

THE **NEW**
MEANING OF
EDUCATIONAL
CHANGE **FOURTH
EDITION**



MICHAEL FULLAN

<p style="text-align: center;">Advance Praise for <i>The New Meaning of Educational Change, Fourth Edition!</i></p>

“For many years the first edition of *The New Meaning of Educational Change* was my ‘bible’ for understanding how to improve teaching and learning for all students within complex school systems. The book’s fourth edition continues and deepens that tradition by featuring a knowledge-base that Michael Fullan describes as ‘more profound and accessible’ and that blends the achievement of meaning with an action orientation. As with earlier editions, I particularly appreciate Fullan’s recognition of the important roles played in the change process by students, parents, community members, teachers, principals, and district administrators.”

—**Dennis Sparks**, Emeritus Executive Director,
National Staff Development Council

“This new edition of a classic and highly influential text significantly extends Fullan’s remarkable efforts to synthesize and make useful what is known about successful educational change processes.”

—**Ken Leithwood**, Professor, Policy Studies,
OISE/University of Toronto

“When the third edition was published in 2001, I wrote that ‘Those who seek to understand the last decade will find no better source. Those seeking a view of the terrain for the next will find no surer guide.’ I reiterate these views for the fourth edition with even stronger conviction. Michael Fullan is at the peak of his knowledge and influence on change and reform in education. He has been a master of the field for the quarter century in which *The New Meaning of Educational Change* has been published. No writer can draw on developments in so many countries, and he has no peer in his command of the links between research, policy, and practice. There is a sense of urgency in the fourth edition because a system-wide breakthrough has not been made at the level of the student and classroom, even though the knowledge of how to do it is at hand. Those who seek to achieve such a breakthrough must read this book.”

—**Brian J. Caldwell**, Managing Director,
Educational Transformations Pty Ltd,
Professorial Fellow, University of Melbourne,
and Deputy Chair of Board,
Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

"Twenty five years ago I was privileged to read the first edition of *The New Meaning of Educational Change* in manuscript form. It changed my professional life. As a neophyte change worker, Michael Fullan's knowledge of the educational change landscape, his ability to add value through analysis, and his unique skill in forecasting the future through reflecting on the past, whilst remaining pragmatically in the present, enabled me to take some (minimal) control over the world of educational change that I was entering. To his great credit, Fullan as the archetypical action-oriented intellectual has pulled off the same trick with each successive edition of the book. In this fourth edition, however, Fullan has excelled himself. Although following a similar structure to previous editions, this is no mere updating of a tried and tested formula. Here Fullan is in full flow: He offers us a view of educational change as comprehensive as the first edition, but with a depth and understanding of the complexities that are unsurpassed in their authority, vision, and passion."

—**David Hopkins**, HSBC iNet Chair of International Leadership,
Institute of Education, University of London,
and Formerly Chief Adviser to the
Secretary of State for Education, England

"*The New Meaning of Educational Change*, first published in 1982, has provided insights that have informed and inspired thousands of educators. Never one to 'stand in place,' Fullan offers new thinking and perspectives in the fourth edition. There is a new emphasis on 'capacity building with a focus on results.' Among many things, Fullan explains the promise and pitfalls of 'going deeper,' creating shared meaning, reculturing, using tri-level reform, and bringing change to scale. Fullan, once again, centers his work on motivation, relationships, and the human dynamics involved in all change efforts. As usual, each concept is built on much research and the field experience of others; each is clear and resonates with plain common sense; each draws from Fullan's own work as a change facilitator on the national, state, and district levels. Michael Fullan's acclaimed work is aptly titled. Change ever changes and we need to understand its ever evolving meaning if we are to make a difference in schools."

—**Lew Smith**, Director,
National Principals Leadership Institute,
and National School Change Awards,
Fordham University Graduate School of Education

The NEW Meaning of Educational Change

FOURTH EDITION

MICHAEL FULLAN



Teachers College, Columbia University
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To four boys and a girl

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Preface

This fourth edition of *The New Meaning of Educational Change* is different in that it is more action-based and contains more of my own assessment and interpretation of what is happening. I start with a key paragraph from each of the prefaces of the three previous editions. This gives an idea of how the core message has evolved in the past quarter of a century.

In the original edition (1982) I wrote:

The issue of central interest in this book is not how many new policies have been approved or how many programs have been developed, but rather what has actually changed in practice—if anything—as a result of our efforts and how do we know when change is worthwhile? What can teachers, administrators, or policymakers do when they know something is wrong in our schools? Can rejecting a proposed educational program be more progressive than accepting it? Why are we so often unclear about how to put a new program into practice?

In the second edition (1991):

It is essential to understand both the small and the big pictures. We have to know what change looks 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 continue to aggregate knowledge of those individual situations with an understanding of organizational and institutional factors that influence the process of change as government departments, universities, teacher federations, school systems, and schools interact.

In the third edition (2001):

An enormous amount has happened in the decade since the last edition. If anything, “the meaning hypothesis” has been deeply confirmed. . . . 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 fragmented demands of overloaded reform agendas.

What is new in 2007? More has happened to further our understanding of educational change in the 6 years since the previous edition than in the 20 years spanning the first and third editions. Meaning has always been about doing. The work that we are now engaged in has a strong knowledge base *because* it is deeply grounded in action. The initiatives are more ambitious, more comprehensive, and more demanding. Because of the strong applied nature of this work, the insights are more robust and more precise. Theory and practice are becoming more fused, to the benefit of both.

We still have not cracked the code of getting beyond the classroom door on a large scale, but the questions are more penetrating and the forces being mobilized in this quest are more powerful and increasingly harder to ignore.

The core question in this edition is how to combine “meaning” and “action” to achieve continuous improvement on a sustainable scale never before experienced. What is “new” are strong, actionable concepts in combination: capacity building, learning in context, lateral capacity building, sustainability, and systems leaders in action—leaders at all levels engaged in changing the system, changing their own context. All of these new and powerful concepts will become clearer in the course of this book.

What is “bad” is the overdosing on standards and assessment (the failure to get the balance right between assessment and capacity building); the inability to get inside the classroom; superficial professional learning communities; and the failure in many countries to reduce the gap between lower- and higher-achieving students and schools. Indeed, widening of the income and education gap is occurring in some of the richest countries—a sure danger sign that society is worsening.

The work on the meaning of educational change has benefited greatly from the growing number and variety of academics, policymakers, and practitioners who are partnering to bring about substantial improvement, as they understand how to go even further. I have the privilege of being in a worldwide network of people who are morally and intellectually committed to educational improvement. This is great work, made all the more meaningful by the collective effort underway in all quarters of the globe. I wish here to thank the literally hundreds of co-workers and friends who have been and continue to be on this journey. What I have learned is contained in the myriad of actions and interactions I have had over the past 40 years.

In this book I plan to show that the knowledge base of change is becoming more profound and accessible, and that it is absolutely indispensable to leading within the relentless ubiquity of innovation and reform. The answer to endemic social complexity is for individuals, especially in interaction with others, to arm themselves with knowledge of the change process, to engage in reflective action, and to test what they know against the increasingly available knowledge in the literature on change.

The meaning of change will always be “new” because it is a human endeavor that is perpetually dynamic. Educational change has meaning because it pursues moral purpose and does so by bringing best knowledge to bear on critical issues of the day. Above all, when it works, it does so because it motivates “a million change agents” to find meaning in collective action to improve humankind. Meaningful work, action-based, never finished—one could spend a lifetime!