

# Preface

*If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more,  
and become more, you are a leader.*

—John Quincy Adams

**T**he world our students are growing up in, and will inherit, is changing at an almost incomprehensible speed. What these future adults will do as work and play may not even be in our imaginations yet. Thus, as educators, we need to develop schools and learning opportunities that prepare our students to be successful in an unpredictable global world. This requires leaders to not only lead in ways that help our schools get better but also in ways that help them become different. Many authors in the field of education are writing about how to improve teaching and learning, but our premise is that improvement is not enough; classrooms and schools need to innovate at the same time they improve. This creates a challenge for leaders—to help their school organizations improve at the same time they help them innovate.

The point of this book is to start conversations about what it means to lead for improvement *and* innovation. Whether your district is small or large, urban or rural, rich or poor or the facilities are new or old, the challenges and obstacles are the same: using the tension between where you want to be and where you are as a creative force to become different, as well as better. This challenge involves knowing when to enhance current capacities and when to seek solutions that are beyond your school's current capacities. This second aspect, knowing not only when but also how to seek solutions outside of current capacities, involves adding new skills to your leadership repertoire.

In this book, we hope to change your mind-set about what is possible for schools and about what it takes to lead into the future. We hope to scratch an itch you never knew you had or the one that's been nagging you forever. We hope to stimulate courageous conversations within you and to take you to deeper levels of thought and to higher levels of action.

#### xiv • Beyond School Improvement

Who are *we*? you might be asking yourself as you read this Preface. Well, we are four friends who have shared experiences and have grown close over the years. We each have more than 30 years of experience as educational leaders. Collectively, we have been teachers, principals, central office administrators, and served at our state's department of public instruction. Additionally, we have taught at the university level and have served as consultants. Our friendship is an oasis where our learning thirst is quenched, challenged, and forever evolving. Perhaps more important, our friendship is a place where we challenge one another to think more deeply, more holistically, more connectedly than we can anywhere else.

Our work together mirrors the process of innovation we discuss in this book. The ideas we wrestled with not only informed our thinking; they formed us. As ideas emerged, we discussed, debated, and dialogued. All the while, these ideas were evolving our thinking and changing how we saw the world and where we fit in it—the ideas formed us. Our working sessions were truly a learning laboratory. We never knew when one small comment would trigger a seismic response that reordered our thoughts in a more potent and powerful way.

This kind of learning is genuine and adaptive because it is a dynamic process where new ideas and past practice interact, and new context is created. It is learning where ideas evolve into deep meaning. In this kind of learning, ideas evolve because they collide with other ideas.

This collision of ideas is often messy, and it can make participants feel uncomfortable. Yet this business of messes and collisions is the only way individuals and systems transform. We have begun to see that educational systems are truly facing a dilemma. To address the future, innovation is an absolute must for our current system of education. Yet our current leaders have been acculturated to improve the current system. Improving and innovating are very different and require completely different skill sets for success.

In our work, we have begun to integrate practices based on this understanding. As we talk to others about our ideas, we usually get an interesting reaction. It is almost as if we observe an awakening. The ideas we have shared create a spark in those we talk with. It is as if the principles we discuss are present yet dormant within them. The message seems to strike a chord, and the timing seems right—thus, this book.

In this book, we offer you a similar inner journey intended to help you transform the way you lead. Being on a journey means that you, as the

reader, need to make meaning of the new ideas you will be experiencing along the way. So we have expectations for you:

1. You can't change your system until you change yourself. Get to know yourself better. The book is about linking you to yourself, creating the energy to move beyond where you are now, and finding the courage to transform.
2. Be patient and reflective with yourself. Be involved with honest, deep, reflective thought, and learn to have courageous conversations with yourself. Trust the "becoming" nature of the journey: who you are now and the you that is becoming a more potent leader.
3. Reflect on how the concepts make sense to you in your situation. Always reference new ideas to your situation and your actions.
4. Use the Glossary (Resource A) at the end of book to help you refer to terms as you read the book and do the activities.
5. Engage in all of the *Take a Moment* reflections and other activities so that you can honestly gauge your progress as you move through the book.
6. Follow your development with the Continuum of Leadership Behavior for Creating Change. Your growth will be a pleasant surprise for you.

Finally, we hope that, as you read, you feel a renewed optimism about the future of education and that you develop an enhanced capacity to make a difference in the lives you touch. You have our best wishes and deepest admiration as you embark on the journey to more potent leadership as a teacher, principal, superintendent, board member, or professor.