

PART I

Change Forces

Michael Fullan

There are large changes at work affecting all levels of the system. The four articles in this section provide a range of perspectives on the main issues.

In a project for Microsoft, Fullan, Cuttress, and Kilcher (2005) developed an “elite course” on leading change in which they identified eight major change forces that all leaders would have to understand, contend with, and address in order to survive and thrive in addressing the complex change challenges into the 21st century.

Elmore and City take us on the “road to school improvement.” Elmore, one of the most incisive analysts and actors in large-scale reform, concludes that this road is “hard, bumpy, and takes as long as it takes,” and offers ideas for surviving the bumps and going to the next level.

Hargreaves and Shirley propose a “Fourth Way” to reform, which in effect is “building from the bottom” and steering from the top.

Noguera takes us into the murky world of “transforming urban high schools” and paints a dim picture of the challenges facing secondary schools and then turns his attention to identifying promising pathways to success.

As a set, the four articles in Part One furnish a valuable context for the other three parts, each of which delves into each of the levels of tri-level reform.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to **The Challenge of Change**

Purposeful Action at Work

Michael Fullan

The first edition of *The Challenge of Change* was published in 1997. It turned out that this was precisely the year when the field of educational change began a major shift toward deeper action and large-scale reform.

The occasion was Tony Blair's first term election in England in May, 1997. He came into office with a clear and explicit education platform in which literacy and numeracy were named as the core priorities. Blair and his government committed in advance to targets of 80% proficiency in literacy and 75% in numeracy for 11-year-olds—starting at a base of 62%. This was an enormous undertaking because it involved the entire system of 20,000 schools and a timeline of essentially four years.

What was more significant was that Blair and his team, led by chief architect of strategy, Michael Barber, said that they would base their strategy on existing *change knowledge*. By that they meant that they would combine “pressure and support”—the *pressure* of targets, monitoring progress, feeding back data, and intervening in cases of low performance; *support* meant investing in “capacity building” through establishing new positions at the school, district, and

government levels to lead literacy and numeracy through intensive professional learning opportunities focusing on instructional improvement and through the development and spread of new high quality curriculum materials.

The good news was that the strategy worked—to a point. Proficiency scores increased from 62% to 75% in literacy and from 62% to 73% in numeracy by 2002 (in fact by 2000). For the first time, we were able to prove to politicians that significant results could be obtained on a large scale “within one election period”—still not reaching the high aspiration targets, but impressive indeed.

The bad news was that the results plateaued from 2000 onward. In our evaluation of the initiative, we attributed this to two things. One was that the strategy was too driven from the top and as such did not get deep enough into the hearts and minds of teachers and principals. The second and related reason was that the government failed to adjust the strategy and in fact did not keep the priority at a high enough level as it entered a second term in 2001.

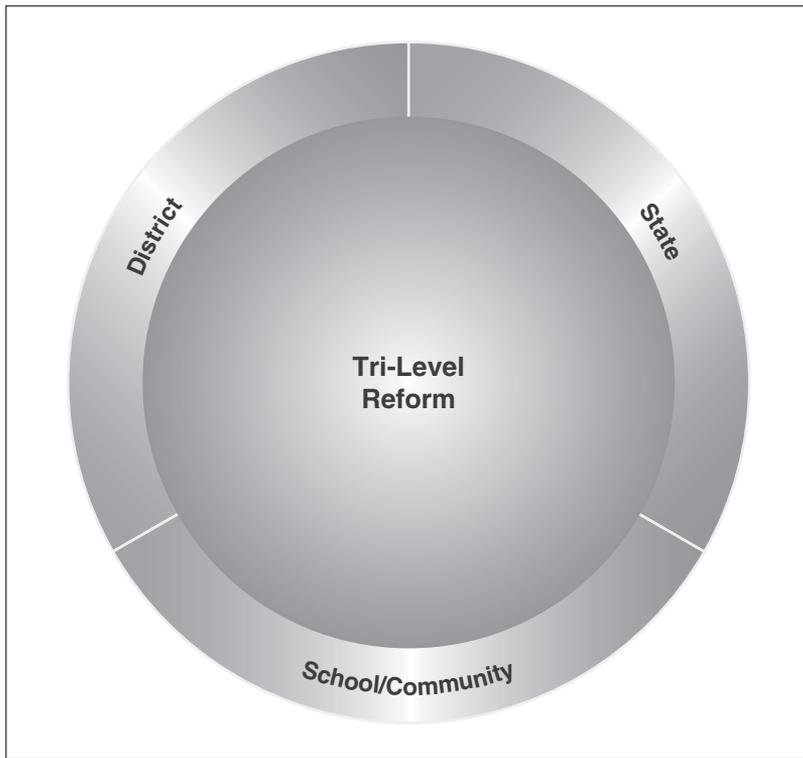
My point is that the effort in England was a kind of coming out of change knowledge from the domain of research to the domain of action. Much of this knowledge incidentally has been chronicled and captured in the fourth edition of *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (Fullan, 2007).

TRI-LEVEL REFORM

We have come to call this approach to system change *tri-level reform* (see Figure 1.1).

In order to bring about sustained reform in any school, we need to move beyond treating one school at a time to addressing all schools simultaneously. To do so means that the district must have its act together (a system of schools, if you like) and that the state (or in the case of federal systems, state and federal) must also approach change from a tri-level perspective.

Many of the articles in this collection (which I will turn to shortly) get at the details of tri-level reform, but at this point I will provide an overview. Tri-level reform does not mean that you wait for the other two levels to get their act together. Whatever level you are operating from requires two things: a focus on your own internal development (a school, a district, or whatever), while at the same time seeking connections with other levels. My own view, not always

Figure 1.1 Tri-Level Reform

obtainable, is to establish a system of not only greater alignment across the three levels but, even more important, greater *permeable connectivity*, that is, more two-way interaction, communication, and mutual influence.

This is not just theory. We have, in fact, been putting this set of ideas into place in Ontario since 2003, when the liberal government came into power (Fullan, 2008a). I have had the privilege of serving as the Premier's education advisor as we have, and still are, establishing a systematic set of policies and strategies to transform the system in Ontario—a large scale proposition involving two million students, 4,000 elementary schools, and 900 secondary schools across 72 school districts.

We have focused on three core priorities (we recommend that large systems focus on a small number of ambitious goals as core, do these well, and stay the course). Our goals focus on high proficiency

IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Our chapter is clearly only one snapshot, albeit of a large district that is taking leadership sustainability seriously. We think that the personal perspectives of a large number of school leaders are both a unique and valuable contribution to our knowledge of personal perceptions on the question of sustainability. As we stand back and survey the overall LC model from the perspective of conditions that favor sustainability, four propositions stand out for us.

Proposition One: Sustainability is not about prolonging specific innovations, but rather it is about establishing the conditions for continuous student improvement.

Proposition Two: Sustainability is not possible unless school leaders and system leaders are working on the same agenda.

Proposition Three: Proposition Two notwithstanding, sustainability is not furthered by school and system leaders simply agreeing on the direction of the reform. Rather, agreement is continually tested and extended by leaders at both school and system levels putting pressure on each other. Sustainability is a two-way or multiway street.

Proposition Four: We have a fair idea about what makes for sustainability within one district under conditions of stable leadership over a five or more year period, but we still do not know how sustainability fares when district leadership changes or when state leadership changes direction.

We have been able to identify some of the main themes of sustainability. They amount to focus, consistency, and mutual reinforcement between the school and district levels, staying the course, and developing an attitude that continuity of good direction and of increased student achievement is paramount. We know sustainability, as in continuous effort and energy, is always vulnerable. We know that sustaining cultures require a lot of work to build and maintain, but can be destroyed quickly with different leadership and change in political conditions. Yet, by making what works explicit, and by enabling more and more leaders at all levels of the system to be aware