

Witnessing the Future from the Shoulders of Giants

A REVIEW OF *THE FOURTH WAY: THE INSPIRING FUTURE FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE*

BY ANDY HARGREAVES AND DENNIS SHIRLEY

CORWIN PRESS, 2009, ISBN 978-1-4129-7637-4

To spawn new ideas requires a thorough understanding of what has preceded the emergence of a new design. The brilliance of new ideas is in forging new direction that reaches further than the best ideas of yesterday and is responsive to an ever changing social context. So it is with considerable admiration that I read Hargreaves and Shirley's *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*. This rallying point for social policy futurists gathers strength from the post-war to present continuum of educational change and offers insightful pathways for an educational future useful for our times. *The Fourth Way* offers "...change that will bring together an energized profession with an engaged public and a guiding but not controlling government, in an interactive partnership..."

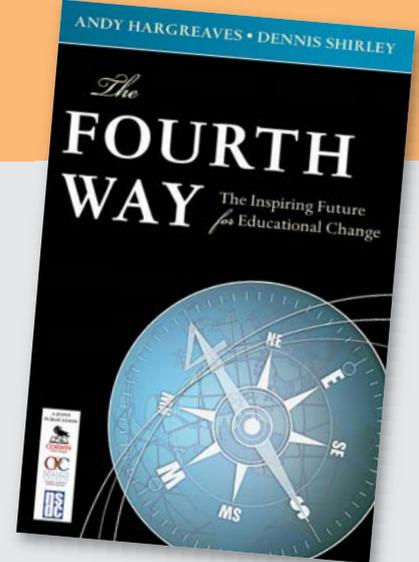
If you've ever been inclined to defend an oppositional stance to a narrow and commercially-driven improvement agenda then *The Fourth Way* is for you. Hargreaves and Shirley stand on the shoulders of three distinct post-World War II era giants and articulate a vision that accounts for ever more diverse communities, challenges to economic and social certainties and schools that are ill-aligned with looming societal influences. I enjoyed the rising feelings of rebellion and hope that there are equally motivating concerns to literacy goals and that purpose in education can be applied to other contemporary concerns and future aspirations.

Lest you believe that *The Fourth Way* is for the fringe, understand that it makes a serious contribution to educational improvement. It stands above commercially-driven rhetoric because it is research-based and well-evidenced with case studies of "outliers of innovation and improvement." The case studies demonstrate the potential effects of schools in society when the goals of schools are aligned with the goals of communities. The authors use Finland as an example of a jurisdiction where "...public education is seen as a collective social and professional responsibility. In direct opposition to the New Orthodoxy, Finland achieves high performance without constantly taking public measures of it."

Other international and North American examples celebrate "...a sense of urgency and a push for success with a culture of optimism and inspiration..." and that "...parents and communities can be so much more than objects of political intervention or recipients of government services."

The review of the First, Second, and Third Ways builds a necessary platform, albeit as a whirlwind tour inside 20 pages. The authors describe that the First Way was ushered in by a sense of entitlement but met its demise by lack of direction, the market-driven Second Way was introduced with an iron fist and defeated by professional rebirth, and "...the educational reform strategies of the Third Way have distracted its founders and followers from their ability to achieve the Way's original ideals." This orientation to the Fourth Way is necessary context. A much tougher argument for context is that education is indeed in an era of "post-standardization." This statement may resonate with futurists but it may be harder to swallow for North American practitioners. Still, the authors make a stellar case for consideration of where we have been and for taking control for the design of the future of education.

Hargreaves and Shirley illustrate *Three Paths of Distraction* that has distracted school reformers from the ideals of the Third Way: the Path of the Autocrat, the Path of the Technocrat and the Path of Effervescence. The authors decry "moral issues and responsibilities ... converted into technical issues..." and marginalized "...importance of moral judgment and professional responsibility." Professionals, say the authors, must once again achieve "...professional discretion to use data to justify trying innovative approaches without anxiety and intimidation, then data can play a powerful role in improving learning and increasing achievement." Most concerning are the distractions of the Path of Effervescence that, in the New Orthodoxy, offer "...increased lateral interaction among teachers and schools [that] often amounts to a kind of hyperactive professionalism." *The Fourth Way* offers a data-rich future that is "...substantial and profound, not data driven and contrived."



The Fourth Way doesn't diminish an educational improvement agenda but it synthesizes ideas and challenges assumptions. What better endorsement of educational reform's purpose than to apply purpose to the real challenges of families and communities? Hargreaves and Shirley's global research and scholarship position them to understand social trends. They capture the imagination of innovation and take it back to the education camp. The result is a strongly evidenced departure from education rhetoric that recycles the same message without nearly as lucid a description of the future and what we need to do as educators to assist youth to harmonize their educational experience and what lies ahead. *The Fourth Way* is as timely and reassuring as the evening news and as inspiring as an Oscar-winning drama. If Hargreaves and Shirley have a portal to the future, "post-standardization" is worth both the wait and the pursuit to get there.

Rarely will a book occupy the hallowed space on my desk rather than the bookshelf. This space is reserved for a publication that warrants frequent revisiting. In the dynamic world of contemporary education, we all need a retreat to the inspiration of innovation, the passion of purpose and a healthy challenge to the status quo that maintains an edge that channels inspired leadership. Hargreaves and Shirley argue that "it is time to reshape the world and to reinvent ourselves within it. This is the call of *The Fourth Way*," an intelligent, thought-provoking and gratifying read. |

GORDON MARTELL is Superintendent of Education, Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division, and a member of CEA's Board of Directors.