Viewing innovations through different paradigms is not only a necessary but a pivotal conceptual and methodological approach for understanding the implementation process of large-scale and whole-school reform. Although the field of educational reform is fraught with non-communicating conceptual paradigms, *Putting Reform into Perspective* literally puts a label on the reform process by examining large-scale reform from the conceptual and personal perspectives of the researchers studying reform and the stakeholders who are asked to implement it. In doing so, this issue brings together varying paradigms of knowledge that, while rooted in differing disciplines, are united in their qualitative attempts to gain access to the processes, practices and implications of reform implementation. This issue, *Putting Reform into Perspective*, examines large-scale and whole-school educational reform using multiple theoretical perspectives comprised of critical, sociological, anthropological, and feminist perspectives.

Success with the implementation of reform depends on the people engaged. The process of reform often leaves us with more questions than answers, questions which are determined by the varying contexts of large-scale reform. Given the nature of education and reform, there are also questions of power, policy and responsibility at stake, as well as a host of human factors including emotions, values and pragmatism. In short, the process of examining reforms at work is both a complex and messy business. The use of multiple perspectives helps to capture aspects of this complexity.

The major question explored in *Putting Reform into Perspective* is, ‘What is needed to resolve the social and critical issues impacting large-scale reform?’ Following are four research papers that deal with differing perspectives of reform, but which also reflect overlapping ideas, themes and threads that connect this issue together. The interconnectedness of ideas presented in this issue is a reflection of the intellectual richness and complementary positions on the issues currently held by scholars concerned with schools and large-scale
reform. Below is set out what each perspective has to offer in an examination of large-scale reform, identifying authors and their contributions to this special issue.

The first paper looks at aspects of the No Child Left Behind reform from the perspective of critical theory. The authors, Henry Giroux, of McMaster University and Michèle Schmidt, of Simon Fraser University, claim that schools as democratic public spheres have the potential to help students interpret the conditions that characterize the larger global universe but also to transform it when necessary. Education as a ‘project’ cannot be removed from the larger historical, social, economic and political world. The emphasis, in this essay, is on relating three distinct crises. The first, the crisis of youth, particularly disadvantaged youth, suggests that under existing approaches to educational reform the social contract has been broken. The second crisis, the crisis of current educational reforms, views students not as responsible citizens who need the knowledge and skills to shape the future, but as customers, clients and consumers, who need to be educated to take tests. Exacerbating this crisis is the disparity between a reform that claims to promote equity, justice and citizenship, yet seems to be more concerned with the imperatives of the marketplace and the needs of the individual consumer. Finally, the third crisis, the crisis of the social, suggests that a language does not exist in dominant educational reform movements that stresses critique, power and social agency as fundamental to educating students in the discourse of democratic values and social citizenship. A mode of critical pedagogy is required that goes beyond simply teaching students to be critical and interpretive. This mode of critical pedagogy focuses on linking a culture of questioning with matters of social and democratic responsibility. It attempts to offer up a notion of accountability and connect thinking with acting and learning within social change.

The next paper looks at some of the sociological aspects of reform. The authors, Thomas Popkewitz of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Sverker Lindblad, of the University of Uppsala, Sweden, begin their argument with the notion that educational reform and reformist educational research can be thought of as a field of cultural practices. The authors use the notion of cultural practices to consider how different institutional patterns, authority relations, stories, analogies, memories and visions come together to constitute the objects of schooling. These objects of schooling refer to the teacher who administers the child and the child who learns, grows,