



LEAD THE CHANGE SERIES

Q & A with AERA 2023 Presenters: *Networks in Educational Change: Contexts, Theories, and Practice*

Note from the Editor:

Ramping up to AERA 2023, *Lead the Change* will feature the excellent presenters in the Educational Change SIG sessions. As a SIG, we are proud to present seven sessions which feature different contexts, perspectives, and methodological approaches to educational change. We asked presenters to reflect on their work and how to use our time at AERA to collectively approach the prickliest problems in education today. It was a pleasure to learn more about the exciting work happening across the globe, and I look forward to learning more at the conference. This issue features the presenters in the *Networks in Educational Change: Contexts, Theories, and Practice* session. See you in Chicago!

Best,
Alex Lamb, Series Editor

Educational Change SIG Sessions at AERA 2023

Thursday, April 13: 8:00am – 9:30am CDT

Critical Educational Change: Culturally Responsive Leadership and Research Trends in the Borderland Context and Beyond

Thursday, April 13: 11:40am – 1:10pm CDT

Networks in Educational Change: Contexts, Theories, and Practice

Saturday, April 15

8:00am – 9:30am CDT: *Engaging Educators in Equity-Focused Change*

11:40am – 1:10pm CDT: *System Change, Well-Being, and Affect: Voices From the Ground-Up*

2:50pm – 4:20pm CDT: *Conditions Conducive to Learning that Promote Educational Change*

Sunday, April 16: 11:40am – 1:10pm CDT

STEM and Sustainable Development Goals

Friday, May 5: 8:00am – 9:30am CDT (Virtual Session)

Transforming Education and Teacher Education: Technologies, Pedagogies, and Practices



Educational Change SIG adopts an interdisciplinary and international approach to understanding many aspects of educational change, including large-scale reform, school-initiated change, school improvement, and classroom-level change.

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ABOUT THE SERIES

Lead the Change series, featuring renowned educational change experts from around the globe, serves to highlight promising research and practice, to offer expert insight on small- and large-scale educational change, and to spark collaboration within our SIG.

Educational Change SIG Events at AERA 2023

All are welcome!

Friday, April 14 5: 11:40am – 1:10pm CDT

Educational Change SIG Business Meeting

Saturday, April 15 6:30pm – 8:30pm CDT

Educational Change SIG Reception

Researching With Communities to Promote Inclusive Education in Latin America

Ignacio Calderón Almendros
University of Malaga, Spain

The 2023 AERA theme is Interrogating Consequential Education Research in Pursuit of Truth. How does your research respond to this call?

Our research is committed to the search for truth, but it does not mean that there is only one way to understand it. It has been precisely this monolithic way of understanding truth, social sciences, education, society and ‘the normal’, which has contributed to the current forms of inequality. An inequality that is not only present in our current societies, but is growing at an alarming rate (Chancel et al., 2022). In schools, this growing inequality manifests itself in more or less subtle forms of exclusion: some are exercised in a blatant way; others without the person perceiving it. In all cases, there is a hegemonic conception of reality that prevents things from changing. For example, the majority conceptions about disability or poverty make school failure logical, which entails a state of conformity with what happens in schools and of immobility.

What we propose is that it is the people who occupy subordinate positions who have the capacity to develop arguments and new narratives that question the hegemonic discourses that organize schools and maintain the “scientific” discourses that place them in positions of subordination. These include discourses such as IQ narratives and all the professional, legal, and policy discourses that support them. All these discourses constitute the legitimate framework of thought and action within the school, which establishes the limits of what can be imagined, questioned, and

done. The educational proposal, then, is to work together with common people — particularly with those who are disadvantaged so that they build their own narratives, as Freire (1972) would suggest, and that these narratives become more coherent and stronger to gain authority and become action. This cannot happen with the emergence of an individual narrative, but with the construction of collective narratives that can resist, question, and challenge the hegemony of the discourses that usually dominate their lives. Only then, the truth regimes of schools can be transformed, because they are taking into account historically ignored and oppressed realities.

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What are some of the ideas you hope the field of Educational Change and the audience at AERA can learn from your work related to practice, policy, and scholarship?

In different Spanish-speaking countries we have worked to promote inclusive education based on this idea of contributing to the community itself by building the sense of inclusion in the school.

Starting from the analyzes of oppressed groups implies that the narratives emerge from an emotion: pain. Building inclusive education from there gives a profoundly humanist meaning to a concept that has been manipulated by neoliberalism to the point of reducing it to nothing. Therefore, this approach, which seeks to subvert power relations in schools, goes through a mobilizing emotional cartography: from solitary pain to collective recognition, anger as a revolutionary impulse, and love by becoming a collective project hoped for by social and educational justice.

For this to happen, the discourses have to maintain the languages of the oppressed people throughout the process (Calderón-Almendros, 2019). These languages

(sometimes maternal, intuitive, loving) are being abandoned throughout schooling, and replaced by professional, bureaucratic, and supposedly scientific and neutral languages.

We have studied this idea particularly with people with disabilities: a mother who goes to school talking about her son as a correct person, leaving the limits imposed by normality, ends up succumbing to the overwhelming power of the institution and professional language: reality is what the institution says. That mother has to assume that her son is not well, and refusing to do so is interpreted as not seeing reality. She has to undergo to the interpretative schemes of the professional, which are loaded with the historical prejudice that has kept people like her son out of school. This school's rejection of

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an emerging narrative—a new conception of reality—eliminates any option for transformation. This logic is shared among many disadvantaged groups, who are disarmed of their languages, and thus demobilized. In the face of institutional language, they are left naked.

For this reason, educational change focused on inclusion and equity needs to start from these genuine languages and fight to maintain them. It implies a connection with other people who little by little are joining the struggle, because they connect with those interpretations that they have been abandoning, forced by the system. The connection between different pains shared within the school produce the emergence of broader and intersectional narratives that take into account different groups and sectors of the educational system: a

school that excludes, causes pain in the student body, but also in the families and in the teaching staff. All of them are abandoning their own senses of the meaning of educate. And together they can rebuild new collective meanings, based on their own research made by conversations and actions at different levels.

In our work, both in Spain and in Latin America, we have generated moments of collective narrative construction, with conversations among a large number of people in which they analyze the situation of their educational systems, their limits and possibilities, as well as the role that they can take on its transformation. These conversations —nourished by personal and biographical experiences— constitute the new interpretation framework, in which they have been able to collectively transgress what is not allowed to think. These narratives are the breeding ground for other narratives focused on action: the community begins to build responses to the reality it lives. Reality is also constructed by them.

What excites you about the direction of the field of Educational Change, and how might we share and develop those ideas at AERA 2023?

Together with Mel Ainscow, for years we have been accompanying several teachers in Latin America to develop their own practices, trusting in their knowledge, and building languages of practice that are based on the recognition of the value of other voices in the community. We had previously gone through processes in which we were building conversations among teachers, community members and policy makers where the voices of students and families gained value (Calderón-Almendros, Ainscow, Molina & Bersanelli, 2020). This constituted new relationship frameworks between the participants, but also between the scholars who were situated within those narratives, which have been illuminating our future within the collaborative Action Research processes that we have been accompanying in those schools. Being in processes of change at different levels implies a mixture of knowledge, a reversal of roles, and a subverting of power. Mel Ainscow

and I are going to delve into these years of research together in our presentation at AERA.

But without a doubt, the most exciting thing is to see how people who recover their stolen languages gradually manage to become masters of their lives. This supposes the construction of collective purposes, which seek to expand the social imagination regarding what is possible, what is necessary and what is desirable in inclusive education, creating cultural productions¹. But also creating school experiences of possibility, and sharing their processes of Participatory Action Research, because they have a clear sense of contributing to an educational change as a social movement (Rincon-Gallardo, 2019). All of them are mobilized under a motto: '[Inclusive education. Wanting it is creating it](#)'. Nobody is going to do it for them. And if they want it, they have to build it.²

For this purpose, some work groups have emerged and become collectives fighting for a fairer school. For example, professionals who regenerate their discourses based on the knowledge of families (Calderón-Almendros, Moreno-Parra & Vila-Merino, 2022). Among all those we have seen grow up, we highlight a group of high school students who are beginning to lead changes in the Spanish school system (Mojtar-Mendieta & Calderón-Almendros, 2022),³ and who come out of shame to proudly show their school experiences publicly. They have learned together to get out of the discourse that blames them for their failures, and their new narratives are based on emotions that move them to action. These narratives consolidate new forms of thought and identity and constitute symbolic systems in which other people can reposition themselves. In a recent speech, Antón, a member of the 'Students for Inclusion' collective, recounted his painful school experience to students at the University of Malaga, Spain. At the end, one university student said: 'When I listen to him, something

burns inside me'. I asked her if it was out of anger. She replied: 'No. It's for hope.'

References

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Ignacio Calderon-Almendros is an Associate Professor in the Department of Theory and History of Education at the University of Malaga, Spain. My research interests lie in inclusive education, fundamentally, the social nature of disability (Disability Studies), disadvantage and sociocultural processes of exclusion. Through Ethnographic and Narrative Research, I examine identity construction and educational experience, and use Action Research as a means to bring about transformation.

¹ My colleagues Teresa Rascón, Florencio Cabello, and I are presenting 'How to make the participatory social documentary a tool for educational inclusion?' at AERA.

² This idea is addressed and exemplified in another AERA presentation: 'Students as subjects. Resistance and collective resilience to challenge barriers to inclusion' authored together with Luz Mojtar and Teresa Rascón.

³ This Student Team has been recognized by the AERA with the 2023 *Youth Teams in Education Research Award*.