

My Earth science educator story – Maggie Williams What I did, Why I did it and What happened



Taking a break from fieldwork in Argyll and Bute, UK, 2015. (Peter Williams).

A teaching career discovered by chance

I didn't plan to go into teaching. My journey began along another route providing an unexpected opportunity to discover that teaching was interesting, enjoyable and exciting.

In my last years at school I was torn between studying Latin, Greek and Geography or three Sciences. I eventually chose Sciences, intending to study Chemistry at university, but by the time I arrived at the University of Leicester I had become keen on rock climbing and changed to Geology instead. I thought Geology would allow greater chances than Chemistry to experience life in the great outdoors!

At university I was inspired by Bob King, a highly-regarded field mineralogist, museum curator and teacher in the Geology Department. While I was there, Bob, pursuing his interest in the mineralogy of Leicestershire as the subject of a part-time Ph.D., showed me that it was never too late to follow your dreams and seriously study a subject. Bob encouraged me to consider a career working in a museum and suggested a postgraduate Museum Studies course.

The end of my undergraduate course coincided with a great change in how museums were displaying collections to encourage museum visitors to interact with displays. It was also at the start of a trend towards appointing more educators and specialist communicators in museums so, to increase my chances of future employment in this sector, I decided to train as a teacher first.

After graduating, I moved to Keele for a one-year postgraduate teacher training course. On my probation year I taught at Gateacre Comprehensive School, Liverpool. During the years before I became a recognised teacher, I kept an interest in museum work by volunteering for work in the Schools' Museum Service, but widened my teaching experience by working with the North Staffordshire School for Travellers. After my first steps into teaching, I discovered I loved working with people and enjoyed helping students to learn.

Further steps along the career path



Teaching in the rain on a field course in Amroth, Pembrokeshire, Wales, UK, 2013. (Peter Williams).

I moved to Rock Ferry High School after qualifying. Later I worked at Birkenhead Sixth Form College where, after beginning as Head of Division, was appointed Assistant Principal.



Fieldwork on a fine day at Marloes, Pembrokeshire, Wales, UK, 2014. (*Peter Williams*).

Looking back at my career, one of the things about working in education is the variety of challenges and opportunities available. I taught Science, Chemistry, Geology and Geography and faced the challenges of setting up new Geology and Geography Departments. I learned how to support students with a range of skills, abilities and experiences and had the pleasure of seeing many students taking up careers in Geology.

I had the chance to stretch myself by taking additional responsibilities. As Head of Examinations, I developed my organisational skills. I uncovered my team building skills working as Staff Development Officer and Head of Library and Learning Resources. I gained experience working as Health and Safety Officer. As Estates, Premises and Services Manager I managed to develop expertise in Asset Management and found an ability to write Accommodation Strategies. For me teaching did not turn out to be a routine and boring career.

Discovering the Earth Science Teachers' Association (ESTA)

In 1971, I discovered the Earth Science Teachers' Association (ESTA). The support and advice I received from this Association proved to be invaluable, not least because its conferences provided opportunities to network, share experiences and ideas with other teachers.



Being presented with some replica fossils as Retiring Chair at the Earth Science Teachers' Conference, Plymouth University, England, UK, 2013. (*Hazel Clark*)

Eventually, I joined ESTA's Secondary Working Group. This allowed me to contribute to ESTA publications including '*Science of the Earth*' and '*Teaching Earth Sciences*'. Remembering the help I received in my early career, I decided to become more proactive about supporting ESTA's younger members. I worked as ESTA Treasurer, spent time as ESTA's Advertising Officer and later became ESTA Chair. I now manage ESTA's Facebook page, work as Special Projects Manager, produce ESTA's newsletter and help edit '*Teaching Earth Sciences*'

A change in course

In 2002, Multiple Sclerosis precipitated retirement from full-time teaching. During 2003 I was awarded a PhD in Earth Sciences after part-time study at the University of Liverpool. It had taken 7 years, 1 month, three weeks and two days to complete, but I visited Bob King soon after receiving my PhD. I needed to tell him I'd achieved one of my dreams and let him know how much as my teacher he had inspired me.

After completing my doctorate, I worked as a part-time research assistant at Liverpool. I am now Honorary Visiting Senior Fellow. In this capacity I teach on undergraduate modules and undertake outreach work. For outreach, I help work experience students, teach STEM Master Classes and run training courses for Geology teachers.



Presenting a session during a course for teachers of Geology, University of Liverpool, England, UK, 2014. *(Peter Williams)*.

Since joining the university, I inadvertently became custodian of several geological collections that had been donated to the university. By a circuitous route, I have finally ended up doing some museum-type work, spending part of each week curating geological materials and making teaching sets for use in schools.



Dressing up as Hockney at Walker Art Gallery as part of the exhibition: 'David Hockney: Early reflections', National Museums, Liverpool, UK, 2013. *(Peter Williams)*.

Plans for the future

Having spent most of my working life in institutions where I'd been the only Geology teacher, I appreciate the support/advice received from ESTA and aim to continue working to maintain this service for those starting teaching. In 2015, I was elected President of the Liverpool Geological Society. My 'career' has taken yet another turn, but I look forward to widening outreach activities, whilst continuing existing work with schools.

I've enjoyed my varied teaching career. It has been hard work, but rewarding in so many ways. My advice for the next generation is to seek advice, seize opportunities to enhance teaching skills and widen your experience to ensure you get the greatest enjoyment out of your work.



Still enjoying the great outdoors (and aiming to complete 100 weeks' skiing before it is too late), Winter Park, Colorado, USA, January 2015. *(Peter Williams)*.

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