

Is Singapore's Education System the Fourth Way in Action? (ERPP Issue 11.1)

Ee Ling Low · Pak Tee Ng

Published online: 13 December 2011
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Welcome to the first issue of ERPP for the year 2012! As mentioned in the foreword by our editor-in-chief, this also marks a special issue of the journal as it brings together articles first presented at a roundtable held on 1 March 2011 held in conjunction with Professor Andy Hargreaves' appointment as the CJ Koh Professor, late February to mid-March 2011. The theme of the symposium centred around the Fourth Way, which is the title of a book co-written by Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley, and how Singapore's education system across the different spectrum from K-12 all the way to teacher education and educational leadership development both locally and globally may be seen to be paving the fourth way.

In the first article, Andy Hargreaves describes the predecessors of the Fourth Way and the Fourth Way itself to set the stage for the special issue. The Fourth Way is distinguished from its predecessors by the strength and wisdom of leaders who take a paradigm shift with regard to how they approach and view education to advance towards a more inspirational, comprehensive and sustainable future. It is not a destination but a journey to improve student learning and achievement. The success of Singapore's education system is no secret. Has its development and change embodied the Fourth Way? What does Singapore need to do or change to remain successful in education and competitive in the global economy? The rest of the article in the issue examine the various facets of the Singapore Education System through the lens of the Fourth Way and address the issue of change in the system.

The article by Poon discusses the relationship between policy, research and practice in the Singapore education landscape in response to the Fourth Way principles of educational change. She uses recent policy developments in Singapore as examples to illustrate the interaction between the use of research data, pragmatic knowledge of classroom practices and stakeholders' interest in policy formulation in Singapore. Poon argues that a key ingredient of the success of Singapore's education system is the unity of vision and mission of the people behind policy, research and practice.

E. L. Low (✉) · P. T. Ng
National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Singapore
e-mail: eeling.low@nie.edu.sg

P. T. Ng
e-mail: paktee.ng@nie.edu.sg

In the next article, Ng examines the challenges of educational leadership in Singapore through the lens of the Fourth Way. In particular, he makes reference to three messages in the Fourth Way and examines the paradoxes and challenges faced by school leaders in Singapore associated with each message. The article argues that the government both drives and steers the education system; that democracy and professionalism, and bureaucracy and market coexist; and that educators embrace both accountability and responsibility.

Moving on from educational leadership, the article by Tan examines teacher education in Singapore through the lens of the Fourth Way. Tan opines that one reason for Singapore's success in education comes from the great amount of emphasis on developing high-quality teachers. The Fourth Way is demonstrated through teacher education programmes that are well informed by empirical evidence gleaned from educational research, standards of performance that are clearly stated, and a concrete and practical assessment system. Lively learning communities are also encouraged by the setting up of networks and centres for teachers to share their knowledge and improve on their teaching excellence. The teacher education model adopted in Singapore that stresses learner-centred values, teacher identity values and the values of service to the profession and community is a constant reminder to teachers that responsibility always comes before accountability.

The internationalisation of Singapore's teacher education model is the theme of the next article by Low and S.K. Lee. They argue that as Singapore's education system, which has consistently emerged as one of the higher ranking countries, has garnered much international attention, it is timely for Singapore to share its expertise and experience to benefit other systems. In this article, the authors describe and examine one such effort of internationalisation to serve the global educational community. Three models of internationalisation are expounded upon: building the local capacity of partner countries, training the trainers and the offering of executive leadership training programmes to an international market. The past and future challenges of internationalisation are also discussed, along with an analysis of how this internationalisation of its teacher education and professional development programmes aligned with the philosophies of the Fourth Way.

In the next article, W. O. Lee moves beyond the confines of Singapore to examine the recent trends in international educational reform, as various countries try to meet the challenges of globalisation and moving towards knowledge-based economies and pursuing a better future in the twenty first century. In particular, in line with the Fourth Way, it reviews the dominant themes, trends, and goals of modern education. It does so by exploring the shared themes of curriculum adaptation, the emerging models of learning and innovation, the trend towards lifelong learning for all, and the growing need for the internationalisation of education. It concludes by suggesting an overall trend of the sectorisation and de-sectorisation of education under new social and economic circumstances in the twenty first century.

Moving into a historical perspective, Gopinathan examines the evolution of Singapore's Education System from the lens of the Fourth Way, considering the challenges and dilemmas that confront educational change practitioners. In this article, the author considers how well the Fourth Way framework fits the evolution and the more recent changes in Singapore education. Gopinathan argues that while there is a good fit in some ways, in other ways, the Singapore context and educational practice is markedly different, due to history, culture and aspirations.

We hope that the articles presented in this special issue have begun a conversation and sparked an interest that will generate further discussions and collaborations among educators and researchers, not only within Singapore but also globally. Ultimately, as the editor-in-chief has so aptly summed up, the issue is as much about sharing the Singapore education journey to the international audience as it is about questioning whether Singapore is indeed, paving the Fourth way in our educational practice and policy implementation.