Editorial

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One well-known philosophical paradox asks what would happen if an irresistible force were to meet an immovable object. Centuries of philosophers, writers, film directors, novelists, and countless others have considered this paradox. On the one hand, if a force is irresistible, the object must move. On the other, the object is immovable, not even an irresistible force can disturb it. As a paradox, it is seemingly both contradictory and true at the same time.

For years, school has been viewed by many as an immovable object, bound by the laws of a grammar of schooling (Tyack and Tobin 1994) that seem to revert schools back to a recognizable form despite wave after wave of reform. Over the last twenty years, the *Journal of Educational Change* has documented these waves of reform as well as the seemingly intractable nature of schools to fundamentally change their form and function. No force seemed able to deeply alter schools in any long-lasting fashion.

In 2020, school met its paradoxical match in the form of the ostensibly irresistible force of Covid-19. Barreling across continents and oceans, the virus left a wake of shuttered schools in its destructive path. For much of the spring and summer, school as most have understood it for centuries ceased to exist. That is not to say that *schooling* ended; indeed, around the world schools crafted ways to keep learning going through an innovative and often frustrating mix of online and remote learning opportunities for young people. However, school buildings themselves closed at alarming rates. Research from the spring indicates that nearly every student around the world was out of school for at least a period of time in 2020 (UNESCO 2020).

By design, a paradox is contradictory and yet true. By this logic, no force, even one as powerful as a pandemic, can truly *move* schools to be fundamentally different in the long term. And still, no school can resist the force of a pandemic. As of yet, the winner, if a winner is possible, of this philosophical battle has yet to be determined. Schools have opened again in some places, and in places where they may not be physically open learning continues. Additionally, plans for re-opening seem to be more oriented towards making things as they were rather than pushing towards truly new ways of doing things. Thus, the object remains immovable. But must it?

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The *Journal of Educational Change* has been the pre-eminent international venue for exploring questions of reform and change for 20 years. As such, it has tackled a range of topics from individual classroom change to large-scale, system-wide change. In all cases, authors have pressed researchers and practitioners to consider what factors support or inhibit sustainable changes in schools. Nevertheless, educational journals can be slow moving, if not immovable themselves. The process of publication from article conception to its publication can take years even in the best of circumstances. To document the ongoing effects of Covid-19 on schools then, a journal must be innovative and attempt to fight inertia.

To meet this challenge, we introduce a series called *Back to School*. In this series, we invite authors to explore how and in what ways Covid-19 has shaped—and is shaping—schools and schooling around the world. We ask authors to draw on their experiences and research to pose questions about, make suggestions for, and critique efforts aimed at getting young people, their teachers, and their school leaders back to school. It is our aim to trouble the notion of going back to school by querying whether a return to the way things have always been is the most fruitful avenue for true change. We hope this series provokes discussion amongst practitioners, policymakers, and educational researchers and that the conversation here leads to a deeper understanding of the possibilities of educational change at a broad scale.

The first paper in this series is by Yong Zhao and Jim Watterston. In their paper *The Changes We Need: Education Post Covid-19*, the authors suggest that now is the moment to consider previously proposed promising educational changes that never met success. They identify three changes to the education system that should be made, focusing on the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, and delivery of instruction in novel ways. They urge us to consider fundamentally rejecting many of the traditional forms of teaching and learning that have become, in a sense, immovable: standardized curriculum, rote learning, and even seated classrooms with traditional teachers. Ultimately, this essay suggests that the irresistible force can win; if schools have to reconsider many of their operation beliefs, then surely can they capitalize on the current moment to make changes that benefit students and their learning.

We invite authors to join us in this conversation. University-based scholars and students, as well as practitioners in schools and policy-makers in a variety of contexts are welcome to submit papers to the editorial team for review. While we cannot publish all, we aim to bring a range of perspectives to the fore. Please consider submitting a short paper (approximately 3000 words or fewer, minus references) on this important and timely topic.

References

- Tyack, D., & Tobin, W. (1994). The “grammar” of schooling: Why has it been so hard to change? *American Educational Research Journal*, 31(3), 453–479.
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