

# THE PRINCIPAL 2.0

THREE KEYS TO  
MAXIMIZING IMPACT



MICHAEL FULLAN



## **Praise for *The Principal 2.0***

“At a time when school leaders throughout the world are facing unprecedented challenges, Fullan has come up with inspirational guidance as to how best to respond. As someone struggling with system change in various contexts, I find his advice both authoritative and challenging. Essential reading for me.”

—**Mel Ainscow**, Emeritus Professor,  
University of Manchester and Professor  
of Education, University of Glasgow

“This book provides essential guidance for principals on how to navigate change and thrive at a time when school leadership has never been more critical.”

—**Amanda Datnow**,  
Chancellor’s Associates Endowed  
Chair and Professor, Education Studies,  
Associate Dean and Faculty Equity Advisor,  
School of Social Sciences,  
University of California, San Diego

“Michael Fullan lights the path and continues to ignite our mission as educational leaders. If we have the courage, his words here will show us the way to improve our teams, our schools, our systems, and ourselves to positively impact student outcomes.”

—**Dan Wilharber**,  
Principal, Scott Highlands Middle School

“Fullan is a master of unearthing the nuances of leadership that help create success. This book and the narratives within highlight successful strategies for system transformation based on the critical role of the principal. What is clear is that if you are to change a system, first you need to change yourself and your own views of what constitutes powerful and enduring leadership. Fullan’s analysis and reflections help guide the way to the right doors and toward pathways to achieve the transformation we desire and need.”

—**Jordan Tinney**,  
Retired Superintendent,  
Surrey School District,  
British Columbia

“I love this manuscript. It speaks to my personal beliefs as an educator, a coach, consultant, adjunct, a former principal, community member, and, most importantly, as a grandparent of school age children in systems that is challenging for them (almost daily), it speaks to me about people and relationships and the possibility of promise for schools and for the future of leadership. The focus on culture, self-care, humanity and context is central to the work of current school leaders.”

—**Ruth Hellams**,  
Retired Principal,  
Educate Consultant,  
Adjunct Faculty

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Three Keys to Maximizing Impact

*Michael Fullan*

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# CONTENTS

Preface	ix
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’ ’ ’

CHAPTER ONE: The Three Keys: Picking Up the Pieces	1
--	---

CHAPTER TWO: A Long Time Coming	13
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER THREE: Spirit Work: The First Key for Maximizing Impact	33
--	----

CHAPTER FOUR: Contextual Literacy: The Second Key for Maximizing Impact	59
--	----

CHAPTER FIVE: Systemness in Action: The Third Key for Maximizing Impact	95
--	----

CHAPTER SIX: Future Making	145
----------------------------	-----

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viii CONTENTS

References	169
Acknowledgments	175
About the Author	177
Index	179

## PREFACE

*PRINCIPAL 2.0* IS BRAND-NEW BOOK, WITH 90% OF IT ORIGINAL. So much has happened in the principalship in the past five years. We are on the frontlines of action, and we have captured its dynamic tension and potential breakthroughs with powerful examples of what the new principalship looks and feels like. I think this will turn out to be a new and crucial era for the heads of schools. They will be expected to build a new internal school and community “system”: one that includes students and parents, health and well-being experts; one that develops a local and regional entity addressing poverty, equity, and new learning; one that develops students to be changemakers. Never have the stakes been higher.

I am also aware that the combination of an already broken system, the pandemic in all its forms, climate collapse, and the plummeting of social trust has made it increasingly difficult, and in some cases impossible, for health care workers and educators to survive. It is this scenario that has led many of us to tackle the matter of system transformation using what we call the *humanity paradigm*. This is not an abstract proposition. It is heavily grounded in local development, middle-level mobilization (regional development), and eventually pushing upward to

system change. This book—our principals in action—contains many of the elements that will be essential for system change. The immediate period, the rest of this decade (2023–2030) will be crucial to progress, and perhaps even to our very survival. The ideas in this book should be seen as concrete examples of feeding forward into what could only be called the battle of the decade—whether education (well-being and learning) could become a central force for societal survival and flourishing.

Our team of about 10 (sometimes more) works on two overlapping endeavors. One is *systemness*—the idea that systems need greater coherence and cohesion. We recognize that the system is dynamically diverse, which to a certain extent can be a good thing, but currently too chaotic, risking the future of humanity both physically (climate catastrophe) and socially (deadly conflict, and gross inequality). Thus, we work with whole districts, regions, states, and countries to improve education systems that will benefit all. Eventually we want the bottom (local communities) and the middle (districts) to be driving forces for system transformation as much as or more than the state. This is direct work—try to make the change happen as you study and work with the system. It was Kurt Lewin who said, “If you want to understand something, try changing it!”

A second and compatible part of our system work is called New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (<https://www.deep.learning.global/>). We focus on:

- Certain global competencies (the 6Cs: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking)

- New learning design and pedagogies that transform the roles of students as learners and all those who work with them
- New conditions at the school, community, district, and state levels

We partner with clusters of schools, whole districts, states, and other entities in almost 20 countries. Above all, we help develop and establish *new purposes for education*: well-being and learning with respect to individual, community, and societal development. Individual academic development occurs within this framework but does not dominate it as it has for the past two decades. Belongingness is a key factor.

In all this work, the principal of course is pivotal—caught in the middle. Are they an agent of the state or the local community? It doesn't help much to say both. But the principalship does give us a powerful entry point to enter, understand, and try to change the system. This book captures the new role of principals required for the demands of an increasingly complex universe and for the opportunities it presents to fulfill humanity and its responsibilities in the rest of this century.

We often acknowledge that some 80% of our best ideas come from the interaction with leading practitioners (including, by the way, young people who in many ways make the best change agents). Again, Kurt Lewin: "There is nothing so theoretical as good practice." I feature such practitioners in eight vignettes spread over the chapters. In Chapter 3, we examine a turnaround example from England; a pivoting success using technology in rural New Brunswick, Canada; and a dynamic

transformation of a primary school in the South Island of New Zealand.

In Chapter 4 we check out a quick turnaround of a listless school in California; a major change in culture in a diverse, multicultural high school in Ottawa, Canada, along with how the district context enabled it; and a new, dramatic development of primary school in Melbourne, Australia, that was founded almost 150 years ago.

In Chapter 5 we visit Adlard, the successful school from England, in relation to how it fared during the depths of COVID-19; and focus on a brand-new secondary school in Toronto, Canada, that hit the ground running.

In all these cases it is the principal who enables the local school to come alive—a leader who is equally plugged into the local community and the wider societal policy and social context. Together they produce graduates and citizens who are aware of what the world is facing. They are the beginning, I think, of a potential new era for education marked by well-being and learning where individual, community, and societal development are pursued simultaneously and synergistically.

The last line of the first edition of *The Principal* is: “There is no time to waste!” Well, the all-encompassing COVID-19 pandemic had something to say about that. Where are principals now? In a 2022 survey by the RAND Corporation titled, “Are Principals on the Brink of a Breakdown?” some 85% of principals reported experiencing job-related stress; 48% said they were struggling with burnout; and 28% reported symptoms of distress. Society itself is reeling physically with disastrous

climate change and with plummeting social distance between and across many levels (Sullivan, 2022).

The truth is that schools and society have been in a long-term decline for the past 50 or more years (see Fullan & Gallagher, 2020). We live atop a time bomb. The relentless inequality, boredom, and alienation that students experience in school grows as they progress up the grade levels: by Grade 10 or 11, barely two-thirds of students were engaged at school. In this respect, the pandemic has pulled the rug out from under any stability that might have remained. My conclusion in this second edition is that the current radical disruption could turn out to be a good or a bad thing—we know it will not be a nothing! A lot will depend on the evolving principalship, which I have attempted to capture in this new book.

We are going to enter the system through the portal of the principalship with a view to understanding and increasing the leverage of principals to help change the system for the better. In my mantra of learning most from those doing the job, we are going to get inside the thinking and action of school principals. I am a great fan of *nuance*—seeing beneath complexity, how things tick, and how to enable them to tick better. In the course of the following chapters, you will witness what effective principals do. You will find that principals are expected to help develop and lead a local system of internal cohesion at the school and community level, to be leaders among district and regional entities, and to be able to take into account what is going on in the wider society. Indeed, we will find that the new principalship is anchored in local

communities, while recognizing that in many ways they must simultaneously take into account national and worldwide matters.

What would it take to leverage such leaders for further progress? In chapter 1, “The Three Keys: Picking Up the Pieces,” we will start where COVID-19 has taken us (and know that the pandemic has not yet departed) and why it represents a major opportunity to redefine our future. The three new keys are described in chapter 1. In chapter 2, “A Long Time Coming,” I trace some of the evolution of the role of the principal that take us to the three new keys. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are based in turn on the keys in action. The final Chapter 6 is about where we go from here. We know one thing: “It won’t be static.” Read this book like you are a participant in a live action movie.

We are at an inflection point where current forces for societal change will result in a change of direction that the world will take. The trouble is that the direction is precarious and unpredictable. This book is intended to shape the odds toward the betterment of humanity through new learning. Mobilize others and learn together, and don’t be afraid to push upward for needed changes!



**CHAPTER ONE**  
**The Three Keys: Picking Up  
the Pieces**

›CHAPTER TWO›  
**A Long Time Coming**

›CHAPTER THREE›  
**Spirit Work: The First Key  
for Maximizing Impact**

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**Contextual Literacy: The Second  
Key for Maximizing Impact**

›CHAPTER FIVE›  
**Systemness in Action: The Third  
Key for Maximizing Impact**

›CHAPTER SIX›  
**Future Making**



## CHAPTER · ONE

# The Three Keys: Picking Up the Pieces

