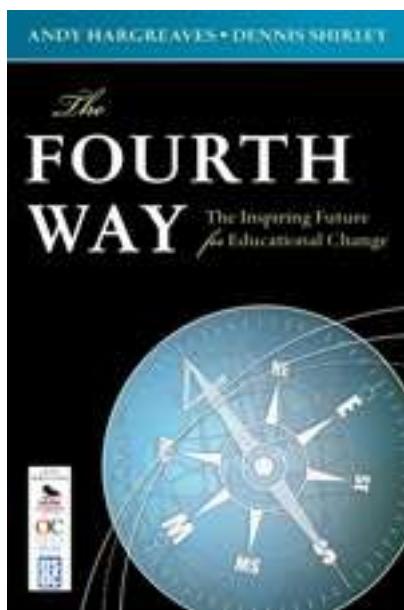


Book Review



The Fourth Way:

The Inspiring Future for Educational Change

by Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley

London: Sage Publications (2009).

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Review by **Ji Zhou**

The world is quickly moving into a multicultural and multi-pluralistic society, for which the old ways of educational change are no longer suited. *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future of Educational Changes* helps us better understand this fast, flexible, and vulnerable situation, and inspires us for effective change strategies. Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley, two leading scholars in the field of educational change and reform, draw on their firsthand studies of the top-performing systems in the world to demonstrate that positive and professional changes are possible for democratic and sustainable educational development.

One of the book's strengths is its critical stance in analysing the previous and current ways of educational change. The authors not only poignantly attack the limitations of each way and the dross that has kept us stuck, but also identify the legacies and essence that each way has left us and should be kept or retrieved. For example, the First Way is characterised by state support and professional freedom; innovation is encouraged and practiced, but is random and inconsistent. The Second Way achieved cohesion and consistency by focusing on market competition and educational standardisation. Yet this is imposed at the expense of professional autonomy. The Third Way, although attempting to combine the best of state support and market competition and balance professional autonomy with accountability, is short-changed by the three aforementioned distractions that have made change goals short-sighted, strategies haphazard, and achievement transient. As a result, the performance-driven targets and testing have undermined the development of higher-order thinking skills and the cultivation of deeper values and virtues.

Another strength of the book is its informed strategies and inspirations. The suggested ideas and moves of the Fourth Way do not come out of the blue. Rather, they are rooted in abundant empirical studies, informed by solid and sound statistical evidence, and inspired by the accumulated wisdom of rich experiences. For example, Finland is included as one highest performing nation in educational, economic, and social achievement. Then, the authors describe a professional network of more than 300 underachieving secondary schools in England that have improved dramatically by promoting effective schools working with schools. The outstanding instances of community organising in some cities and districts in the United States are also provided to show how communities can be dynamically and democratically engaged in positive educational change. Finally, the most turned-around

school district in England is held as a successful example of how indigenous leadership, and community-based initiatives and capabilities can be capitalised to build the civic capacity that increases student achievement. These concrete examples not only provide some practical guidance for interested educators and practitioners, but also instil hope that the Fourth Way is possible.

Although acknowledging the significant contribution of the book, there is at least one area in which readers would benefit from further information. In giving examples of the Fourth Way, the authors provide a balanced analysis and presentation of quantitative and qualitative data. However, they still paint the picture with too broad strokes. The qualitative description provided is not sufficient to fully capture the change efforts in real practice. In the absence of ample qualitative narration, readers may find it difficult to compare and contrast the examples with their own constraints and opportunities when implementing the suggested change strategies. Hence, despite its balanced lens of macro structural analysis and micro narratives of concrete examples, this book serves more as a theoretical guide than a practical reference. In addition, each chapter should include references rather than at the end of the book, which would make it more convenient and efficient to locate the sources.

Overall, *The Fourth Way* is a must-read for scholars and practitioners in the field of education. The authors present a balanced, insightful, and critical analysis of the first three ways of change, extracting the essence and dross, and then map out the promising Fourth Way of change, which integrates teacher professionalism, student initiative, community organising, government support, and public accountability.