It’s been two years since your edited book Leading Educational Change was published by Teachers College Press. The book has become an instant classic. In your view, what has attracted so many readers, domestically and internationally, to the book?

The purpose of the book was to open a broader conversation on educational change from global perspectives across five domains: 1) emerging issues in educational change; 2) improving practice; 3) equity and educational justice; 4) accountability and assessment systems; and 5) whole-system change.

The rising focus on comparative systems has unearthed many questions about how to lead educational change. Within the research community, much has been written on this topic in invaluable volumes, articles, and books. I wanted to bring that empirical evidence to wide audiences—from researchers unfamiliar with this area of the field, to practitioners, policymakers, communities, and families—and present it in an accessible way. After all, it is in the community, through partnerships, that we can most effectively lead educational change.

I have been very fortunate to collaborate with leading thinkers in this arena and very much appreciate their commitment and dedication to this project and to the field. The response to the book has been overwhelming positive. Even after two years, I receive frequent emails about how much the book has informed policies and practices and how it is being used (in undergraduate and graduate courses, in community-based organizations and school districts, in NGOs, and to support nation-wide reform efforts through Ministries of Education).

The book has even inspired another book, by our fellow Educational Change SIG member, Dr. Susan Elliott-Johns, Leadership for Change in Teacher Education (Sense Publishers, 2015). What this response indicates to me is that: the field benefits from educational change scholarship; the work of our SIG members is critically important to informing change on the ground;
and, we need to continue to communicate our research in multiple ways to inform both macro and micro contexts.

*As the founder of the Lead the Change Series, where do you want to see this newsletter moving forward?*

I come full circle with this interview. The Series was born out of a desire to offer our members a meaningful resource, beyond the annual meeting, that would lift up ideas and work of our scholars and to generate dialogue and collaboration among our members and beyond. I think the primary charge for the Series still stands—illuminate our members’ scholarship. I am very pleased by the response the SIG has received about this series, and I thank you, Santiago for your leadership in continuing the series, now on its 49th issue!

Where I think we can continue to grow the Series is by: a) bringing in diverse voices, from all corners of the globe, in order to reflect the emerging discourse on educational change from multiple cultural traditions; b) inviting interdisciplinary perspectives to the fore that could further the knowledge base and scholarship of our SIG members; and c) introducing a dialogue among scholars on pressing issues worth deeper exploration.

*What are your major hopes and plans as the next chair of the Educational Change SIG?*

I have big shoes to fill following Dennis Shirley, and other prominent scholars before him, Alma Harris, Amanda Datnow, and our SIG’s founder, Andy Hargreaves. In addition to continuing this Series and our awards, there is an opportunity to connect our membership to each other via diverse platforms, from Twitter to mentoring and peer networks. With the SIG’s rising visibility within AERA, building relationships with complementary SIGs could promote knowledge sharing and cross-field collaboration. And, exposing diverse publishers to the important work of our members can further elevate the SIG as an incubator of cutting edge ideas that move education forward.

We are among the more active SIGs at AERA, and that is no coincidence. We have had a tremendous leadership from our officers and a commitment of our members to build a genuine, global community of scholars. Our SIG is both a home and a platform on which to further research on educational change in its broadest sense. What I particularly value is our members’ commitment to public scholarship, to disseminating knowledge through multiple mediums, to inviting a public dialogue across sectors, systems, and stakeholders to further our collective understanding on what it takes and how to improve the results for our young people.

*Next year the AERA will be celebrating its 100th conference. What are key issues you would like to see addressed, and how do you see the Educational Change SIG contributing to this important event?*

It is a privilege to start my term on the 100th anniversary of AERA, an institution that has created a global conversation on education and research. The Educational Change SIG epitomizes AERA’s mission to “promote research to improve education and to serve the public good.” Our SIG is particularly poised to make a significant contribution during the centennial meeting, given the theme of public scholarship that speaks to global contexts and “education in diverse democracies.” The scholarship of our members addresses the complexities of leading change at a time of great global shifts and fosters continuous inquiry and collective problem solving within and beyond our education enterprise.

This year’s program exemplified the members’ commitment to empirical rigor and a focus on excellence with equity, voice, justice,
and leadership at all levels. The studies asked tough questions, offered fresh perspectives, and the discussions that emerged from the sessions identified considerations that could be implemented in variety of settings.

Given that the centennial meeting will be in Washington, DC, there is an opportunity to bridge, in a more intentional way, research and policy, to invite policy voices into the conversation to discuss what we know from the field and what are the implications of our research for education and the society. It is also an opportunity to have an honest dialogue about the role research plays in policy and what can we do, as a research community, to more effectively communicate to the policymakers and other influencers. The global composition of our members also offers an opportunity to shed light on common challenges, as well as ideas and innovations across contexts.

Expanded and after school learning are among your key areas of expertise. What do you see as key contributions of knowledge in these fields to educational change?

We know that young people learn throughout their waking hours and that in-school learning presents only a fraction of their overall education time. Researchers in youth development, early childhood, and psychology have for decades made an argument about the importance of informal learning environments to young people’s development of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills (like social-emotional learning). However, until recently, this knowledge was presumed peripheral to the work of schools and educational improvement. So, what changed?

Research in neuroscience, sociology, youth development, and emerging scholarship on family and community engagement has broadened both the awareness and the recognition about how children learn, who influences student learning, and that so-called “soft skills” matter to young people’s readiness for college, career, and citizenship. Learning in high-quality out-of-school time (OST) settings also carries benefits within the traditional academic environment, from self-agency, motivation, attendance to performance. Further, research on inequity in access to learning has shed light on the role OST programs after school and in the summer play in closing the opportunity gap. What this means is that educational change must pay attention to how we create both the conditions and vehicles for authentic experiences that support student learning and development at the center.

There is a wealth of scholarship that exists among researchers in this arena, but the knowledge remains largely siloed even within the AERA structure. That is not how young people experience their own learning and development—it is not all neatly compartmentalized. We stand to gain as a research community by creating intentional pathways to linking and learning from each other, across SIGs, to examining connections and intersections, like between educational change and out-of-school time. If we expect transformational change to take place in our schools and communities, change that moves the needle on a broader set of outcomes, we need to be in constant communications with intra- and interdisciplinary scholarship. We need more diversity of perspectives that push the boundaries of our own thinking and research.
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