

## Introduction

Job stress is a major problem in the teaching profession because teachers often face heavy workloads with a multitude of responsibilities to a diverse set of stakeholders. For English language educators, the classroom has become an unpredictable environment where job security has declined in recent years and where class sizes and other problems are increasing. Familiar concerns are diminishing resources, additional time and work required to address accountability and accreditation, and the ongoing pressures of teacher evaluation. No wonder our profession often ranks among the top five professions in terms of stress.

This book is the first to address topics of reigniting, retooling, and retiring in English language teaching. Reigniting, retooling, and retiring are positive steps in the career path of the educator who is seeking support and guidance along his or her professional journey. Drawing on the collective expertise of many contributors with a wide range of professional experiences and a combined history of hundreds of years of experience worldwide, this volume provides readers with a thorough and in-depth analysis of the ways in which to address professional development from the beginning of one's career through retirement and beyond.

### **WHY THIS BOOK IS NEEDED AND WHY IT WAS WRITTEN**

At a time when teachers worldwide are facing downsizing, funding cuts, oversized classes, forced retirement, public criticism of their professional performance, and the concomitant feelings of failure, burnout, and depression that accompany these realities, the contributors (who are all seasoned educators) offer support, options, and direction. Their writings provide positive and encouraging descriptions of the possibilities for readers to employ their skills and knowledge to find new opportunities and ways to approach their profession. The contributors' diverse perspectives for readers fill a critical need for teachers who face any of the challenges identified, regardless of their teaching context or tenure.

The unique and extraordinary depth and breadth of experience and knowledge accrued by the contributors became clear in 2007 when we editors met in Dubai to address the need for this volume. Each brought different perspectives to the issue and the task. Individually and as a

group, we had previously presented workshops and presentations. Liz and John had conducted a workshop at the NAFSA Convention in 2002 at the start of the problematic “post-nine-eleven era” in international education. Workshop participants were dealing with job loss or job reduction; some were looking for alternative opportunities beyond teaching positions. They were interested in “Retooling for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” the title of the workshop. Following a joint presentation by the three editors at the 2007 TESOL Convention, Christine began working with her colleagues on a topic that they were facing: teacher burnout.

In our meeting in Dubai in 2007, the three editors identified three “phases” of professional development for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which later became the key words in the title of this book and the featured sections of the volume: reigniting, retooling, and retiring.

Dating back to 2002, the editors had been expanding professional networks to create a select group of colleagues who ultimately became the contributors to this volume. In 2008, Christine talked to University of Michigan Press Editor Kelly Sippell about this volume. The same year, Liz and John founded an English language educators group affiliated with TESOL of professionals of any age and at any stage in their career paths who were interested in issues of “retirement redefined.” This group continues to grow each year in its membership and its concern for this topic.

## **HOW CONTRIBUTORS WERE SELECTED**

We editors represent three diverse perspectives on career path development and managing challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They share a commitment to excellence and some measured risk-taking activities in the profession that have allowed them to draw on what they know and do to revise their teaching. We are long-time collaborators and colleagues who have worked together on conference organization, professional boards of directors, workshop presentations on this topic and others, and on professional association projects for TESOL, NAFSA, and TESOL Arabia.

Dr. Christine Coombe, President of TESOL (2011–2012), is an English language teacher in the United States and in the United Arab Emirates and a Toastmasters leader. Christine is an excellent representative of a group of educators who are on a career path that includes hard work and extraordinary achievement in the profession.

Dr. Liz England, Professor and Director of TESOL at an established, U.S. university-based online distance program, brings a career-long commitment to excellence in language teacher education and an ongoing personal effort at balancing multiple tasks throughout her career—both professional and personal (single parenting and other personal obligations that require unique skills and personal qualities).

Dr. John Schmidt, a language course administrator and educator (in both Spanish and English), has trained English teachers on five continents, as well as designed and delivered numerous highly motivating, creative instructional programs for groups of teachers and learners throughout his career. Reignited six years ago as a Toastmaster, he has since taught public speaking to several hundred teachers and students of English.

With shared values, international professional experiences, and guided by principles of diligence and excellence, we have invited contributors to this volume from a wide network of professional colleagues worldwide. We selected contributors on the basis of their backgrounds and experience in finding diverse and creative ways to address career path development. The contributors have each faced a variety of challenges in their professional journeys and have drawn on their individual strengths and employed unique and functional approaches, along with specific strategies, to find and pursue new professional opportunities.

### **INTENDED READERSHIP**

This book will be of interest to teachers or teachers-in-training who seek new ways of packaging themselves for new employment or for unique professional opportunities. Any teacher who has experienced job burnout will also be interested in this book. The volume's personal approach and sensitive analysis of the issues facing educators today will make this a must-read for teachers worldwide.

### **TEACHER BURNOUT**

Most teachers agree that the teaching profession is a challenging one, as well as a stressful one, because of the various roles we play and responsibilities we have. Supported by empirical evidence, research confirms that teaching is universally one of the most stressful careers. In a single classroom, teachers tend to serve in many different roles, in addition to that of educator. They also have to deal with the conflicting demands of various stakeholders. As a result, severe stress and burnout are serious issues for all teachers, including English language teachers.

Burnout has been defined as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalized and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind. It is a response to the chronic emotional strain of dealing exclusively with other human beings, particularly when they are troubled or having problems" (Maslach, 1982, p. 3). Maslach emphasizes that "what is unique about burnout is that the stress arises from the *social* interaction between helper and recipient" (1982, p. 3)—in our case, teacher and students.

When dealing with the problem of stress and burnout in the ELT profession, teachers generally follow one of three paths. Some simply end their careers as professional educators. Others seek relief from stress by “downshifting” or taking a less prestigious or demanding role, by redefining their job as part-time or adjunct instructors, or by shifting previously held duties to others. Teachers like us (the volume editors) have chosen to reframe our sense of identity as educators through reigniting our love of the profession and retooling to reshape our identities and revise our repertoire of activities as educators.

Whether you are just beginning to feel the stress associated with teaching or are in full burnout mode, a practical approach to discovering why you entered the teaching profession is recommended. This volume provides a multifaceted look into what works for English language educators who strive to regain their love of the profession and zest for teaching (reignite), develop new skills to add “spice” to their careers (retool), and remain professionally active in their later years (retire).

## **ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK**

This volume is divided into three sections: Reigniting, Retooling, and Retiring. It features chapters on all three aspects and focuses on vital issues involving personal and professional impact. *Reigniting, Retooling, and Retiring in English Language Teaching* is designed to offer English language teachers the latest information on how to prevent or recover from burnout, reignite their love of the teaching profession, repackaging their skills, and retire, including retiring such that they remain involved in alternate aspects or activities within the profession.

### **Part 1: r eigniting**

Teaching is a profession in which the teachers themselves are continuously learning. There is never a shortage of different challenges to tackle, new techniques to acquire, or new personalities to contend with, given the never-ending flow of students and new reforms and initiatives.

In this section on *reigniting*, readers discover new ways of refreshing themselves in professional contexts. Each chapter offers a tool for creating new possibilities from well-honed skills and knowledge acquired over time.

At times, teachers often feel that their skills and knowledge are out of date and useless. Some feel that they no longer have a place in the modern world of language teaching and learning. Part 1 offers readers the opportunity to experience “the winds of change” by reigniting with new challenges in service to others.

In the first chapter, Joseph Falout, Tim Murphey, and Christopher Stillwell take the term *reigniting* literally! By attending to one’s own professional

and personal needs, we are better equipped to address the needs of others, according to the contributors. Readers can use the engaging techniques described in this chapter to identify signs and symptoms of burnout and then address them in positive, healthy ways.

The next chapter addresses the role of reflection when reigniting. Having written extensively on this topic throughout his career, Thomas Farrell advocates “stepping away” through reflection to separate oneself from events in the classroom in order to evolve, both as a teacher and as a human being.

David Nunan, an internationally recognized expert in language teacher education, addresses the power of action research projects to enliven, invigorate, and improve our classroom teaching practice and our approaches to teaching and learning in both the classroom and online contexts. Finding interesting and significant questions for research requires skills and knowledge, but combined with wisdom and maturity, the results can be rewarding. Action research projects enrich our professional lives.

Neil Anderson then provides examples of how leadership skills can be applied to draw on our skills and knowledge. Following Anderson’s suggestions, teachers experience renewed joys of responsible and effective leadership.

Salah Troudi and Sarah Rich highlight the value of teacher portfolios as tools for reigniting. As relative recent additions to the world of teacher evaluation, teacher portfolios have not traditionally been viewed as opportunities for teachers to use the data collected in teacher portfolios to reignite their teaching as well as their plans for professional development.

Finally, Christine Coombe, John Schmidt, and Mashael Al-Hamly encourage us to reignite our teaching by bringing more fun into the job and providing more meaningful learning opportunities to the students. They provide a rationale for the inclusion of entertaining classroom and extracurricular activities, and suggest innovative ways to make our courses and our teaching more enjoyable and effective.

## Part 2: retooling

The term *retool* has also come to refer to professionals and their acquisition of new knowledge and abilities to expand their repertoire of skills and enhance their job opportunities.

In the first chapter of this section, Sheryl V. Taylor and Donna Sobel advocate the need for educators to retool, refuel, and renew for their professional development, particularly as job expectations and competing requirements shift and as sociopolitical and socioeconomic employment contexts evolve.

Next, Mick Randall, Phil Quirke, Sandra Willis, and Naz Awan provide testimony regarding the importance for English language educators to consider pursuing advanced degrees in the profession.

Liz England navigates the journey toward online distance teacher education programs in TESOL for professionals who are exploring new approaches and technologies to learning and teaching. The author stresses that for many educators, the step to an online teaching context is the logical next step for an English language professional.

With numerous published textbooks and academic volumes, Keith Folse promotes authorship as a means to professional reward, offering a detailed examination of the complex procedures involved in translating textbook ideas and teacher-made materials into finished, publishable products.

Sharing more than four decades of combined experience as educational consultants, Mary Lou McCloskey and Cheryl Leever Huffman walk readers through the process of becoming an independent consultant and highlight the advantages and challenges of moving in this new professional direction.

The transition from classroom instructor to school administrator involves retooling, which Joyce Kling and Suzanne Panferov discuss as they suggest professional and personal development for new administrators.

Finally, Charles Hall encourages ELT educators approaching retirement to reflect on their interests, hobbies, and life experiences in order to “re-tread” as ESP specialists and engage in new professional pursuits.

### **Part 3: r etiring**

For many English language educators, the topic of retirement brings out diverse apprehensions, uncertainties, and fears. Taking a positive approach toward retirement, the authors present prospects of retiring while still remaining active in the profession. The final section of this volume looks at retirement from English language teaching and offers different perspectives on this important issue.

Ann M. John’s chapter describes her efforts in retirement to refocus on career strengths with a recommitment to service. In this personal account, the author shares with both current and future retirees her ideas about reflection and stance transformation as educators move into a new phase of their lives.

In Andy Curtis’s chapter, his purpose is to help readers fundamentally change the way they think about and prepare for retirement, with a focus on early retirement. The chapter starts with a critical examination of current definitions of retirement, both positive and negative. Reasons why retirement is important for individuals and for societies and communities are presented.

The last chapter of this volume focuses on financial aspects of retirement. Andrew Hallam introduces important financial tenets to help teachers increase their odds of retiring in comfort. The author discusses the financial challenges that English language teachers face in preparing for retirement.

The chapters in the three sections of this volume have been written in support of English language educators' desire to regain their love of teaching, repackaging their skills and redirect their talents, and redefine "retirement" in their career paths. As volume editors, we found this project to be instrumental in helping us reignite, retool, and prepare for the eventuality of retirement from the profession. We hope it proves as helpful to readers!

## Reference

Maslach, C. (1982). *Burnout: The cost of caring*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.