

Preface

Who are the Editors?

Between the 1970s and the mid-2000s, we both spent over 20 years working as English teachers, trainers, materials writers and project managers in state education systems in Kenya, China, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Hungary. We have subsequently worked as members of the TESOL group at Leeds University, during which we have retained and expanded our international links and activities. We have noticed that in most of the international contexts which we know, many state school English teachers are still struggling to make sense of the classroom implications of the more or less explicitly communication-oriented curricula which most are now supposed to follow. Although as the following chapters show, such curricula may have first been introduced up to 25 years ago, the education systems in which English teachers work often seem either oblivious to their struggles or apparently unable to provide appropriate support.

When trying to understand why this state of affairs was so common in the countries in which we worked or had contacts, we like many others, first considered whether or how the problems that we had observed might be addressed through improving ‘visible’ aspects of curriculum change initiation and implementation of planning strategies and procedures. Over time it has, however, become clearer to us that if we wish to understand how change implementation strategies and procedures might be made more supportive of hoped-for change outcomes, we need to understand the experiences of the people who are expected to implement curriculum change. This has led us to the focus of this book—teachers’ experiences of TESOL curriculum change.

What is This Book About?

This book is a response to the following quote which has appeared in all four editions of the book from which it comes. The first edition was published in 1981. The fact that the author finds it necessary to repeat it in his 2007 edition suggests that its message has still not been fully understood.

Neglect of the phenomenology of change- that is how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended- is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms (Fullan 2007: 8).

The chapters that follow explore the change experiences of a handful of the millions of English teachers who currently teach English in state education systems. The teachers come from 10 different countries on every continent. In all their contexts, the goals of their English curricula have changed as their governments have (like the Japanese Ministry of Education in the following quote, though of course phrased differently) increasingly seen the teaching of English as essential, both for individual learners ‘to acquire communication abilities in English as a common international language’ and for the nation as a whole to be linked ‘with the rest of the world, obtaining the world’s understanding and trust, enhancing our international presence and further developing our nation’ (Ministry of Education. Tokyo 31.03.2003). However, both in Japan and elsewhere, such national aspirations have rarely resulted in visible examples of state system teaching successfully enabling most learners to develop real English communication abilities during their years of in-school study.

Attempts to explain why this has been so in the existing literature on TESOL change (e.g. Hyland and Wong 2013; Markee 2007) focus largely on the macro, systems level of change—for example, different procedures and factors to be considered when making decisions about change planning, or the strategies for supporting change. Very little research has investigated the change process through exploring the experiences of the people on whom implementation ultimately depends: the teachers. Given the fundamental conservatism of most of the educational cultures in which state systems are situated (see discussion below), implementing a ‘communication oriented’ curriculum implies considerable adjustments to English teachers’ and learners’ behaviours and ways of thinking about teaching and learning. But what actually are these adjustments and how do teachers feel, as they attempt (or decide not) to make them? What influences whether they

make them, what support helps? This book explores questions such as these through stories of teachers' experiences of living through curriculum change. We hope that readers will find resonance in these stories in relation to their own teaching and learning contexts, and that the stories and analyses of their messages will contribute to the TESOL/educational change literature from the personal perspective that has so far, generally, been neglected.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-1-137-54308-0>

International Perspectives on Teachers Living with
Curriculum Change

Wedell, M.; Grassick, L. (Eds.)

2018, XIX, 279 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-137-54308-0

A product of Palgrave Macmillan UK