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An Opportunity for Change

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For learning to take place, one needs ability, effort, and opportunities to learn (Sorensen & Hallinan, 1977). Sorensen and Hallinan's (1977) article is a seminal contribution to the sociology of education and sets the groundwork for so much of our understanding of inequality in educational experiences and outcomes. These concepts and working with Maureen T. Hallinan have shaped my own research agenda. While the model may seem simple, there is much that goes into those three elements. I have examined opportunities to learn through the opportunities parents provide for their children, through classroom instruction, through students' course-taking, through the role of the principal, and more. The articles in this issue of *i.e.: inquiry in education* cover various factors that impact students' opportunities to learn. The articles include a wide range of methods, units of analyses, and topics. The authors examine students, teachers, principals, and organizations. They focus on socioemotional skills, ethical considerations, motivation, job satisfaction, and more. While the articles provide variety in content area, they all have more a specific theme than opportunities to learn: change that impacts opportunities to learn. In the following, I highlight some of the key takeaways related to opportunities to learn and change (but not all—you should read them for even more!) from the articles published in this issue of *i.e.: inquiry in education*.

Often the focus of change in education is to improve the life outcomes of students. However, that does not always occur or occur as fully as we would hope. **Aslan** (2021) examines the expectations and hopes for the future of Syrian students who have immigrated to Turkey due to the extensive conflict in Syria. Their families recognized that a change needed to happen to provide better opportunities for their children. Aslan describes a mixture of positive and negative perceptions from these students about this life change. More specifically, Aslan finds that the students are unhappy with their home lives, but they view their schools in a positive light. Additionally, "according to the study findings, when the participant students were asked to compare their [future] dreams after they came to Turkey to the ones they had in Syria, they mostly stated that they did not have dreams in Syria or the content of their dreams changes after coming to Turkey" (p. 11). Our goal as educators is to provide a safe and caring learning environment for our students so that they can succeed in the future regardless of their life at home. If we are not providing that within our schools, then we need to make impactful changes.

But sometimes, changes in students' educational paths are sudden and outside our control. **Bayar and Alimcan** (2021) study the distance-learning process that was thrust upon students due to COVID-19. The authors use this sudden change to assess how distance learning could be improved. These changes include changes to student behaviors and the infrastructure of distance learning. They also suggest that there are behaviors of teachers that should be changed as well, namely student-teacher communication. While distance/remote/virtual learning has been an option for a decades in some form or another, the COVID-19 pandemic has made this mode of educating more prevalent and provides us as educators an

opportunity to ensure that the opportunities to learn presented via distance learning are as robust as our in-person learning opportunities.

While external context factors certainly impact student opportunities to learn, there are intrinsic factors related to student learning as well. **Cetin** (2021) examines the role of self-regulation (which includes a self-reflective process), metacognition, and self-determination on student achievement. Indeed, self-regulation, metacognition, and self-determination significantly predict university students' GPAs. **Kasikci and Ozhan** (2021) also examine the role of social-emotional factors in student outcomes. They find that in middle school students, social-emotional learning skills are significantly related to achievement as well as happiness. These articles point to another lever for change and opportunity to learn: the development and support of student social-emotional learning. More and more schools are focusing on what was once a latent function of schooling. Now teachers are being asked to provide social-emotional instruction as well as academic instruction within their classrooms. However, for teachers to do so, they need to have the appropriate skills and characteristics.

Teacher characteristics are the focus of the article by **Sahin and Yuskel** (2021). They argue that "ethical principles such as professionalism, responsibility, justice, equity, ensuring a healthy and safe environment, non-corruption, honesty, integrity and trust, objectivity, professional commitment and continuous improvement, respect, effective use of resources should be followed in the teaching profession" (Sahin & Yuksel, 2021, p. 2). Sahin and Yuksel (2021) examine personal change via the growth and development of teachers, with a particular emphasis on ethics and ethical teacher behaviors. The participants indicated that teachers need to be self-reflective and continually work to improvement themselves and "be open to change" (p. 16).

Ruzgar's (2021) article helps us to continue to think about the skills, knowledge, and characteristics that are necessary for high-quality teachers. Ruzgar asks pre-service teachers what good teaching entails and what the characteristics of good teachers are. Ruzgar (2021) finds that good teaching includes creativity, student-centeredness, stimulating and challenging instruction, relevance to the content, and adaptability. Moreover, good teachers are able to build relationships with students, mentor students, and respect students; are enthusiastic; and are content experts. Underlying many of these important qualities is culturally relevant teaching, despite this not being directly mentioned by the participants. Culturally relevant and responsive instruction is vital to student success, which often requires changes within instruction, teachers, schools, and districts.

As people and organizations engage in change, we need to be self-reflective as individuals and organizations. Indeed, the new Illinois Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards (2021) state, "Culturally Responsive Teachers and Leaders are reflective and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and how they impact others, leading to a more cohesive and productive student development as it relates to academic and social-emotional development for all students" (p. 2). **Shresetha** (2021) provides us with an excellent example of how self-reflection can lead us to be more aware of ourselves as educators and

leaders. She conducted a self-study set in Nepal that documents her emotional literacy journey as a Nepali woman earning her PhD in educational leadership. She details a careful self-reflective process that allowed her to improve herself as an educator. The reflective process and openness to continued growth are values that all educators would benefit from. Indeed, Lubelfeld et al. (2020) argue that leaders (and educators more generally) are "unfinished" and that they are constantly growing. While there is uncertainty that comes with being unfinished, an unfinished leader/educator provides a role model for their staff and students by being self-reflective, honest with themselves, and open to change.

Steibick and Hart (2021) examine teacher instructional change and self-reflection through the development of a reflection tool to inform their practice. The reflective tool allows the teachers to engage in inquiry "to promote curiosity, evaluation, collaboration, planning, and problem-solving" (p. 11). While the tool is one product of the study, the more important product was the action research that the teachers engaged in during the study. The reflective process started with teachers questioning but then moved to teachers analyzing data.

Not only can self-reflection lead to instructional changes, but it may lead to people making changes within themselves and their behavior. The hope of education is that people are changing for the better. For example, **Ozudogru** (2021) examines how pre-service teachers' identities are formed. More specifically, how do teaching practice and video reflections impact the identities of pre-service teachers? Through their reflections, the pre-service teachers refine their thinking and skills regarding what it means to be teacher. This study provided another example of the importance of self-reflection.

We need to consider not only individual level change but also the roles of people within an organization. Change is not easy, and in organizations, we should expect that there are various levels of readiness for change. To successfully implement change, we need to remember that "the people doing the work [are] at the center of the change process" (AIR, 2010, para. 1). However, change is often accompanied with a sense of loss (Heifetz et al., 2009). The Concerns Based Adoption Model provides a framework for helping us understand people's reactions to change. There are seven stages of concerns, starting with being unconcerned, then seeking information, moving to how it personally impacts them, then management concerns, consequence concerns, moving to collaboration focus, and finally, ideas to improve the change (AIR, 2020). In the constantly changing world of education, we need to be willing to accept that there will be change and participate in that change. However, it is important for change leaders to recognize that the people within their organization may need to move through the various stages of concern in order to successfully implement the change. Leaders also need to reflect on how much change is being asked of the school community.

In *The Relationship Between Change Fatigue and Job Satisfaction of Teachers: Gender and Experience as Moderators*, the authors focus on teachers, "who are among the most important elements of educational organizations and witness many change initiatives throughout their professional lives" (**Limon et al., 2021**, p. 13). The authors find that change fatigue and job satisfaction are negatively correlated. This finding

aligns with the work of Doug Reeves (2006), who reminds us that we need to weed the garden so that we make room for new initiatives within our organizations. We cannot keep adding more and more on to our teachers' plates. High-impact leaders "must avoid those actions that divert teachers and educational leaders away from the essential mission and vision of the organization" (Reeves, 2016, p. 64). Instead, we need to make a critical examination of the organization's purpose and focus and ensure that change initiatives are aligned to that mission and vision. Additionally, leaders need to include stakeholders in the work of the mission and vision.

Guy and Arthur's (2021) article, *"I Am Not Alone": Impact of Participating in a Group-Level Assessment for Undergraduate Women Engineering Students,* provides us with an example of how hearing from the voices of our stakeholders can help facilitate change. They argue that "participatory research is able to shed new light on this topic and provide a novel perspective on the problem at hand directly from the women themselves, while at the same time empowering participants throughout the research process" (Guy & Arthur, 2021, pp. 3–4). Voice is an essential element of effective change since change is not done to someone but with someone, and in education, this includes the students. Integrating student voice in educational decisions can yield meaningful results in improving not only their own experiences within school and schooling but also the students' own skills in providing feedback (Lubelfeld et al., 2018). As Guy and Arthur found, incorporating student voice can empower the students to be change agents.

Listening to stakeholders is only one element of the set of behaviors that leaders need to use in order to implement change within schools. **Demirdag** (2021) focuses specifically on the role of instructional leadership within schools and its relationship to teacher motivation. The results indicate that as teachers perceive higher levels of instructional leadership, their own motivation increases. In this study, the element of instructional leadership that has the strongest relationship with teacher motivation is that the school leader promotes professional development. This emphasis on support highlights the importance of relationship to effect change. For change to be successful, there needs to be trust (Reeves, 2016). The demonstration of caring and support helps to promote trust within organizations.

While it is important to recognize that change has an individual component, it is also important to recognize that organizations can learn as well. **Altun and Bulut** (2021) consider how COVID-19 is related to personal, organizational, and educational learning. COVID-19 resulted in principals changing their own understandings, attitudes, behaviors, and awareness. The schools as organizations learned as well. They learned about crisis and resource management, team spirit, and communication. In education, we learned about distance learning (also see **Bayar & Alimcan**), the importance of the people that make up the school communities, and planning.

For organizations to learn, they require an effective leader. The focus on self-reflection and the acceptance of being unfinished are one element of being an effective leader—more specifically, a resonant leader. A resonant leader is "in tune with those around them" (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005, p. 4). In addition to being a mindful leader, the other two elements of being a resonant leader are hope and

compassion (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). "*Hope,* enables us to believe that the future we envision is attainable, and to move toward our vision and goals," and through "*compassion,* we understand people's wants and needs and feel motivated to act on our feelings" (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005, p. 9). The combination of these three elements allows leaders to be persistent in the face of the challenges faced by education today and to support those around them.

Kaya (2021) reminds us that while change is dependent on the people within the organization, change is also impacted by contextual factors. In addition to the people within the organization, school size, resources, climate, and leadership also impact organizational innovation. That is to say, in order to implement change, it is important to understand the given situation within which change is occurring. Wagner et al. (2006) offer a framework to help understand the current situation when implementing change. They argue that change leaders should understand the four arenas for change: Context (larger external realities), Culture (shared values and beliefs), Conditions (external structures), and Competencies (knowledge and skills). Kaya's article examines the role of these four arenas for change and their relationship to innovation.

Technology in education is one of the paths that we can use to move forward and is often a source of innovation for schools. As we moved to remote learning in March 2020 due to COVID-19, we had to rely on technology more than ever, and as we move back to in-person learning, technology continues to play a key role in education in new and exciting ways. **Aksut and Aydin** (2021) use the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework to examine using digital stories in preschool education. The authors argue that digital stories can support concept learning in the classroom, but the teachers need to have technology competence in order to implement digital storytelling. With technology, it is about not just using the technology itself but using it as an innovative tool for learning. As the International Society for Technology in Education (2021) argues, teachers should be "helping students become empowered learners" (para. 1) through the use of technology. This requires that teachers are themselves learners, leaders, citizens, collaborators, designers, facilitators, and analysts (International Society for Technology in Education, 2021).

Robinette (2021) also focuses on innovation in instruction and teacher competencies. More specifically, Robinette asks the teachers to unlearn (Lubelfeld & Polyak, 2017) how they have been using innovation configurations and to use them for instructional improvement. "The innovation configuration map should work as a means to mediate teachers' learning and development of how to plan and instruct the guided reading program" (Robinette, 2021, p. 5). Robinette finds that using innovation configurations could support the teachers' development if they engage with them in a meaningful way. But effective use of innovation configurations also takes time for self-reflection on their use and implications for instruction.

Often, the challenges that we are faced with in education are an opportunity to unlearn how we have always done things in the past and move forward in an exciting direction (Lubelfeld & Polyak, 2017). In other words, challenges are an opportunity for us to be innovative. The articles in this issue of *i.e.: inquiry*

in education provide us insight into elements that we need to unlearn, opportunities we should continue to enhance for students, and levers for change. We have the opportunity to innovate. We have the opportunity to reflect on what our core values are as educators and organizations. We have the opportunity to embark on great change.

Reflecting on opportunity and change reminds of a time when I went to visit my dad. At the time, he had a dog named Buster who was a Chihuahua mix. Buster had a little staircase that led up to the couch. During the visit, the staircase got moved away from the couch so that it led to nowhere. Buster still climbed those stairs, stopped at the top, and stayed there. He was confused that the couch was no longer at the top. My dad said, "He doesn't do well with change." How will you respond to change when you are confronted it? Will you stop and wait for things to return to "normal," like Buster? Will you resist change? Will you embrace the opportunity to unlearn the way things have always been done in the past? Will you seek innovation? Will you lead your organization to be a learning organization? What opportunities to learn will you provide for your students? How will you change the lives of your students?

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