

# *Foreword*

To come upon *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership* should not surprise anyone who has followed Michael Fullan's work over the years. The concept has been implicit in most of his writing. Indeed, he has made direct reference to education as a moral undertaking. It follows, then, that school teaching and leadership are moral endeavors.

Before reading the manuscript and deciding whether to accept his invitation to write this foreword, I began to wonder how he had addressed the sticky issues embedded in the word *moral*. When our book, *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching*, was published in 1990, the question most asked of colleagues and me was, "Whose morals are you talking about?" A little conversation quickly revealed that our interrogators held varying assumptions. Some thought that we had taken a stand on drugs, alcohol, and extramarital sex. Others thought that we had written a book on religion. And there were those who commended us because, they assumed, we had ventured into the realm of the spiritual.

We had just come off two comprehensive studies of schooling and the education of educators in the United States. In both, we had gathered an enormous amount of the familiar kinds of quantitative data. But, in both, we also had done a lot of walking around and conversing with people in the settings we studied. In the first, I always spent a good deal of time with the principals. Although our conversations might have appeared to be casual, each addressed the same common ground. One of my questions always was, "What do you see to be the central purpose of your school?"

The answers were disturbingly similar. They commonly consisted of two components that I briefly summarize: "There is no

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agreement here on this issue,” and, “Our job is to give the kids a good education.” Subsequent analysis of the hard data on schools individually and collectively showed high and balanced parental expectations for the development of personal, social, vocational, and academic attributes in the education of their children. Other data refined these general purposes to specifics such as equity, fairness, care, and civil interpersonal relationships. The descriptive embracing word that comes to one’s mind is that these are *moral* conditions. Interestingly, in the earlier school-based discussions, nobody referred to the moral imperatives embedded in *good* education.

In the second study, we followed up these findings with specific items in questionnaires and in questions deliberately asked in the 1,800 hours of interviews we conducted in the teacher-preparing settings. We found little attention being paid to the purposes of schooling in the education of educators. Future teachers entering in or finishing the concluding student teaching phase of their programs commonly tilted their answers toward providing good education for all students. In answer to the question of whether this included creating a school and classroom environment characterized by and devoted to the development of civil and ethical principles, they said that it was a good idea but they had not thought about it very much. Some vaguely remembered something of this sort having been embedded in an earlier course but could not recall anything specific.

Participants in both studies were uneasy about the word *moral*. No wonder that I was curious about how Michael Fullan had addressed it in a book that boldly announces, in its title, moral imperative embedded in school leadership. He might have gotten off the hook a bit by referring to “educational” rather than “school,” since the former is a very general concept and the latter is to a considerable degree a political entity buffeted by a variety of moral persuasions.

Instead, he simply assumes moral responsibility for schools and the education of those in them to be part of educators’ guiding credo. This implicit assumption consists of two parts that become increasingly explicit as one moves along in his manuscript. The first is that the people of a social and political democracy are held together in a *moral ecology* that transcends the different interests, economic stratifications, cultural origins, religions, ethnicities, and races it embraces. They sense it and celebrate it. Since, for many, this ecology is to a considerable degree an abstraction, it is fragile. The second part of his assumption is that education of deliberate moral

intent provides apprenticeship in the understandings, dispositions, and behaviors required for democratic citizenry. Providing this apprenticeship is a major purpose of our schools.

Michael is well aware that the nature of this moral ecology, and the education required to sustain and strengthen it is and always will be a subject of debate. But this is not what his book is about. Many excellent treatises on these matters are available. Instead, he leads readers through a much broadened concept of the educational domains school leaders must encompass in seeking to fulfill the moral imperative.

There is also an interesting pedagogical assumption running through the book. Michael's inquiries into schooling undoubtedly made him well aware that the moral imperative of leadership in and for the schools of a democracy is little addressed in the preservice preparation of educators. But he also realizes that most of his book's readers are committed to lifelong careers and the continued learning such require. Wise man that he is, he knows that such people rise to high expectations when those they respect have confidence that they will.

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