Implementing Educational Reform

There is constant pressure on governments and policymakers to raise the standard of education and to develop appropriate curriculum and pedagogies for students. It is no easy task. This book presents eight specific case studies of education reform implementation which capture how the design and implementation choices of policy makers are shaped by national and historical contexts. They offer real examples of the choices and constraints faced by policymakers and practitioners. The cases are a mix of nationally and locally mandated reforms with five examples from nations where the state initiated and guided reforms. The concluding synthesis chapter highlights commonalities and differences across the cases and disparate responses to shared concerns. Providing a breadth of real-world research, it will assist policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders interested in system change.

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Implementing Educational Reform
Cases and Challenges

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CONTENTS

List of Figures and Tables  page vii
List of Contributors  viii
Preface  xv

1 Why Focus on Implementation in Education Reform?  1
   Alan Ruby and Colleen McLaughlin

2 Promoting Equity in Education through System Change:
   Lessons from the United Kingdom  17
   Mel Ainscow

3 A Decade of Reform in Hong Kong  41
   Mary James

4 Reforming a Whole School System: The Case of Kazakhstan  67
   Colleen McLaughlin, Liz Winter, Olena Fimyar and Natallia Yakavets

5 The Challenges and Opportunities of Greater Autonomy for
   Post-Soviet Universities: An Illustration from Kazakhstan  91
   Matthew Hartley and Alan Ruby

6 School Improvement by Design: Why It’s Needed, How It Works
   and How It Can Be Improved  105
   Brian Rowan

7 Promising Practice in Government Schools in Vietnam  127
   Tony McAleavy and Rachael Fitzpatrick

8 Reform Implementation Lessons: A Case Study of
   High-Performing Singapore  149
   Saravanan S. Gopinathan and Edmund Lim
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Qatar’s Road to Education Reform: The Need for Teacher Autonomy</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Asmaa Al-Fadala, Stavros N. Yiannouka and Omar Zaki</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Implementing Educational Reform: Some Reality Checkpoints</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Colleen McLaughlin and Alan Ruby</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

4.1 Elements of the systemic education reform in Kazakhstan  page 75
9.1 Timeline of reform phases  177

Tables

3.1 Percentage of equivalent high levels attained in single science subjects – final three years of HKALE compared with the first six years of HKDSE  54
3.2 PISA results: mean scores and rank  55
4.1 Timeline (as of 2018) of piloting and implementation of the renewed curriculum  72
6.1 Four patterns of school improvement by design  111
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Alan Ruby has a long career in government, business, philanthropy and education, ranging from classroom teacher to Australian deputy secretary of education to chair of the OECD education committee. At the University of Pennsylvania, Mr Ruby, a senior fellow in the Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy, focuses on globalization’s effects on universities and education around the world. A highly regarded teacher, he leads graduate seminars on ‘Globalization and the University’. He earned the School’s Excellence in Teaching Award in 2006. Since early 2018 he also served as the initial director of the Global Engagement office at GSE, advising the Dean on ways to increase the school’s international impact.

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Our educational realities seldom conform to our educational intentions. We cannot put our policies into practice. We should not regard this as a failure peculiar to schools and teachers. We have only to look around us to confirm that it is part of the human lot. But ... improvement is possible if we are secure enough to face and study the nature of our failures. The central problem of evidence-informed practice is the gap between our ideas and our aspirations and our attempts to operationalise them.

Lawrence Stenhouse (1975)

We write, upholding Stenhouse’s core ideas, that change and particularly implementation are inevitably going to be hard, complex and involve failure; that we can learn a great deal from experiences, especially when the unexpected happens; that we should remain optimistic and keep working on the gap, for it matters; and that this is ultimately a very human process. This book is written in the hope that it will help policymakers and practitioners alike and that it will be a welcome example of detailed human accounts of trying to enact aspirations to improve learning and teaching.

We have chosen to focus on implementation as we think it is often the least discussed and developed. We have chosen to do this through case studies of real attempts at change written by informed participants who are unafraid to offer up failures and successes because we see a need for grounding knowledge in practice.

We have attempted to draw out some truisms and common challenges and link them with research to use when thinking about implementation. We have avoided concluding with simplistic and reductionist checklists but offer threads of learning that we think we see in the tapestry of the cases.
We wish to acknowledge and thank our contributors and all the actors who were responsible for working on the implementation of the ambitious policies in these cases. We hope that you will find them interesting and useful. And we especially thank our partners in life, Julie and Eileen, who heard more of this work in progress than they probably would have liked.

Reference