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Book Review: Innovation and Change in English Language Education

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Reviewed By

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1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that today's technological world is moving in a much more speed than the past, which requires the skill of keeping up with the pace of change. This change and innovation is a must for all organizations. According to Shen (2008, p.73), this change is trickier in the educational context, where "the nature of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of those involved and the way that these are expressed in action" is of much significance. The need for innovation in education derives from the fact that they are, according to a study of the European Union reported in Popescu and Crenicean (2012, p.3982), "among the most important skills that employers seek." Therefore, the book under review in this paper is about a topic that needs constant attention.

2. The Book Review

With the aim of curriculum innovation and teacher professional development, the book "Innovation and Change in English Language Education" approaches the issue of innovation in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and the foundations for change. The main gap that encouraged the authors of the book to start writing the book was that although teachers are often exposed to the talk of innovation, there seems to be "no lasting impression" on them, and finally, on the curriculum. In fact, the authors are curious about "how innovations come into being, are introduced, taken up" and in what ways do they affect teachers, practice, or policy (Hyland & Wong, 2013, p.xiv).

The book uses a rational, well-structured, and easy-to-understand sectioning by categorizing the chapters into four sections of (1) Conceptions and contexts of innovation and change, (2) Innovation and change in teacher education, (3) Innovation and change in the language curriculum, and (4) Innovation and change in teaching practice. In Section 1, the fundamental concepts and ideas of innovation have been presented, in which principles, models, contexts, cultures, and management of change are presented and discussed. Section 2 discusses change and innovation in teacher education, in which teachers' thinking, practices, and self-conceptions are presented. Section 3 is an attempt to elucidate various aspects of change ad innovation in curriculum and the related policies. Finally, Section 4 is dedicated to the practical aspects of implementing the innovation and change presented in the previous chapters. Each section, which is divided into 4 or 5 chapters, will be reviewed in detail as follows.

Section 2, as briefly touched upon in the previous paragraph, discusses the concept of change and innovation, as well as their key tenets. Chapter 2 of this section is an article by Kennedy entitled "Models of Change and Innovation" and it lays the necessary ground and presents the most fundamental issues in change and innovation. The chapter starts with criticizing the status-quo of models of change and innovation for their simplistic, linear, and one-size-fits-all approach and then suggests that factors such as context, cultural views, attitudes, and beliefs must be taken into consideration for change and innovation processes to be successfully implemented.

Chapter 3 builds on the concept of context and its role. In this chapter, Markee emphasizes that "context is a multi-layered phenomenon" (2013, p.28). He presents a hierarchy of interrelating subsystems in which an innovation has to operate. This hierarchy considers cultural, educational, institutional, administrative, and political subsystems as

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prerequisites to classroom innovation. The hierarchy is primarily based on 'onion skin' model of Kennedy (1988) in which sociocultural factors are deemed necessary for change and innovation.

In Chapter 4, Gong and Holliday (2013) view the factor of culture with a special case of Chinese mainstream textbooks. In the first phase of their article, they reject the current views of context and the extremes in this regard, and then support a cosmopolitan approach to the issue of context as a guideline for innovation for curriculum renewal. They report a case study of the attitudes of rural Chinese secondary school students to English language textbooks in which they found that developing the students' critical culture abilities and become a multicultural person is a key goal leading to the final goal of developing a "whole person" identity in the Chinese context.

Finally, Chapter 5 is entitled "The management of change" written by Waters and Vilches (2013) and is mainly concerned with the obstacles and hardships of the management of change. They review and present concepts from the literature on the management of change, including the structure of the change process, innovation design features and contexts, and implementation processes. They also discuss and evaluate the success of a change management program in the Philippines as a case. The chapter ends with the implementations of their evaluation for teachers.

Section 2, which is concerned with innovation and change in teacher education, is mainly concerned with implementation of change in teacher education, as well as how it can affect teachers' identities and practices. Chapter 6, written by Johnson (2013), is entitled "innovation through teacher education", in which she goes to the heart of teacher education programs and discusses the whatness and howness of the programs. She states that social activities that teachers engage in in their teacher education programs help teachers develop expertise in their teaching practice.

In Chapter 7 written by Burns (2013), she discusses "innovation through action research and teacher-initiated change" and stresses the importance of action research as a powerful tool at the hand of teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and combine research into their classrooms. She discusses the factors influencing action research and in what ways they can help foster change in classrooms. She then moves on to review a case of a program in Australia designed for teaching English to foreign students.

In Chapter 8, the issue of reflection is discussed in detail by Bailey and Springer (2013). They consider reflection on one's teaching as an important factor for innovation. They propose that teachers should engage in activities such as conducting action research, observing others' lessons, compiling a teaching portfolio, and video-recording lessons. This way, as the authors suggest, they can understand change in their teaching practices by taking into account "feasibility, acceptability, and relevance" (Bailey & Springer, 2013, p.108).

In Chapter 9 entitled "Teacher thinking, learning, and identity in the process of educational change" Freeman (2013) emphasizes the process of change and discusses it within the framework of three constructs, which he believes to be interrelated. He borrows the constructs from Lortie (1975): professional identity, Freeman (2002): professional learning, and Borg (2006): teacher thinking. He reviews the literature regarding the three constructs and argues that taking them into account as key constructs that form the base for the process of change.

Section 3 is primarily concerned with the language curriculum and how innovation and change can be fostered within its framework. It also views the issue of change and innovation from a broader point of view, namely in policy making. The first chapter in this section, Chapter 10, discusses innovation in language policy and planning with special emphasis on English language education. In this chapter, Bianco (2013) discusses the geo-political forces that he believes determine how language learning must be planned. By considering the world of politics and its impacts on how language curriculums are designed and consequently how languages are learned, he argues that the role of innovation must be understood as different kinds of 'renewal' of English language education.

Chapter 11, written by Derewianka (2013), discusses "change and innovation in primary education." She looks at examples of curriculum change in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia to integrate innovation in their primary education curriculums, with special emphasis on the latter. She starts her investigation with the UK's the National Curriculum and the US' Common Core State Standards and how they attempt to revise their curriculums "to identify the essential knowledge that students need to acquire and to provide greater autonomy to teachers and schools" (Derewianka, 2013, p.155). Then, she moves on to the case of Australia, where she actually works, to monitor how teachers view and implement the new curriculum in their classes.

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Carless and Harfitt (2013), in Chapter 12, are concerned with innovation in secondary education by studying a case of curriculum reform in Hong Kong, emphasized in the New Senior Secondary curriculum (NSS). The authors first draw a framework for evaluating the new curriculum and then consider its content aspects such as change and diversification in assessment aspects, establishing a stronger synergy between schooling and the students' future careers, and preparing the students for a lifelong learning process. They then continue with their evaluation and conclude that there is a mismatch between what is intended in the reform and what can actually be gained, traditional and modern assessment, and the like.

In Chapter 13, entitled "higher education constraints on innovation", Murray (2013) investigates innovation in higher education, i.e. college/university with the case of the US and Australia. Building on Kachru's (1986) categorization of ELT as Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles, she investigates difference in context between learners of the three circles. Considering the US and Australia as two inner-circle countries, she focuses on how change is interpreted differently in local contexts. She concludes that public institutions of higher education in these countries are affected by the policies of the governments and that these institutions "can respond innovatively and creatively to such external pressures" (Murray, 2013, p.197).

Section 4, which sort of wraps up the discussions around innovation and change by discussing implementations for the actual teaching practice. This section starts with Chapter 14 by Tomlinson (2013) in which he discusses 'innovation in materials development.' With his broad, expert viewpoint in materials development, Tomlinson argues that many ESL course books, such as those produced commercially, have not undergone a significant change in the past 30 years and still focus on PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) activities. However, there are also teaching and learning materials designed around the world that have incorporated innovation, such as emphasis on collaborative materials in Japan, discovery-driven materials in Oman, extensive reading materials in Lebanon and Japan, new technology supported materials in India and Sri Lanka, task-driven materials in Belgium, task-free activities in the UK, text-driven materials in Ethiopia and Namibia, and process drama materials in South Korea.

The issue of 'corpora, innovation and English language education' has been discussed by Hyland (2013) in Chapter 15. He argues that corpora have been responsible for two significant changes in language education. One is that it provides teachers with the use of authentic language and materials developers with information to produce dictionaries, reference books, and course books. The other advantage of corpora concerns learners and their access to authentic language, along with a chance to reflect on their own learning. Hyland introduces a website named 'Check My Words' as an innovative tool for writing which provides learners with the necessary information on language resources as they compose and proofread.

In Chapter 16, Nunan (2013) investigates 'innovation in the young learner classroom' by citing a number of his own work in the field of teaching to young learners. With special emphasis on technological innovations, Nunan first starts with reviewing literature on teaching of English to younger learners and educational policies. He then reports a number of case studies of innovation in pedagogical practices with the conclusion that innovation can be successful with "the enthusiastic support of the leadership, buy-in by parents, active engagement by the children, and ongoing professional development on the part of the teachers" (Nunan, 2013, p.246).

Chapter 17 features an article by Wong (2013) who looks at 'technological innovation and teacher change' with a focus on IT in teacher professional development. Considering the special case of Hong Kong, where the government attempted to train more than 1800 English teachers to integrate IT skills in their classes. He reports the results of a two-year longitudinal case study into the target teachers who were required to take advantage of information technology for promoting innovation in their classes. Specifically, the study explores how teachers managed to use innovation in their classrooms, as they attempted to remain "in control of their professional practices" (Wong, 2013, p.248). The relationship between pedagogy and technology, and between how teachers view innovation and how they adopt it is also discussed. Wong concludes with suggesting ways in which teachers can lay the ground for integrating technology and IT in their teaching practices.

Finally, Chapter 18, written by Davison (2013), investigates 'innovation in assessment' and common misconceptions and problems in this area. She refers to Black and Wiliam's (1998) concept of Assessment for Learning (AfL), in which assessment is defined as being primarily providing a tool for learning better. She refers to challenges that educational systems, especially those traditional exam-oriented ones, face when they engage "in the process of

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initiating and implementing such innovative assessment approaches" (Davison, 2013, p.263). She studies the case of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Brunei by using data obtained from questionnaires, interviews with key stakeholders and teachers, and the analysis of policy documents to investigate and find out about common misunderstandings and conceptual confusions that educational communities grapple with while they are engaged in the process of innovation.

To sum up, the aim of the book is to present a multidimensional view of innovation and change educational systems, with an emphasis on ELT systems around the world. The book uses a well-structured, coherent sectioning system in which each chapter lays the ground for the next one, forming a logical category under which all chapters of each section fall. One of the strong points of this book is the number of case studies presented in it, comparing and contrasting them with each other, which leads to finding the shortcomings and strengths of each system and curriculum. The other advantage of the book is that as it considers teachers at the heart of change and innovation in English language education and a determining factor in the success of innovative plans, it concludes with a section (Section 4) specifically allocated to how teachers can get ready to implement change and innovation in their classes. In other words, the aim with which the book starts, is fulfilled at its end with implications for teachers and teacher education.

The book comes with some shortcomings that the authors of this paper suggest. The first disadvantage is that some of the contributing authors have not provided rich case studies which could contribute more to the literature by presenting something unique, supporting the discussions. In addition, it would be more informative to include studies carried out in more diverse contexts, including in the Iranian EFL context or the Middle East, for it to be applicable in wider range of contexts and cultures.

Another shortcoming is that the authors could include more examples of action research in their chapters. In other words, if more action research was incorporated in the studies presented in the chapter, it would contribute more to the actual use of the ideas in real classroom settings. Particularly, regarding the fact that as Miller (1970) argues that human factors in innovation and change are considered the most important factors in the process, reporting results of action research carried out in the Iranian context could contribute more to the aim of the book, which is describing innovation and change. Hence, it is suggested that further work in this area of study focus on presenting the results of action research from various cultures and contexts, including the Iranian EFL context.

Furthermore, an essential part of change is socio-cultural features of the context in which change is set to be implemented. However, the book lacks sufficient socio-cultural groundwork for the discussion of change, especially in contexts that may not be open to change. In fact, social and cultural factors underlying change and innovation are essential for the discussion and they could be incorporated in the book in more detail, if not some chapters are dedicated to the factors.

The topic of change and innovation has gained significance and attention in Iranian education system during recent years. Therefore, Iranian EFL teachers and teacher trainers can benefit from the findings of this book and instructions given for the management of change and innovation. Iranian EFL teachers, education system, and educators can use this book to lay the groundwork for solid bases of change, which the Iranian context is in dire need of. Hence, this book can play the role of a foundation on which innovation and change can be built and developed.

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