

Preface

With middle age on the horizon, Ross decides he must leave the small private preschool where he has taught, and thrived, for 12 years, to accept a position with higher pay and a pension plan at a large public elementary school.

After 23 years teaching sixth grade in the town's middle school, and with only one year to retirement, Sally is transferred to the primary school to teach second grade, where there is an enrollment bulge.

Michael is preparing for his tenure year when the only other fourth-grade teacher in his building becomes seriously ill. With grave misgivings, Michael agrees to the principal's request that he take over his colleague's inclusive class and coteaching responsibilities.

The high school English department's preview of new state assessments leads them to conclude they must revamp the curriculum to emphasize works of nonfiction. Janice, whose third child is a toddler experiencing developmental delays, is distressed when she realizes she will spend most of the year teaching from books and assigning projects she has never used before.

Teacher preparation programs ground teachers in learning theory, curriculum development, instructional strategies, assessment techniques, and any number of concepts and skills needed to teach effectively. But they appear not to address one topic common to all teachers' experiences: change. How do teachers learn to meet the many changes that they will face throughout their careers? How do they learn to avoid the burnout that can result from failure to adapt to change? How can they become energized, rather than defeated, by unexpected change? How can they seek out change as a means to transform themselves, their classrooms, schools, and communities?

We have written *A Teacher's Guide to Change* to prepare K–12 classroom teachers to understand, anticipate, and respond creatively to a range of changes teachers typically encounter throughout their careers. Some changes may seem minor, such as adopting new instructional materials or teaching a new grade level; others are momentous in their scope and consequences, such as the large-scale changes in assessment practices that accompanied the No Child Left Behind Act. Regardless of the magnitude, when teachers must struggle to adapt to change, the passions that brought them into the profession can be dampened. We hope to help teachers see change as a choice they can make to enhance their effectiveness and career satisfaction. Because change offers challenge, it also offers opportunities for stimulation and growth. This book has been designed as one that can reconnect teachers to the passion and excitement that drew them to teaching in the first place. Our hope is that our readers will recommit to staying in the teaching profession because they know they can meet the challenge of change, and because they see that

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openness to change gives them access to professional development opportunities throughout their careers.

It is our intention to provide teachers with practical skills—conceptual, reflective, interpersonal, and strategic—to use immediately as well as in the future. These skills can be used by teachers to adjust to changes that are imposed on them and to changes they choose, as well as to lead others to adopt the changes they champion. Teachers who understand and can manage their responses to change and influence the responses of students, families, and colleagues are more likely to become respected peer leaders and to find satisfaction in a long career in teaching.

When this topic is addressed in research and books pertaining to K–12 education, it is typically directed toward administrators rather than classroom teachers. This book is aimed at teachers and argues that change is not something that merely happens to teachers or must be imposed on them; change is something teachers can understand, manage, become increasingly invested in, and lead. Our intent is to contribute to an increased professionalism of teaching by helping teachers not only understand the change process but also acquire the skills to manage it.

A Teacher's Guide to Change calls on two key sources: the research literature on change management, and the responses of over 100 teachers to a survey about their experiences with change. The quantitative survey questions are presented in Appendix A, along with the results to the fixed response items; responses to the open-ended questions which are not included in Appendix A have been incorporated as examples throughout the book. The teachers who were asked to complete the survey were nominated by higher education faculty because they were thoughtful, experienced individuals who were likely to provide careful and complete responses to a lengthy online survey. We did not seek out teachers with any other special characteristics. From June through December 2007, about 150 teachers were invited to complete the survey; 121 responded and 107 completed the anonymous survey. They had taught all across the United States, as well as in some foreign countries, though most were from the Northeast. They had experience in urban, suburban, and rural schools, and in public, private, religious-affiliated, and charter schools. They taught in general education and special education, at the preschool, elementary and secondary levels. Approximately 20% volunteered to be interviewed at length; the interview questions appear as Appendix B. Since all participants were assured that their anonymity would be protected, pseudonyms are used throughout this book.

A note about quotations and vignettes: We are grateful beyond measure to the teachers who told us their stories. Whenever possible, we have used their own words, editing with the lightest touch and only as needed to achieve clarity; these contributions are indicated throughout the book by quotation marks. Sometimes the teachers described their experiences with change at length, in exchanges that resembled comfortable conversations more than formal interviews; these have become vignettes in our book. Because we had to adapt these accounts for the printed page, they are presented without quotation marks. For a few vignettes, we have recounted experiences from our days as classroom teachers or from the tales told by teachers who once were our students and now are our friends. All of the quotations and vignettes represent authentic experiences of teachers.

A Teacher's Guide to Change comprises ten chapters organized into five parts:

Part I, Experiencing Change helps teachers examine the many facets of a change experience. In Chapter 1, we consider why change is so challenging for most teachers, and why it is helpful to try to face it with confidence and optimism. In Chapter 2, we draw on the experiences of the teachers who responded to our survey to describe, and then ask

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teachers to look ahead to, the kinds of changes, at school and at home, they might experience that are likely to have an impact on their teaching. In Chapter 3, we explore three dimensions of change—voluntary versus mandated, top-down versus bottom-up, and incremental versus fundamental—and ask teachers to analyze their experiences with change in terms of these dimensions.

In *Part II, Understanding the Change Process*, we take a close look at what usually happens as people experience change. Chapter 4 describes how people typically respond when they first contemplate change, with special attention paid to the phenomenon of resistance to change. Chapter 5 outlines two models of the change process: the stages-of-concern model (self, task, and impact) described by Fuller and Brown (1975) and later adapted by Hall and Hord (2001, 2006); and the transition model (endings, the neutral zone, and new beginnings) described by Bridges (2004). In both chapters, teachers are prompted to look back on changes they have experienced to better understand the concepts and processes presented.

Part III, Implementing Change, describes the steps teachers can take to initiate and carry out a change effort in their classrooms. Chapter 6 helps teachers plan in detail for the undertaking, while Chapter 7 guides them in a six-step process as they implement the change. Both chapters include several examples of change initiatives undertaken by the teachers in our study.

In *Part IV, Leading Change*, we enable teachers who have learned to plan and implement changes in their own classrooms to lead change in a wider arena. Chapter 8 details the change efforts teachers can lead in their many spheres of influence. Chapter 9 helps teachers appreciate that the teaching skills they have already mastered are the foundation for the leadership skills needed to engage others in a change effort.

In *Part V, Changing Throughout a Teaching Career*, we maintain that change can provide the vitality that is essential to a long and satisfying career in education. Chapter 10 encourages teachers to seek professional development opportunities and to assume new roles (for example, as mentors) as a means of insuring that their careers remain meaningful and joy-filled and that generations of students will reap the benefits of teachers who continually renew themselves and their commitment to the profession.

What this book is not: This is not a book for cheerleaders who see change in a strictly positive light. Nor is it for anyone looking for a “quick fix” for disgruntled teachers. Although it might be the basis of a series of professional development sessions, it is much more than the vehicle for a one-time inservice workshop.

What this book is: Our goal is to offer teachers practical strategies that are grounded in theory and research in an engaging and accessible format. We take a pragmatic approach, offering guidelines that can be generalized to multiple settings and using vivid examples so that teachers reading this book will be able to apply the ideas and strategies directly to their own experiences.

This book is a resource for those teachers who are curious about the many different kinds of change they face and who want to manage the change experience more effectively. The key opportunities the book affords teachers are to (1) learn from the experiences of others, (2) act purposefully when choosing how they will respond to change, and (3) craft their own plans to initiate change.