

PREFACE



This book comes at the end of a decade of great growth and apparent prosperity. Middle-class America, like the middle classes in many other developed economies, became a culture of shopping, spending, and speculation. Even moderate middle-class earners turned into property owners and speculators, boosting consumer spending and incurring increasing debt with the confidence that ever-rising property values would cover their credit. Meanwhile, those on the lower rungs of the middle and working classes saw their real incomes fall and borrowed more and more money on increasingly risky terms to make ends meet and avoid getting left behind.

But the boom is over. Housing prices are in free fall and the credit crunch is on. Big-time investors played and lost with ordinary people's money, our governments stepped in to bail them out, and we will be paying the price and repaying the debt for years to come. So who needs another book on educational change at this crucial moment in our shared economic destiny? Isn't it time to just hold things right where they are, to put education and schools on the back burner, and attend to bigger priorities instead?

There are those who have said that the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression should cause us to freeze all public spending at current levels and that boosting public education is a luxury we can no longer afford. They have argued that now is the time to cut back, just as we did in the 1980s. Yet, in *When Markets Collide*, economic and investment guru Mohammed El-Erian reminds us that it is exactly when we are in a slump and falling behind international competitors, such as the emerging economies, of China, India, and parts of the Middle East, that we most need to invest in the training and skills that will shape our future.¹

Then there are those who produce fear-mongering books and videos that depict how much harder and longer the children and young adults of Asian economies work in order to get ahead. We learn about young people who take extra calculus for pleasure, go to cramming schools on the weekends, and study musical instruments with relentless rigor. Like many American reformers in the 1990s argued after visits to Japan, these commentators propose harder work, longer hours, and increased diligence as the savior of our overindulged adolescents.² Of course, more emphasis

CHAPTER ONE

THE THREE WAYS OF CHANGE

The First Way of Innovation and Inconsistency

The Second Way of Markets and Standardization

The Third Way of Performance and Partnership

We are entering an age of post-standardization in education. It may not look, smell, or feel like it, but the augurs of the new age have already arrived and are advancing with increasing speed.

- Shortly before the 2008 U.S. presidential election, the chair of the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee proclaimed that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act had “become the most negative brand in America.” Eighty-five percent of surveyed educators agreed the NCLB was not improving schools, and a high-profile commission—including leading superintendents, CEOs, and two former secretaries of education—complained that America’s obsession with tested and standardized basics was destroying its capacity to be economically creative and competitive.¹
- In Asia, high-performing Singapore emphasizes “Teach Less, Learn More” and mandates 10% “white space” for teachers to bring individual initiative and creativity into their teaching. Meanwhile, the burgeoning economic power of China makes school-developed curriculum a national educational priority.
- The European Union names 2009 the “Year of Innovation and Creativity” in its push to give it a greater edge in economic competitiveness.²

CHAPTER TWO

THE THREE PATHS OF DISTRACTION

The Path of Autocracy

The Path of Technocracy

The Path of Effervescence

Those things that many use to divide us can also bring us together. The Third Way has offered integrated strategies in a polarized world. By doing so, it has brought into being one of the 10 “mega-trends” predicted by John Naisbitt for the 21st century—the replacement of *either/or* thinking with *both/and* solutions. Pressure *and* support, top-down leadership *and* bottom-up empowerment, public *and* private sectors, autonomy *with* accountability—these are just some of the Third Way’s creative combinations.¹

This antipathy to *either/or* thinking isn’t new. In education, it’s the hallmark of the foundational philosophy of one of America’s greatest educators—John Dewey. Dewey disliked the polarized fads and fashions that moved educational policy from one extreme to the other. “Mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites,” he complained. “It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of *Either-Ors*, between which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities.”² To overcome this predisposition towards what he called “dualistic” thinking, Dewey organized many of the chapters of his magnum opus, *Democracy and Education*, to explore synthetic and integrative approaches to learning—“Interest *and* Discipline,” “Play *and* Work in the Curriculum,” and “Labor *and* Leisure” among them.³

CHAPTER THREE

THE FOUR HORIZONS OF HOPE

The Top-Performing Nation

The Innovative and Effective Network

The Democratic Movement

The Turned-Around District

Each Way of change has left a legacy—a mixture of strengths and weaknesses, good and bad. The philosopher George Santayana warned that if we do not learn from the past, we are condemned to repeat it.¹ History is not a pile of refuse, nor is it a refuge. Our challenge, in relation to our values and our vision, is to learn from history what we can and to leave behind what we must. What, in this sense, have the first three ways of change bequeathed to us?

- Retrieving the spirit of innovation and flexibility of the First Way can restore the capacity of teachers to create much of their own curriculum and rekindle the inspiration of world-changing social and educational missions that bind teachers together and connect them to ideals beyond themselves.
- From the interregnum, we can take the guiding power of broadly defined common standards, the importance of personally supporting each student, and the technical advances of portfolio and performance assessments that began to make complex and authentic assessments part of the learning process, and not just judgments about learning that was already over.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FOURTH WAY

The Six Pillars of Purpose

The Three Principles of Professionalism

The Four Catalysts of Coherence

The *Fourth Way* is a way of inspiration and innovation, of responsibility and sustainability. The Fourth Way does not drive reform relentlessly through teachers, use them as final delivery points for government policies, or vacuum up their motivations into a vortex of change defined by short-term political agendas and the special interests with which they are aligned. Rather, it brings together government policy, professional involvement, and public engagement around an inspiring social and educational vision of prosperity, opportunity, and creativity in a world of greater inclusiveness, security, and humanity.

The Fourth Way pushes beyond standardization, data-driven decision making, and target-obsessed distractions to forge an equal and interactive partnership among the people, the profession, and their government. It enables educational leaders to “let go” of the details of change, steering broadly whenever they can and intervening directly only when they must—to restore safety, avoid harm, and remove incompetence and corruption from the system.

The Fourth Way involves a trade-off for educators. It releases teachers from the tightened grip of government control. It also reduces their autonomy from parents, communities, and the public. Parents become more involved in the daily lives of their children’s education, community members become more visible and vocal in schools, and the public gets engaged in determining the purposes of education together rather than simply consuming the services that are delivered to them.