Letter from the Editors:

It is a tremendous pleasure and honor to serve as the editor of Lead the Change (LTC). It is also an easy assignment in the sense that the prior editors, Helen Janc-Malone, Kristin Kew, Santiago Rincón-Gallardo and Osnat Fellus, did such a fantastic job for so long using LTC as a platform to share some of the most innovative, thoughtful and thought-provoking research on and practice in educational change. They also set the precedent of thinking about educational change in expansive ways. When so much of what we read can become narrower and narrower in focus over time, from its inception, LTC provided opportunities to hear from those with different disciplinary backgrounds and lenses (e.g., organizational theory, anthropology, organizational behavior, change management, critical theory), different content expertise (e.g., adult learning, mathematics, technology, school choice, etc.), and different contexts (e.g., Mainland China, South Korea, Kenya, Israel, United Kingdom, etc.). This is one of key strengths of the series and one which I think makes it particularly special and worthwhile.

With this in mind, we (Jennie Weiner and Min Jung Kim), thought one way to honor the legacy and future of LTC, and celebrate this incredible milestone of 100 Issues, was to revisit some of our past issues. Specifically, we asked various authors to re-read their piece and to consider how they might modify/adjust/add to what they wrote based on their experiences and insights since publication. The result is, we believe, a group of highly relevant and thoughtful pieces bridging the past and the future and offering new opportunities for us to collectively consider the power of change and its limitations in the educational sphere. In the coming year or so, we will be integrating some of these special pieces into the regular rotation of new LTC contributions. We hope you will find them as illuminating and interesting as we do and look forward to the next 100 issues!

Sincerely,

Jennie & Min Ju
Kirsi Pyhältö, PhD.

How, and in what ways, has your work evolved since the first publication of this piece? What ideas/points still hold true? Which might you revise? What do these shifts suggest to you about the field of educational change more broadly?

Our team just completed a longitudinal multimethod research project focusing on large-scale, national curriculum reform in Finland. I think the project has resulted in quite interesting results on the nature of the reform, and potentially on the dynamics of educational change more broadly. For example, based on our results, it seems implementation strategies which promote school impact in terms of committing teachers to school development and finding locally engineered sustainable solutions, are also those which facilitate teachers’ ability to pro-actively handle work stressors. Our results also show that the same implementation strategies contributed to perceived curriculum coherence among teachers and decreased stress. And yet, despite this positive and exciting results high levels of variability existed between schools regarding the extent to which teachers were able to utilize these effective strategies.

Additionally, I am very excited to say that, since our initial Lead the Change piece, we also made two new contributions to the research on agency. First, our research team launched an international comparison across four European countries on induction phase (0 to 5 years of experience) teachers’ sense of professional agency in the classroom and in the professional community. We also examine the socio-cultural factors contributing to these experiences to identify sources of variability/similarity and the impact of context on professional agency over time. We are just now piloting cross-cultural measures. I think exploring early career teachers’ (ECR) professional agency is particularly important from the perspective of sustainable school development for a couple of reasons: ECRs suffer from high turnover rates, experience exhaustion, and feelings of inadequacy. They also use less powerful teaching methods, lack innovation in their classrooms, and often face challenges in collegial relations. As a result, their potential to contribute to school development, for instance by experimenting with novel teaching practices, cannot be fully utilized for the benefit of educational systems or the students within them. Developing strong sense of professional agency both in the professional community and in the classroom can be considered a particularly important asset when facing such challenges. To support the development of such agency among early career teachers, we need to gain better understanding of the anatomy of professional agency and the factors that contribute to it in different kinds of socio-cultural contexts.

Second, our team has recently developed measures exploring pupils’ individual and...
collective learning agency, and just completed the three-year follow-up to our initial study with all 4th and 7th graders from 75 schools participating. Our preliminary findings imply that pupils learning agency is not only strongly connected with their school achievement, but also their well-being. Our long-term goal is to explore the potential relationship between teachers’ professional agency and the development of pupils’ individual and collective learning agency. We have a great opportunity to engage in this work as we have longitudinal data from both the teachers and pupils in these schools.

What advice might you have for those interested in affecting change and improvement?

While educational change is always affected by local and global trends and policies, I think the key to promoting sustainable change lies in schools and specifically in ensuring communities of teachers are given the opportunity to engage as learners. First, I think it is important that all educational reforms are designed in the way to promote active and skillful learning through collective sensemaking and active participation. This should occur within and across all the levels of the educational system including everything from administration to local communities. This collective action increases both alignment within the educational system that will lead to more sustainable change and serves to build the system’s capacity to engage in new learning to generate necessary and positive change. Second, I recommend investing heavily in promoting teachers’ professional agency in the classroom and within the professional communities. Agency in this case being defined as the will to learn (motivation); enhanced learning skills (both self- and co-regulated learning skills); and self-efficacy in learning (both individually and together. I do so because strong professional agency is likely to allow teachers to cope with educational change and pro-actively steer and design such changes. From this perspective, it is thus important to keep in mind that schools need to provide meaningful learning environments not only for pupils, but for teachers too. Third, I would focus the school improvement initiatives on developing learning environments that cultivate pupils’ individual and collective learning agency and work with young people to enhance their interpersonal skills and well-being.

What most excites you about the direction of the field of educational change is going? What are the future research directions that should be addressed in the field of educational change?

Currently, there are a couple of things I find particularly interesting in the field of educational change. The emerging shift from the “what” to the “how” is very relevant and exciting. For example, focusing more heavily on exploring curriculum making processes rather than outcomes is a trend I am enthusiastic to see and would like to encourage moving forward. These kinds of studies are valuable as they provide new understanding as to how the desired reform outcomes can be attained and what might impact those outcomes. The results of such studies also being highly useful also for those who design and implement educational change. Moreover, I am also excited about nested multilevel designs as a way to understand educational change. I think we can gain more valid knowledge if we explore individuals and school communities within their environments and socio-cultural contexts. These kinds of studies are very resource intensive and call for developing new instruments, but at the same time, the potential gains from such efforts are huge both in terms

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of scientific novelty and practical implications. For instance, if we gain understanding on how classroom dynamics contributed to both teachers’ and pupils’ well-being, and how these two are related, we can design powerful interventions to promote well-being in the classrooms.