

CHAPTER ONE

THE CRISIS OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

We are at a pivotal moment of world history. An immense crisis has come upon us, and our lives are being turned upside down. We are in the midst of the greatest economic turmoil in half a century. The technological changes of the digital age are rampant and relentless. Political unrest and instability is erupting everywhere—some of it promising; much of it perilous. Climate change is unabating. And the movement of people and ideas around the world is greater than ever before.

When we wrote *The Fourth Way*, we saw a lot of this coming, and we spelled out the implications it had and the options it offered for the future of public education. All these change forces still apply. Many are even more intense in their impact and effects. But the biggest change since our last diagnosis is not in something that affects education from the outside; it is in the global transformation of education itself. It's not just the world that's changing education now. An orchestrated shake-up of every aspect of education is starting to change the world.

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A GLOBAL EDUCATION MARKET

Education, including public education, is a massive new market for global capital investment that is worth tens of billions of dollars.¹ The

financial debt bubble has burst. The property bubble has too. Capital investment has to find new markets to gravitate toward. For many investors and venture capitalists, one big new answer is education.²

Markets are not new to public education, of course. As long ago as 1776, in *The Wealth of Nations*, Scottish economist Adam Smith argued for the importance of markets in education. A century later, Victorian capitalists and philanthropists supported and inaugurated a public educational system that would produce people with the skills required for a growing industrial economy. In the second half of the 20th century, the human capital argument positioned public education as an investment in economic returns that would come from a more educated and skilled generation in the future.³ And in the past few decades, a multi-million dollar “school improvement industry” of textbook and testing companies, providers of staff development services, and research and development consultants has mushroomed.⁴

But the most recent impact of markets on public education represents a step-change. This is because of what Diane Ravitch calls “venture philanthropy,” where the leaders of vast foundations “converged in support of reform strategies that mirrored their own experience in acquiring huge fortunes, such as competition, choice, deregulation, incentives, and other market-based approaches.”⁵ This recent shift is also due to the direct influence of large publishing, testing, and technology conglomerates in the delivery of services for the public sector and in convening international meetings of political leaders, corporate executives, and academic consultants that shape and shift the national and international conversation about global educational reform. What are the effects?

The most obvious development is that more and more schools are being turned over to private control. In England, the Coalition Government is converting locally controlled schools into independent academies, sometimes by raising the floor for what counts as failure in order to legitimize these conversions. In the United States, the No Child Left Behind Act plowed millions of dollars into “supplemental educational services,” including for-profit companies, even though, by comparison, traditional school districts have demonstrated superior student learning gains.⁶

In England, the spread of academies is weakening local authorities to the extent that many can no longer run their school improvement and support services. Academy staff and the “chains” of schools for which they work must, in the words of one newspaper, be “rubbing their hands together with glee” at the prospect of taking over private control of these services instead.⁷ Meanwhile, in the United States, almost entire school districts, such as New Orleans and Detroit, have been transferred to charter management organizations.⁸

These entrepreneurial interventions are being made easier as school system leaders implement Common Core State Standards in the United States, a detailed national curriculum in England, and common standards elsewhere. Some districts are being consolidated to the point where they are no longer the guardians of local democracy, but more like regional line managers of central government policy.

Then there is the influence of the private sector through educational technology. Despite the very real potential of “personalized learning” for offering students more flexible ways to access and process their learning, in too many instances, schools are being cajoled and coerced into uncritical adoption of digital technology products and services. For example, an increasing number of U.S. states are now legislating that all high school students must take at least one course through online platforms in order to graduate, even though there is no evidence this improves learning.⁹

Meanwhile, publishing and testing companies are reaping huge returns from designing, marketing, and sometimes operating the burgeoning products of standardized testing. One single testing contract alone with New York State in 2012 cost taxpayers all of \$32 million.¹⁰ New certification requirements for U.S. teachers include filming themselves teaching and sending copies of their films to private corporations that charge these young recruits hundreds of dollars for the privilege of rating their teaching for them. The corporations also retain exclusive copyright of the films, allegedly for research purposes.¹¹

One way to increase profits is to reduce costs. The greatest cost in public education is teachers’ salaries. Profits from public education can therefore increase if the immediate costs of teaching can be kept low. This is already occurring on many fronts. These include attacks on teachers’ pensions and tenure in the United States and the imposition of local bargaining in England so that teachers working in poorer parts of the country will be awarded less rather than more pay. The introduction of performance-related pay can also be employed to remove more experienced and therefore more costly teachers if they have low value-added scores, and replace them with young, flexible, and temporary teachers at less cost to the system. Indeed, some U.S. states are using performance measures to grade their teachers on a bell curve—ensuring that 7% or so of them will fail every year. The modal (most commonly occurring) number of years experience in teaching in the United States is now just *one year*.¹² Imagine if the modal number was the same for doctors. What an outcry there would be!

All these profit-oriented policies and strategies that yield short-term economic returns from education are controversial. *None* of them are practiced in high-achieving nations described in this book. These nations have very tiny or nonexistent private sectors. Because they

want to encourage their teachers to work with the most challenging students and understand that teaching is an altruistic profession where most motivation is intrinsic, not one of them assesses teachers' performance in relation to student test scores. All of them invest high authority in local control. Every one of them attracts high-quality teachers and then retains them until they perform at their best. High performers also invest more of their resources in learning and teaching because they are not diverting funds into things like transportation or centralized administration. Last, not one of the governments of these high performers tests all their children on almost all of the curriculum, year after year.

Market-oriented reforms that are designed to yield short-term economic returns are clearly the wrong strategy, headed in the wrong direction.

Private education has a legitimate role in educational provision. It can offer options that the public system may not be providing, and it can stimulate the public system to change by spearheading innovations and alternatives. But market-oriented reforms that are designed to yield short-term economic returns are clearly the wrong strategy, headed in the wrong direction. Another kind of change is urgently needed in those countries like the United States and England that are currently underperforming. What might that be?

THEORIES OF CHANGE IN ACTION

All reforms have theories of change. They have a *purpose* that has to be achieved, *tools* to achieve that purpose, and *practices* to arrange those elements in a particular way. They entail *processes* to adjust and refine the design over time as problems surface and the reality of the environment becomes better understood. These theories of change can be explicit or implicit, intentional or assumed.

In the world of educational change, theories of what to change and how to change abound. Market-oriented reforms emphasize competition, comparison, survival of the fittest, consumer choice, and performance-based pay. Standardized reforms encompass common standards and curricula, high-stakes testing, and a range of mechanisms to ensure fidelity and compliance. Some changes try to balance pressure with support, using targets and transparency to exert pressure and providing training and professional interaction to offer all the necessary support. Meanwhile, those who want to innovate, rather than merely improve, try to create platforms of resources and support—increasingly, though not necessarily, of a digital nature—so

that people can make changes for themselves in creating curriculum, accessing people who can teach them, or constructing professional learning networks, for example.

All theories of change are also premised on assumptions or beliefs about how people change as individuals, and how to bring about change altogether. Psychotherapists believe that people will find insight and experience personal growth when they explore their feelings and release their repressions. Alcoholics Anonymous puts its faith in peer support and the organization's famous twelve steps of recovery. Weight Watchers grounds its principles in peer pressure, self-set targets, transparency of outcomes, and a bit of televised celebrity role modeling as well. Market-based changes assume that a competitive instinct and the lure of external rewards drive people. Opposing theories are premised on the idea that people can be drawn into change through inspirational leadership, professionally engaging interactions, success at their work, and support to perform it well.

In the end, theories of educational change must be judged not by their ideological or philosophical underpinnings, but by their outcomes and effects on students. For this reason this book provides six examples of educational change from around the world that have achieved excellent results. These are drawn from our firsthand studies of successful practice. We look at high-performing schools and systems in detail and then map backward to determine the theories of change in action that hold them coherently together. The design principles of these theories of change are in many cases startlingly simple and, with suitable adaptation, surprisingly applicable to quite different contexts. This book invites readers to explore these high-performing systems and schools to see how their underlying principles of change can be put to work in other institutions and systems—including, we hope you will discover, your own.

But before looking at the best systems around us, it's important to engage with the change models that prevail in the present and the ones that have inscribed themselves in our memories and practices before. These models form the mainstream assumptions and memory-laden backdrops against which alternative models have to assert their claims to success.

THREE WAYS OF CHANGE

In *The Fourth Way*, we began by analyzing three approaches to educational change that have taken place across the world over the past four decades. We unpacked the assumptions each way of change contained, and then examined each of these Ways in terms of their impact and

effects. These distinct Ways of change emerged from our research on the experiences of more than 200 educators in eight U.S. and Canadian high schools over 30 years.¹³ The idea of *The Fourth Way* then began to evolve through our subsequent investigations of high-performing countries, networks, and school districts that we happened to be investigating in different parts of the world.

The First Way of educational change, which characterized the late 1960s and then the 1970s, was an age of strong investment in public education, high professional autonomy and discretion in selecting and designing the curriculum, passive trust from parents who left teachers alone to get on with the job, and encouragement of innovation in group-based and open-plan methods along with child-centered approaches to learning. The First Way was also a period when a lot of innovation was not understood in any real depth, much of it did not spread, and there was great inconsistency among schools. As a movement, the First Way is now no longer with us, but it lives on in the nostalgic memories of some boomer generation teachers and union leaders who still defend principles of individual professional autonomy against the political forces that threaten to intrude upon them. Memories of past innovations also influence how older educators interpret and respond to innovations today.

After the first oil crisis of the 1970s, a *Second Way* of educational change followed the First during the Reagan and Thatcher eras in the United States and United Kingdom, respectively. In an environment of declining resources and rising teachers' salaries, the Second Way was an age of growing austerity in salaries and resources, and of centralized prescriptions of curriculum and instruction. Educators experienced unprecedented and orchestrated attacks on the competence and privileges of public school teachers. Declining confidence in the ability and financial capacity of the welfare state to serve the public good led to a new model of market competition in education, as well as public rankings of school performance, and eventually of individual teacher performance too.

The Second Way of educational change, with intense top-down pressure and little support, characterized England, Chile, the United States, and parts of Australia and Canada through the 1990s. The Second Way is still very present in the Race to the Top (RTTT) legislation of current U.S. educational policy, with its aggressive support for charter schools and individualized performance-based pay for teachers based in large part on student test scores. In many U.S. states, these trends also accompany attacks on the allegedly unjustified privileges of teachers' benefits and tenure compared to private sector workers.

The Second Way's stringent and unsupportive measures led to a widespread crisis of teacher recruitment and retention. Governments responded by searching for reform solutions that were pitched somewhere between and beyond the First Way and the Second. In the United States, President Bill Clinton hosted a summit in 1998 with Tony Blair of the United Kingdom to explore new "Third Way" policies that would combine the security of a reformed welfare state, along with a renewed respect for professions and professionalism, with the entrepreneurial energy and innovative spirit of markets. Anthony Giddens, former director of the London School of Economics, served as the thought leader who gave this new Third Way its intellectual bearings and legitimacy.¹⁴

In U.S. education, the Third Way was apparent in how magnet schools emerged as a legitimate alternative to regular public schools in the 1990s. The Comprehensive School Reform Program enabled teachers to make First Way–like choices in reform options for their schools, but only within the imposed parameters of officially approved, evidence-based alternatives. Award-winning districts like Norfolk, Virginia, and Boston, Massachusetts, supported a more participatory professional climate within schools by providing teachers with opportunities to coach and learn from one another.

In the end, though, the Third Way never achieved the high impact and political visibility in the United States that it did in other nations. American policy leaders persisted with Second Way strategies of systemwide testing and increasing private alternatives that had already started to take hold in many states, through the federal legislation of No Child Left Behind. This approach intensified under the RTTT strategy of the Obama administration.

In contrast to the United States, Third Way strategies were pursued more fully in England and parts of Canada where top-down pressure was retained and even increased. This occurred in the form of system targets in literacy and mathematics achievement. Increased support was also provided in terms of training, materials, and extra coaching and assistance. The Third Way invested in peer-to-peer interactions to enable teachers to deliver the targeted results by forming data teams to identify gaps and make interventions, by developing new strategies in professional learning communities, and by moving ideas and instructional strategies around schools through clusters and networks. Data teams and professional learning communities were two aspects of the Third Way that did have an impact in the United States as a supplement to policy makers' persistence with Second Way priorities in market competition and standardization.

Some real gains were made in Third Way systems in terms of student achievement and teacher morale. However, we also criticized the Third Way for the narrowness of its focus on literacy and mathematics to the exclusion of other curriculum areas, and for its preoccupation with imposed achievement targets that, as we will see in Chapter 2, sometimes led teachers to “game the system” and use inauthentic strategies to produce the appearance of improved results.

Finnish education expert Pasi Sahlberg argues that combinations of developments now comprise what he calls a “global education reform movement” or GERM.¹⁵ GERM, according to Sahlberg, consists of

- standardization of teaching and learning;
- focus on literacy and mathematics achievement;
- teaching for predetermined results;
- test-based accountability;
- increasing bureaucratic control;
- merit-based pay for teachers; and
- renting of other countries’ premade reform models, rather than creating and owning one’s own.

We would make two additions to these developments that point to a kind of “Third Way Plus”:

- the use of data to drive decisions and discussions about student learning and achievement; and
- the spread of digital technology into the everyday life of classrooms and schools.

In the Second and Third Ways, the metaphors of global educational change are often quite mechanical. Within GERM, change doesn’t grow, adapt, emerge, or evolve as it does in natural or complex systems. It is “driven” and “delivered” as in the industrial world of commodity production and distribution. This blue-collar model of teaching fails to produce the innovation and creativity in children’s learning that are essential for 21st century knowledge economies.¹⁶

THE FOURTH WAY ALTERNATIVE

There are alternative theories of change. These have different design principles and assumptions that produce the economic and

social outcomes that are essential for economic dynamism, social cohesion, and democratic ways of life. The Fourth Way of change leads to different end points of education that encompass yet also extend beyond high standards and individual achievement. At the same time, the Fourth Way reaches these end points through particular processes of change that have their own distinctive design principles as well. It approaches the purposes and outcomes of education on its own deliberately designed paths. This book is about these pathways to educational excellence.

The Fourth Way set out an alternative vision to the first three Ways of change, based on the countries, districts, and networks of schools we had been studying in different parts of the world. In this Fourth Way of educational change, we argued the following points in our earlier book:

- System targets for securing achievement gains by raising the bar and narrowing the gap in measured student performance are replaced by inspiring and shared moral purposes to transform learning and achievement for all, with any targets remaining being collectively decided, not politically imposed.
- Teaching and learning include but also extend beyond the basics of literacy and mathematics to encompass and engage a broader range of learning for all kinds of learners.
- Data are used to inform teacher inquiry and decision making in professional learning communities, rather than to drive it.
- Testing is employed to sample the progress of a system without distorting the way it operates, compared to the Third Way's combination of high-stakes testing coupled with imposed system targets that can produce widespread gaming of that system in order to produce the required results.
- Teachers engage in developing curriculum together within and across their schools, rather than just delivering the curriculum on behalf of others.
- Leadership is not about individuals managing the delivery of imposed reforms, but about developing distributed and sustainable responsibility for innovating and changing together. It is about collective responsibility rather than vertical accountability.

Figure 1.1 provides a comprehensive overview of the different components of Fourth Way theories of change in relationship to the three previous Ways of change, as outlined in our previous book.

Figure 1.1 A Framework of the Four Ways of Educational Change

	The First Way	The Second Way	The Third Way	The Fourth Way
Purpose	Innovative; inconsistent	Markets and standardization	Performance targets: raise the bar, narrow the gap	Inspiring, inclusive, innovative mission
Community	Little or no engagement	Parent choice	Parent choice and community service delivery	Public engagement and community development
Investment	State investment	Austerity	Renewal	Moral economy
Corporate influence	Minimal	Extensive - charters and academies, technology, testing products	Pragmatic partnerships with government	Ethical partnerships with civil society
Students	Happenstance involvement	Recipients of change	Targets of service delivery	Engagement and voice
Learning	Eclectic and uneven	Direct instruction to standards and test requirements	Customized learning pathways	Truly personalized; mindful teaching and learning
Teachers	Variable training quality	Flexible, alternate recruitment	High qualification, varying retention	High qualification, high retention.
Associations	Autonomous	Deprofessionalized	Reprofessionalized	Change-makers
Learning Communities	Discretionary	Contrived	Data-driven	Evidence-informed
Leadership	Individualistic; variable	Line managed	Pipelines for delivering individuals	Systemic and sustainable
Networks	Voluntary	Competitive	Dispersed	Community focused
Responsibility	Local and little accountability	High-stakes targets; testing by census	Escalating targets, self-monitoring, and testing by census	Responsibility first, testing by sample, ambitious and shared targets
Differentiation and Diversity	Underdeveloped	Mandated and standardized	Narrowed achievement gaps and data-driven interventions	Demanding and responsive teaching
Pillars of Purpose and Partnership				
Principles of Professionalism				
Catalysts of Coherence				

This book now concentrates attention on this quest for excellence by examining six deliberately selected examples of high performance in school systems and schools across the world. This is a means to flesh out the Fourth Way in action, to focus on some of its core elements, and to refine what we can learn about it through the hard test of evidence and comparative experience.

One thing this new work has taught us is that few systems are purely Fourth Way, Second Way, or any other Way in character. Fourth Way principles often coexist alongside those of the Third Way, or even the Second Way, in emerging policy hybrids of change. The four Ways are more like what German sociologist Max Weber described as “ideal types.” Ideal types, Weber said, are categories that exist nowhere in their entirety yet can still be classified as having certain traits because they help us explain the main properties of cultures or systems.¹⁷ In the real world of schools and school systems, a wide array of teaching styles can bump up against one another, even among teachers who might be on the same grade-level team or who have been teaching in the same subject department for years. Likewise, what happens to “pure” policy directives is often determined by how these directives relate to, overlap with, or conflict with preceding policies from a different era. In this sense, it’s not unusual to find First Way teaching in a Second Way system with a Third Way school principal or superintendent, for example.

Our book explores six examples of educational excellence and the theories of change that underpin them, on a global scale, across five countries. Each of them has been a unique educational project, yet all of them possess and express common purposes and principles of design and development. They are all part of one broad path or way of achieving educational success that draws on yet also transcends previous traditions of educational change and reform.

BENCHMARKING OR BENCH-PRESSING

One way to determine whether the Fourth Way or any other way is the best way, and to discern what this best way or these best ways might look like in practice, is to compare different countries and systems with one another. However, comparing high-performing countries does not, by itself, lead to a better way. A lot depends on how people draw these comparisons and what kinds of purposes they have in mind. In general, the process of comparing systems with one another and of learning from these comparisons is known as *international benchmarking*—something that is now a big feature of international educational policy

discussions and directions. International benchmarking, we will see, has immense benefits in helping people understand how to achieve excellence—but the process is often misdirected and misunderstood. If we return to the origins and evolution of benchmarking, we are more likely to be clearer about how to use the benchmarking process to best effect.¹⁸

One of our grandfathers was a cobbler. He repaired people's shoes for a living. In the 19th century, part of the practice of shoemaking for particular customers was to place the foot of the person who would be wearing the shoe on a "bench" so they could "mark" out the pattern of the shoe to get a better fit. And so emerged the practice that we now call *benchmarking*.

One of the cobbler's grandsons (who is also a coauthor of this book) spent several summers helping to finance his way through university by working on a survey of the town's municipal sewer system. While one surveyor operated an instrument to calculate angles, his partner would balance a calibrated metal staff on a chiseled notch or mark that had, decades earlier, and as far back as the 1800s in some cases, been cut into the corner of a nearby stone building. These notches or benchmarks had figures for altitude recorded in a printed local and national database. The height of benchmarks was calculated in relation to surrounding benchmarks. The joint task of the sewer survey was to determine the height or level of a particular sewer in relation to the premeasured benchmark in the nearby building.

It wasn't until the 1980s that benchmarks and benchmarking migrated from being used as ways to measure and *guide* existing practice in shoemaking or surveying, to being deployed as a tool to *improve* other kinds of practice elsewhere. In the early 1980s, the new chief executive officer of Xerox, David Kearns, sent teams of his executives to visit the sites of high-performing Japanese competitors in order to figure out the processes that led to the outstanding results, learn from what had been seen, and apply what had been learned to improve practice within Xerox itself. This was one of the first known uses of what is now called *industrial benchmarking*.¹⁹

The president of the U.S. National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE), Marc Tucker, believes that educators can learn a lot from industrial benchmarking. This, he says, is not a strategy to replicate or merely copy what other people are doing, because the likely outcome would be merely an inferior version of something that already exists. Instead, when comparing U.S. factories with Japanese higher performers, for example, the point is "to sort out those strategies that worked because of conditions that could be duplicated in

the United States from those conditions that we could not hope to duplicate, and then identify those things that would be much easier for us to do, than it was for them to do.”²⁰

Industrial benchmarking is not a simple or solely technical process. It involves establishing teams who assemble a wide range of data, including those gathered during a site visit, to look at the processes that competitors use in order to produce their superior results. The teams then apply what they have learned to their own unique settings in order to streamline or revise their organization’s production processes.

In recent years, these processes of industrial benchmarking have been adopted in the practice of making international comparisons of educational performance. Measures of student achievement such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), and Trends in International Math and Science Studies (TIMSS) have been used to identify superior performers or those who are “best in class” in relation to people’s own systems. International organizations with links to policy and business strategy—such as the OECD, McKinsey & Company, and the NCEE—send teams of researchers, practitioners, and other experts to the top performers overall or in a particular class in order to elicit the processes that seem to explain successful outcomes.²¹ They then endeavor to determine what lessons can be learned from all of this that might benefit other countries that are doing less well. Within education, this widely used and influential strategy has become known as *international benchmarking*.

The chief designers and users of international educational benchmarking intend that it should be at least as sophisticated as its industrial counterpart, if not more so. For them, benchmarking of one country’s achievement against another is not a ploy to induce anxiety or bring about a competitive drive to increase performance in any way, at any cost. It is not about whether one country can leapfrog another by one or two positions or by a few points in achievement scores. The main purpose of benchmarking is to prompt *learning* about and *inquiry into* one’s own performance as a result of comparing it with a thorough and authentic review of the performance of those who do even better.²² The immediate goal of educational benchmarking, then, shouldn’t be increased competitiveness, but “policy learning” within and across systems.²³

Unfortunately, while the publication of and publicity given to international test results have directed needed attention toward international

benchmarking, they have also led to some distortions of the benchmarking process.

1. *Bench-Pressing*. Benchmarking is often converted into pointlessly competitive bench-pressing as country after country tries to prove it can push harder and higher than its peers. Irish politicians say they want to get into the top five of PISA. The Netherlands laments its fall from seventh to tenth on PISA, even though three jurisdictions that entered PISA for the first time in 2009 are now placed above it—this means that, compared to its former peers, the Netherlands actually sustained its high performance. The Norwegians say that at least they can do better than the Swedes, and the Swedes say the opposite!
2. *Teleported Models*. Systems can be tempted to gravitate toward some countries and jurisdictions rather than others among benchmarked high performers because they seem to have a reform package that looks politically plausible, technically intelligible, easily transportable, and able to deliver short-term results. This may be one of the reasons that various nations are drawn more to Ontario than other equally high-performing Canadian provinces as a model of educational change. Ontario has a clear and well-articulated policy design that emphasizes a tight focus on literacy and numeracy in relation to targets of tested achievement under firm central guidance. The Ministry of Education in Ontario provides persistent and relentless pressure along with ample supplies of human and financial resource support. The more sparsely populated province of Alberta in western Canada, however, has so far had much more difficulty providing a compelling explanation for its equally high performance that others might see as easy to replicate.
3. *Inconvenient Truths*. Some of the features that define or explain high-performing countries may not be easily transportable by or even seem desirable to many governments, so they are deemphasized or neglected, even though they may be a critical part of those countries' success. Finland and Singapore, for example, have compulsory military service or its equivalent for men, which may play a role in supporting student achievement in schools as part of an overall ethic of disciplined patriotism. Most Asian high performers are not conventional

Western-style democracies and this can aid strength of coordination and speed of implementation in a way that international agencies reporting on comparative educational achievement tend to overlook. Finland's high-tax Scandinavian democracy and its abundant investment in public services may explain why, in the international reports of McKinsey & Company, Finland has been increasingly positioned as an extreme and, by implication, easily discounted case.²⁴

4. *Restricted Range of Indicators.* Industrial benchmarking uses a wide a range of indicators to judge the success of competitors and the strategies they use to secure that success. So when *international* benchmarking in education refers only to comparisons in student standardized achievement scores, it departs from the original richness and spirit of *industrial* benchmarking. For example, the fact that the culturally diverse Netherlands is at the top of UNICEF's indicators of child well-being is just as important as that country's seventh and then tenth placed ranking on PISA in recent years.

The point of international benchmarking should *not* be to rank and rate people against one another to induce international status anxiety and panic-driven competitiveness. It should *not* be to cherry-pick this or that policy because it is ideologically compatible with one's own current political ambitions or priorities, while neglecting other equally influential ones that are not. Entire models of change should *not* be taken out of their original context that may be quite alien to one's own. And inconvenient but influential items such as high taxation levels, military service requirements, or forms of political control should *not* be overlooked because they may spoil a good change story or be politically difficult to transplant.

The most significant contribution of international benchmarking is to *inquire into* and to *learn from* the exemplary performance of others. This sort of learning is not only advanced by transnational advocacy and consulting groups who use comparative achievement data to help promote improvement and innovation around the world. It is also practiced by all of the high-performing nations themselves. These nations eagerly and aggressively benchmark themselves against and are constantly learning from fellow high performers, in order to keep on

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improving and innovating. In some cases, this benchmarking process includes innovative partnerships that link principals, teachers, and students directly with one another across nations.

The OECD notes that the world's highest performers such as Finland, Singapore, Ontario, and Shanghai (China) are also all "most determined international benchmarkers." These systems are open-minded and eager to learn from one another. "A strong and consistent effort . . . to do disciplined international benchmarking and to incorporate the results of that benchmarking into policy and practice is a common characteristic of the highest-performing countries," the OECD says.²⁵

This book uses international benchmarking to promote learning about six systems that exemplify exceptional practice in widely varying contexts with quite different cultures and political systems. Some of the practices are produced by governments together with the education profession and some are produced by the profession in at least partial opposition to the government. The book is about what we can learn from these exemplars, individually and together. Much of this kind of work has already been undertaken by impressively large and influential national and transnational economic and policy organizations such as the OECD, McKinsey & Company, and the NCEE. What can this book offer that adds value to the significant body of work that they have already set out?

CORNERSTONES AND CORNER STORES

In recent years, national and transnational policy organizations have harnessed their considerable resources to raise important questions about educational policy that generally support improved status, conditions, and compensation for teachers; increased equity in student outcomes; and strong investments in the development of public education. They collect impressive bodies of data to inform cross-country comparisons in student achievement. They dispatch expert teams to the highest performers or the more dramatic improvers to undertake the difficult international benchmarking work of determining the policies and other processes that are responsible for these countries' results. We have been privileged to be part of these teams. We appreciate just how rigorous their work is—and some of their results are represented in this book. More than this, two of the reviews we undertook for this book, in California and Singapore, are modeled on the procedures these organizations pioneered.

The international benchmarking undertaken by these organizations has become a *cornerstone* feature of how countries now examine and

reflect on their own policies. Through publication of country-by-country case studies; compilations of cross-country comparisons around particular issues like leadership, school improvement, and teacher quality; and conferences and seminars that convene ministers, policy advisors, and researchers, nations are prompted to inquire more deeply into the effectiveness of their own policies. They exchange information and insights with comparable peers who seem to be performing better. They also start to develop an international consensus about the directions that countries should aspire to if they want to attain greater educational excellence and equity.

The more publicly visible and transparent national and transnational cornerstones of international educational change today are the OECD, McKinsey & Company, and the NCEE. The OECD consists of 34 predominantly western European nations dedicated to markets and democracy. Founded in 1948 to help administer the U.S. Marshall Plan to coordinate the reconstruction of Europe and Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War, the OECD has now developed a diverse portfolio addressing virtually all social policy matters of significance. In education, the OECD administers PISA, one of the most important benchmarking tests. In its latest administration, PISA went far beyond the OECD members to encompass 65 nations and territories, giving it a truly global reach.

Compared to the OECD, McKinsey & Company is one of the world's leading consulting firms. More than 70 chief executive officers in Fortune 500 companies have worked for McKinsey & Company previously. In the past dozen years, McKinsey & Company has become increasingly involved in the education sector, studying and making recommendations to policy makers on better ways to improve teacher quality, reduce achievement gaps, and deploy resources.

The third cornerstone group, the NCEE, focuses its efforts primarily on the United States. The NCEE has, from time to time, convened influential blue ribbon committees of chief executives, former White House educational leaders, and outstanding school district superintendents to provide state of the nation reports on public education and its future. Examples include *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, published in 1986, and in 2006, *Tough Choices or Tough Times* that criticized America's obsession with standardization and proposed a stronger focus on flexible and creative problem solving.²⁶ The NCEE's president, Marc Tucker, has been an outspoken advocate for international benchmarking as a way to study and improve school systems. In *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: An American Agenda for Educational Reform*, published in 2011, he

used international data to make a blistering denunciation of recent U.S. policies and urged the nation to learn from and start to adapt successful practices from high-performing countries.²⁷

As cornerstones of international educational change, these organizations play crucial roles in collecting, publishing, and interpreting the data that are the basis of international benchmarking. They convene high-level meetings of ministers and other political and bureaucratic leaders to discuss the implications of this benchmarking, and make their own statements and summaries on the implications of their research and interpretations for future educational policy. These organizations' status as advocacy bodies as well as disseminators of research results gives them leverage over future policy strategies, often in a progressive and socially just way. For instance, they support increased teacher professionalism, the adoption of equity measures such as de-tracking schools for early adolescents, and the provision of increased support rather than merely the exertion of external pressure to stimulate school improvement.

But as policy advisory and agenda setting organizations, each of these three bodies also serves particular stakeholders such as government ministers and other policy makers or is guided by predominantly economic interests and agendas. These affiliations affect the kinds of explanations and recommendations they provide as well as what is omitted from them. These limitations occur not because these organizations are partisan, but because of the nature of their mandates. None of these organizations, for example, provides advice about ways that community organizing can be used to improve schools or how to place pressure on policy makers to reconsider ill-advised educational reforms. Nor do they advise how teachers in low-performing systems could develop their collective voice to achieve the same kinds of status and support that their colleagues enjoy in high-performing ones. This is why it is important to have complementary narratives of high performance and educational change that have different sources of support and that embrace other examples, evidence bases, and outlooks.

Our corner store perspective in this book concurs with much of what the OECD, McKinsey & Company, and the NCEE have already established. But for the reasons previously described, there are also some key differences. Compared to the cornerstone perspective, our own corner store explanations point to the equivalent impact of local control, local development, and local authority in educational decision making in Finland, Canada, and even in Singapore—a tiny, compact country where what is national is also inevitably very local too.

Second, while cornerstone and our own corner store perspectives both recognize how teachers and school leaders can be more than

deliverers and implementers of other people's curricula, the independent evidence of our own corner store studies is that teachers can be designers and developers of good curricula and effective innovation themselves.

Last, just like the OECD, McKinsey & Company, and the NCEE, our own corner store analysis concentrates a lot of attention on Canada, but whereas all three cornerstone organizations have focused almost exclusively on the Canadian province of Ontario as being interchangeable with the whole of Canada, our own corner store analysis also examines an equally high-performing province—Alberta—with a quite distinct cultural and political identity of its own and a rather different set of educational policies.

It is also worth pointing out that, like McKinsey & Company, our understanding of high performance is grounded in analyzing outliers of success. One of these, in our case, is a high-performing school serving a large cultural minority population in the North of England. Another is a significant movement to undertake successful turnarounds in the lowest performing schools in California. The California case in particular demonstrates what can be achieved when political and professional capital work together to renew public education and the achievement outcomes of students by opposing government policies that are inequitable and that are directed toward extraneous political purposes.

So as well as politically and economically based *cornerstones* in education and public life, we need independent *corner stores* to offer products that sometimes produce something different from the mainstream. This is the purpose of our book.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is an analysis of educational high performance from one corner store perspective. It is based on our firsthand studies of six jurisdictions in ways that, we believe, get to a deeper level of complexity and detail in understanding teachers and schools, as well as government officials and leading stakeholders, than is usually possible in the more leadership and policy-focused accounts of cornerstone organizations. *The Global Fourth Way* sets out six examples of high performance.

1. *Finland*, the highest performing country outside Asia on PISA, the highest performer of all for the PISA cycles before the most recent one, and an outstanding achiever in the World Economic Forum's rating of economic competitiveness;

2. *Singapore*, the highest performing country in the world on PISA in mathematics, and among the top three in literacy and science, where per capita income and life expectancy now exceed that of the United States, and where citizens have leapt from third- to first-world status in the course of a single generation;
3. *Alberta*, the highest performing English- and French-speaking jurisdiction on PISA that shares many cultural similarities with western, oil-rich U.S. states like Texas but that posts achievement gains far above them;
4. *Ontario*, that performs almost identically to Alberta and that has become a living laboratory of successful educational reform for leaders around the globe;
5. *England*, where a failing secondary school in a low-income immigrant community turned itself around through inspirational leadership and culturally responsive pedagogy by swimming against the tide of prevailing government policy;
6. *California*, where the California Teachers' Association fought its governor and launched an ambitious initiative to raise student achievement in one-third of the state's most disadvantaged and academically challenged communities, with early results indicating significant gains.

The final chapter draws together what we have learned from these very different but compelling cases to draw out the key implications for teachers, principals (or headteachers), and school system leaders. It presents pointers for practice for moving beyond the unimaginative and often deadening grip of excessive testing on children and beyond the micromanagement of professionals by top-heavy bureaucracies.

Before delving into these six cases, the next chapter raises a prior question about the nature of high performance and the kind of high performance that schools, systems, and entire nations should want to pursue. Should they get better or improve at their current game, we ask? Or should they innovate and change the game altogether? How is this question addressed through the three existing ways of educational change? How should it be addressed in the future? This is one of the key challenges of all educational change today, to which we give our imminent attention.