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Note: Every effort has been made to provide accurate and current Internet information in this book. However, the Internet and information posted on it are constantly changing. It is ineveitable that some of the Internet addresses listed in this textbook will change.

CHAPTER 1

Teaching and Reflective Decision Making

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this book we explore how decision making contributes to the effectiveness and empowerment of teachers. Empowerment involves a feeling of self-efficacy—the knowledge that you make a difference in your work environment and that what you do as a teacher affects how students learn. An empowered teacher has assumed the responsibility to be a reflective decision maker, an active designer of instruction who reflects on teaching practices and student learning. We consider how reflective teaching is like bridge building and examine the power and importance of relationships in teaching.

Where are we heading?

Consider two alternative styles of teaching: the consumer versus the reflective decision maker. The **teacher-consumer**, through preference or circumstance, permits the curriculum—the content and methods of what is taught—to be determined and organized by others. Typically, the teacher-consumer has surrendered to the textbook the responsibility to define, analyze, and develop the curriculum. As consumers, they may follow the teacher's manual verbatim, without considering the worth of each topic or activity to the students in a particular school or classroom. They may not consult other teachers and experts to explore alternative methods and resources. Thus they do not participate in the creative process that brings curriculum to life.

Delegating all decisions about curriculum to a textbook poses significant risks. Textbooks present a wide variety of topics and often include an abundant assortment of important and unimportant, relevant and irrelevant information (Erickson, 1998). That information includes the concepts, skills, and phenomena that should be emphasized, with the addition of "details, embellishments; redundancies, illustrations, examples, facts, and names" (Dempster, 1993, p. 434). Too often, the student loses the point of the lesson in the midst of the profusion of information. Furthermore, the teacher may teach too many topics superficially, without sufficient depth for learning to take place. Similarly, teachers can become overwhelmed by the profusion of content standards that 21st-century students are required to master. Without careful attention to priorities and thoughtful planning, both teachers and students can be buried in ineffectively applied requirements (Carr & Harris, 2001).

Contrast the teacher-consumer with the reflective decision maker or with the **teacher-designer**, who uses content standards to develop district and/or grade-level goals, clarifies the outcomes to be learned and ways of assessing them, creates units of study, and only then decides what instructional materials, activities, and assessments are appropriate. Textbooks may be used, but the teacher (or team of teachers), not the textbook, is the major decision maker. Key topics are taught in sufficient depth to develop understanding; topics of little importance are eliminated.

Teacher decision makers have the fullest opportunity to flex and stretch their reflective thinking. They make *planning* decisions by choosing and analyzing content, clarifying outcomes, selecting learning activities, and assessing student performance. They make *implementation* decisions as they design and teach units and lessons, assess learning, make adjustments for individual student needs, and enhance their students' thinking skills. Finally, they make decisions about *classroom management*, applying their beliefs and principles about individual human beings and communities to create and maintain a positive learning environment.

After completing instruction, reflective teachers analyze student success and revise their teaching plans accordingly. Yet these teachers are interested in more than just what goes on in their classrooms. They participate actively with others in professional development activities, and constant learning (Beerens, 2000). They also take an active interest in the growth of their profession and the recurring need for educational change and improvement (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1991; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999).

This text explores a wide range of issues, strategies, and topics that teachers must consider in the 21st century. Further, it reflects on the characteristics of an effective decision maker.

A number of teacher-educators have used the term *teacher reflection* to describe a teacher's instructional decision making (Schon, 1987, 1991; Spring, 1985; Zeichner, 1996; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). The many views of teacher reflection (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Valli, 1997) range from the *technical view* (e.g., How well are the techniques I'm using working?) to the *critical* ethical/moral view (e.g., What are the long-term effects on society of this content or this technique?) (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993). A common definition consistent with the approach taken in this book is "the teacher's ability to make rational educational choices and to assume responsibility for one's choices" (Ross, 1987, p. 2), in other words, to make thoughtful instructional decisions. A key aspect of such decision making is to consider multiple points of view rather than acting on the first idea that comes to mind.

Our work has focused on the question, What do teachers need to think about when making a teaching decision? Good teaching decisions are based on much more complicated questions than these: What shall I do on Monday? What works? Decisions that appear to be straightforward are related to multiple variables. Each must be weighed according to its impact on students, both short and long term. Reflecting on these variables is a complex process, and not every educator engages in it. In fact, we have observed that frequently a person who attempts to tell you there is one right way to teach hasn't taught very many students—or is trying to sell you something!

Reflective teachers ask themselves, Is this an effective technique for this type of lesson? They also ask: Is it suited to this group of students? Do I have the necessary skills to use it? Does it model ethics I believe in? Is it fair? Is it important? Will I be able to look back on this day and feel I have done what students needed most? We cannot answer these questions for you, although teaching would be much easier if we could.

Rather than describing a single methodology, we have attempted to provide a broad range of options. We have our preferred strategies, which you'll probably be able to discern, but it is most important that you thoughtfully identify and follow your own process and beliefs. Reflective teachers carefully weigh knowledge of how students learn and develop with knowledge of the best practices in pedagogy and a host of other variables. This book will help give you the tools you need in order to consider a wide variety of factors in making wise educational decisions.

SECTION 1. TEACHING RESEMBLES BRIDGE BUILDING

Section 1 Objective

After you have completed this section, you will be able to describe how bridge building resembles teaching and learning

This is a book about teaching and even about bridge building, metaphorically speaking. It will help you learn a lot about the things teachers do and the ways they help students learn. It will help you begin to understand the way teachers think when they plan lessons, teach, and consider whether their lessons are successful.

Two Ends of the Bridge—Students and Content

Teachers build many kinds of bridges. We can imagine teachers building bridges to connect them to their students or to connect students. Similarly, we can imagine building bridges between subjects or between one idea and another. Perhaps the most basic bridge a teacher must build is the bridge between a student and the content the teacher hopes the student will learn (see Figure 1.1).

Metaphors, like this metaphor of a bridge, can be powerful tools in learning. They provide us with another view of important topics, in this case the process of reflective teaching. Stop for a minute and think how teaching is like building a bridge between a student and the content and what you would need in order to build a good bridge. Jot a few ideas on paper before you continue reading.

In order to build a bridge between a student and the content, you need to know a lot about your students. You must know what the students already understand about the topic, their interests, and their current and needed skills. You also should know how the students

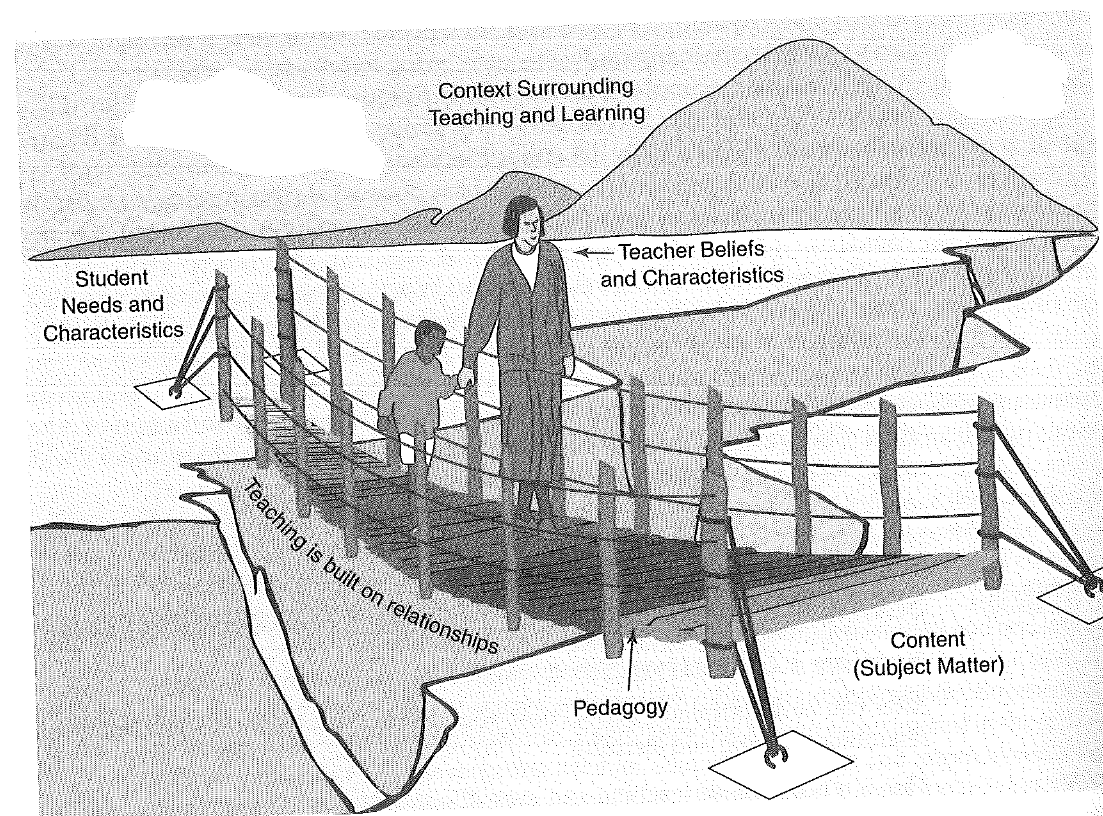


Figure 1.1 Five Factors Contributing to Teaching Decisions
From *Teaching as Decision Making: Successful Practices for the Elementary Teacher* (p. 6), by A. J. Starko, et al., 2003, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall. Copyright 2003 by Pearson Education, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

learn best and how their background can help in the learning process. Your end of the bridge will have to be wide, reflecting your full understanding of your many students. This will be a challenge, since you will have many students, each needing to cross the bridge.

The other end of the bridge is equally important. In order to build an effective bridge between students and content, you need to know the content well. Again, your end of the structure must be wide, reflecting your in-depth understanding of the subject to be learned. It is not enough to know *some information*. As a teacher, you need to know how to find the *most important information*, the ideas that will help students learn and grow for years to come. Time in school is too precious to waste on ideas that are trivial. You must anchor this end of the bridge to powerful ideas that will help students understand new content, solve problems, and ask important questions.

The Middle of the Bridge—Teaching

Once the two ends of the bridge are firmly anchored, you must actually build it. This is the part of the process we most commonly associate with teaching. When we build the bridge, we plan lessons and activities for students that will help them understand the content, moving them from what they know to what they do not know. It is ideal to build a bridge that is strong enough to support students on their journeys *and* scenic, so they may cross with joy and interest. To do so, you will need lessons that are clear, well-structured, and interesting. The lessons will need to be familiar enough to make students comfortable, challenging enough to move them forward, and novel enough to interest them. This is no small challenge!

It is also important to understand the conditions under which the bridge is built. Just as bridge building needs to be appropriate for the climate and geography of the area, so will your teaching need to be suitable for the **context** in which you teach. Activities or goals that may be appropriate for one group may be unsuitable in another political, cultural, economic, or social environment. It would be interesting to consider what kinds of contexts might be analogous to sunny days, swampy ground, or earthquakes. Think about the elements of this bridge-building metaphor as you consider the teacher decision-making model below.

SECTION 2. REFLECTIVE TEACHER DECISION MAKING

Section 2 Objectives

After you have completed this section, you will be able to:

1. consider a variety of factors when planning and reflecting on teaching results; and
2. develop a vision of the kind of caring relationships you will establish in your classroom learning community.

Teaching is a complex endeavor. No one learning activity will work with all students, in all circumstances, or for all types of content and objectives. The teacher must make a conscious decision every moment about what to do. Such decisions are based on a great

deal of information and must often be made in a split second. At other times, you will be able to take more time to reflect on the complexities of teaching and learning, for example, when you are making lesson plans and redesigning lessons. The decision-making model attempts to clarify the factors to be considered when making teaching decisions.

REFLECTING ON THE IDEAS

Reflective teachers make a full range of decisions about planning, implementation, and management. Imagine yourself sitting at your desk planning a lesson for a class you will teach. Make a list of all the factors, issues, and knowledge a teacher needs to consider when making such teaching decisions.

In Figure 1.1 our bridge shows five factors that contribute to successful and responsible teaching decisions: the students, the subject matter (content), pedagogy (knowledge about teaching), the learning context, and the teacher (Richardson, 1996; Shulman, 1986).

Let's consider each factor in greater detail. The first factor influencing teaching decisions is **student needs and characteristics**. This is the first end of the bridge in Figure 1.1. The teacher needs to consider students' home background and culture when trying to relate new ideas to their prior experiences. For example, referring to curling to illustrate a point in a science lesson may totally confuse a student who has never seen that sport. In contrast, a teacher who utilizes students' knowledge of seesaws when teaching the concept of fulcrum makes a connection that facilitates learning. Students' developmental levels and learning styles may also influence the choice of activities. Teachers need to include multiple pathways for learning that include all senses and appeal to all students' interests and talents.

Considering teaching situations from the perspective of students' needs can make the difference between technical and critical reflective thinking (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). For example, if a student is disruptive in class, a teacher who is thinking only about the technical aspects of "How will I complete this lesson?" will approach the situation differently than one who considers, "What might be causing the student to act this way?" In the first instance, the teacher is likely to look for the quickest way to quiet the disruptive student—probably some type of disciplinary consequence. In the second case, the teacher might think of multiple possibilities, ranging from lack of sufficient challenge in the lesson to lesson content that conflicts with values taught in the student's home. Those needs would result in different strategies for addressing the problem.

The **subject matter**, or content (at the other end of the bridge), also influences teaching decisions. Each subject will have standards set by the state or district that specify key student learning outcomes for the different grade levels. Teaching science may call for certain activities, whereas teaching literature may require different strategies. Understanding content is important, but it is not sufficient. A good teacher must be able to "translate" ideas so that students understand them. It may take several attempts before a teacher discovers how to represent a complex idea so it makes sense to students.

A significant influence on decision making is how much the teacher knows about **pedagogy**: teaching, learning, assessment, and classroom management. The teacher needs a professional knowledge base of concepts, theories, and techniques to draw upon. These ideas include knowledge of human development, learning theory, multicultural education, assessment strategies, and teaching methods, to name a few. They are important tools for bridge building.

Another very important aspect of a teacher's thinking is the **context**, the conditions that influence everyday classroom life. The social, cultural, and political forces in the school, district, and community help determine what is taught and sometimes how it is taught. For example, many state departments of education are holding educators accountable for their students' learning of state standards.

Finally, **teacher characteristics and beliefs** have an important impact on decision making. Teacher traits such as self-confidence, enthusiasm, cultural background, intelligence, and commitment affect what a teacher will do on a particular day. Personal beliefs, or philosophy, about students' ability to learn, the purposes of school, and social values will also influence a teacher's choice of actions.

Teachers are shaped by their culture's assumptions about truth, learning, intelligence, and work. Often a teacher's beliefs about teaching can be expressed in metaphors used to describe their work, like the metaphor of the bridge cited here. Think about the ways two teachers' classrooms might differ if one viewed teaching as planting seeds and waiting for harvest, while the other viewed it as parallel to athletic coaching. Reflective teachers are aware of the beliefs, values, and assumptions that underlie their teaching and are able to reexamine those beliefs when appropriate (Langer, Colton, & Goff, 2003).

It is important to consider all five factors (students, subject matter, pedagogy, context, and teacher beliefs) before, during, and after teaching. For example, when designing curriculum and lessons before teaching, the teacher may consider the following questions: What do I know about the students' backgrounds and interests? What do students know or believe about this topic? What objective do I want students to achieve? Which concepts are most important? What types of activities will I need for students to learn the necessary content? What problems may arise during the lesson? What strategies have I planned in order to confront problems if they arise?

During teaching, the teacher observes how well the ideas are being understood by students and reflects on all five factors as possible explanations for why the lesson seems to be going well or not. For example, if students seem confused by the lesson, the teacher might reflect upon the following questions: Is this lesson out of sync with students' cultural experiences? Are the students distracted by something that happened at lunch? Am I continuing with the same activity too long? Do I need to get students actively involved? Using this information, the teacher makes adjustments as needed in the pace, depth, and complexity of the lesson. Such decisions may even require shifting to a different activity or, in unusual circumstances, changing to a different lesson and objective(s).

After teaching, the reflective teacher evaluates the success of the lesson by asking: What do the students' work and responses tell me about how well they attained the objective(s)? Why was the lesson successful or unsuccessful? What could I have done differently? What have I learned about my students or about this topic? The five factors can help answer these questions. The teacher can then use this information to revise the lessons as necessary and to plan future ones more intelligently.

In your field experiences and early years of teaching, you will begin to see how these ideas can be woven together into the wonderful complexity of teaching.

Relationships and the Caring Community

Another important idea is the way two of our factors—the students and the teacher—come together. Consider once more our metaphorical bridge. Even if the bridge is built well, with strong ties to the students' world and strong links to the content, it is of little use unless the students cross over willingly with the teacher. One of the great truths about teaching is hard to learn from a book: *Teaching is about relationships.* In the end, students must trust you enough to come across the bridge with you. Going to new places can be frightening. A caring relationship allows students to find the courage to try new things, risk failure, and learn to grow. These relationships are at the heart of teaching. Caring relationships sometimes mean being gentle and other times being stern. At all times they require us to view each student as one of our planet's most priceless treasures.

In a caring community, we build students' skills and their hope. Students who enter our door must understand that we know they can learn. They must know that we expect them to learn, we care whether or not they learn, and we intend to help them so that they do learn. The concept of caring is an essential element of effective teaching (Noddings, 1992, 1995; Pang, 2001).

Goleman (1995) makes the argument that emotional intelligence (EQ) is a set of patterns, behaviors, and kinds of thought that are essential for success both in learning and in the workplace. He believes that effective educators must both teach and model appropriate affective and cognitive development. These include such components as

Caring is at the Center of Good Teaching.

self-awareness, independence, optimism, accountability, empathy, and the ability to manage one's feelings. Goleman (2000) suggests that school curricula must include a more complete "emotional literacy curriculum" that addresses issues such as handling stress, conflict resolution, decision making, and group dynamics.

Given the many other demands on busy teachers' time and school schedules, teachers may question whether we can assume responsibility for emotional development that has been traditionally centered in the home. Goleman and others would argue that we have no choice. In a culture in which school violence is often part of the headlines, one of the most important things we do may be taking time to teach emotional skills. Still others suggest that the links between emotional intelligence and life success are more complex, and that it is important to attend to the emerging body of research before making whole-scale changes in curriculum (see, for example, Cobb & Mayer, 2000, Mayer & Cobb, 2000). However the research emerges, it seems reasonable to assume that teaching to support healthy emotional development is most likely to occur in a climate of healthy relationships between students and teachers, with teachers modeling the kinds of affect and the kinds of intellect to which their students should aspire.

Still another way to focus on the types of relationships that are needed in classrooms is the increasing interest in the idea of linking spirituality and education, both as a means of fostering relationships and as a vehicle for developing character. Many teachers are uncomfortable with the thought that spirituality may have a place in public education. The important division between church and state makes any practice that could be interpreted as promoting specific religious beliefs inappropriate. Yet writing in this area has increased to the point that a major publication, *Educational Leadership*, devoted an entire issue (December 1998/January 1999) to exploring "The Spirit of Education." The interest in this issue was so great that it sold out more rapidly than any issue in the history of the publication.

Palmer (1998, 1998/1999) describes spirituality as "the ancient and abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos—with our own soul, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of being alive" (1998/1999, p. 6). From Palmer's perspective, the courage to teach is the courage required to open our hearts and ourselves to the relationships required to teach. It requires asking the important questions that are embedded in all disciplines: Does life have meaning? What can I trust? How do we deal with suffering? How do we appreciate beauty? These are not questions we can answer for our students. They are questions that can be explored together while studying a myriad of academic subjects, building and requiring relationships of trust in safe communities.

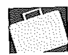
Renard and Rogers (1999) have developed a more complex model of relationship-driven teaching. Their model centers on fulfilling students' fundamental emotional needs so that learning can take place. If students' emotional needs are being met in school, they are more likely to engage in learning (Rogers, Graham, & Ludington, 1998). When students believe teachers care about them, they are more motivated to learn and more likely to cross the metaphorical bridges we are building. Renard and Rogers describe two underlying principles and six standards that strengthen relationship-driven teaching. They can be useful as we consider ways to build communities in a variety of classrooms.

The first principle is based on the work of Covey (1989), "seeking first to understand" (Renard & Rogers, 1999, p. 35). Our first goal in building relationships with students is to seek to understand them. We must understand the knowledge, beliefs, experiences, and interests of our students as they are—not as we would like them to be. The second principle involves managing the learning context, not the learners. It requires establishing school situations likely to foster **intrinsic motivation**, motivation that comes from within the students, so that teachers do not attempt to dominate or control students from the outside. Teachers who are able to manage conditions, rather than students, are more likely to motivate students.

The six standards described below (Renard & Rogers, 1999) are designed to build a motivating teaching context.

1. *Safe.* Safety in school must include not just physical safety (although that certainly is important), but emotional safety as well. Students must know that they will be safe from threats, intimidation, or embarrassment. In a safe classroom, students are free to take risks and try new things.
2. *Valuable.* Students are more likely to engage and persist in learning if they perceive that what they are doing is valuable. Valuable content fills a need, solves a problem, and can be interesting and enjoyable.
3. *Successful.* Students need evidence of their success to maintain motivation. They need activities which are challenging enough that they recognize their growth while still allowing for success.
4. *Involving.* Students are more motivated to learn when they feel they have a stake in what is going on around them. Students who take part in planning an activity or other decisions about their learning are more motivated to continue.
5. *Caring.* Everyone wants to be liked. Students want to feel that their teachers accept, value, and care about them. The harder some children are to like, the more they probably need to know you care. Caring can be very hard work.
6. *Enabling.* Good teachers constantly seek out the best practices that help their students learn. They continue to learn and grow in search of teaching methods that will be effective with all students, rather than relying on "tried and true" methods that work with many students but leave some behind.

The Responsive Classroom model (Charney, 1992; Horsch, Chen, & Nelson, 1999) briefly described in Chapter 11 is another example of a model of teaching and management focused specifically on the development of self-management and motivation in classroom communities.



REFLECTING ON THE IDEAS

Observe a teacher you consider to be effective. Be particularly attuned to the things the teacher does to develop positive relationships with students and foster intrinsic motivation. It may be helpful to divide a paper into the six areas listed above and make notes of behaviors that appear to fit each category. Share your observations with a colleague, and look for similarities and differences.

As you study this text and learn about teacher reflection and planning, consider how the activities you plan for your classroom may facilitate strong relationships and student motivation. Fortunately, there are many times in education when an instructional choice can serve more than one goal. For example, in Chapter 2 you will learn that some scholars believe that an emotionally safe classroom atmosphere is more compatible with brain development than one that is highly competitive or negative. Other scholars would recommend the same type of atmosphere but for different reasons: perhaps to develop the relationships of trust necessary for student motivation. Be alert to other parallel recommendations. In many cases the strategies that are recommended for optimum cognitive growth also will serve important affective functions and vice versa. In the end, whatever strategies you choose for teaching will form the structure of the bridge you cross with your students. It will be the heart of your teaching—the community of relationships you build in your classes—that will determine whether you cross successfully.

Practice Activity

Practice Point

Choose a metaphor and relate to it a brief reflection describing your view of the core role of a teacher. You may wish to develop this metaphor into a more formal description of your philosophy of teaching. It can be helpful to examine your metaphor and your philosophy periodically and see if they have changed as you have developed in experience and expertise.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

We have provided a model for reflective teacher decision making, a metaphor for thinking about teaching, and information on the importance of relationships in teaching. The rest of the book develops your ability to design instructional units and manage your classroom. As you explore the chapters that follow, examine the information in a careful and systematic way and respond to the exercises provided. We have written this book because we believe the information can help you to be the best teacher possible. We hope that you will find the information both practical and thought provoking. It is our vision for you to become a reflective teacher "designer," capable of making thoughtful and appropriate instructional decisions. We wish you well on the journey.

Unit Preparation

As you read this text, we will describe a process for creating a teaching unit. If you complete each "Unit Preparation" section in turn, you will develop an original teaching unit by the time you complete this text. To begin, it is important that you determine the audience for your unit. Ideally, you should prepare a unit for a real classroom, preferably one in which you are currently doing a variety of field experiences.

Identify that class now. Begin talking to the teacher about content areas that would be appropriate for unit planning and special class needs you should consider. Find out whether content in that class is typically organized in single-subject or interdisciplinary units. You probably will find the unit planning process easier to use in content that is organized around key concepts rather than skills. For example, a unit on types of poetry or habitats will fit this planning model more readily than a unit on how to read a map, although map reading could be embedded in many units. More detailed information on selecting unit content will be found in Chapter 3.

For now, it is most important to make a decision about the class for which you will be preparing materials and the general areas you might address. *Begin reading in that area now.* It is essential that you have a solid understanding of the content yourself before trying to teach it to others. Do not make the mistake of thinking that because you are teaching adolescents your content knowledge can be limited. Selecting the most important content for secondary school students requires teachers to know far more than they teach. Only by knowing the content well can you make good decisions about content emphases and organization. Be sure to keep all relevant bibliographic information for your reference list. Keep track of any commercial materials or materials that you use in the unit and reference them appropriately.

Portfolio Activity

The Portfolio Activities in this text are designed to help you compile a collection of materials that can be helpful in demonstrating your knowledge and reflection about teaching and learning. In some cases the Unit Preparation activities also can serve as parts of your portfolio. In other cases we will suggest additional activities. For example, one of the most powerful means of describing our beliefs about teaching is through the metaphors we use. The metaphor you wrote for the last practice activity could be polished and placed at the front of your portfolio to illustrate your educational philosophy.

Search the Web

The World Wide Web can be a valuable resource for reflective teachers seeking information on content, research on teaching, or even lesson ideas. A strength of web publishing is that it is accessible to many individuals; many teachers and organizations throughout the world are able to post information for others to share. Of course, it is a challenge to carefully review and determine the credibility of the source and accuracy of the information on the web. Further, many web addresses are unstable; if you visit a website today (or we print one in this text), there is no guarantee it will exist next year. The teacher who created it may have taken another position with a different address, the organization may have lost its web-savvy organizer, or any number of other scenarios may exist.

We will cite web resources that appear to be stable and will probably continue to be useful for many years. One of the most important of these resources is the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. It provides links to virtually any type of document about education and a variety of search services. To find the ERIC Clearinghouse for middle-level resources, go to: ericeece.org/midlink.html

Use the following addresses for ERIC resources on the teaching of the subjects indicated:

Science and Math: www.ericse.org
Social Studies/Social Science: ericso.Indiana.edu
Reading, English, and Communication: eric.Indiana.edu
Languages and Linguistics: www.cal.org/ericcll

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TOPIC 1

Planning for Instruction: Setting the Stage