

PREFACE



These are the dog days of public education and large-scale reform. At least that's how most teachers and many school leaders see it. It's easy to sympathize with them. In most of the Anglo-American group of nations, public education, as we have known it for over half a century, is under increasing attack. The idea of public education for the common good is being replaced by the insistence that anyone can provide public education, even at a profit, so long as it improves tested outcomes for individual students. Local democratic control of schools is being eroded and eradicated in favor of individual free schools, charter schools, and academies that are separated from each other but funded and regulated by a distant, centralized government bureaucracy. Things are changing quickly, and not always for the better.

One of the most serious new developments is the escalating assault on teachers. What teachers do is constantly demeaned. The inspiring purposes that brought teachers into teaching and that keep children engaged with their learning are no longer officially respected. The joys and triumphs of teaching are found in things like hearing children read their first words, introducing students to interests that stay with them for the rest of their lives, and finding ways to connect children's learning to their languages and cultures. When teachers introduce young people to the wonders of nature; when they answer children's questions about fairness, death or God; when they are able to turn a bully into a protector of weaker children, then they know they picked the right profession, and that their work has been well done. But these things are being squeezed aside by demands to drive up test scores, to compete with other schools and teachers, to deliver a centralized

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curriculum, and to hammer away at the basics week after week until the heads of the nation's children are flattened and blunt!

And if it is not enough for teachers to be attacked for what they do, they are increasingly insulted for who they are and what they make. In the age of austerity, hard-earned retirement benefits are portrayed as expensive indulgences that should be cut down to size or eliminated altogether. The communications coup following the global economic collapse has brilliantly turned public anger away from bankers and on to public sector workers and particularly teachers. Based on unreliable and unstable test-score data, teachers are compared with one another in order to reward and punish them on the basis of these narrow measures of performance. A profession that once was—and in the highest-performing countries, still is—dignified as the achievement of years of long and rigorous training, is now being recast as something that can be picked up in a few quick weeks of preparation over the summer holidays.

These reform measures have more than two decades of a track record behind them and they are making teachers weary. The results of the 2012 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* confirm the depressing decline of the teaching profession in the United States. In the previous two years, the percentage of teachers surveyed who reported being very satisfied in their jobs declined sharply, from 59% to 44%. The number who indicated they were thinking of leaving the profession jumped from 17% to 29%.¹ Imagine being a student knowing that the teachers you encounter are becoming less satisfied, and close to one in three would rather be somewhere else.

The dog days of reform also apply to the reforms themselves. After being tried time after time, in place after place, the repeated failure of the reforms does not deter their advocates from driving them through with even greater ferocity. The reforms are defied by the evidence and contradicted by the experience of high performance in other countries and systems. Stubbornly, too many reformers in Anglo-American nations refuse to change horses in midstream.

Consider the contrary evidence. First, while many U.S. systems have turned public schools in entire urban areas over to charter management organizations, charter schools, as an aggregate, perform worse than conventional public schools.² Although some academies in England perform well, many demonstrate no consistent advantage over conventional state schools.³ Second, although schools have invested heavily in educational technology while cutting teacher positions, it turns out that often students *do* want to be taught by teachers after all, and their academic achievement results show it.⁴ Third, despite all the efforts to

link teachers' salaries to test-score results, pay for tested performance has little or no evidence of prior success in the teaching profession, and external incentives do not raise performance in other complex professions either.⁵ To make matters worse, these ineffective policies are exported to developing nations, with even fewer resources as well.⁶

All of these different change forces—marketplace models of school improvement, technology as a replacement for teachers, and pay for performance—are redefining the teaching profession as one where teachers are being trained faster, with careers that are shorter, even though most teachers do not hit peak periods of performance until at least four and often eight years into the job.⁷

And then there are the lessons of international experience. The world's highest-performing systems—Finland, Singapore, and Canada among them—are also strong *public* systems. They engage people in their schools locally. They use testing prudently, not pervasively. They favor innovation, not detailed standardization. Teachers' performance rewards are not based on student test-score data. Teaching is a life-long career requiring rigorous training, not a short-term engagement that can be prepared for fast.

There is a better way forward with abundant evidence to support it. We first outlined it in our previous book—*The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*.⁸ This drew upon our research to articulate a new change architecture for school improvement. We stated that to be high achieving, educators in school systems need the right kind of purpose that inspires them, a strengthened professionalism that propels them forward, and a cultural and structural coherence that holds them together.

We showed that three previous ways of change have all had some strengths, but also real limitations that prevented schools from reaching their full potential. The *First Way*, from the 1960s, gave educators unprecedented professional freedom in their classrooms but no way to spread what they learned or to bring it together. *Second Way* reforms that began in the 1980s created a push for standards and greater academic rigor, combined with the stimulus of market competition. But standards turned into standardization, and instead of innovating more, schools found themselves struggling to outdo each other at the same game instead. *Third Way* reforms, which were launched most successfully in England and parts of Canada but only

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got partial traction in the United States, gave teachers opportunities to learn from one another through new lateral networks, but mainly according to data-driven testing processes that limited the depth and scope of their professional conversations.

On top of this retrospective account, we drew upon international evidence of high achievement that we investigated in a network of 300 high schools, a high-performing country, a turned-around district, and an oppositional movement to bring about positive change despite prevailing policies. Our book sketched out a broad route for the Fourth Way, but it needed to be mapped in more detail and had to be laid out in practice to be truly useful.

The Global Fourth Way therefore fills out, refines, and sometimes redefines the features that characterize high achievement. It is organized around, and springs from, a new international research agenda of investigating high performance in different schools and systems across the world that we have developed over several years.

We lay down the foundations of this argument in the first two chapters. We begin by asking what *kind* of change we want. Do we want to improve what already exists or transform it into something fundamentally new? We explore and explain the dynamic combination of improvement with innovation. The point, we argue, is not just to continue with incremental change, but also to push for deeper, disruptive transformations of schools and systems.

The following six chapters set out the evidence for our argument. They consist of six cases of successful innovation and improvement. Two are high-performing nations. Two are large-scale systems that have hybrid properties of and, in different ways, are transitional between the Third and Fourth Ways. The final two cases depict schools and systems that strive and struggle to establish the Fourth Way within contrary systems of market competitiveness, standardization, and extensive testing.

Chapters 3 and 4 describe two high-performing national systems that exemplify many Fourth Way principles: Finland and Singapore. Although very different from each other geographically, politically, and culturally, they have transformed themselves and their educational systems within a generation or so. Despite and even because of their differences, the two nations are both defined by the possession of a compelling and coherent moral purpose, an emphasis on the civic necessity of strong public education, clear commitments to high-quality teachers and teaching, and ways of securing system integration that are more about cultural coherence in beliefs and communication than about bureaucratic alignment on paper.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe two systems poised between the Third and the Fourth Ways: the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Ontario. In educational results, as in its quality of life and government policies, Canada is a global leader. Officially bilingual and multicultural, Canada possesses many features that are similar to its U.S. neighbor, but some decisive differences as well. Its provincial education systems point to the importance of public investment and professional quality and stability as platforms for educational success. Canada also shows that educational excellence does not require centralization of federal power and authority. This authority, it shows, can be dispersed effectively across provinces (the equivalent of U.S. or Australian states), where local school districts have considerable influence too.

The next two chapters examine a Fourth Way school and network of schools that have established themselves within and against wider systems that operate on Second Way principles of markets and standardization, and on Third Way policies of data-driven improvement. Chapter 7 examines a turned-around high school in an impoverished cultural minority community in the North of England. Like a number of similar peers, this school courageously adopted a highly innovative change strategy that based the curriculum on how its students learned best. It galvanized its teachers through inspiring and distributed leadership and worked closely with local parents and the community. This was all achieved within and occasionally against a national system of intense pressures for meeting the demands of data-driven improvement and standardized testing.

Chapter 8 sets out a successful case of bottom-up, union-driven reform in California that shows how, on a considerable scale, and even when the larger policy environment is unsupportive and obstructive, meaningful and measurable academic gains are still possible. This chapter shows how Fourth Way unions along with a range of partners can be in the forefront of changes that benefit students and uplift teachers. It also illustrates how and why governments and system administrators in Second Way systems especially sometimes have to be circumvented or even challenged because they resist changes that benefit students. The point made in all these chapters is that Fourth Way thinking and acting can and do occur everywhere—even in systems that are uncongenial to them.

The six case studies pinpoint essential change principles that enable and inspire a school or a system to innovate and improve. The final chapter addresses the nitty-gritty, and

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potentially galvanizing practical issues that change leaders must confront and conquer in order to take charge of the profession and release its dynamic potential. Educational change, we say, doesn't need just levers or drivers to make it happen. It also needs professional dynamos who generate and transform people's energy for change. We certainly need great urgency for change in many schools and systems, but we cannot do this without generating professional energy as well.

The dynamos of educational change can and should be a system's thousands of teachers and its school leaders. Governments can provide an inspiring sense of direction and the resources and constant messaging to match it. The public can lift its sights not only to raise expectations for individual parents' own children, but also to embrace aspirations for all the nation's children. But, in the end, nothing of value will occur without the commitment and capability of thousands of classroom teachers and their leaders who have ultimate control over how they teach their own students every day.

This is the call of the Fourth Way—a call that is not abstract or academic, but that is practical and palpable because it already exists in the highest-performing schools and systems in the world. It is a call that requires us to reflect on and return to our most deeply held principles about high-quality teaching and learning, to learn from the successes of others that can help us advance, and to redouble our efforts to provide an outstanding education for all young people.