

Chapter 2

Moral Purpose and Change Agency

Managing moral purpose and change agency is at the heart of productive educational change. It is necessary to take a closer look at each of them, and to make explicit their organic relationship.

Moral Purpose

In their major study of teacher education, Goodlad and his colleagues found themselves being pushed deeper to the moral purposes of education in order to understand the basic rationale for teaching in post-modern society: 'We came to see with increasing clarity the degree to which teaching in schools, public or private, carries with it *moral imperatives* — more in public schools, however, because they are not schools of choice in a system requiring compulsory schooling' (Goodlad, 1990a, p. 47, my emphasis; see also Goodlad, Soder and Sirotnik, 1990). Goodlad singles out four moral imperatives:

Facilitating Critical Enculturation

The school is the only institution in our nation specifically charged with enculturating the young into a political democracy . . . Schools are major players in developing educated persons who acquire an understanding of truth, beauty, and justice against which to judge their own and society's virtues and imperfections . . . This is a moral responsibility. (pp. 48–9)

Providing Access to Knowledge

The school is the only institution in our society specifically charged with providing to the young a disciplined encounter

with all the subject matters of the human conversation: the world as a physical and biological system; evaluative and belief systems; communication systems; the social, political, and economic systems that make up the global village; and the human species itself. . . . (Teachers) must be diligent in ensuring that no attitudes, beliefs, or practices bar students from access to the necessary knowledge. (p. 49)

Building an Effective Teacher-Student Connection

The moral responsibility of educators takes on its most obvious significance where the lives of teachers and their students intersect. . . . The epistemology of teaching must encompass a pedagogy that goes far beyond the *mechanics* of teaching. It must combine generalizable principles of teaching, subject-specific instruction, sensitivity to the pervasive human qualities and potentials always involved. (pp. 49–50)

Practicing Good Stewardship

If schools are to become the responsive, renewing institutions that they must, the teachers in them must be purposefully engaged in the renewal process. (Goodlad, 1990b, p. 25)

One of Goodlad's colleagues, Sirotnik (1990, p. 298 ff) adds his list of moral requirements: commitment to *inquiry, knowledge, competence, caring, freedom, well-being, and social justice*. In his own words:

The implications of moral commitments to inquiry, knowledge, competence, caring, and social justice go farther than curriculum and classroom experiences. They go to the very heart of the moral ecology of the organization itself. This can be readily seen in the extent to which these commitments are reflected in the work environment of educators outside of classroom teaching *per se*. To what extent does the organizational culture encourage and support educators as inquirers into what they do and how they might do it better? To what extent do educators consume, critique, and produce knowledge? To what extent do they engage competently in discourse and action to improve the conditions, activities and outcomes, of schooling? To what extent do educators care about themselves and each other in the same way they care (or ought to care) about students? To what extent are educators empowered to participate authentically in

pedagogical matters of fundamental importance — what schools are for and how teaching and learning can be aligned with this vision. (p. 312)

At a policy level, growing concerns about educational equity and economic performance mirror the more particular issues just described. The restructuring movement, in intent at least, places a renewed focus on the education of *all* students, 'especially those who have been ineffectively served in the past' and attempts to reorganize schools for that purpose (Murphy, 1991, p. 60). Poverty, especially among children and women, racism, drug abuse, and horrendous social and personal problems all make the equity and excellence agenda more serious and poignant day by day (Hodgkinson, 1991).

My main point, however, is not to consider these matters at the institutional level — at least not at this time. The building block is the moral purpose of the *individual* teacher. Scratch a good teacher and you will find a moral purpose. At the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto, we recently examined why student teachers wanted to enter the profession. We have a post-baccalaureate fifth year program which results in certification after one year. It represents a particularly select group because there is a great demand to enter teaching in Ontario. For 1992/93 there were some 7000 applicants for 1100 positions. We use as admission criteria a combination of two factors weighted equally — academic grades, and an applicant 'profile' designed to capture experience and reasons for entering teaching. Because of the emphasis on experience, the average age is 29. In a small study we drew a random sample of 20 per cent of those in the 1991/92 year (Stiegelbauer, 1992). We set out to derive from the written profiles, what student teachers said about 'why they want to become teachers'. The most frequently mentioned theme was 'I want to make a difference' reflected in the following sample of quotes:

I hope my contribution to teaching, along with other good teachers' contributions, will help result in a better society for our future. I care about children and the way that children are learning.

Education is an important factor which determines the quality of an individual life and the future of society as a whole.

No other profession enables one the opportunity to provide such a positive impact on a child's overall development.

I want to effect positive change in students' lives.

I've always thought that if I could go into a classroom and make a difference in one kid's life . . . then that's what I am here for.

I am not suggesting that the mere statement of purpose is a straightforward matter. We cannot automatically take these statements at face value (although our day-to-day experience with student teachers provides ample corroboration of this theme), and there are different motivations for entering teaching among any cohort: But I am saying that we have a kernel of truth here. Many, many teachers enter the profession because they want to make a contribution — they want to make a difference!

What happens here-on-in — in teacher preparation, induction, and throughout the career — is a different story. Those with a non-existent or limited sense of moral purpose are never called upon to demonstrate their commitment. Those with moral potential, however inchoate, are never developed. Those with a clearer sense of purpose are thwarted.

Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) address the latter issues in their treatment of teaching and guilt. They quote Davies (1989, p. 49) 'at the centre of the feeling of guilt is self disappointment, a sense of having done badly, fallen short, of having betrayed a personal ideal, standard or commitment'. Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) also suggest that aspects of moral purpose like caring may be too narrowly conceived. They argue that there is more to it than personal caring and interpersonal sharing: 'Care . . . carries with it social and moral responsibilities as well as interpersonal ones' (p. 12).

The argument is somewhat subtle, so let me make it more directly. If concerns for making a difference remain at the one-to-one and classroom level, it cannot be done. An additional component is required. Making a difference, must be explicitly recast in broader social and moral terms. It must be seen that one cannot make a difference at the interpersonal level unless the problem and solution are enlarged to encompass the conditions that surround teaching (such as the collaborative school, chapter 4), and the skills and actions that would be needed to make a difference. Without this additional and broader dimension the best of teachers will end up as moral martyrs. In brief, care must be linked to a broader social, public purpose, and the latter if it is to go anywhere must be propelled by the skills of change agency.

We now come to the integrative theme of the chapter: *teachers are agents of educational change and societal improvement*. This is not as

highfalutin as it sounds. I have already argued that they are part way there on a small scale with their aspirations for making a difference. And they are there ecologically with expectations of reform constantly swirling around them. In addition to making moral purpose more explicit (thereby clearly declaring what business we are in) educators also need the tools to engage in change productively. Care and competence, equity and excellence, social and economic development are natural allies in this quest.

Change Agency

I will have more to say about change agency later. Here I want to outline some of its elements at the individual level. How to produce more of it, and under what conditions it can be further developed and sustained are the subjects of the remaining chapters.

I define change agency as being self-conscious about the nature of change and the change process. Those skilled in change are appreciative of its semi-unpredictable and volatile character, and they are explicitly concerned with the pursuit of ideas and competencies for coping with and influencing more and more aspects of the process toward some desired set of ends. They are open, moreover, to discovering new ends as the journey unfolds. In chapter 3, the complexities of the change process and some of the insights and lessons arising from the new mindset will be explored in detail. At this stage the question is, what conceptions and skills should the teacher of moral purpose possess in order to become a more effective change agent.

I see four core capacities required as a generative foundation for building greater change capacity: personal vision-building, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration. Each of these has its institutional counterpart: shared vision-building, organizational structures, norms and practices of inquiry; focus on organizational development and know-how, and collaborative work cultures (chapter 4). For reasons that should be increasingly clear throughout this book we need a dual approach working simultaneously on individual and institutional development. One cannot wait for the other. And if they are not working in concert, in particular settings, it is necessary to work on them separately looking for opportunities to make them connect.

The individual educator is a critical starting point because the leverage for change can be greater through the efforts of individuals, and each educator has some control (more than is exercised) over what he or she does, because it is one's own motives and skills that are at

question. Moreover, working individually on the four capacities about to be described makes it inevitable that there will be plenty of intersection of effort. I am not talking about leaders as change agents (more of that later) but of a more basic message: *each and every educator must strive to be an effective change agent.*

I start with personal vision-building because it connects so well with moral purpose contending with the forces of change. Shared vision is important in the long run, but for it to be effective you have to have something to share. It is not a good idea to borrow someone else's vision. Working on vision means examining and reexamining, and making explicit to ourselves why we came into teaching. Asking 'What difference am I trying to make personally'? Is a good place to start. For most of us it will not be trying to create something out of nothing. The reasons are there, but possibly buried under other demands or through years of disuse, or for the beginning teacher still underdeveloped. It is time to make them front and centre. We should not think of vision as something only for leaders. It is not a farfetched concept. It arises by pushing ourselves to articulate what is important to us as educators. Block (1987) emphasizes that 'creating a vision forces us to take a stand for a preferred future' (p. 102); it signifies our disappointment with what exists now. To articulate our vision of the future 'is to come out of the closet with our doubts about the organization and the way it operates' (p. 105). Indeed, it forces us to come out of the closet with doubts about ourselves and what we are doing.

Says Block writing more generally about organizations: 'We all have strong values about doing work that has meaning, being of real service to our customers, treating other people well, and maintaining some integrity in the way we work' (p. 123). Teachers, as I have indicated, are in one of the most 'natural' occupations for working on purpose and vision, because underneath that is what teaching is all about.

Several points in conclusion. First, I cannot stress enough that personal purpose and vision are the starting agenda. It comes from within, it gives meaning to work, and it exists independent of the particular organization or group we happen to be in.

Second, personal vision in teaching is too often implicit and dormant. It is often expressed negatively (what people want to get rid of, or not see happen) or narrowly in terms of means (more time, smaller classes). We need also to have positive images as driving forces. Teachers do not have to wallow in hubris in realizing that they are in a strategic position. Teachers should be pursuing moral purpose with greater and greater skill, conceptualizing their roles on a higher plane than they currently do.

Third, once it gets going, personal purpose is not as private as it sounds. Especially in moral occupations like teaching, the more one takes the risk to express personal purpose, the more kindred spirits one will find. A great deal of overlap will be experienced. Good ideas converge under conditions of communication, and collaboration. Individuals will find that they can convert their own desires into social agendas with others. Remember, personal purpose is not just self-centered, it has social dimensions as well such as working effectively with others, developing better citizens, and the like.

Fourth, personal purpose in teaching should be pushed and pushed until it makes a connection to social betterment in society. This is what it is at the one-to-one teacher-student level anyway. It has greater scope and meaning, and calls for wider action if we realize that *societal improvement* is really what education is about.

Fifth, and an extension of the previous point, is the realization that personal purpose in teaching is a *change theme*. Gardner (1964, p. 72) quotes Petrarch

By citizens, of course, I mean those who love the existing order; for those who daily desire change are rebels and traitors, and against such a stern justice may take its course.

Today, the teacher who works for or allows the *status quo* is the traitor. Purposeful change is the new norm in teaching. It has been bouncing around within teaching for the past thirty years. It is time we realized that teachers above all are moral change agents in society — a role that must be pursued explicitly and aggressively.

Finally, and paradoxically, personal purpose is the route to *organizational* change. When personal purpose is diminished we see in its place groupthink and a continual stream of fragmented surface, ephemeral innovations. We see in a phrase, the uncritical acceptance of innovation, the more things change, the more they remain the same. When personal purpose is present in numbers it provides the power for deeper change:

Cultures get changed in a thousand small ways, not by dramatic announcements from the boardroom. If we wait until top management gives leadership to the change we want to see, we miss the point. For us to have any hope that our own preferred future will come to pass, we provide the leadership. (Block, 1987, pp. 97–8).

All four capacities of change agency are intimately interrelated and mutually reinforcing. The second one — inquiry — is to say that the formation and enactment of personal purpose is not a static matter. It is a perennial quest. One of the new paradigm writers, Richard Pascale (1990) captures this precisely: ‘The essential activity for keeping our paradigm current is persistent questioning. I will use the term *inquiry*. Inquiry is the engine of vitality and self-renewal’ (p. 14). Stacey (1992) puts it this way: ‘A successful, innovative organization must have groups of people who can perform complex learning spontaneously. Because in open-ended situations no one can know what the group is trying to learn, the learning process must start without a clear statement of what is to be learned or how’ (p. 112).

Inquiry is necessary at the outset for forming personal purpose. While the latter comes from within, it must be fueled by information, ideas, dilemmas and other contentions in our environment. The beginner, by definition, is not experienced enough with the variety and needs of students, and with the operational goals and dilemmas of improvement to have clear ideas of purpose. Habits of ‘questioning, experimentation, and variety’ are essential (*ibid*). Reflective practice, personal journals, action research, working in innovative mentoring and peer settings are some of the strategies currently available (see Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991). Inquiry means internalizing norms, habits and techniques for *continuous learning*.

Learning is critical for the beginning teacher because of its formative timing. But we are talking about more than this — lifelong inquiry is the generative characteristic needed because post-modern environments themselves are constantly changing. We are probably never exactly right in the first place, but in any case we need the checks and balances of inquiry because in changing times our initial mental maps ‘cease to fit the territory’ (Pascale, 1990, p. 13). Thus, we need mechanisms to question and update our mental maps on a continuous basis. For Pascale, the question is the answer: ‘Our quest isn’t just a New Management Paradigm of the Nineties but a way of thinking that is continually open to the next paradigm and the next and the next . . .’ (p. 265). What could be closer to change agency?

The relationship between the first two capacities — personal vision and inquiry — involves the ability to simultaneously *express and extend* what you value. The genesis of change arises from this dynamic tension.

The capacity of mastery is another crucial ingredient. People must behave their way into new ideas and skills, not just think their way into them. Mastery and competence are obviously necessary for

effectiveness, but they are also *means* (not just outcomes) for achieving deeper understanding. New mindsets arise from new mastery as much as the other way around. Mastery then is very much interrelated with vision and inquiry as is evident in this passage from Senge (1990):

Personal mastery goes beyond competence and skills, though it is grounded in competence and skills . . . It means approaching one's life as a creative work, living life from a creative as opposed to a reactive viewpoint . . .

When personal mastery becomes a discipline — an activity we integrate into our lives — it embodies two underlying movements. The first is continually clarifying what is important to us (purpose and vision). We often spend too much time coping with problems along our path that we forget why we are on that path in the first place. The result is that we only have a dim, or even inaccurate, view of what's really important to us.

The second is continually learning how to see current reality more clearly . . . The juxtaposition of vision (what we want) and a clear picture of current reality (where we are relative to what we want) generates what we call 'creative tension'. 'Learning' in this context does not mean acquiring more information, but expanding the ability to produce results we truly want in life. It is lifelong generative learning. (p. 142)

It has long been known that skill and know-how are central to successful change, so it is surprising how little attention we pay to it beyond one-shot workshops and disconnected training. Mastery involves strong initial teacher education, and continuous staff development throughout the career, but it is more than this when we place it in the perspective of comprehensive change agency. It is a learning habit that permeates everything we do. It is not enough to be exposed to new ideas. We have to know where new ideas fit, and we have to become skilled in them, not just like them.

Block (1987) says that the goal is:

(to learn) as much as you can about the activity you are engaged in. There's pride and satisfaction in understanding your function better than anyone else and better than you thought possible. (p. 86)

We also know that inquiry, learning, and mastery are intrinsically anxiety producing: 'Almost every important learning experience we

have ever had has been stressful. Those issues that create stress for us give us clues about the uncooked seeds within us that need 'attention' (*ibid*, p. 191). This means that the capacity to suspend belief, take risks, and experience the unknown are essential to learning. We can be more selective in what we try (as distinct from accepting all change) but in exploring selected new ideas we must be patient enough to learn more about them and to look for longer term consequences before drawing conclusions.

Rosenholtz (1989) found that teachers in schools characterized by these 'learning enriched' habits, not only learned more and became better at what they did, but they became more confident. The more accustomed one becomes at dealing with the unknown, the more one understands that creative breakthroughs are always preceded by periods of cloudy thinking, confusion, exploration, trial and stress; followed by periods of excitement, and growing confidence as one pursues purposeful change, or copes with unwanted change.

Back to Senge (1990):

People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode . . . personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see that 'the journey is the reward'. (p. 142)

In order to be effective at change, mastery is essential, both in relation to specific innovations and as a personal habit. New competencies and know-how are requirements for better understanding and judging the new and are the route to greater effectiveness.

Collaboration is the fourth capacity. Aside from the power of collaboration which we take up in later chapters collaboration is essential for personal learning (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991). There is a ceiling effect to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves. The ability to collaborate — on both a small and large scale — is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society. Personal strength, as long as it is open minded (i.e., inquiry oriented) goes hand-in-hand with effective collaboration — in fact, without personal strength collaboration will be more form than content. Personal mastery and group mastery feed on each other in learning organizations. People need one another to learn and to accomplish things.

Small-scale collaboration involves the attitude and capacity to form

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productive mentoring and peer relationships, team building and the like. On a larger scale, it consists of the ability to work in organizations that form cross-institutional partnerships such as school district, university and school-community and business agency alliances, as well as global relationships with individuals and organizations from other cultures.

In short, without collaborative skills and relationships it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as you need in order to be an agent for societal improvement.

In summary, skills in change agency are needed, because the processes of improvement are dynamically complex, and as we shall see, these processes are to a certain extent unknowable in advance. Chaos in a scientific sense is not disorder, but a process in which contradictions and complexities play themselves out coalescing into clusters (see Gleick, 1987, Stacey, 1992, Wheatley, 1992). Scientists talk about 'strange attractors' as forces that pull chaotic states into periodic patterns. Moral purpose is one of change processes' strange attractors because the pursuit and pull of meaning can help organize complex phenomena as they unfold. Strange attractors do not guide the process (because it is not guidable), they capitalize on it. Without moral purpose, aimlessness and fragmentation prevail. Without change agency, moral purpose stagnates. The two are dynamically inter-related, not only because they need each other, but because they quite literally *define* (and redefine) each other as they interact.

I have argued that moral purpose and change agency, far from being strange bedfellows, should be married. They keep each other honest. They feed on, and fulfill one another. Moreover, together they are generative in that they have an in-built capacity to self-correct and to continually refigure what should be done. Not only are they effective at getting things done, but they are good at getting the *right* things done.

I have also claimed that moral purpose and change agency separately, but especially in combination, are as yet society's great untapped resources for improvement. We need to make them explicit, and make them part and parcel of personal and collective agendas. We need to go public with a new rationale for why teaching and teacher development is so fundamental to the future of society. We need to begin to practice on a wide scale what is implicit in the moral purpose of teaching. To do so we need the capacities of change agency. And we need to know a lot more about the complexities of the change process.