Introduction

THE CHANGING WORLD WE LIVE IN

This book is about change. It will explore the human dynamics of change and consider how these dynamics impact change efforts in schools.

As of January 2006, Amazon.com reported the availability of 60,805 books on change; Barnes&Noble.com listed 37,823. Google cited 1,490,000,000 (nearly 1.5 billion!) hits on change. One hundred forty-four movies had *change* in their titles. Between 2000 and 2005, a total of 866,071 patents reflected entrepreneurial endeavors and a wide range of inventions. No doubt, by the time you read this, these numbers will have skyrocketed.

We live in a society that promotes and rewards change. Bookstores contain dozens of volumes about self-improvement. Daily newspapers routinely report new technological advances. Our newly purchased computers become second rate within months as more sophisticated models are released.

Look at what has unfolded recently. We now walk around with cell phones literally attached to our ears and, if we have Bluetooth, we talk into thin air. We cannot live without access to the Internet. Daily, dozens—if not hundreds—of e-mails hit our computer screens or Blackberries. Mailing a letter is passé; instant text message responses are expected. We can shoot photographs and within minutes transmit them to the other side of the world.

We unlock our cars with passive alarm transmitters; we have a remote control for everything. Floppy disks, videos, and audiocassettes are ancient history. *Digital* is now the word that describes how we view things, communicate, compute, and complete our work. We can bring our own movies on airline flights. iPods, popular and impressive when they could store hundreds of songs, can now store thousands. The speed and breadth of change worldwide is astounding; its place in the fabric of America is significant.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

America has stood as a symbol of change, "the world's last best hope." Essayist Frederick Gentles put it this way: "The mystique of the American Dream has

captured the imagination of the world, for it has created a glamour and a dynamism that make this country stand in vivid contrast to [what some see as] less vital societies" (Gentles & Steinfeld, 1971, p. 3). America became a "nation that considered itself unique because it seemed to be the place where dreams could be fulfilled" (L. Smith, 1977, p. 9).

Benjamin Franklin called America the place where it is always morning. Historian Daniel Boorstin captured the sprit of America when he wrote, "The United States thus became . . . a place of second chances, opportunities, revivals, revisions, and rebirths. A place for trying out what elsewhere was only imagined, or could not even be imagined elsewhere because it could not be tried" (Boorstin, 1972, p. 9).

In 1960, when John F. Kennedy accepted the Democratic Party's nomination for the presidency, he used the image of pioneers overcoming hazards and hardships as they conquered the West:

> Today some would say that those struggles are all over—that all the horizons have been explored—that all the battles have been won—that there is no longer an American frontier. But I trust no one in this vast assemblage will agree with those sentiments. For the problems are not all solved and the battles are not all won—and we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier—the frontier of the 1960s—a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils—a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats . . . I believe the times demand new invention, innovation, imagination, decisions. I am asking you to be pioneers on that New Frontier. (Kennedy, 1960)

THE DREAM DEFERRED AND DENIED

Unfortunately, the dream, in the words of poet Langston Hughes, had, for some, been a "dream deferred." Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., in his 1963 "I have a dream" speech, made it clear that the dream could no longer be deferred, as he referred to President Abraham Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation "as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves . . . a joyous breakthrough to end the long night of captivity." However, as King affirmed:

> But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and chains of discrimination . . . so we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition. In a sense we have come to our nation's Capital to cash a check . . . we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to

believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity in this nation. (King, 1963)

Because America allegedly provides unlimited possibilities to advance and unprecedented opportunities to change, its failures and contradictions provoke considerable anger and disappointment. However, despite the contradictions, each year millions still choose to come to America in search of something better, something new, something hopeful. This country remains the crucible of change, improvement, and advancement.

EDUCATION AS THE EQUALIZER

To become successful in America requires hard work, perseverance, and determination. Nonetheless, in the United States one could advance and succeed, with American schools serving as the means to securing the American dream. In the words of Horace Mann (1842), "Individuals who, without the aid of knowledge, would have been condemned to perpetual inferiority of condition and subjected to all the evils of want and poverty, rise to competence and independence by the uplifting power of education" (p. 44).

In his Pedagogic Creed, published in 1897, John Dewey, America's most prominent philosopher and educator, stated:

I believe that education is the fundamental method for social progress and reform. I believe that all reforms which rest simply upon the enactment of law, or the threatening of certain penalties, or upon changes in mechanical or outwards arrangements are transitory and futile. (p. 129)

As progressive reformer Herbert Croly expressed in 1909:

The real vehicle of improvement is education. It is by education that the American is trained for such democracy as he possesses; and it is by better education that he proposes to better his democracy. Men are uplifted by education much more surely than they are by any tinkering with laws and institutions, because the work of education leavens the actual social substance. (p. 214)

AN UNFULFILLED MISSION

Americans have recognized the importance of a good education and have presumed that schools will do their job in providing that education. Ironically,

despite the fact we expect much from our schools, we are often discouraged about the ability of public schools to serve as the route to success. This disappointment is not new.

One hundred years ago, Dewey (1899) pointedly said:

> Nothing would be more extraordinary if we had a proper system of education than the assumption, now so commonly made, that the mind of the individual is naturally adverse to learning, and has to be either browbeaten or coaxed into action. (p. 255)

More than twenty years ago, John Goodlad, in the very first sentence of his highly respected book *A Place Called School* (1984), stated in no uncertain terms, "American schools are in trouble. In fact, the problems of schooling are of such crippling proportions that many schools may not survive. It is possible that our entire public educational system is nearing collapse" (p. 1).

For Linda Darling-Hammond, things had not sufficiently changed as recently as 1997:

> Although the right to learn is more important than ever before in our history, schools that educate all of their students to high levels of intellectual, practical, and social competence continue to be, in every sense of the word, exceptional. Although many such schools have been invented throughout this nation's history, they have lived at the edge of the system, never becoming sufficiently widespread for most young people to have access to them. (Darling-Hammond, 1997b, p. 2)

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

With each scathing review of American education comes a different attack on what schools currently do. Depending on the timing, the setting, the speaker, and the audience, the problem shifts. It could be poor test scores, inadequate preparation for college or the world of work, poor quality of teaching, or a general lack of public confidence in schools. Along with each outcry comes a demand for renewal, reform, restructuring, reinvention. Something must be done! All this implies change: moving schools from what they are to something better. But many individuals, including educators, do not believe something can be done. They are wrong.

Peter Senge, a leading advocate of learning organizations, tells the story of a session he conducted with educators, instead of businesspeople. He asked those present whether significant change occurs only as a result of crisis. In business groups, typically three quarters will respond affirmatively. This group of educators responded differently. Very few raised their hands. Puzzled, Senge

went on to ask, "Does that mean you believe significant innovation can occur without crises?" No one raised a hand. Now exasperated, Senge asked, "Well, if change doesn't occur in response to a crisis and it doesn't occur in the absence of a crisis, what other possibilities are there?" A soft voice from the audience responded, "I guess we don't believe significant change can occur under any circumstances" (Senge, 2000, p. 33). The implications of Senge's anecdote are dramatic, but not shocking.

Consequently, there are two sets of critical issues for us to consider:

1. What do we mean by significant school change? How might we define it? How would we know when it has taken place?

2. What does it take to move a school from below par to acceptable and even exceptional levels of performance?

There is no doubt that the pace of progress and the speed of change in U.S. society is astounding. Our way of living has been dramatically transformed in nearly all arenas. The world is not the same. Yet many schools (and, some would contend, most schools) have not been sufficiently reactive, much less proactive.

In writing this book, which is based on seven years of extensive research, my assumption is that we can more effectively serve as facilitators and supporters of change if we can describe change, measure change, and explore change; look at schools that have dramatically improved; and use a conceptual framework to suggest what it takes to bring about significant school change.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

This book looks at schools that have significantly changed for the better. Ironically, in a society that applauds change, many individuals believe these school success stories are the exception, not the rule. Despite reports that have complained about the United States being "a nation at risk" or initiatives that feel compelled to remind us that "no child should be left behind," many American schools just coast along, doing what they have always done. Despite studies that announce embarrassing comparisons of American students with their counterparts in other nations, too many American schools do not get better. It can be argued the vast majority of schools in America deny they have to change, do not know how to change, or are unsuccessful in their attempts to change.

This book draws from a eight-year national research project, which looked at data and documentation from 601 schools from forty-four states. Using sixteen criteria that measure significant school change, each of these schools was nominated for the National School Change Awards. Eight of the

forty-eight award-winning schools (six per year for eight years) were selected for deep and rich portraits, multilayered stories complete with plots, actors, and themes.

Each of these portraits is about a school that once had been considered a failure or major disappointment. These are schools that had been rated in the bottom quartile (or worse) in terms of student achievement, quality of teaching, and parental approval. These are schools that had terrible reputations.

However, these are schools that brought themselves up by their bootstraps to become some of the best schools in their districts and states. These are schools that had symbolized much of what is wrong with American schools and transformed themselves to be models of what is right about American education. These are schools that demonstrate successful change efforts are within our reach.

THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

This book is organized into six parts.

Part I is titled "The Dynamics of Change"; its three chapters provide a foundation and framework for the book. In Chapter 1, "Describing Change," we examine the *human phenomenon of change* and apply it to school change. We consider reasons why the exhilarating and exciting sense of change is frequently met with resistance. We look at how school change is sometimes threatening and why it is often difficult. We explore specific descriptions of change and consider how these influence our ability to change a school. For example, some contend change cannot be precisely predicted; it does not proceed in a logical and linear manner; it involves multiple factors, seemingly unrelated to each other. At the same time, change can attack our assumptions and disrupt our routines.

On the one hand, these change descriptions can be applied to life itself. On the other hand, they can help us to better appreciate the complexity and difficulty of changing schools. I believe we can better understand change through the lens of human dynamics. We may wish to change organizations, such as schools, but these entities are not inanimate objects; they are filled with people who have a full range of psychological, emotional, and physiological needs, and reactions. As James and Connolly (2000), in their book on school change, stated:

> We might like to think that we have at some time a period of stability but change carries on nonetheless. Change can be minor, low key and easily handled. It can however be substantial, very significant and imposed upon us, or we may initiate it and carry it through ourselves. (p. 16)

Chapter 2 addresses the issue of *how to measure change.* It explains how the National School Change Awards were created and provides the research base for the four domains used to identify and measure significant school change.

Each of the four domains addresses a fundamental question about school change. First, how meaningful is the change? Is it substantial rather than superficial? Second, how deep and broad is the change? Is it systemic rather than isolated? Third, how is the change focused? Is it student centered, looking at teaching and learning? And, fourth, how is it measured? Is it solution or outcome oriented?

Chapter 3 describes our effort at *exploring change* by looking at the research methodology used to conduct this deep study of eight of the school change award-winning schools. Although each of the eight schools was idiosyncratic, a number of common themes emerged, themes that led to my design of a comprehensive conceptual framework.

Part II, Chapters 4 through 7, contains the portraits of four elementary schools.

Government Hill Elementary School in Anchorage, Alaska, posed a unique set of challenges. For example, it's not every principal who has to go on moose patrol, checking the playground before the students have their recess. And it's not every principal whose school is slated for closing because of falling enrollment. Principal Sandy Stephens took on both challenges. A growing limited English proficiency population at Government Hill affected all classes, and teachers did not know how to adjust. By 1991, large numbers of students had transferred to other schools, and the school was down to 156 students; it was the end of Government Hill. However, in 2001, there were 475 students, and on registration day the cars with families who wanted to enroll their children stretched around the block. The school's achievement scores consistently rose to the city's top ten.

John Williams Elementary School No. 5, in Rochester, New York, is in the city's poorest and most dangerous neighborhood. The first thing that Michele Hancock did when she was appointed John Williams's new principal in June 1999 was to bring together her family, friends, and colleagues to paint the common areas of the uninviting elementary school. Michele's new message was that expectations should be high for the students in this urban high-poverty area and, with hard work, school improvement was possible. Over the next four years, the Grade 4 English language arts passing scores went from 13.3% to 63.2%, and the math scores rose from 30.7% to 78.8%. Science scores jumped 39 points, to 70%, and 83% of students passed the new social studies exam.

Skycrest Elementary School in Citrus Heights, California, was considered the worst elementary school in the San Juan School District. As one teacher put it, "I hated coming to work because the school was out of control and no one was doing anything about it." Deciding to take on the challenge, Chris Zarzana moved to Skycrest from leading a successful elementary school in the district. She first restored order. With her credibility established, the focus shifted to reading, reading, and reading. Over three years, the student population rose 20%, to 740 students; children living in poverty climbed from 52% to 82%; and the percentage of English language learners jumped 300%, to comprise one third of Skycrest students. Nonetheless, Skycrest students from this multicultural

community secured gains of seven percentage points in reading and four percentage points in mathematics.

South Heights Elementary School is in Henderson, Kentucky, a rural area hundreds of miles from any professional hockey team. Nonetheless, principal Rob Carroll used the feature length film *Miracle* to show his students and staff that miracles could happen. The film tells the story of Herb Brooks, the untraditional hockey coach who announced to American Olympic officials he was going to create a hockey team that would beat the Soviet Union, the legendary powerhouse. Months of grueling practice built on rigorous discipline transformed the players; they became gold medal winners in 1980. The South Heights miracle was equally dramatic. In 1997, only 41% of South Height's fourth- and fifth-graders averaged a proficient score in reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts and humanities, and practical living. In 2002, it was 66%.

Part III, Chapters 8 through 11, contains the portraits of the four secondary schools.

Gustav Fritsche Middle School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was led by Bill Andrekopoulos, a "troublemaker" who is now the superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools. As a middle school principal, Bill would constantly challenge the status quo with simple questions like "Why does it have to be this way?" Mr. A, as he is called, and his teachers dared the state of Wisconsin to designate Fritsche as a public charter school that would report directly to the state rather than to the district's bureaucracy. They got their wish. Bill used a participatory model, visits to exemplary middle schools, and data-driven decision making to involve the entire staff. By 2000, Fritsche's sixth-graders outperformed other district students by two times in writing and four times in mathematics.

George Washington Carver Academy in Waco, Texas, is literally down the road from President George W. Bush's ranch and retreat. Upon entering this one-story middle school, one steps on a large blue carpet that announces "Texas Blue Ribbon School of Excellence." But it was not always this way. Located in a neatly kept African American community, the school had a previous life as the district's only sixth-grade school. That effort to deal with a federal desegregation court order missed the mark on two counts: It did not lead (1) to racial integration or (2) to academic excellence. The district's strategy shifted, and Carver was converted in 1992 to a Grades 6–8 magnet school. Principal Molly Maloy assembled a staff that truly wanted to be at Carver. She asked the teachers to hire their new colleagues, create their own curriculum, and think through "what's good for kids." From 1994 to 2000, Carver students increased their reading scores by twenty-seven percentage points, mathematics by forty-seven percentage points, and writing by twenty-two percentage points. Furthermore, in the 1999–00 school year, 46% of the students were African American, 32% were Hispanic, and 21% were Anglo.

Louis W. Fox Academic and Technical High School in San Antonio, Texas, is only a mile away from the Alamo, where Texas freedom fighters refused to yield to the overpowering forces of General Santa Ana's Mexican troops. More

than 150 years later, surrender to the forces of despair and defeat was not an option. Unfortunately, in 1985, Fox Tech had been defeated, declared by the Texas State Department of Education to be "disestablished." New principal Joanne Cockrell was firm as she told the reconfigured staff that she expected them to like kids and not watch the clock, because there was much work to be done. The large school was reorganized into four theme-based schools within a school; successful alumni were brought back to inspire the students; tutoring in reading was remarkably successful. Soon, many students were being prepared for the SATs because college admission had become their goal. Fox Tech lowered its dropout rate in seven years from 14.2% to 2.6%. Sophomore state mathematics results went from 22% passing to 92% passing. From the "worst high school in Texas," the school rose to national recognition by *Time* magazine in 2001.

Niles High School, in Niles, Michigan, is located in Michiana, an area hovering near the Michigan–Indiana state border. This comprehensive high school was neither a "knock your socks off" school nor a disaster. It just coasted along until dozens of alumni reported they had to drop out of college because they were ill prepared. Other graduates came back and complained that they could not get decent jobs. New principal Doug Law revitalized a school leadership team and created a climate for change. The critical question that drove the effort was "Why are we here?" The Niles High School team increased graduation requirements, created a strong (and nationally recognized) school-to-careers program, implemented block scheduling, developed approaches for ninth-graders to successfully transition to high school, and provided support for at-risk students.

Part IV, which includes Chapters 12 through 14, focuses on a conceptual framework I propose—three essential elements required for significant school change: context, capacity, and conversations. Part V, Chapters 15 through 17, continues to look at the conceptual framework. It describes three catalytic variables that influence the aforementioned elements, these being internal dissonance, external forces, and leadership.

Finally, in Part VI, I attempt to create meaning from the extensive data and the emerging themes. The question I raise is, what are the lessons we can learn?