



# MORE THAN 'JUST' A TEACHER



## Lynne Bianchi considers what it means to be a primary science teacher today

**H**ow often when asked 'What do you do?' have you replied 'I'm just a teacher'? Most of us often pass ourselves off as 'just' teachers, when in truth we are so much more. Teacher, adviser, consultant, confidante, manager, leader, partner, collaborator, role model, councillor, researcher, learner, friend – which one are you? What else should be added to this list?

Of course, in the 21st-century education system teachers are expected to carry out roles well beyond 'just' encouraging learning in others. The expectations on us as teachers are much greater and, after being prompted by a fellow editorial board member to read the report *Teaching Scotland's future* (Donaldson, 2011), I feel a sense of relief in seeing, in black and white, what we have been working so hard to promote for many years.

### The Scottish view

Donaldson endorses a range of partnerships to enhance engagement of young people in

science education and seeks to provide us with food for thought with regard to teacher education in Scotland, and no doubt more broadly and in professional life itself. The report focuses strongly on initial teacher education and considers how the 'vital early phase in the development of new teachers must be relevant, coherent and of high quality' and that 'our prospective teachers deserve and are capable of more than we currently ask of them' (p. 6). I would go on to suggest that this is true of most in our teaching profession, who have the critical insight, experience and drive to do so much but are often stifled by protocols, hierarchy and poor leadership.

In England we stand at a crossroads in primary science education, unsure of which route the government will send us on and, indeed, whether it will be the way we would have chosen or the best for our young people. We reflect in staff rooms, cluster meetings, over the dinner table and in our hearts about what we would really like to see happen, and we identify with precision

the mistakes we feel have been made in the past. We are already a lot like Donaldson wishes us to be: 'reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals who have the capacity to engage fully with the complexities of education and to be key actors in shaping and leading educational change' (p. 4).

I allow a wry smile as Donaldson affirms a proactive view of teacher education and looks towards promoting a 'more integrated relationship between theory and practice, between the academic and the practitioner, between the provider of teacher education and the school'. My career in teaching has always aspired to achieve such integration and many of us who have explored the world of continuing professional development, diplomas, master's degrees, diplomas in education and doctorates will instinctively seek out ways to ground our practice in theories of learning.

**Key words:**  
Nature of science  
ITE  
CPD

Teacher, adviser, consultant, confidante, manager, leader, partner, collaborator, role model, councillor, researcher, learner, friend – which one are you?

most in our teaching profession... have the critical insight, experience and drive to do so much but are often stifled by protocols, hierarchy and poor leadership

It is gratifying to read this Scottish view and to feel that many of us have been following the right path, using our own instinctive wisdom, when encouraging teachers and clusters of schools to try out innovative ideas related to improving the experience of learners in science. With the backing and support of a wide range of funders, including the Comino Foundation, local authorities, and the AstraZeneca Science Teaching Trust, the approach we use at the Centre for Science Education at Sheffield Hallam University to teacher-informed innovation and development can't be all wrong!

engage as much as possible in critical reflection on your classroom experiences and on new legislation and place your own professional stamp on what you do and how you do it

### The English situation

It is disheartening to search for, but not find, similar encouragement from the English government. So much of what has been good for teachers in supporting the development and refinement of their 'craft' is (or

### Websites

AstraZeneca Science Teaching Trust CPD Units: [www.azteachscience.co.uk/resources/cpd.aspx](http://www.azteachscience.co.uk/resources/cpd.aspx)  
Centre for Science Education, Sheffield Hallam University: [www.smart-science.co.uk](http://www.smart-science.co.uk); [www.shu.ac.uk/research/cse](http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/cse)  
Comino Foundation: [www.cominofoundation.org.uk](http://www.cominofoundation.org.uk)

was) supported by local authority advisers, subject associations and outside agencies. We learned a lot through these collaborations and innovations, but these bodies are now squeezed financially to within an inch of their lives; *Teachers TV* was a testament to much of this, so what a shame that is in the place it is now.

Donaldson does right to remind, not only the Scottish initial education system, but all of us that, *'The "craft" components of teaching must be based upon and informed by fresh insights into how best to meet the increasingly fast pace of change in the world which our children inhabit'* (pp. 4–5). We must allow the time for those who aspire to be leaders and those who work hard to develop others as leaders to bring that 'freshness' to the classroom through professional development, collaborative work with other schools, and networks underpinned by critical reflection on practice.

At the Centre for Science Education we look for networks of teachers who wish to push boundaries. We pride ourselves on the way that we work in partnership with these teachers, providing foundations and starting points for thinking about learning. As I sit here and write I urge you, as students, lecturers, teachers, head teachers and co-education enthusiasts, to respond to the challenge that Donaldson sets us by endeavouring to push forward a culture of learning in our profession in which both theory and practice are deep rooted. I urge you to engage as much as possible in critical reflection on your classroom experiences and on new legislation and to place your own professional stamp on what you do and how you do it. Sometimes it does feel safer to do it together. Join groups such as our own at Sheffield Hallam, at your local university or college, within your cluster network or simply collaborate with the teacher in the classroom next to you. Investigate opportunities to forge links to even the smallest of projects where the focus is

on understanding more about what we do and how it works. By doing this we enter into a relationship with grounded action research that we may then take further if we wish.

You may think you are not part of this community of researchers, but if you are in the classroom and reflect upon your lessons, then of course you are. It may be too long winded to say that you are a *'reflective practitioner engaged in critical and grounded action research related to the teaching and learning of science'* when asked what you do, but as a teacher, by default, you are, and so you should be proud to say it and supported in doing it! We have one of the most powerful roles to play in the development of our young people. In a fast-moving world where time passes so very quickly, I urge you to do something that restores your commitment to doing more than 'just' teaching. Download the Donaldson report perhaps, explore the AstraZeneca Science Teaching Trust CPD units, find out who we are at the Centre for Science Education and see whether there are any projects you would be interested in learning about. And when you have done that, share it with someone else. By reading this alone you are already half way there: *Primary Science* is a great way of finding out what is going on in primary science across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – but you didn't need me to tell you that!

### Reference

Donaldson, G. (2011) *Teaching Scotland's future: Report of a review of teacher education in Scotland*. The Scottish Government. Available at: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/337626/0110852.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/337626/0110852.pdf)

Lynne Bianchi is a member of the *Primary Science* editorial board and a senior research fellow at Sheffield Hallam University.  
Email: [l.m.bianchi@shu.ac.uk](mailto:l.m.bianchi@shu.ac.uk)