

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

- Finland is the world's leader on results in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests of sophisticated, applied knowledge in mathematics, science, and literacy, as well as on international ratings of economic competitiveness. Finland avoids national standardized tests altogether and reaches high levels of achievement by attracting highly qualified teachers with supportive working conditions, strong degrees of professional trust, and an inspiring mission of inclusion and creativity.³
- Many parents and teachers in England object to its young children being the most tested in the world. That country's government puts an end to all standardized testing in secondary schools. Wales abolishes national testing altogether up to age 14.⁴ One of the leading headteachers' associations and the largest teachers' unions announces a joint conference motion to boycott the primary school tests.
- In Canada, the legislature of the conservative province of Alberta votes to abolish the Grade 3 provincial test and Nova Scotia announces the elimination of its provincial examinations in Grades 6 and 9 because they say that they are "not worth the costs."

FINDING OUR WAY

At the end of the 20th century, a new consensus emerged in most Western democracies about the best path forward for peace, prosperity, and progress. Leaders called this new path the Third Way. Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of Germany wrote a joint paper on this Third Way.⁵ President Bill Clinton convened an international meeting at the White House to discuss it, and the director of the prestigious London School of Economics, Anthony Giddens, became its theoretical guru.⁶ The idea was simple: Get past the idealization of the welfare state on the one hand and the ideology of markets on the other. Instead, develop a more pragmatic path—the Germans called it “the new middle”—that would capitalize on the strengths of the welfare state and markets while minimizing their weaknesses. Above all, support policies that would reinvigorate and expand the public sphere, with the ultimate goal of increasing civic engagement among all sectors of the population.

This promising policy direction that raised high hopes around the world is now stuck—especially in education. Based on what we can learn from the past, as well as excellent alternatives at home and abroad, this book draws on years of our own research and improvement work to show how and why the Third Way has stalled. It then sets out a better way—a Fourth Way—of educational and social change to correct the course and gather momentum for a better path ahead.

The Fourth Way has not been conjured out of thin air. Almost all ideas about change start somewhere else. They can come from other countries such as Finland, Singapore, and South Korea that have strong records of educational and economic achievement as well as social cohesion, or they can come from exceptional outliers of innovative and highly effective practice within our own districts, states, provinces, and nations. We have direct experience with many of these and draw on that experience throughout the book.

The past is *also* a foreign country.⁷ We bring ideas, images, and experiences of change from there, too. The past shapes our aspirations for and orientations to change in the present and the future. Knowingly or unknowingly, school leaders often take some of what worked for them in one school into the next—even when it doesn't fit. It's therefore best to have a thoughtful and reflective relationship to past experiences—including educational experiences. This way, we can accept their existence, acknowledge their influence, and sort out which aspects should be rekindled and which left behind.

Educators and reformers have already trodden other Ways; their journeys and experiences undoubtedly affect how they approach the Way ahead. We therefore begin by describing the three preceding Ways of educational change to tease out the legacies they have bequeathed to us. In these Ways, you might see some of your own journeys and struggles and appreciate how much you already know that can equip you to move ahead. The following accounts of the first two Ways of change in particular draw on Giddens's theoretical accounts of the Third Way.⁸

THE FIRST WAY OF INNOVATION AND INCONSISTENCY

The First Way was one in which the welfare state defined the status quo. It lasted from the end of World War II to the mid-1970s. In Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the social safety net of the welfare state appealed to war veterans of all ranks and their families. Having made so many sacrifices, they now wanted the opportunities and freedoms for which they had fought. Economist John Maynard Keynes and his followers presented investment in state services not just as a social good but also as a benefit for the economy because it developed the pools of talent that would fuel future prosperity. The Bretton Woods Agreements, signed in a hotel in the mountains of New Hampshire, gave this strategy an international footing.

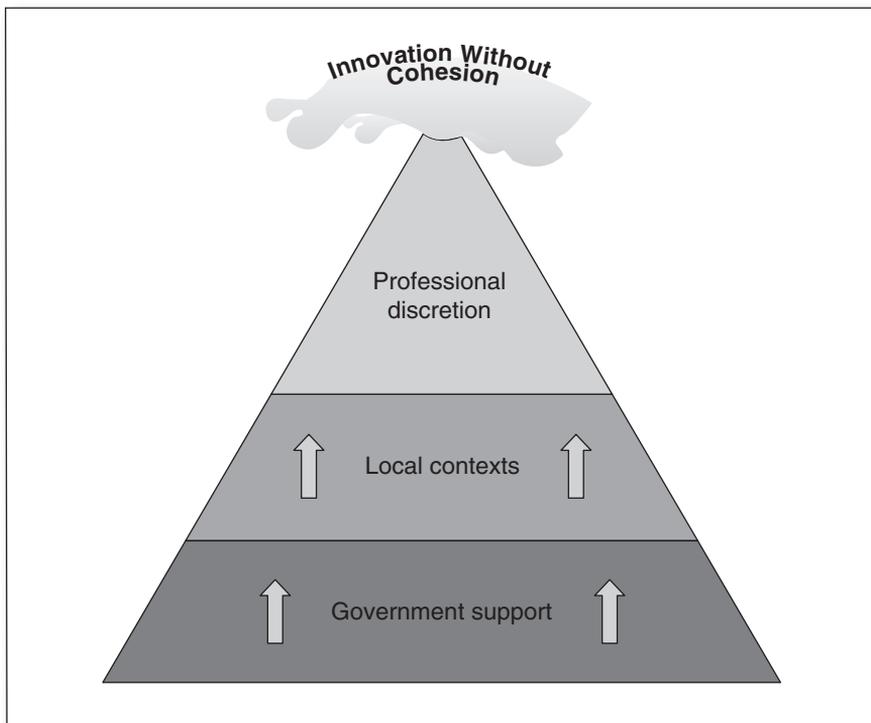
In the United States, First Way thinking came to full fruition during Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, through federal programs such as Operation Head Start for early childhood education. In Britain, Canada, and elsewhere, the new emphasis was evident in the establishment of national health services, investments in public housing, and an expansion of comprehensive secondary education and higher education. This was a period of enormous confidence in

the ability of the state to solve social problems, fueled by a booming economy and spurred by the rising Baby Boomer population.

In the latter years of this age, these structural changes of state and economy catalyzed a cultural revolution. Social movements that began with the civil rights struggle expanded into protests against the Vietnam War and in favor of women's liberation. These provided avenues for historically marginalized groups to push their freedoms and proclaim their new assertiveness in the public sphere. At the same time, the first generation of economically independent adolescents invented and indulged in the freewheeling culture of rock and roll, along with the antiestablishment humor of television shows such as *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and *Laugh-In*.

This rebellious and creative spirit of the times entered public schools, albeit unevenly, in the form of experimentation, innovation, free schooling, deschooling, and teaching in primary and elementary schools that was more child centered (Figure 1.1). Idealistic educators such as Herbert Kohl and Jonathan Kozol wrote gripping narratives condemning educational injustices and advocating radical changes.⁹ Even with these challenges, teachers and other state professionals had great autonomy in the First Way.

Figure 1.1 The First Way



They enjoyed high levels of trust from an increasingly prosperous public, and they were left alone to get on with the job.

In a study of long-term *Change Over Time* spanning more than three decades from the 1970s to the present in eight innovative and traditional high schools in the United States and Canada, one of us found that all the schools were caught up in the zeitgeist of this First Way of social reform. Educators remembered this period as having great optimism and innovation. A high tide of liberalism led to generous outlays that reduced poverty and provided substantial government resources for schools serving the children of the most disadvantaged populations. One teacher described this as “a golden age of education [where] there was money and respect and all kinds of things happening.”¹⁰

Teachers who entered education during this First Way and who were still teaching decades later expressed immense nostalgia for the schools of the 1960s and early 1970s. But there were two diametrically opposed nostalgias, not one. Teachers in schools that had been more innovative were nostalgic for the freedom to develop curricula to meet the varying needs of their students as part of a mission to change the world. This group believed that today’s reform environment of high-stakes testing and curriculum prescription had stolen this mission from them. They grieved for the passion and creativity that had been taken from their teaching.

Teachers in schools that had been more traditional were also nostalgic for their lost professional autonomy, but not for the same reason. For them, autonomy meant liberty to teach academic subjects just as they chose—including long lectures in which they could display their subject mastery. They remembered schools that were smaller, where unmotivated students left early for employment, and where the students who stayed wanted to learn.

The First Way therefore suffered from huge variations in focus and quality. Whether a school was traditional or innovative, excellent or awful, creative or bland, depended on the lottery of leadership among individual school leaders within an unregulated profession. The theories of change in action during this First Way could start innovation and spread it among a few enthusiasts. However, the skill base of teacher education rested on intuition and ideology, and not on evidence. There was no leadership development to create consistency of impact or effort. Parents had no way of knowing how their children were doing in school beyond the information conveyed on report cards. Fads were adopted uncritically, and many young radicals turned schools upside down during their brief tenures before leaving for greener pastures.

This unevenness in implementation pervaded the First Way and helped erode public trust—not just in education, but in the welfare state itself. Outside education, First Way reforms also fostered long-term dependency and even social exclusion among a hard-core group of recipients who lacked the experience, skills, or dispositions to find employment and succeed in the marketplace. A backlash began. Something had to change.

THE INTERREGNUM OF COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION

By the mid-1970s, the First Way had reached its limit. The oil crisis that began in 1973 had plunged the world into a recession. An impatient public, demoralized and upset by the war in Vietnam, by the spectacle of long gas lines in America, by power and coal strikes during the United Kingdom's notorious Winter of Discontent (1978–79), and by the expense of ever-expanding bureaucracies, began to question how their tax revenues were being spent. With jobs drying up, welfare claims escalating, and the salaries of teachers and other tenured state professionals increasing with their seniority, education no longer seemed to be effective.

From the mid- 1970s to the late 1980s, an interregnum set in. President Ronald Reagan in the United States and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Britain reduced resources for and infused market principles into the welfare state. They pushed through the full or partial privatization of services and market competition between providers that placed professionals under new pressures to perform. Similar strategies emerged in New Zealand, the Canadian province of Alberta, and the Australian state of Victoria.

At first, the introduction of new market freedoms injected energy and initiative into the state system. The United States saw the emergence of the charter school movement, powered by an unlikely coalition of libertarians, 1960s-inspired antiestablishment activists, and parents of color from the inner cities. Government magnet schools were developed to create achievement opportunities for inner-city youth so they could concentrate on areas of interest in which they excelled. Benefiting from these reforms, one school in the *Change Over Time* study that was designated as a magnet school was transformed from being one of the worst high schools in its city to standing among the top 150 schools in the country.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Thatcher's education minister, Sir Keith Joseph, provoked passionate debates about secondary school reform. Vocational education, long a neglected domain, came alive with new initiatives. Mentoring and tutoring programs for every individual student were the trailblazers of today's personalized learning. The radical idea that high school students should have portfolios of diverse assessments and achievements negotiated and discussed on a continuing basis with a mentor teacher foreshadowed the current growth in assessment-for-learning. Hybrid vocational programs where students attended their home school for the mainstream curriculum in the morning, then moved to another school in their town or city in the afternoon to engage in communications or production technologies according to their interests, anticipated England's current national system of "specialist" secondary schools.

After the inconsistencies of the First Way, this transitional period marked a quest for coherence. Her Majesty's Inspectorate in England defined eight broad areas of educational experience (somewhat similar to Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences) to provide balance, breadth, and coherence in the curriculum.¹¹ In 1981, the Reagan White House commissioned *A Nation at Risk*, which led to support for common educational standards, along with provision for consumer choice and increased professional training at the district level.¹² Statewide, many governments started to design a common curriculum based on broad standards that were not so numerous as to eliminate professional autonomy or stifle classroom creativity. A little later, the Canadian province of Ontario, under the only socialist government in its history, echoed these emphases by promoting detracking (destreaming) and a small number of common learning outcomes, approached in an interdisciplinary way.¹³ In all these cases, leading policymakers believed that the right combination of market pressures, government guidelines, and site-level resources would drive up the quality of teaching, which in turn would raise student achievement.

However, for the classroom teacher on the receiving end of change, this combination of centralized frameworks and initiatives with decentralized responsibility seemed bewilderingly contradictory. Portfolio assessments were paralleled by standardized tests. Interdisciplinary initiatives ran alongside subject-based report cards. Magnet schools targeted to particular populations also had to include populations with special educational needs to meet federal civil rights guidelines.

The more innovative schools had leaders who were able to help teachers interpret the complexity together. They succeeded in maintaining their missions while still addressing the standards. Traditional schools in the *Change Over Time* study, however, drifted into decline as their leaders overprotected their staffs and shielded them from the gathering shadow of Mordor and its reform requirements that threatened the hobbit-like Middle Earth of their schools—until it was too late. Without the guidance of effective leadership, teachers in these schools complained that the outcomes were too vague. Many school districts responded by composing and compiling big binders of highly specific outcomes, but teachers disliked these as well. Frustrated leaders threw up their hands in despair, concluding that teachers are never satisfied! But the answer to outcomes and standards lies not in how they are written or imposed, but in how communities of teachers make sense of them together in relation to the particular students they teach.

In the end, these reforms, like many others, depended for their success on effective leadership, high-quality professional learning, and student engagement with the changes that affected them. But training for existing

leaders was nonexistent or discretionary. Most professional development for teachers remained haphazard and workshop driven. No one yet showed confidence in students as agents of reform. The collapse of common understanding and consistent quality was the result of the system's failure to invest in its people.

THE SECOND WAY OF MARKETS AND STANDARDIZATION

Mounting frustration with years of incoherence and inconsistency, a continuing economic climate of limited public expenditure and overall financial stringency, and the growth of political and parent nostalgia for tradition and certainty helped propel many nations into a strident Second Way of markets and standardization.

In education, the full onslaught of the Second Way arrived earliest in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales in the late 1980s with the launching of detailed and prescriptive national curricula. It emerged a little later, in the early 1990s, in some Australian states. After starting slowly in a small number of U.S. southern states in the 1980s, it exploded in the United States after one of those state governors—Bill Clinton—was elected president in 1992. Ontario also undertook a similar path in the mid-1990s, with Alberta's Conservative government preceding it. Increasingly, the Second Way agenda also came to define the educational reform strategies and conditions of international lending organizations such as the World Bank when change was introduced in developing countries.

In this truly international Second Way, markets were overlaid with growing government centralization and standardization of educational goals. Performance standards and achievement targets enforced political control of outcomes in the public sector. In Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, with lesser or greater degrees of resources and support, this period witnessed the imposition of prescriptive and sometimes punitive reforms in the shape of

- increased competition among schools, fuelled by publication of rankings of test results;
- prescribed, paced, and sometimes scripted curriculum content in areas of learning that were more narrowly defined;
- the misuse of literacy coaches as compliance officers, along with periodic inspections and management walk-throughs to boost skill development and enforce curriculum fidelity;
- political targets and timetables for delivering improved results;

- sanctions such as involuntary teacher transfers, principal removal, and school closure when failure persisted;
- teacher training that moved away from the academy towards on-the-job training in schools; and
- replacement of broad professional learning by in-service training on government priorities.

During the Reagan and Thatcher years, *citizens* were redefined as *clients*, *customers*, or *consumers*. Facing economic crisis and the salary burdens of maturing state professionals, the welfare state (stigmatized as the “Nanny state” by Thatcher) was demonized as a thief of taxpayers’ money. In education, parents who understood how to navigate new provisions for school choice were freed and empowered, but the professionals who served them became subject to greater surveillance and government prescription. The *passive trust* of the First Way when parents respectfully handed their children over to teachers who were left to get on with the job was replaced in the Second Way by an *active mistrust* between parents and teachers.

Some argue that this Second Way promoted a sense of urgency, attended to all students, increased teachers’ skill levels, and moved the profession in a common and accountable direction.¹⁴ Equity advocates representing traditionally disenfranchised populations believed that increased accountability measures might even boost and equalize achievement.¹⁵ Others welcomed the new commitment to gathering comprehensive data on student achievement, anticipating that more precise information would lead to greater assistance for struggling students such as those in special education programs and their schools.¹⁶

However, after the energy and initiative of the interregnum, markets and diversity were quickly trumped by standardization and uniformity. In the United States, statewide high-stakes tests were increasingly administered to all students—even those who were newly arrived from abroad, without the barest rudiments of English. Standards were easy to write and inexpensive to fund; they spread like wildfire. They were revered in administrative and policy circles but resented and resisted in classrooms. However, as scripted and paced literacy programs were then imposed in many districts and on their schools, the bureaucratic screw tightened with increased ferocity.

England lost its local innovative energy in the Second Way, which began when a new national curriculum was imposed in 1988. Standardized achievement tests were subsequently introduced at four age points in 1995, published by rankings in newspapers and on government Web sites, and linked to the feared school inspection agency, Ofsted, which placed schools it judged to be low performing in “Special Measures.” When the New Labour government succeeded the Tories in 1997, resources were slowly restored to the system, but there was no letup of top-down pressure. If anything,

pressure intensified through the introduction of a timed, prescribed, and paced National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy that was imposed on all primary schools in England. In theory, schools had been given devolved responsibility for budgets and implementation. In practice, the restricted scope for autonomous action amounted in many cases to displacement of blame from governments to schools when results were poor. (See Figure 1.2.)

Meanwhile, in the province of Ontario, the new Progressive Conservative government installed its own detailed secondary school curriculum. The government reduced resources for teachers, mandated a high-stakes Grade 10 literacy test linked to student graduation, and broadcast doubts about teachers' commitments to the public good.

Figure 1.2 The Second Way

