The 2018 AERA theme is The Dreams, Possibilities, and Necessity of Public Education. What can be the promise of public schools and how does—or should—educational change bring us closer to such schooling?

When I started thinking about the promise of the public education it took me ten seconds to realize that any response to this question will probably be influenced by history, context, and culture. In this sense, the meaning of public education in the US, for example, is different than that in Mainland Europe, and both differ largely from the meaning of religious education that prevail in many parts of the world. Therefore, my response is no doubt influenced by my own personal experiences in the educational system in my country.

Let’s start with asking – a promise for whom?

For an African child, education increases the opportunity to get a good job in France, for example, or in an international company. For any country, though, public education promises good citizens, skillful employees, low levels of crime, and so on. The promise is strongly related to educational ideologies, but I leave the discussion about it to philosophers of education—at least in part for a shortage of space.

Likewise, when we talk about plausible effects of educational change to the fulfilment of (any) promise, we move from the abstract level of ideologies and visions to the practical level of organizational processes and technologies. In this level, a precondition to the success of the change is an acceptance of the 'promise' by local communities, i.e., the promise cannot be forced on local parents and students by international agencies/governments, but should corroborate local cultural scripts and social norms, and organizational routines. If I
take my country, Israel, as an example, its multicultural characteristics—Jews and Arabs, Secular and Religious people, Immigrants from Europe and North Africa—is reflected in the educational system. There is a system for secular Jews, religious Jews, Ultra-Orthodox Jews, and for Arabs. Each of the four educational systems in this small country is influenced by common and different entrenched norms and values that conceptualize the 'right' education, the 'right' teacher, the 'right' teaching method, the 'right' civic education. Needless to say that educational change cannot be implemented identically in these four systems. Attempts of the local Ministry of Education to force a unified reform usually fail (except reforms in teacher wages.)

In my view, the educational change has a key role in

(a) professionalizing teachers in Africa or Asia in new teaching methods and didactics to increase students' intellectual growth in their schools;

(b) making the American public school, for instance, an innovative educational setting in which students no long enter classrooms, while sitting and waiting for one teacher after another.

This can be 'the room of the future' in which students of all ages are engaged in learning assignments through self-learning, group discussions, debates, movie filming, news broadcasting, and so on. It can also be a classical dancing for fourth graders through which students vent their energy and learn how to be patient and collaborative at the same time.

Your work focuses on, inter alia, social justice and educational change, what are some examples that show these are harnessed to educational change?

The research on exceptional educational leaders indicates that one of the distinctive features of these leaders is their moral/ethical awareness that guides their decisions and activities in school. In the case of leaders for social justice, a popular academic topic in our time, their awareness for values of equality, equity, and justice is supposed to encourage and inspire teachers to implement changes in their classes that promote these values and promote disadvantaged students.

Several years ago, I met a secondary school principal whose educational purposes included the promotion of students from poor families. When she first arrived at the school, as a newly appointed principal, she realized many teachers believed such students should attend another school, which is why they seemed not to really care about these students. One of the principal's first changes was to stop any transfer of students with low achievements to other schools, despite resentment in the teacher lounge. Later on, she implemented projects aimed at increasing self-esteem among students from unprivileged communities, collaborated with some NGOs to promote students with very low achievements, and harnessed new teachers to fulfil her vision—making the school the first 'home' for students from poor families.

In contrast, leaders for social justice are likely to obstruct educational projects and changes that do not corroborate the spirit of
justice, equity, and equality in their school. For example, they will refuse to implement reforms that glorify the history of the white man and marginalize at the same time the contribution of Afro-American or Hispanic people to US. In Israel, such principals have refused to allow their students memorize the death of politicians that had expressed racist attitudes against Arabs in their life.

This is evident also among exceptional educational leaders such as instructional or transformational leaders. They simply disagree to adopt changes that are called by institutional theorists of organizations as rationalized myths or rituals, i.e., they are based on false assumptions although everyone believes they are true and important. For example, in our era of neoliberalism, school principals have been demanded to implement many new projects aimed at increasing student achievement without taking into account the influence of local contexts. Thus, sometimes students from disadvantaged communities face educational changes that contradict their culture and social values, and therefore fail to succeed in learning assignments and tests. I assume the principal should be a gatekeeper who selects only educational projects/innovations that meet the needs of his/her students and of the school’s community to better enhance the chances of the students in the schooling process.

Let’s start with educational changes on the global context and connect them to teacher emotion. In recent years, maybe as a response to the spread of many neoliberal reforms worldwide, many researchers have paid much attention to emotion display, emotion regulation, and feelings in teaching and in educational leadership. So, how is educational change related to emotion?

First, many new educational projects/changes that request changing teachers’ instructional and managerial practices and routines at work are unlikely to succeed unless change agents help teachers develop positive emotions toward the project/change (e.g., moving from anger to enthusiasm). As we know, change has three broad elements—cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Looking at the 'big' education reforms in the last two-three decades one can realize how many of them (usually those grounded in neoliberal ideologies) have ignored the emotional aspects and expected teachers to accept new practices and routines blindly, as if they are heartless robots.

Let’s take for example a reform that restructures the teacher’s role to also include teaching small groups of students (up to six) that requires different teaching skills than in 'regular' classrooms of 30 students and more. No one expects teachers to feel confident when required to enter small rooms and teach in a different way; they need new trainings, but not only. The change agent in this case needs to work with teachers about altering their feelings toward the new situation; why are they afraid of the new change? What would make them feel enthusiastic about it? What kind of emotion

Second, we should use the knowledge produced in the field of educational change to help school principals modify teachers' undesirable emotions at work and replace them with those that are more compatible with the ethical code of teaching. For example, it is very sad to read reports about teachers in schools serving unprivileged communities who have developed negative emotions towards their students and displayed them in class and with parents. I believe that models of change initiation and implementation as well as change strategies could help principals alter these adverse emotions and in doing so to create a better school climate and higher student achievement. Yet, we have to be very careful about determining which emotions are desirable and which not; this is a highly contextualized issue, as every society defines the emotions its members should express or suppress. In the Bedouin society, for instance, teachers are not expected to display enthusiasm or to say "I was wrong, sorry," as their culture interprets such emotion displays as a weakness, particularly among male teachers. This is just an illustrative of the danger of Eurocentric judgment in the topic of emotion.

Authors exploring the lives of young people nowadays use the term the Y Generation to depict their inclination to immediate satisfaction of personal needs, short responses like in WhatsApp application, and repudiation of authority. There are book authors who further claim that the Y generation tends to seek for shallow explanations and is unlikely to distinguish sharply between virtual and palpable reality.

So, what kind of education and schooling do students in this generation need? To answer this question, I could simply list the name of potential subject matters whose applied value is high such as financial education, career choice, delay of gratification, frustration tolerance, and so forth, hopefully I hit the nail on the head. Alternatively, I asked my 17-year-old son what he would expect teachers to do in his school. Beyond the topics I mentioned, he added: "they should listen to us too. I want them to develop personal relations with us." Ops, this is the Y Generation—no more formality and hierarchy but attachment and intimacy regardless of race, religion, age, authority, and many other 'holy' divisions in our world. Thanks to his simple and so human answer, I would like to highlight two points:

1. Educational change should study the emergence and development of instructional leadership within current forms of schooling and teaching and understand the facilitators and inhibitors affecting this development. Instructional leaders are assumed to encourage teachers to develop new teaching methods, create an informal climate in

Young people today (students) are the focus of educational change for improvement. From your perspective, what are the key needs of young people at this time and what might the field of educational change prioritize in order to meet these needs?
classroom, and integrate day-to-day topics in the lives of the Y Generation into their class.

(2) Here again, educational change cannot be separated from the research on teacher emotion. Researchers of both fields of study should cooperate to better understand the ways to intensify desirable emotions in the classroom and minimize the display of undesirable ones that might impede student learning. Educational change extends beyond cognition and behavior.

What do you think are the most important educational change issues today? What excites you about the educational change field today?

Personally, I am very curious about education reforms and changes in educational systems and schools in developing countries, what some dub 'the Third World,' because of their distinctive cultural and social values and structures. Our knowledge about educational change and reform implementation in many African, South American, and Asian countries is extremely limited (at least in English). The same can be said about our knowledge about changes in indigenous societies worldwide.

I believe a lack of theoretical and applied knowledge about reform initiation and implementation in developing countries is one of the main reasons for reform failures in many of them, despite efforts of UN agencies such as the World Bank or UNICEF to promote education in these countries. Yet, what we gain from the few studies about education reforms in traditional societies and developing countries is that neoliberal reforms borrowed by world agencies from the developed world and implemented in developing countries usually fail and remain on the rhetoric level.

Personally speaking, I am always excited to read about educational changes in countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Nepal, India, Kenya, Central Africa, or any other developing country. Through the stories of change in these parts of the world, I get some sense of knowledge fertilization; we can learn so much from other cultures, other ways of thoughts, other life styles about our societies, simply because the stories break well-established beliefs about education, change, and reforms in our mind. We learn that school, schooling, and education have manifold meanings that are tightly connected to myths, rituals, values, norms, and so on. I encourage researchers from developed and developing countries to conduct studies about educational change in these countries and unearth new, sometimes alternative, ways to initiate and implement changes or face resistance.

Another topic that might contribute to the literature about educational change is career development, in general, and career stage models, in particular. Looking at the principal/teacher career cycles in terms of a sequence of stages explains why the ability of newly appointed principals to implement changes is constrained and why mid-career principals are in strong need to initiate changes that are most suitable to their school and its community as a means to
prevent decline and burnout.

Career-stage perspective can provide us with insights into the influence of each career stage upon teachers and principals in times of change, their ability to implement the change profoundly, their motive to face resistance, and the like. From my own studies, a senior principal can be motivated and revitalized in times of change just like younger ones and vice versa.

IZHAR OPLATKA

Professor Izhar Oplatka is a professor of Educational Administration and Leadership at The School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Israel and the head of the department of Educational Policy and Administration. Professor Oplatka’s research focuses on the lives and career of school teachers and principals, educational reform and change, emotions and educational administration, and the foundations of educational administration as a field of study.

His most recent books include Higher education consumer choice (2015, with Jane Hemsley-Brown, Palgrave); The legacy of educational administration: A historical analysis of an academic field (2010, Peter Lang Publishing); The essentials of educational administration (2015, Pardes Publisher, in Hebrew); and Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Schools (2015, Routledge, with Anit Somech). Professor Oplatka’s publications have appeared in varied international journals including Educational Administration Quarterly, Journal of Educational Administration, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, Comparative Education Review, Teacher College Record, Journal of Educational Change, Urban Education, and so forth.

Professor Oplatka can be reached at: oplatka@post.tau.ac.il