

The New Meaning of Educational Change

A Book Review by Diana Watson, New Hampshire

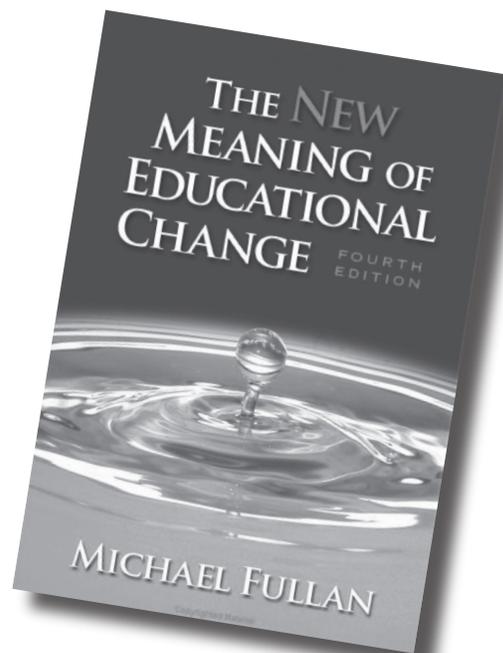
“Collaboration makes a positive difference only when it is focused on student performance for all and on the associated innovative practices that can make improvement happen for previously disengaged students.” (p. 285)

In this fourth edition, Fullan reexamines educational change in light of the growing body of knowledge about the process of change. For change to actually occur, certain factors must be met. Citing numerous research studies, Fullan notes the importance of relationship, meaning and motivation in effective and sustained educational change. Change takes time, and effort, and on-going support. To further complicate things, it turns out that an individual must experience some part of the proposed change before understanding what the change really is. By experiencing the change, by achieving success, an individual can come to believe in the change. Fullan argues that belief underlies all action. For successful initiatives involving change, a critical factor is allowing an appropriate amount of time for the people to believe in the change. Therefore, according to Fullan, in order for real change to occur in schools, educators must:

1. Believe the proposed change can occur (motivation)
2. Believe the proposed change makes sense (meaning)
3. Feel they themselves have a meaningful role in the change
4. Experience some success with the change

Fullan recommends professional learning communities as a vehicle for providing effective support for teachers (relationships) as they implement changes in practice. While making a compelling case for collaborative practices as a means of supporting improvements in teacher practice, Fullan doesn't shy away from discussing just how very difficult collaboration has proven to be within schools. He identifies the factors which play against professional learning communities, and provokes the reader to consider, “. . . we knew specifically and clearly a quarter of a century ago how powerful collaborative or collegial cultures were and how they functioned. Twenty-five years is a long time to sit on knowledge that serves the very moral core of school improvement.” (p. 153)

Michael Fullan corroborates what I believe to be true about educational change. He says the student must be at the center of all proposed



change. He says collaborative practices are the key to sustaining the changes that support student learning. And, he validates these arguments with research. This book has been at my fingertips for three months. I take it everywhere I go. I keep snatching it up and opening to one of the many sticky note marked pages to quote a pertinent paragraph. Frankly, I wish I could memorize the entire contents of the book so as to be able to cite it from memory. So often, when I am “selling” the idea of collaborative practices and the work of the National School Reform Faculty, I am asked if there is anything I can give to the administrators or school board to show that the work is effective. I finally have the tool I've been looking for: *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, fourth edition. ■

The New Meaning of Educational Change,
Fourth Edition, by Michael Fullan,
Teachers College Press, 2007

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