

Preface

The Moral Imperative Realized is about the actual accomplishment of moral purpose in any endeavor—in this case, for education. It is, in other words, about raising the bar and closing the gap of student achievement for all students—not as a slogan, but as a reality. The moral imperative, of course, has widespread urgency in all areas of human life—in finance, in politics, and in all aspects of how we treat each other. It is at the very heart of the well-being of the individual, the society, and the global world. It is not about religion, but about the purpose and fulfillment of human and social life. Education can lead the way, and, in this book, there will be plenty of named examples of how some educators are already doing so. But it needs to be more widespread in education and in all walks of life. This book tells you what it looks like and how to get more of it.

This is my second book that explicitly addresses the matter of the moral imperative in education. What has changed since I wrote *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership* in 2003? Interestingly, it was that very year—2003—that we began to intensify and deepen our work on the moral imperative. So there is plenty to update. Let's be clear about the topic. In 2003 the concept of moral purpose or moral imperative was fairly new. John Goodlad, in his foreword to *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, noted that when he used the term *moral*, people were confused. Was moral purpose about the pure life, religion, the spiritual? For some, this can be the case. But for education reform, it should be clear that the moral imperative focuses on raising the bar and closing the gap in student learning and achievement for *all children regardless of background*. It

is about a better society for individuals and for the collective. Not only has this focus become clearer in the last few years, but the moral purpose as we shall see also means being skilled at doing something about it—actually accomplishing greater moral purpose.

There are three big, interrelated developments over the past eight years. First, the idea of moral purpose has become much more serious. There is greater, more intense pressure on making it happen—a growing frustration that more progress is not being made. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) certainly introduced and highlighted the agenda. Its weak suit was its wrong and inadequate strategy to implement moral purpose on any scale. Now we have Race to the Top and related legislation to replace NCLB. There is more intensity—and this time seemingly greater attention to implementation (see Fullan, 2010a). The dramatic new film *Waiting for “Superman,”* by Davis Guggenheim and Lesley Chilcott, shows in gut-wrenching images how the poor in the United States are suffering at the hands of the public education system. There is no question that the stakes are being raised dramatically. The moral imperative is now blasting its way onto front pages across the United States.

Second, we actually know how to accomplish greater moral purpose with results to show for it. I will furnish plenty of cases of actual implementation that allow us to see how it can be put into practice—what I call *realized moral purpose*. We see this in our work under the rubric of *Motion Leadership*—the book (Fullan, 2010b) and the movie (Fullan, 2010c). We will uncover these insights in the chapters that follow.

Third, another dramatic change is that we are addressing larger swaths of the system. No longer is the moral imperative about this or that outstanding school. Rather, it is about whole systems engaged in successful reform—whole districts, whole states or provinces, whole countries. All schools must be implicated in the pursuit of the moral imperative.

This is all good news. Accomplishment, at the end of the day, is always more satisfying than planning. It turns out that school and system leadership are central to this mission. This book zeroes in on school and system leadership to show what it can do on the ground. It reveals how leaders are part and parcel of system change, that they can and must affect the micro and macro pictures. Realizing moral purpose depends on engaged and deeply committed leaders at all levels of the system.

There are four chapters in this book. The first makes clear that moral purpose by itself is not a strategy. If you do not know how to implement moral purpose, you really don't have it. And if you are passionate about it and others don't get it, you still don't have it. If you whip people into a frenzy and have no viable strategy to go forward, you are once again setting up the poor for failure. Action in the early stages is messy, but leaders with effective moral purpose persist and figure it out. This book both shows what success looks like and helps guide the way to do more of it—more of it on a dramatic, large scale.

The second chapter takes us inside success as we look at realized moral purpose. Not only do we have more clear examples of how to go from failure to success, there is greater specificity and precision about how to get there. The core components, the smallest number of key factors required for success, are increasingly known. And they are small in number. These elements of success must be pursued relentlessly and in concert, but they are not a mystery any longer—tough work, but doable, and oh so satisfying and energizing.

The third chapter links the school and the district, demonstrating clearly that the success of principals and that of the district are closely intertwined. Indeed, the success of peers among peers is crucial. I will show that building up school-to-school allegiance and friendly competition are powerful ways to improve many schools simultaneously.

The final chapter examines the increasingly visible presence of system leaders in action, but it is eminently practical and grounded (as well as uplifting). All in all, the work of school leaders is becoming more meaningful, more exciting, and above all more central to the success of education systems in any country. For those who wanted purpose and those who wanted action, you can now find it in one place—the school of the 21st century, nested in education systems that treat education success and societal success as deeply symbiotic. Leadership, a phenomenon that has been everything and nothing, has finally found its niche. It is clear, powerful, challenging, frustrating, and deeply morally fulfilling. As we found in *Motion Leadership*, practice drives practice. There is no better driver than realizing one's moral purpose.