

The three categories of teaching ‘knowledge’ (drawn from Cohran-Smith and Lytle, 1999)

Knowledge for practice

This includes well-established theories about the philosophy, psychology and sociology of education. The teacher learns the theories from lectures and by reading books and papers. It is knowledge which is treated as being objective and fixed.

Knowledge in practice

This develops as teachers practise their craft. It is the tacit knowledge that teachers use to think wisely in the classroom, making ‘in the moment’ decisions about teaching and learning. It is subjective and includes the things that teachers do instinctively when they respond to learners or change an activity which is not working. Teachers learn through reflection on practice and discussion with others.

Knowledge of practice

This is knowledge of the context. It includes the things that teachers instinctively ‘know’ about their context. Different teachers will experience the context differently, so this knowledge is subjective – it cannot be considered to be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Teachers work in the social and cultural environment to build a relationship with learners. Teacher learning involves being prepared to challenge their own assumptions and interpretations, and understanding the context in which they are working, including the needs and background of their learners, in order to develop their own teaching personality.

When a teacher moves schools, they need to work with colleagues to come to understand their new context. Teaching approaches that have worked before might need to be changed. Teachers learn through reflection on practice and collaboration with others.