
Teachers' Voices: Exploring Course Design in a Changing Curriculum

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TEACHERS' VOICES; EXPLORING COURSE DESIGN IN A CHANGING CURRICULUM. Anne Burns and Susan Hood (Eds.). Sydney National Center for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University, 1995. 137pp. \$24.95 Available in the U.S. through Alta Book Center, 14 Adrian Court, Burlingame, CA, 94010.)

This is a book for teachers, about teachers, and by teachers, written as part of the response to changes in the Australian Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). During the 1980's, most AMEP programs were designed on needs-based, learner-centered, decentralized curricula following the ideas of Nunan (1988). But the 1990's has seen a shift to the concept of a competency-based curriculum leading to the award of a Certificate in Spoken and Written English. *Teachers' Voices* is an account of the action research carried out by ten teachers who were involved in these curriculum changes, beginning with two academic papers, which set the scene.

Anne Burns explains what is generally understood by action research, and offers a model for both the process and methodology which goes beyond that of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). She also emphasizes the need for teachers to receive support while they are engaged in action research. Susan Hood gives an overview of the requirements of the Certificate in Spoken and written English (CSWE), before proceeding to examine how different teachers have been able to organize their approaches to the syllabus in line with their own personalities, or their operational demands.

Hood's paper leads directly to the first sub-section on action research, which briefly discusses content selection and sequencing. The first paper offers general considerations, while the second concentrates on those courses conducted in the students' workplaces.

The second sub-section, consisting of three papers on grammar, has more unity. The CSWE is based on the functional grammar approach of Halliday (1985) and all three writers admit that this forced them to reconsider their teaching approach. The evidence that they present, however, suggests that this had a beneficial effect on their teaching practice, and provided them with reasons for focussing on course design. They also realized that a competency-based curriculum did not imply that every lesson had to be directly linked to the CSWE.

Two papers on assessment reinforce Burns' earlier emphasis on the need for support and interaction for action researchers, and the different ways in which teachers can structure courses, while the final sub-section, on learners, dismisses the suggestion that the new curriculum removed the possibility of needs analysis, and presents instances of students' differing learning styles.

Teachers' Voices is a short, but important book for anyone interested in curriculum design or reflective teaching. Given the growing interest in this approach, particularly in the Pacific area (Richards and Lockhart 1992, 1994; Ho 1995) this book is a timely and valuable contribution to the literature on this aspect of professional development.

References

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About the Reviewer

McBeath has a B.A. in English from Southampton University, a Diploma in TESL from Trinity College London and an MSc. in Teaching English from Aston University. His main interests are ESP and materials design. He has been working in the Sultanate of Oman for the last 14 years, is a Flight Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force of Oman, and a Senior English Education Officer at the Air Force Ordnance Service School.