

The Fourth Way



Changes
NEXT EXIT ↗

*Successive waves of social and education reform
have been fundamentally flawed.
It's time for something bolder and better.*

Andrew Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley

Have you come to believe that standardization and accountability are here to stay? Does it seem that education leaders have little choice but to be compliance officers and data managers who tweak test performance and enforce the latest mandates? If so, think again. Consider the following snapshots of change:

■ A high-profile group of business and education leaders, which includes two former U.S. secretaries of education, complains that the U.S. education

system has become obsessed with testing basic skills. The group calls for a complete overhaul of current assessment practices (New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 2007).

■ Singapore urges its educators to “Teach Less, Learn More” and mandates that all teachers must have 10 percent of their time free to come up with independent lessons designed to enhance student motivation and creativity.

■ In Britain’s Celtic fringe (in contrast to England, whose students are the most

tested in the world), Scotland continues to resist standardized testing, Wales has abolished all state testing up to age 14, and Northern Ireland is preparing to abandon the selective exams students take at age 11.

■ None of the Nordic countries, which are among the highest performers on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), even has an indigenous term for *accountability*. Instead, these countries speak of *collective responsibility* (Hargreaves, Flalász, & Pont, 2007).

of Change

What does all this mean? Education policy is undergoing a global transformation, and the United States isn't getting it. The United States is not only losing—it's not even playing the right game.

The public, the education profession, and key players in the corporate and philanthropic sectors all sense that something is dreadfully amiss. Only 15 percent of U.S. educators believe that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is improving public education (Public Agenda, 2006). Representative George Miller, chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, has abandoned hope for NCLB's reauthorization in the remaining months of the Bush administration, describing the act as "the most negative brand in America" (Hoff, 2007). Middle-class parents are aghast at the loss of play and pleasure in their children's schooling (Tyre, 2006). With more than 70 percent of school districts reporting they have cut time in social studies, science, foreign languages, and the arts so they can increase attention to tested subjects like math and literacy, it's no surprise that the public is turning against NCLB (Rose & Gallup, 2007).

In England, improvements in achievement results have largely hit a plateau. Most of the gains have been exposed as statistical artifacts and consequences of test preparation (Macbeath et al., 2007). Rates of reading for pleasure are in decline (Ofsted Publications Centre, 2004). The majority of English parents are opposed to the current levels of testing for young children (Shaw, 2004), and the education profession is becoming increasingly assertive about the proliferation of inter-

minable inspections and countless tests.

The evidence is clear: Our single-minded focus on achievement gains has not improved the lives of our children. The United States and the United Kingdom occupy the bottom two rungs in UNICEF's 2007 survey of child well-being in 21 industrialized countries.

Tested standardization is a political solution in search of the wrong prob-

provided unprecedented levels of support for the poor, but they also fostered long-term state dependency without providing any real foundation for long-term civic engagement. The First Way granted state professionals, including educators, considerable freedom. In education, it fostered innovation but also allowed unacceptable variations in quality.

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lems. We need better solutions to the problems we actually have and the new challenges we will face in the future.

The Way It Was

In 1997, President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair convened a group of international leaders to chart a new direction for social policy, which they called the Third Way. Their guru was leading British public intellectual Anthony Giddens, who argued that policymakers needed to move away from the unproductive debate between overdependency on the state (the First Way) and overreliance on free markets (the Second Way).

Giddens articulated his theory in *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (1998). The First Way, he said, was the welfare state, which in the United States culminated in the Great Society initiatives of the 1960s. These policies

In the Second Way, the pendulum swung back. The antitax governments of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher cut many social services and outsourced others to the private sector. These reforms reduced costs and dependency and encouraged entrepreneurial drive and individual responsibility, but they also undermined social cohesion and widened the gaps between rich and poor. In education, the Second Way manifested itself in increased regulation by the market and the state, leading to a collapse of professional motivation and crises of teacher retention and leadership renewal. High-stakes standardization, driven by government performance targets, sucked the passion and pleasure out of teaching and increased the workload and vulnerability of education leaders (Hargreaves, 2003).

The Third Way, endorsed by Clinton and Blair, offered something between and

beyond the first two. It called for increased support for public services in terms of financial resources, buildings, materials, and training. In education, it proposed a mixed economy of diverse providers, leading to the increasing prominence of charter schools in the United States and specialist schools in the United Kingdom. In the Third Way, there has been an encouraging growth of professional communities and networks in which educators and schools share knowledge and help one another improve, thus injecting lateral energy into the system (Fullan, 2006). These are good things.

But there have been disturbing developments, too. A new kind of autocratic and all-seeing state has emerged—one that enforces inflexible government mandates, such as No Child Left Behind's adequate yearly progress goals. Although bottom-up support and lateral networks have had some success in securing short-term test gains, the political culture of high-stakes testing is undermining longer-term, more innovative efforts. Political targets in tested basics still drive the hurried interactions of data-driven professional learning communities as teachers anticipate the upcoming test dates in their preparations, curriculum focus, training choices, and classroom activities.

The Way It Might Be *A Nationwide Vision*

Other paths to change are possible. On a national level, consider Finland. After being one of the most backward economies in Europe in the 1950s, and after an international banking crisis, the loss of its Russian market, and the escalation of unemployment rates to almost 19 percent in the early 1990s, Finland consciously coordinated economic and educational transformation. The nation's



effort to develop a creative and flexible knowledge economy was accompanied by the development of a significantly more decentralized education system. Finland now has a largely local curriculum and virtually no standardized testing.

Finnish control teacher quality at the most important point—the point of entry. Applicants to teacher education programs have only a 1 in 10 chance of acceptance. Even though teacher pay is only average for industrialized nations, teacher retention is high because conditions are good. Within broad guidelines, highly qualified teachers create curriculum together in each municipality for the students they know best. The sense of delivering a curriculum devised by others from afar is utterly alien to Finnish teachers.

In classes rarely larger than 20, Finnish teachers know their students well. Teachers are free from excessive paperwork and endless external activities. They receive generous specialist

support as needed. With these advantages, teachers strive for quality by quietly lifting all students up one at a time.

Principals share resources across schools and feel responsible for all the students in their town and city, not only for those in their own school. In each school, the principal is seen as part of a "society of equals," not as a line manager. All principals teach for at least two hours a week. They are often recruited from within their schools; in fact, it is illegal for a principal to be recruited from outside education.

Assessments are largely diagnostic and internal to the school. External accountability is confidential and undertaken on a sample basis for monitoring purposes only, not to impose sanctions on individual students, educators, or schools.

The results: Finland is the world's number-one performer in literacy, math, and science in the PISA rankings for 15-year-old students. It boasts some of the narrowest achievement gaps in the world. It also ranks at or near the top in economic competitiveness (Hargreaves et al. 2007).

Networking for Power

There are also some leading-edge developments within the Anglo-American community of nations. We recently completed a study of the Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning (RATL) network in England, which comprises more than 300 underperforming secondary schools (Hargreaves, Shirley, Evans, Johnson, & Riseman, 2007). This network articulated a menu of short-term, medium-term, and long-term strategies that education leaders could deploy to meet their goals. Through a system of mentor schools, peer coaching, and reciprocal observation and feedback, as well as a

careful study of data to inform but not drive instruction, RATL boosted achievement in more than 200 of its schools at twice the average annual rate.

Although RATL still had a tendency to focus too much on the short term because of the surrounding policy pressures for targets and testing, the power of network-driven improvement—in which professionals support and challenge professionals, schools work with schools, and the strong help the weak—provides powerful clues about the elements of a Fourth Way strategy that can drive improvement. Indeed, the network is now pushing beyond immediate results into more profound transformations: for example, cultivating pupils as leaders of change, engaging community members in discussions of how culture and language can support improvement, and radically altering the curriculum to accommodate the visual learning styles of some students.

Systemic Change Arising from Communities

Not all reform starts with government. A report by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (Mediratta et al., 2008) provides valuable new evidence of the power of bottom-up reforms for raising pupil achievement, even in the face of top-down accountability systems. The research team studied seven urban school districts and targeted schools that were working closely with community-based organizations. Findings included the following:

- **People Acting for Community**
Together in Miami matched parents with partner schools to focus on literacy instruction in elementary schools. The percentage of 3rd and 4th grade students achieving proficiency in reading on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test improved from 27 percent in 2001 to 49 percent in 2005, far outpacing a comparison set of demographically similar schools.

- Among schools affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation in Austin, Texas, those with higher levels of faculty engagement showed larger percentages of students meeting minimum standards on the Texas state test.

- A campaign by the Oakland Community Organization divided that city's largest and most dysfunctional high schools into small schools. The new schools showed improved graduation rates, increased enrollment in college-preparatory coursework, and improved ratings on California's Academic Performance Index.

Perhaps the most interesting finding was that community organizing is corre-

lated with higher levels of teacher-parent trust, sense of school community and safety, achievement-oriented culture, and parent involvement in the school.

ened by high-performance exemplars like Finland in the present, and inspired by a commitment to more innovative and inclusive goals for the future. The Fourth Way would rest on five pillars of purpose and partnership, three principles of professionalism, and four catalysts of coherence.

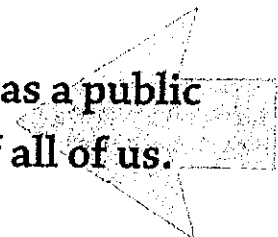
Pillars of Purpose

The solid pillars of purpose and partnership that uphold the edifice of the Fourth Way include

- *An inspiring and inclusive vision that draws people together in pursuit of an uplifting common purpose.*

- *Deepened public engagement that*

We need a vision of education as a public good that shapes the future of all of us.



lated with higher levels of teacher-parent trust, sense of school community and safety, achievement-oriented culture, and parent involvement in the school.

Toward a Fourth Way

The First Way of the welfare state had a sense of mission and showed the value of innovation but resulted in too much variation in quality and implementation. The Second Way of markets and standardization provided urgency, consistency, and direction, but at great cost to professional motivation, authentic achievement, and curriculum creativity. The Third Way has increased levels of support and added lateral professional energy but subjected teachers to a frantic and frenetic pursuit of arbitrary improvement targets.

Each way had strengths in some areas but enormous limitations in others. We propose a Fourth Way of change—informed by an effort to identify and learn from the best of the past, enlight-

harnesses and legitimizes the proven power of community organizing to inspire a great public debate about the future of education.

- *Achievement through increased investment in education facilities and other social services, confirming the First Way's emphasis on our shared social responsibility to support and create better opportunities for the poor.*

- *Corporate educational responsibility, with education and business partners equally accountable to each other.*

- *Students as partners in change rather than merely targets of change efforts and services—more involved in their own learning and learning choices, actively consulted about the quality and improvement of teaching, and substantially engaged in the overall governance of the school and its development.*

Principles of Professionalism

Education leaders and teachers are the ultimate arbiters of change. The class-

room door is the portal to reform or the raised drawbridge that holds it at bay. Three principles of professionalism are indispensable components of any sustainable change:

■ *High-quality teachers* who are attracted by their country's inspiring and inclusive vision; have high status as builders of their nation's future; enjoy supportive working conditions, sufficient pay, and professional autonomy; and are trained to a rigorous intellectual and practical standard.

■ *Powerful professionalism* in which teachers' associations become profound agents of systemic change that benefits students, not only opponents or implementers of changes imposed on them by others.

■ *Lively learning communities* in which teachers learn and improve together in cultures of collaboration, trust, and responsibility.

Catalysts of Coherence

The hardest part of any plan for change in education is how to make it spread. Coherence does not mean cloning or aligning everything so it looks the same in all schools. It means bringing diverse people together to work skillfully and effectively for a common cause that lifts them up and moves them in the same direction. Four catalysts can create this coherence:

■ *Sustainable leadership* that is integral to educational change, not an afterthought. One way to build more leadership capacity is to increase supply by identifying and developing aspiring and emerging leaders. But we can also increase capacity by reducing unnecessary demand—eliminating the excessive reform demands that deter many qualified potential leaders and trusting them to become inspirational developers of their communities instead of mere managers of imposed targets and external initiatives. Where Singapore now advises "Teach Less, Learn More"

we would add "Reform Less, Improve More."

■ *Networks of mutual learning.* As in England's leading-edge Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning project, schools must support and learn from one another, become collectively responsible for all the children and youth in their city or community, and commit to systems and dispositions where the strong help the weak.

■ *Responsibility before accountability.* As in Finland, we must give a higher priority to collective professional

and bolts all over the boiler room floor.

The theories behind the First, Second, and Third Ways that have defined recent U.S. education strategy have been fundamentally flawed. Now it is time for something bolder and better. We need to let leaders lead again. We need to engage the public, not just submit citizens to opinion polls and electioneering. And with lateral learning networks spreading within and across schools, we need to put educators themselves at the leading edge of reform.

Education policy is undergoing a global transformation—and the United States isn't getting it.



responsibility than to external accountability. And we must base external accountability on sampling rather than a politically distorted insistence on testing every student.

■ *Building from the bottom, steering from the top.* Social policy should neither let a thousand flowers bloom nor micromanage everything in detail, but rather provide a broad and inspired sense of direction with genuine development of community and professional responsibility. Positive change should emerge and spread from below rather than being dictated from the top.

A New Vision

With the U.S. presidential elections now less than a month away, Americans have new opportunities to shape education policy. Both John McCain and Barack Obama recognize that something has gone wrong with the No Child Left Behind accountability machine, which is now spitting nuts

Most of all, we need a vision of education as a public good that shapes the future of all of us. This vision should help us develop greater innovation and creativity, expect and demand commitment and perseverance from our students, foster the international awareness and cultural understanding that strengthen global partnerships and security, and promote the inclusiveness that elevates our differences into the strengths that can enable us to bring about opportunity for all in a just society.

In the Fourth Way, there will still be standards, including public, human, and ethical ones, but there will no longer be standardization. There will be hard work and persistence, but not pointless drudgery. There will be greater support for the education profession, but not unconditionally. The goal of the Fourth Way is to create the schools that will undergird and catalyze our best values to regenerate

and improve society. Only then will the United States become the education leader that others around the globe eagerly seek. ■

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