago when a father got on with his son, a boy of no more than 5 or 6 years old. I can't say this account is word for word because it happened a long time ago and I didn't record it, but these are the parts I remember vividly. Within a minute or two the boy was looking up at the linear diagram above his head showing the stations on the Piccadilly Line of the London Underground. The father noticed his son's interest and said: 'That's the map of all the stations on the Piccadilly Line. It's so we know where to get off.'

'Where are we getting off?'

'Knightsbridge. Can you see where it says Knightsbridge?'

The boy shook his head, so his father pointed it out.

'See? It says *Knights ... bridge*,' underlining the syllables with his finger.

'Why do you think it is called Knightsbridge?'

1 See Jordan Peterson, *Twelve Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (London: Penguin, 2018), ch. 4.

'I don't know – does a knight have a bridge there?'

'Maybe,' replied the father, amused. 'It's a good question. He may have at one time. Can you count how many stations we've got to go until we get there?'

'Where are we now?' asked the boy.

'Here ... at King's Cross. Look, *King's ... Cross.*'

'Why is it called King's Cross? Did a king have a cross there?'

The father laughed again. 'Yeah! He did actually.'

'Why?'

'In the olden days, people travelling to London on horses or on foot needed to know they were getting close to the centre of the city, so there were crosses to mark the way.'

'Really?'

'Yeah. Look, here's King's Cross and here's Knightsbridge. Let's count the stations ...'

At that point, the boy moved to climb onto the seat to see the diagram better but his father told him to get down. The boy asked why he couldn't stand on the seats and his father replied: 'Because people have to sit on these seats and they don't want to sit where your dirty feet have been.'

For the next minute or so the father pointed at the stations and read the names as the boy counted them. When he had finished, the boy went back to Covent Garden – one of the stations pointed out by his father.

'Does that say "garden"?''

'Yes.'

'Is there a garden there?'

'Not any more,' replied his father. 'But I think there was once.'

'What's a covent?'

'Another name for a convent, I think. That's a place where nuns live.'

'What are nuns?'

'Women who love God, pray a lot and do good things for poor people. But it doesn't say *Convent* Garden – it says *Covent* Garden. See, there's no "n" in it. If there was an "n" there (pointing), it would say *convent*.'

At that point another passenger, equally entertained by this masterclass of paternal tuition, pointed out to the little boy: 'Actually, you're right! There was once a convent in a garden there, and that's why it used to be called *Convent* Garden!'

The boy's face lit up and he looked at his father with a satisfied grin. His father laughed. It was my stop. So I got off.

This father may have consciously learned some teaching techniques – questioning, counting by pointing, sounding out letters and syllables – or he simply may have intuited the behaviours of how to pass on skills and knowledge, motivated by his love for his child. But it wasn't just skills and knowledge the father was passing on; he was passing on morality too. At the point where he corrected his son's attempt to stand on the seats, he explained why he shouldn't – thus regulating the behaviour the boy ought to display and thereby passing on virtues and values. Either way, the father was doing a brilliant job at *teaching* his son.

Humans developed teaching – the process by which to educate – to answer the questions that only humans ask. As far as we know, human beings are the highest developed proponents of the ability to consciously question and then set targets from which to learn. As far as we know, no other species has been able to refine the practice of teaching and educating its young to the extent that humans have: the passing on of skills to use tools, the wisdom to imbibe knowledge, the development of reasoning and judgement, the refinement of perception and intuition and, above all, the constant asking of the question 'why?'²

Teaching as a calling

What teachers teach and what children learn is not solely focused on the cognitive. It is also about how to want, to feel, to do and to be. I often hear trainee teachers tell me that teaching is a 'vocation'. I understand what they mean, but sometimes I think they confuse this with modern connotations of the word, which focus on training in the practical application of skills. The word vocation comes from the Latin *vocare* meaning 'a calling', which referred to a religious 'calling to serve God', as a priest might. The

2 See Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), ch. 19.

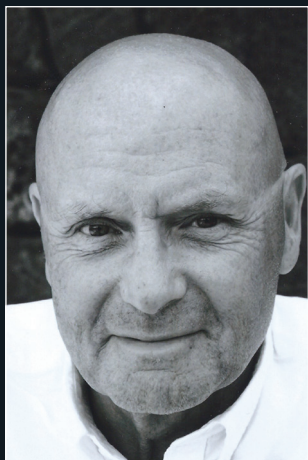
word has also evolved to express a sense of purpose that others, such as doctors, nurses and teachers, might feel about their role in society. What they do is not just a job, it is a mission.

A person with a deep sense of vocation, therefore, is someone who is not dependent on constant positive reinforcement. If you are hoping your class of children will thank you every day for the wonderful lessons you teach them, you are probably going to be disappointed. You will almost certainly not get a daily adrenalin rush of triumph at witnessing some cognitive leap forward. There will be times when you may not even feel much sense of satisfaction. I once went a whole year feeling frustrated, undervalued and, I admit, angry – but I went home every night still knowing I was doing a job that was intrinsically good.

For the majority of the children you will teach, any realisation that you have done a good job may come as a reflection later in their life, when it is probably too late for them to tell you. They may suddenly remember a moment in your class when they recall the patient way you showed them for the umpteenth time how to tie their shoelaces or the gentle, sympathetic tone you used in order to explain an arithmetical procedure, or the excitement triggered by the passion you had for history, geography, science or sports. It may even come as late as when they are themselves parents, perhaps trying to teach their own children something for the first time. During the various lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, it struck me how often parents appeared on television and radio singing the praises of their children's teachers; until they had to 'homeschool' them, they hadn't realised the extent of the knowledge and skills required and the sheer hard work involved in teaching children.

This is an important conceptual lesson for a teacher, or indeed anyone in any profession. Most of the really important fundamental achievements in human existence occur over a generation or longer, not in the timeline of a day, a month, a year or even a working life. We must satisfy ourselves that we are committing to a generational process that transcends our lifetimes. The brevity of our lives as teachers is compensated for by subscription to a historic commitment. Your teaching, as technically proficient as it may be, is not merely about passing on skills and knowledge or even creating opportunities for experiences that enable growth and reflection. Your teaching contributes significantly to the development of moral values: the knowledge of the difference between right and wrong; the ability to choose between right and wrong; the capacity to select and employ a range of virtues that will form the kind of character that can stand up for right and stand against wrong.

This book makes the claim that teaching is a profession (a discussion we will address shortly), but that is not an assumption you should take for granted. Indeed, whether teaching is a profession or not has been a hotly contested notion at times, not least in recent decades. In many ways, professions are a particular construct of a society at a given time and place, and teaching is no different. The demise of communism at the



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He now writes and speaks on ethics and professional values in teaching, and presents lectures to thousands of students each year at universities and school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) providers across the country.

Alan also runs the award-winning social media network newteacherstalk.com.

This book is a wonderful read and a perfect 'new teacher' gift.
[Katarina Pillai, primary school early career teacher \(ECT\), LETTA Trust school](#)

I was hooked from the start! A thoroughly thought-provoking
read and a pleasure to engage with.

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An excellent book that gives everyone food for thought, and an essential
and invaluable resource for new and experienced teachers.

[Aimee Lascelles, PGDE student, University of Dundee](#)

Alan's book provides a genuine account of the experience of teaching. Absolutely brilliant.

[Patricia Duncan, Secondary PGCE student, University of Worcester](#)

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. It gripped me from the first page
and at times I had to drag myself away from reading it.

[Bryher Freight, secondary school ECT, Cornwall](#)

I think Alan's pearls of wisdom will stay with me and support me throughout my career.

[Hannah Mitchell, second-year student, Primary BA QTS, Edge Hill University](#)

I highly recommend *Becoming a Teacher* as a core course text. It will be an invaluable
companion for trainees throughout the PGCE year and support them during their ECT years too.

[Michelle Wormald, Programme Director – Secondary PGCE, University of Hull](#)

We will be providing all of our trainees with a copy of this
book at the start of our training programme.

[Stuart Russell, Director of ITT, Kent and Medway Teacher Training](#)

This book has tremendous merit and value, providing a key point of reference for
students. Alan addresses sensitive issues in depth – issues that often cause
confusion and uncertainty among trainees and ECTs.

[Suzanne Allies, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Worcester](#)

I would encourage all trainee teachers to read this book. Alan draws on his own
experience to highlight the practical implications of each topic, making it relevant
to all teachers, not just trainees. It should be an essential text for all ITT courses.

[John Taplin, Programme Facilitator, Northampton Teacher Training Partnership](#)

I will most certainly be using this book on our courses. The narrative style is lively
and refreshing, and portrays a frank and honest discussion of the challenges that
teachers face through real-life and authentic anecdotes.

[Alison Hales, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Greenwich](#)



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