

# researchinfocus

Lorna Earl and Andy Hargreaves

## Learning to Change

### Canada's Contribution to Educational Change

We are, of course, pleased and proud to be given the Canadian Education Association's Whitworth Award for contributions to educational research in Canada for the year 2000. Our pleasure is all the greater because this is, apparently, the first time the award has been given to two people not only for their individual success, but also for their collective, collaborative achievements.

Among the many things we try to stand for in educational research, one is undoubtedly promoting and participating in joint endeavours of research, evaluation, publication and development work with many of our colleagues in the wider educational community — including other highly accomplished research peers such as Michael Fullan, Dean Fink and Brad Cousins, energetic new scholars and the new ideas they bring to the field, and eager graduate

paradoxically, in other parts of the world, it is Canadian expertise on educational change that is consistently sought. Canada is recognized as a world leader in, and at the forefront of, theory and practice in educational change — in ways that benefit student learning and recognize the importance of teachers in the improvement process.

Along with many of our colleagues, we have, for example, designed and evaluated district-wide and state-wide reform initiatives in the United States, evaluated national reform initiatives such as the high-profile National Literacy project in the United Kingdom, and assisted with reforms in less developed countries in Asia, East Africa, South America and the former Soviet Union through organizations such as UNESCO, the Aga Khan Foundation, the Soros Foundation and the Canadian International Development Agency. Canada truly has become a world leader in the theory and knowledge-base of

Education of the University of Toronto to bring together and further develop this important professional community and to enhance its influence on educational research, policy and practice in Canada and elsewhere.

### The International Centre for Educational Change

ICEC is made up of a group of scholars and field developers (Steve Anderson, Nina Bascia, Amanda Datnow, Lorna Earl, Michael Fullan, Lynn Hannay, Andy Hargreaves, Wayne Sellars) at OISE/UT who are committed to *working together to investigate, initiate, support and speak out with integrity and authority on changes and reforms in education, locally, nationally and across the world*. Together, we work in areas that are current and contentious, often challenging existing belief systems and offering alternative interpretations. We believe that educational change is inevitable but improvement is not. It is only as educators struggle with ideas from a variety of perspectives that they are able to stand outside and make sense of their world. Our job, as we see it, is to provide the links and insights that can make connections among fields, across boundaries, and between theory and practice through many of our publications such as the *Journal of Educational Change* (published by Kluwer) and the *International Handbook of Educational Change*.<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, the two of us have worked individually, together, and with a number of other colleagues and young scholars. Our collaborative work that has been recognised by CEA is particularly worthy of note.

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students who constantly prevent us from falling into intellectual complacency.

Canadians rarely trumpet their national triumphs. In educational reform, we all too frequently import ready-made policy solutions from south of the border and overseas that do not fit our distinctive cultural values or are out of tune with our different economic and demographic circumstances. Yet,

educational change, and we have learned much from — as well as being proud to make some contribution of our own to — this significant movement.

Recognizing the power and potential of this critical mass of Canadian expertise on educational change, in 1995, we established the International Centre for Educational Change (ICEC) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in

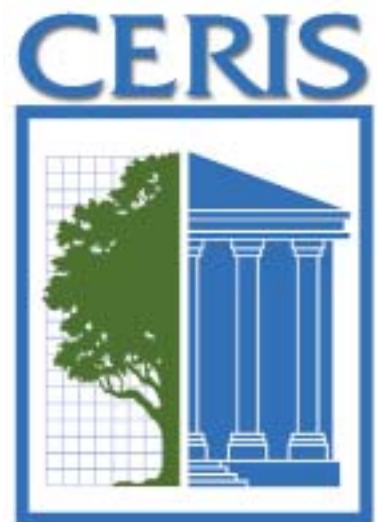
## Schooling for Change

We were first brought together by a mutual, former colleague, Steve Lawton, in 1989, to respond to a request for research proposals from the Ontario Ministry of Education for a literature review of Canadian and international research on education for early adolescents. Andy had recently joined the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education from Britain where he had just completed his Ph.D. and a book on the history, organization and practice of English middle schools.<sup>2</sup> Lorna, with a background as a school board researcher, and with a Ph.D. on the epidemiology of teacher stress, had just been granted the Research Director at the Scarborough Board of Education. Before the days of e-mail, we collaborated on this first proposal entirely by phone and fax without ever meeting face-to-face.

These were the specious origins of our relationship that now spans over a decade, where we trusted in the process of collaboration before we had the opportunity and experience to trust each other as people. But our intermediary and almost invisible colleague who brought us together obviously knew us well. Our expertise was complementary, but our standpoints were far from contradictory. Lorna's research background was largely quantitative, Andy's mainly qualitative; Lorna's disciplinary background was predominantly psychological and measurement-based while Andy's was more sociological in nature; Lorna came from the policy-oriented research world of school boards, Andy from the university world of peer evaluated scholarship; Lorna knew the Canadian educational scene, while Andy brought an international dimension to it. Even the writing styles were complementary as we shortened and lengthened each other's sentences!

Such complementarity has energized and enriched a creative body of work over the years. At times, it has also generated conflict as we have differed, bickered, and sometimes fundamentally disagreed with each other about theory, ideology, policy application, and even the overall direction of our Centre. Yet disagreement is one of the most underrated desirable aspects of collegiality and friendship. We believe that because of it, the work we do together and with our other colleagues has only gained in quality and grown stronger because we have sometimes made difficult calls on each other's judgement, challenged one another's ideas, and been forced to look more closely at beliefs or interpretations that each of us holds dear.

In 1990, this joint work led to our first report, *Rights of Passage*,<sup>3</sup> which ended up on every principal's desk in Ontario and helped frame *Transition Years* policy in education for Ontario's NDP government. The report subsequently became a book entitled *Schooling for Change* that has since been widely published and translated into Spanish and Portuguese.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on international research about the common and variable needs of adolescents, we argued in the report for a smoother transition between elementary school and high schools, for high schools to become less like curriculum factories and more like welcoming communities for their Grade 9 and 10 students; for a curriculum that was rigorous and relevant, and that was based on learning standards, not on content-driven time; for alternate and multiple forms of assessment that harmonized with the new curriculum; and for change and reform strategies that provided the necessary support and timescale for these goals to be achieved.



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Amorcés il y a plus de dix ans, les travaux de Lorna Earl et d'Andy Hargreaves sur l'amélioration et le changement scolaires leur ont permis de remporter le Prix ACE-Whitworth 2000 pour l'excellence de la recherche en éducation. Le Canada est reconnu partout dans le monde comme étant à l'avant-garde de la théorie et de la mise en œuvre du changement dans les écoles. Malgré cela, nombre d'éducateurs et d'éducatrices de ce pays regardent au-delà de nos frontières pour des solutions qui correspondent mal à nos valeurs culturelles particulières. L'International Centre for Education Change, fondé par Earl et Hargreaves, a pour mission de faire de la recherche sur le changement, de l'amorcer et de l'appuyer. À cette fin, le Centre se prononce sur les changements et les réformes en éducation qui surviennent au plan régional, national et international.

## Learning to Change

A few years later, in the mid-1990s, we followed this work with an investigation of 29 exemplary Grade 7 and 8 teachers in the throes of implementing some of the changes in their classrooms. Drawing on our other work on educational change, we described how teachers made sense of one version of the new orthodoxy of educational change (as we called it) that was spreading rapidly across the world.<sup>5</sup> This new orthodoxy has the following components:

- **High standards** of learning that *all* students (excluding only those with the most severe mental dysfunctions) are expected to achieve;
- **Deeper learning** that moves beyond mere memorization of content to emphasize conceptual understanding, problem-solving, and knowledge application, essential in the new knowledge society;
- **Centralized curriculum** that ensures common and consistent commitment to, as well as coverage of, what students should know and be able to do in today's society;

- **Literacy and numeracy**, as prime targets for reform, and for attaining higher learning standards;
- **Indicators and rubrics** of student achievement and curriculum planning that enable teachers and others to be clear when standards have been achieved;
- **Aligned assessments** that are tightly linked to the prescribed curriculum, learning standards and indicators — ensuring that teachers keep their eyes on the prize of high learning standards for all;
- **Consequential accountability**, where overall school performance in terms of standards-raising is closely tied to processes of accreditation, inspection, increasing school choice, and the relationship of funding to levels of success (and failure).

In principle, the educational developments of the new orthodoxy promise significant progress in educational reform in terms of improving quality and standards of learning and opportunity for all kinds of students. Indeed, our own research showed how teachers, working within the context of broadly defined standards, could work as strong professional communities to develop their own curriculum units together, could tailor the learning to the specific needs of their very diverse students, could involve students themselves in planning and deciding what kinds of work would address the learning outcomes, and could use assessments wisely to engage students and their parents in responsible and accountable conversations about learning.

At the same time, we argued, when standards are defined in great numbers and elaborate detail, they can create a “hurry-along curriculum” where content coverage takes precedence over learning and even teachers’ “wait-time” to answer student questions gets compressed.<sup>6</sup> As well as inhibiting learning, over-prescriptive and unnecessarily detailed standards undermine the professionalism and morale of teachers. As one teacher in England put it:

*They tell us to go and be busy over there, so we all swarm over there and get busy. Then they change their minds and say, “No, over there!” So we all swarm over there and get busy again in a different way. And then it's ‘over here’, then over somewhere else. And we all keep on swarming as they point fingers in new directions. Every few years, they come to watch you to see if you're swarming properly.<sup>7</sup>*

By drawing on the detailed evidence of outstanding teacher practice and the policy frameworks that permit and encourage it, our work has shown how it is possible to meet the ambitions of standards-based reform without getting bogged down in its frequent, practical problems of overstandardization, under-resourcing, deprofessionalization and curricular narrowness. It also illustrates how we can move beyond the difficulties and drawbacks of standards programs to embrace and realize the virtues of the best standards principles.

## Beyond Change

Canada is a conundrum of a country. While it is a world leader in educational change theory and educational policy, many of its jurisdictions adopt imported solutions that go in search of domestic problems. Much of our foundational research on the effects of educational change continues to reveal the damaging effects of such spurious solutions — through Lorna and her colleagues’ longitudinal study of the long-term effects of educational reform on Grade 7 & 8 teachers, and Andy and his colleagues’ research on the emotions of teaching and educational change; and his investigation of *Change Over Time?* in eight secondary schools over the past 30 years.<sup>8</sup> Many of these borrowed policy solutions are placing schools and their teachers on borrowed time — increasing teachers’ workloads, eating away at their time, paring local support systems to the bone, reducing effective professional development to hit-and-run

inservice training, and subscribing to cumbersome standards frameworks that make a hurdle race of student learning and a travesty of teachers' professionalism.

By contrast, our school improvement work in Ontario, Manitoba and elsewhere — along with our studies of exemplary teachers and their impact — continuously points not only to the sense of *urgency* that commonly drives educational change efforts but also to the sense of *agency* teachers need to have to carry these changes through, and the sense of *energy* and hope they need to persist with these changes over the long haul. Respect, reward, involvement and engagement in reform agendas that provide guidance, along with sufficient flexibility for teachers to develop curriculum units, assessment formats, and standards with their colleagues and students, are all essential for making urgency, energy and agency into a powerful *synergy* for positive educational change. This is exactly the kind of synergy that yields better learning and stronger achievements for all students.

In the United States, George W. Bush's educational slogan is to leave no child behind. The implication of our own collective findings on positive educational change is that leaving no child behind means leaving no teacher behind either. As a society, we believe that this is our next challenge for educational change.

- 1 A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan and D/ Hopkins (eds.), *The International Handbook of Educational Change* (The Netherlands: Kluwer Publications, 1998).
- 2 A. Hargreaves, *Two Cultures of Schooling: The Case of Middle Schools* (New York: Falmer Press, 1986).
- 3 A. Hargreaves and L. Earl, *Rights of Passage: A Review of Selected Research About Issues in the Transition Years* (Toronto, Ontario: Queen's Printer, 1990).
- 4 A. Hargreaves, L. Earl, J. and Ryan, *Schooling for Change* (London and New York: Falmer Press, 1996). (also translated into Spanish).
- 5 A. Hargreaves, L. Earl, S. Moore and S. Manning, *Learning to Change: Teaching Beyond Subjects and Standards* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Barcelona: Octaedro, 2001).

6 M. Dadds, "The Politics of Pedagogy," *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 7, no.1 (2001): 43-58.

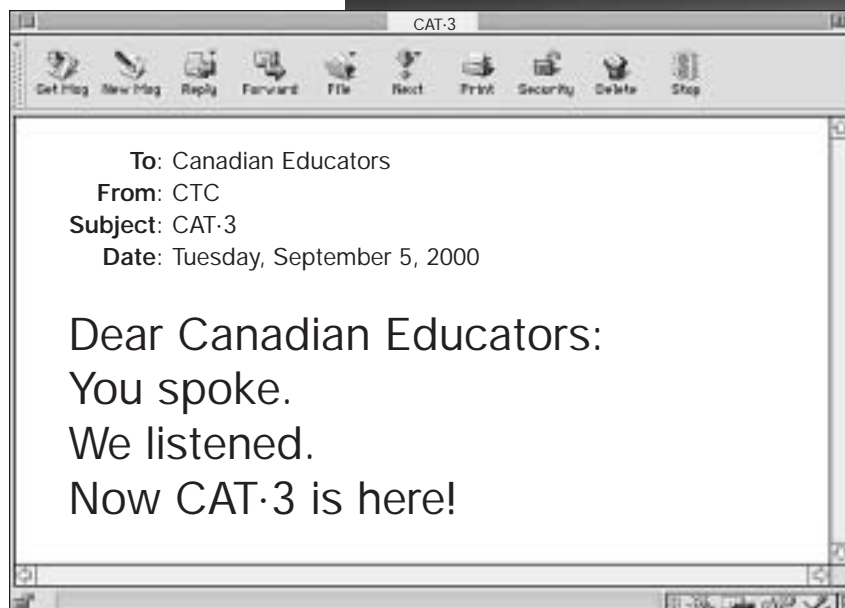
7 Ibid.

8 A. Hargreaves and D. Fink, "Three Dimensions of Educational Reform," *Educational Leadership* 57, no. 7, (April 2000): 30-34.

**Dr. Lorna Earl** is an associate professor at OISE/UT and an acknowledged leader in the field of assessment and evaluation. She was named a Distinguished Educator by OISE/UT in 1994. [learl@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:learl@oise.utoronto.ca)

**Dr. Andy Hargreaves** is a professor at OISE/UT, and Professor of Educational Leadership and Change at the University of Nottingham in England, whose research has focused on educational change. [ahargreaves@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:ahargreaves@oise.utoronto.ca)

They are the co-directors of the International Centre for Educational Change and co-winners of the 2000 CEA-Whitworth Award for Educational Research.



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