

The New Meaning of Educational Change

THIRD EDITION

Michael Fullan

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MICHAEL FULLAN



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And Conor makes five

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Preface

This is the third edition of *The Meaning of Educational Change*. An enormous amount has happened in the decade since the last edition. If anything, “the meaning hypothesis” has become deeply confirmed. As we shall see, advances in cognitive science make meaning the foundation for the new pedagogy of constructivism. Chaos or complexity theory leads us inevitably to the conclusion that working on “coherence” is the key to dealing with the nonlinear fragmented demands of overloaded reform agendas.

Fortunately, the interest in educational reform has reached new heights as we enter the 21st century. Grappling with the problem of achieving large-scale reform grounded in local ownership has become the new challenge—overtaking the false choice between local innovation and macro, superficial reform. There are a great many new examples of initiatives and corresponding lessons of change to be mined.

These new lessons of reform enable us to become much more precise about the inner workings of educational change processes. To do this we have to understand both the small and big pictures. We have to know what change feels like from the point of view of the teacher, student, parent, and administrator if we are to understand the actions and reactions of individuals; and if we are to comprehend the big picture, we must combine the aggregate knowledge of these individual situations with an understanding of organization and institutional factors that influence the process of change as governments, teacher unions, school systems, and communities interact.

One of the most promising features of this new knowledge about change is that it makes sense. Indeed, rendering complexity understandable and amenable to productive action is the theme of this book. This doesn’t mean that it is easy. When you have a good idea and you are facing an urgent problem it is easy to ignore the process of change. Resisting the urge to bulldoze ahead is counterintuitive.

I have written this book for individuals at all levels of the educational system. All key players will find a chapter on their own roles, as well as chapters on other roles and agencies with whom they must interact. Part I—Understanding Educational Change—provides an overview of the history, sources, processes, and outcomes of change and the implications for dealing with it. Part II contains chapters on each of the main roles at the local level, examining the daily reality people face. In Part III, I return to the larger scene to consider the role of governments, the evolution of the teaching profession, and the future of educational change. Each of the 16 chapters can be read and understood on its own, although the underlying theme and total picture depend on the combined chapters.

I contend that the “knowledge base” of change is becoming more profound, and that it is absolutely indispensable to dealing with the relentless ubiquity of innovation and reform. It isn’t that people resist change as much as they don’t know how to cope with it. The answer is for individuals, especially in interaction with others, to arm themselves with knowledge of the change process and to refine it continually through reflective

action, and to test what they know against the increasingly available knowledge in the literature on change.

There is not much jargon in the book: one cannot claim that meaning is the answer and then proceed to write an abstruse treatise on the subject. The main findings are amply referenced. For the student of change who wishes to delve into the topic, the reference section contains some 250 items, many of which are new. For those less interested in the research base, the chapters can be read without attention to the references. In short, the book is intended for professionals (policymakers and practitioners) at all levels of the system, as well as for professors and university students seeking a textbook on theories and practices of educational change.

Dissatisfaction with and interest in educational reform is a worldwide phenomenon. Although most of the material I draw on comes from North America, any discussion with those involved in educational innovation and reform in other countries quickly reveals that the nature of problems and the principles of success and failure are common around the world. The fact that our books on educational change have been translated into almost a dozen languages attests to the wide relevance of the ideas.

It is also important to acknowledge that the best insights into the change process come from our association with practice. While Kurt Lewin was right in saying that “there is nothing so practical as good theory,” it is equally true that “there is nothing so theoretical as good practice.” This is especially so when it comes to change theory. In this sense, I have learned most from the work we have been directly involved in locally and around the world. Many of these ideas have been developed in our Learning Consortium partnership with school districts in the Toronto region, and with my colleagues at the University of Toronto where we have been engaged in our own laboratory reform of higher education including a massive merger involving almost 200 professors, 3,500 students, 300 administrative staff, and two lab schools coming together in 1996 from two different cultures. I have been privileged to learn about change with my colleagues at the University of Toronto on a day-to-day basis.

Other long-term projects we are involved in fuel the fire: policy developments in Ontario concerning the Ministry of Education and Training, the Education Quality and Accountability Office, and the Ontario College of Teachers; the Manitoba School Improvement Program; the Assessment Literacy Initiative in Edmonton; the Consortium on Educational Change in Illinois; the Center for Development in Louisiana; the Guilford County Leadership Development Initiative in North Carolina; the partnership with the Aga Khan University in Pakistan; the work with the Soros Foundation in Eastern Europe; the exchanges with the World Bank on reform projects in many countries; and the fascinating evaluation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in England in which targeted improvements are being attempted in 20,000 schools simultaneously.

In other words, I have benefited enormously from these action projects working with large international groups of students and doers of change. These include the thousands of teachers, principals, superintendents, teacher union leaders, and others who have participated in our workshops. Conducting workshops on managing change is one of the better ways of learning about it. In these sessions, there is no shortage of wrenching practical questions constantly causing one to go back to the drawing board.

It is now impossible to thank by name the hundreds of cochange agents working on educational improvement who so generously give of their time and ideas. I can only say that they know who they are and I thank them sincerely.

Producing the manuscript was a massive task. It had to be done well, and it had to be done quickly. Claudia Cuttress was able to pull all of it together in short order because of her knowledge of the various projects and sources, and because she works with amazing speed and quality. My heartfelt thanks for her tremendous contribution.

On the home front, Wendy, Bailey, and Conor have been great and fun supporters throughout. They know that *The New Meaning of Educational Change* is a special book. While it would be a stretch to call it a family project, my family has been closely associated with its history over the almost 25 years of development to the present edition.

To all these people, I hope the final product contributes some sense of new meaning and value commensurate with at least a fraction of the support I have received. Thank you all.

PART I
**UNDERSTANDING
EDUCATIONAL CHANGE**

CHAPTER 1

A Brief History of Educational Change

Everything must change at one time or another or else a static society will evolve.

—Anonymous first-year university student
on an English language proficiency test

One person claims that schools are being bombarded by change; another observes that there is nothing new under the sun. A policymaker charges that teachers are resistant to change; a teacher complains that administrators introduce change for their own self-aggrandizement and that they neither know what is needed nor understand the classroom. A parent is bewildered by a new practice in reading and by the relevance of education to future jobs. Some argue that restructuring schools is the only answer, while others decry that this too is just a pipe dream diverting our attention from the core curriculum changes that are desperately needed. One university professor is convinced that schools are only a reflection of society and cannot be expected to bring about change; another professor is equally convinced that schools would be all right if only superintendents and principals had more “vision” as educational leaders, and teachers were more motivated to learn new approaches to improving the curriculum. A governor works hard to get major new legislation passed to reform education; a principal thinks, “this too shall pass.” Charter schools are hailed simultaneously as saving the day and destroying the public education system. Commercial entities take over school districts and claim that they can do a better job. States pass dramatic legislation to serve notice to “failing schools” and “failing school districts” with corresponding invasive interventions intended to make things right. Standards-based reform is held up as the answer to our woes.

Amidst all this turmoil, agents at all levels wonder how to get more and more programs institutionalized, while teachers think that it is these same promoters of change who should be institutionalized, not their programs. Students are too distracted by a host of other matters to pay much attention to all the uproar.

What are we learning from these mostly aborted and confused attempts at reform? Remarkably, the history of intensive educational change is less than half a century old. I won’t say much about the 1950s. It was relatively quiet for most of the decade. The big initial development, as Miles (1993) has noted, was the National Training Laboratories’ (NTL) training in group skills, shared reflection, diagnosis, and action. For the most part these experiences were laboratory-based, detached from the day-to-day instructional issues and function of schools.

To say that NTL and related projects had limited impact is not to say that they were on the wrong track. Today, for example, it is abundantly clear that one of the keys to successful change is the *improvement of relationships* (Fullan, 2001)—precisely the

focus of group development. In any case, as it turned out, these early attempts represented mere tinkering. There were much larger fish to fry if education was to play a leading role in societal development.

THE FIRST ATTEMPT FALLS FLAT

One doesn't have to believe that Sputnik was the literal cause of large-scale reform in the United States post-1957, or that all new ideas started in the 1960s, or that the United States was the only country engaged in national educational reform, to know that something very different was in the air in the 1960s. Elmore (1995) stated earlier in describing the pre-1950s "progressive period":

What is most interesting about the progressive period, as compared with other periods of educational reform, is that its aims included explicit attempts to change pedagogy, coupled with a relatively strong intellectual and practical base. Noted intellectuals—John Dewey, in particular—developed ideas about how schools might be different. (p. 7)

Progressive reformers believed, according to Elmore, that for the most part "good ideas would travel of their own volition" into schools and classrooms (p. 18). The strategy, noted Elmore, "turned inward, toward the creation of exemplary settings" (p. 11), particularly over time. The result:

We can produce many examples of how educational practice could look different, but we can produce few, if any, examples of large numbers of teachers engaging in these practices in large scale institutions designed to deliver education to most children. (Elmore, 1995, p. 11)

Despite these failures, and indeed ignoring their lessons, the U.S. federal government launched a large-scale national curriculum reform series of initiatives in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. I have previously labeled this the "adoption era" of reform because the goal was to get innovations out there, as if flooding the system with external ideas would bring about desired improvements. Huge sums of money were poured into major curriculum reforms like PSSC Physics, BSCC Biology, and MACOS Social Sciences, and organizational innovations such as open plan schools, flexible scheduling, and team teaching.

By the early 1970s there was mounting evidence that the yield was minuscule, confined to isolated examples. Goodlad, Klein and associates' (1970) *Behind the Classroom Door*, Sarason's (1971) *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change*, and Gross, Gianquinta, and Bernstein's (1971) *Implementing Organizational Innovations* all attested to the absence of change at the level of the classroom. The term "implementation" (or more accurately, "failed implementation") came into the vocabulary of reform, and in the first major review of research, Fullan and Pomfret (1977) documented the massive failure of reform. Putting ideas into practice was a far more complex process than people realized.

Elmore summarized that what these models missed

was the complex process by which local curricular decisions get made, the entrenched and institutionalized political and commercial relationships that support existing textbook-driven curricula, the weak incentives operating on teachers to change their practices in their daily work routines, and the extraordinary costs of making large scale, long-standing changes of a fundamental kind in how knowledge is constructed in classrooms. (1995, p. 15)

There was actually great pressure and incentives to become innovative, and this resulted in many schools adopting reforms for which they did not have the capacity (individually or organizationally) to put into practice. Thus, innovations were adopted on the surface with some of the language and structures becoming altered, but not the practice of teaching.

Another major force for reform around the Western world in the 1960s was the various forms of civil rights movements, pinpointing scores of inequities. Numerous national initiatives across the world focused on the disadvantaged. The education system was thought to be one of the major societal vehicles for reducing social inequality. To the intrinsic complexity of changing one's practice was added the enormous difficulty of tackling the existing power structure and overcoming the prejudice and ignorance of ethnic, class, gender, and special differences of all kinds. Nor is there much evidence that the lives of the disadvantaged have improved, even in cases where sincere efforts to do so are in evidence (Oakes et al., 1999). And where gains have been achieved, it has been in isolated cases, seemingly guaranteed not to go to scale.

Not much progress has been made since the 1960s, despite renewed interest in large-scale reform in the 1980s focusing on accountability. The *pressure* for reform has increased, but not yet the reality. The good news is that there is a growing sense of urgency about the need for large-scale reform, more appreciation of the complexity of achieving it, and even some examples of partial success.

The urgent reasons for reform are now familiar. The global society is increasingly complex, requiring educated citizens who can learn continuously, and who can work with diversity, locally and internationally. Although the source of blame varies, it is now an undeniable conclusion that the educational system and its partners have failed to produce citizens who can contribute to and benefit from a world that offers enormous opportunity, and equally complex difficulty of finding your way in it. Rohlen (1999) makes this case convincingly in his analysis of "social software for a learning society," in which he argues:

In essence, the message is that our schools need to teach learning processes that better fit the way work is evolving. Above all, this means teaching the skills and habits of mind that are essential to problem-solving, especially where many minds need to interact. (pp. 251–252)

For these reasons we have witnessed a growing intensity in the efforts at large-scale reform in the 1990s. We can now accurately conclude, as I will illustrate throughout this

book, that large-scale reform has returned. We are now less naive than the last time we had such an opportunity, while society, and therefore the problem of reform, is more complex.

The forces reinforcing the status quo are systemic. The current system is held together in many different crosscutting ways. Confronting the isolationism and privatism of educational systems is a tall order. It requires intensive action sustained over several years to make it possible both physically and attitudinally for teachers to work naturally together in joint planning; observation of each other's practice; and seeking, testing, and revising teaching strategies on a continuous basis. Reform is not just putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the cultures of the classrooms, the schools, the districts, the universities, and so on. There is much more to educational reform than most people realize. This book honors that complexity but also identifies the most powerful levers for reform at our disposal. These levers must have the strength to influence complex webs of factors, while having the virtue of clarity, if not simplicity. We need powerful usable strategies for powerful recognizable change.

If a healthy respect for and mastery of the change process does not become a priority, even well-intentioned change initiatives will continue to create havoc among those who are on the firing line. Careful attention to a small number of key details during the change process can result in the experience of success, new commitments, and the excitement and energizing satisfaction of accomplishing something that is important. More fundamentally, reducing the number of failures and realizing new successes can lead to the revitalization of teaching and learning that is so desperately needed in the lives of educators and students today.

The problem of meaning is central to making sense of educational change. In order to achieve greater meaning, we must come to understand both the small and the big pictures. The small picture concerns the subjective meaning or lack of meaning for individuals at all levels of the educational system. Neglect of the phenomenology of change—that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended—is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms. It is also necessary to build and understand the big picture, because educational change, after all, is a sociopolitical process. This book will have succeeded or failed to the extent that people who are involved in education can read the account and conclude that it makes sense of their individual context, enables them to understand the broader social forces influencing change and—above all—points to some action that they and others around them can take to improve their immediate situation.

In the process of examining the individual and collective settings, it is necessary to contend with both the “what” of change and the “how” of change. Meaning must be accomplished in relation to both these aspects. It is possible to be crystal clear about what one wants and be totally inept at achieving it. Or to be skilled at managing change but empty-headed about which changes are most needed. To make matters more difficult, we often do not know what we want, or do not know the actual consequences of a particular direction, until we try to get there. Thus, on the one hand, we need to keep in mind the values and goals and the consequences associated with specific educational changes; and on the other hand, we need to comprehend the dynamics of educational change as a sociopolitical process involving all kinds of individual, classroom, school, local, regional, and national factors at work in interactive ways. The problem of meaning is one of how

those involved in change can come to understand what it is that should change, and how it can be best accomplished, while realizing that the what and how constantly interact and reshape each other.

We are not only dealing with a moving and changing target; we are also playing this out in social settings. Solutions must come through the development of *shared meaning*. The interface between individual and collective meaning and action in everyday situations is where change stands or falls.

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

I do not attempt to survey the content or substance of all the latest educational innovations and reforms. I do, however, use a wide range of specific innovations to explain the practical meaning of educational change. Included in the studies on which I draw are changes in various curriculum areas (e.g., reading, mathematics, science, social studies), computers, cooperative learning, special education, school restructuring, teacher education, schoolwide innovations, district reform, state and national policies, and so on. Locally initiated changes are well represented along with those sponsored at the provincial/state and national levels.

The book is divided into three main parts. Part I, Understanding Educational Change (Chapters 1 through 6), provides a detailed overview of how educational change works. Chapter 2 addresses the issues regarding what are the main sources and purposes of educational change. It raises questions about who benefits from what types of changes, and about the bases on which decisions to change are made. Evidence is analyzed that leads to the conclusion that many decisions about the kinds of educational innovations introduced in school districts are poorly thought out and unconnected to the stated purposes of education. The sources of innovation and the quality of decisions made indicate that change is not necessarily progress. Change must always be viewed in relation to the particular values, goals, and outcomes it serves. This is frequently difficult to assess in education, because rhetoric differs from reality, and consequences cannot easily be determined or measured. Chapter 2 also concludes that there is an increasingly rich source of innovative ideas “out there.” The main difficulty is how to achieve coherence in this sea of potentially valuable clutter.

Whether or not the sources of change are suspect, what does it mean to change? Chapter 3 deals with the subjective reality of coping with change, both involuntary and desired change, and makes explicit the objective reality of what we mean when we refer to something as having changed. This chapter defines what change is. Combined with Chapter 2, we see overwhelming possibilities and thus the problem of achieving meaning.

Chapter 4 identifies the main factors that relate to adoption or decisions to initiate change. There are a variety of reasons why individuals or groups decide to embark on a change—personal prestige, bureaucratic self-interest, political responsiveness, and concern for solving an unmet need. This chapter raises questions about how and why decisions about particular educational changes are made. The way in which these decisions are made strongly influences what will happen at the follow-up or implementation stage.

Implementation and continuation (or the extent to which change actually occurs and is sustained) are the focus of Chapter 5. Since implementation refers to what really happens in practice (as distinct from what was supposed to happen), it is a central theme that runs through the whole book. The history of implementation research is not pleasant. It shows that planned change attempts rarely succeed as intended. As some old sayings go, “There’s many a slip ‘twixt the cup and the lip,” “the proof is in the pudding,” and “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.” Honorable motives are even more problematic when we attempt to get others to heaven as well as ourselves—when social rather than individual change is at stake. In fact, I will show that, ironically, in many ways the more committed an individual is to a specific form of change, the less effective he or she will be in getting others to implement it. While the above sayings have been around a long time, it is only in the last 30 years that educators have come to realize that “the proof is in the ‘putting’”: the way in which change is put into practice determines to a large extent how well it fares. As we shall see, some of the most recent evidence indicates that we may be getting better at planning and implementing not only specific innovations, but also more complex policy reforms. Certainly there is greater clarity about what factors need to be addressed and how to address them.

Chapters 4 and 5 cover the process of change: from how changes become initiated to how or whether they get put into practice and become institutionalized. What happens at one stage has powerful consequences for subsequent stages. In the final analysis, Chapter 5 provides an overview of the dynamics of how educational changes get implemented/nonimplemented and institutionalized/discontinued.

It is one thing to know the events and situations that cause change or prevent change from happening; it is an entirely different question to know what to do about it. Chapter 6 delves into the complex issues of planning and coping with educational change. It addresses the perplexing question of “the pathways problem”—knowing what constitutes success is not the same thing as achieving it in a new situation. Many attempts at change fail because no distinction is made between theories of change (what causes change) and theories of changing (how to influence those causes). And when solutions are attempted, they often create their own problems, which are more severe than the original ones. Chapter 6 contains examples of both failure and success at planned change. At a minimum this knowledge offers certain psychological and practical advantages simply by allowing us to become more clear about the process and meaning of change and more realistic about what can be accomplished. By making explicit the problems of planning and coping with change, we gain further understanding of why certain plans fail and others succeed. I also identify guidelines for how change can be approached or coped with more effectively.

Part I, then, provides the overall framework for thinking about and doing something about educational change. It shows, incidentally, that “rationally planned” strategies are not that rational when it comes to dealing with people and the problem of meaning. Part I does not differentiate in detail what it all means for the everyday teacher, principal, parent, and so on. This is the purpose of Part II, “Educational Change at the Local Level,” which consists of six chapters (7 through 12) in which I examine what is known about the role of people in different positions at the local school and school-district levels. In each case, I bring to bear the body of research knowledge (particularly concrete, experiential evidence) on a given role in order to address two sets of questions. The first set concerns

the meaning of change for people in the role under discussion—what their experience is in relation to the process of educational change. Then, when we have some understanding of the meaning of change for given role incumbents, the second set of questions is directed at generating ideas for what they could or should do about it. These guidelines will range from general suggestions to specific steps to be taken, depending on the circumstances.

The six chapters in Part II are designed so that individuals within these roles can gain greater understanding of their place in the context of changes around them. These chapters also enable individuals in one role to gain an understanding of the realities of participants in other roles and thereby a clearer view of the sociology of educational change in the society as a whole.

Chapters 7 to 9 examine change within the school by analyzing the roles of key participants and their organizational relationships. As implementation is the essence of change, it follows that the teacher as implementer is central. Chapter 7 examines the concrete situation of the teacher and shows that change is only one among many problems the teacher faces—in fact, that the conditions for change as well as strategies employed by central policymakers and administrators provide many more disincentives than benefits. Sociologically speaking, few of us, if placed in the current situation of teachers, would be motivated or able to engage in effective change. Obvious strategies do not seem to work. Professional development of teachers has been ineffective and wasteful more times than not. Building on earlier chapters, Chapter 7 explains why many approaches to change do not work for teachers and suggests some remedies. There have been great new advances in knowledge in the last few years in understanding professional learning communities and the role they play in “reculturing” the teachers’ role in improvement.

More lip service than mind service has been given to the pivotal role of the principal as gatekeeper or facilitator of change. However, the research evidence is mounting, and we have much to go on in sorting out the role of school leadership. Chapter 8 describes the situation of the principal and his or her current role in facilitating or inhibiting change. As before, to understand what is, we examine specific evidence and situations. It is only through specificity that we can go beyond the generalities of leadership qualities found in much of the literature. In deriving implications for what the role of the principal could or should be, the emphasis will be on the formulation of specific guidelines that deal with the total reality faced by the principal. The principal is absolutely key when it comes to developing the “school capacity” to manage change.

People think of students as the potential beneficiaries of change. They think of achievement results, skills, attitudes, and the need for various improvements for the good of the children. They rarely think of students as *participants* in a process of change. Consequently, there is little evidence regarding what students think about changes and their role regarding them. It is interesting and worthwhile to attempt to develop the theme of what the role of students is and what it could be. Naturally there will be differences according to the age of students, but Chapter 9 will elaborate on the possible meaning of change for children and adolescents. Fortunately, there is growing attention being paid to the “voice” and participation of students in school reform.

The remaining three chapters of Part II address the immediate local environment of the school—district administrators, consultants or resource people, and the parents,

community, and school board. A considerable amount of evidence exists that the superintendent and other district administrators are as crucial for determining change within the district as is the principal within the school. Again it will be necessary to examine evidence that will allow us to determine in which ways this is specifically true. What is it that the district administrator does? What is the actual process of events, and what are the results? As interest in large-scale reform has increased, the role of districts has received greater attention. The goal is to engage *all* schools in the district in ongoing reform, not just a few. Case studies of school districts doing this are discussed in Chapter 10.

There are many different consultants in education, variously called curriculum coordinators or consultants, resource teachers, internal change agents, external agents, staff developers, organization development specialists, disseminators, linking agents, and so on. Chapter 11 considers the role of consultants. The intricacies of being a consultant are considerable: the consultant needs to combine subject-matter knowledge, interpersonal skills in working with individuals and groups, and planned change skills for designing and implementing larger change efforts. Evidence from major studies in recent years combined with the framework for understanding educational change enables us to draw some conclusions about how and why some consultants are effective and others are not and how the roles of consultants can be better conceptualized and practiced.

In Chapter 12 the roles of parents, communities, and school boards are examined. The problem of meaning is especially acute for these groups, which are vitally concerned about and responsible for educational decisions but which often have limited knowledge. Case-study materials and other research evidence will be used to clarify what communities do vis-à-vis questions of initiating, rejecting, supporting, or blocking particular changes in their schools, and will illustrate the dilemma that schools face about whether or not to involve parents in decisions about change. I will especially take up questions regarding the role of the individual parent in instruction, decision making, and otherwise relating to the school and to the education of his or her child.

As Part II analyzes what happens at the local level, the four chapters in Part III turn to the regional and national levels. If we are to understand the realities of change at the local level, we must discover how societal agencies, for better or worse, influence change in schools. The role of government agencies represents another dilemma for understanding educational change. On the one hand, important social reforms would not be launched without federal or state/provincial impetus. On the other hand, external reforms frequently are not successful and are seen as interfering with local autonomy. We now have enough evidence from governmental change efforts since 1960 to understand why this source of reform is necessary, why it often doesn't work, and what the implications are for altering the approach. Common principles and research findings will be used to analyze how national and state agencies function in the realm of education. Chapter 13 assesses these issues and formulates guidelines for governmental action.

In Chapters 14 and 15 the education and continuing professional development of school personnel are examined. Nothing is more central to reform than the selection and development of teachers and administrators. The initial preparation of teachers, including induction, is the purview of Chapter 14. Attention is currently being riveted on teacher education as a major strategy for improvement. The preservice education of teachers has not prepared them at all for the complexities of educational change. And until recently,

the plight and the potential of the beginning teacher have been ignored. While reversal of these traditions is not yet in evidence, I will present considerable data to demonstrate that teacher education is finally receiving the critical attention it deserves.

Career-long professional development for teachers and administrators, which I take up in Chapter 15, has not fared much better. In-service education or ongoing staff development explicitly directed at change has failed, in most cases, because it is ad hoc, discontinuous, and unconnected to any plan for change that addresses the set of factors I have identified in earlier chapters. Factors affecting change function in interaction and must be treated as such; solutions directed at any one factor in isolation will have minimal impact. Nevertheless, if there is a premier strategy for reform it would involve the continuum of teacher and administrator selection and development, and its link to school improvement. Fortunately, some of the best and most recent research and practice are in this very area of professional preparation and continuous professional development. Chapters 14 and 15 analyze these developments in some detail, demonstrating that success hinges on how well these new potentialities are realized.

In the final chapter of the book (Chapter 16) I reflect on the problem of change in the context of future trends and expectations for educational change. In many ways we now know what works. Unfortunately this formulation itself is partly a theory of change rather than of changing—to know what works in some situations does not mean we can get it to work in other situations. The basis for hope, however, lies somewhere among the naivete of the 1960s, the cynicism of the 1970s, the partial successes of the 1980s, and the more informed large-scale reforms of the 1990s. Going beyond hope, this book will identify and point to action steps that each and every one of us can take to bring about significant improvements.

PROSPECTS FOR REFORM

In the 1991 edition of *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Chapter 1 contained the following paragraph:

As we approach the 1990s we are in the midst of an educational reform movement the likes of which we have never before seen. This time reform efforts are more comprehensive *and* backed up by more resources and follow-through. We should find out over the course of the next decade whether our now considerable knowledge about the do's and don'ts of implementing educational improvements can be put to good use. (Fullan, 1991, p. 13, emphasis in original)

Well, the next decade has just passed. And we do know more, much more. These lessons will be highlighted throughout the book.

I have argued in the *Change Forces* trilogy (Fullan, 1993, 1999, forthcoming) that teachers are “moral change agents”—that the moral purpose of schools is to make a difference in the lives of students and that making a difference is literally to make changes that matter. This raises the larger question concerning the relationship between public schools and democracy. In many ways this represents the unfinished legacy of

John Dewey. Cohen (1998) argues that Dewey was not child-centered as an end in itself, but rather for the purpose of developing a new system of curriculum and instruction rooted in scientific and social problem-solving through the development of new, more democratic social relations. Schools were to become counter-cultural agencies that would “correct the human and social devastation of industrial capitalism” (Cohen, 1998, p. 427). Need I say that the problem of potential human destruction (and growth) has become compounded in the chaotic conditions of postmodern society?

As Cohen says, Dewey never addressed the problem of how such a public school system could develop let alone thrive in a society that it was to help make over. And we do know that, as it has turned out so far, schools are a much more conservative agency for the status quo than a revolutionary force for transformation.

For starters, developing the capacity for schools to serve as “moral change agents” means understanding the relationship between democracy and the public school system. In Galbraith’s (1996, p. 17) *Good Society*:

Education not only makes democracy possible; it also makes it essential.
Education not only brings into existence a population with an
understanding of the public tasks; it also creates their demand to be heard.

Similarly, Saul (1995) says that a primary purpose of education is “to show individuals how they can function *together* in a society” (p. 138, emphasis in original).

In modern society the relationship between democracy and schooling has always been too abstract, or perhaps taken for granted and thereby often neglected. It should no longer be. As Andy Hargreaves and I said in *What’s Worth Fighting for Out There?*: “Teachers and parents observe democracy deteriorating every time the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged learner widens” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 15). Public schools need to develop what Coleman (1990) termed “social capital”—to help produce citizens who have the commitment, skills, and disposition to foster norms of civility, compassion, fairness, trust, collaborative engagement, and constructive critiques under conditions of great social diversity. Schools also need to develop intellectual capital—problem-solving skills in a technological world—so that all students can learn. This too is a moral purpose. To become committed to the development of social and intellectual capital is to understand the goal of moral purpose; to address it productively is to delve into the intricacies of complexity and change.

We have learned over the past decade that the process of educational reform is much more complex than had been anticipated. Even apparent successes have fundamental flaws. For example, in our development work we have been interested in how long it takes to turn around a poor performing school or district to become a good or better performing system. Our current conclusion is that you can turn around an elementary school in about 3 years, a high school in about 6 years, and a school district (depending on size) in about 8 years (Fullan, 1999, 2000b).

As valid as these general conclusions are, there are three problems. First, the time lines are too long. Given the sense of urgency, people rightly ask: Can these time lines be accelerated? Say, reduced by half? Incidentally, all these successes have involved “the use of the change knowledge” documented in this book. The question is: By *more*

intensive and more thorough use of the change knowledge, can we accelerate the process of successful change? The answer is yes, which we will see does not solve the problem.

Second, the number of examples of turnaround is small. There is only a minority of elementary schools, and fewer high schools and school districts, that are engaged in this manner. In other words, we have not nearly gone to scale where the majority of schools improve. It is not enough to have a handful of successful cases.

Third, and most revealing, it takes 3, 6, 8 years of hard work to produce improvement, but the results are fragile. One or two key people leave and the success can be undone almost overnight. Thus, from the point of view of “sustaining change,” even in those small number of success cases, there are serious problems.

The main reason that change fails to occur in the first place on any scale, and does not get sustained when it does, is that the infrastructure is weak, unhelpful, or working at cross purposes. By the infrastructure I mean the next layers above whatever unit we are focusing on. In terms of successive levels, for example, a teacher cannot sustain change if he or she is working in a negative school culture; similarly, a school can initiate and implement successful change, but cannot sustain it if it is operating in a less than helpful district; a district cannot keep going if it works in a state which is not helping to sustain reform.

In other words, we have our work cut out. At the individual level we must carve out a niche of meaning and effectiveness despite a less than helpful system. At the same time we must join others in helping to change local cultures and contexts so that those making improvements are rewarded, and those who are complacent are both understood and end up feeling less and less comfortable with the status quo. Finally, more and more people must address “the big picture,” exploiting the current underutilized potential for reform while strengthening the infrastructure of policies and resources. The agenda for the next decade is to “transform the system” by improving the overall infrastructure in a way that reinforces and extends local innovation in some cases, and helps to cause local development in others.

This is not a race to see who can become the most innovative. The key words are meaning, coherence, connectedness, synergy, alignment, and capacity for continuous improvement. Paradoxically, if meaning is easy to come by it is less likely to be powerful. Simple systems are more meaningful, but less deep. Complex systems generate overload and confusion, but also contain more power and energy. Our task is to realize that finding meaning in complex systems is as difficult as it is rewarding.

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