



THE CASE OF ENGLAND

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Marc Tucker with Judy Coddling

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Putting in Place a National System to Raise Student—and System—Performance

No state in the United States has produced gains in student performance as fast or on as wide a scale as has England in the years since Maggie Thatcher first became Prime Minister. This is the story of the system that Thatcher put in place, John Major continued and Prime Minister Blair has refined and, in many ways, actually made to work. To that extent it is a story of educational policies and strategies that bear close study by anyone interested in duplicating England's achievements. But it is no less a story of individuals and the political leadership they provided, without which the other story would not have happened at all. I will tell the political story, too, because, without it, it will be hard to explain how changes so fundamental could have occurred so rapidly and their champions prevailed so completely.

We will speak here of the changes that have taken place in England's education system. England is itself a country of about 50 million souls, about the population of California and Illinois combined. Its population density is about three times that of continental Europe and, though it is one of the world's richest nations, its Gross Domestic Product per person (number 12 in the world) is only about two thirds that of the United States. As the world now knows, what was only recently a fairly homogeneous nation when it came to race and ethnicity has become home to a rapidly growing number of people born elsewhere, often of different race and ethnicity from the native English. The United Kingdom now tops the charts in the number of applications for asylum among industrialized countries.

When Maggie Thatcher came to office, the issue was Britain's economic performance, which had been dismal and declining for years. Thatcher campaigned as her father's daughter, a certified member of the middle class, not the privileged class, who had learned from her father not only the virtues of self-reliance and hard work, but who had also absorbed from her observations of his

grocery business the realities of world trade. Thatcher took a dim view of the effects of the growth of the benefits bureaucracy in Britain and declared that the best way to help Britain's poor and its suffering middle class was to whittle down the ranks of government and make Britain competitive again in world commerce. For Thatcher, education fit right into this picture. She herself had risen to power not through the peerage but through the opportunities that education had given her, and she meant to make those opportunities available to everyone. On the point of education, Thatcher sat squarely in the middle lane of the American political tradition. The irony is that this would lead Thatcher to greatly expand the central government's role in education. But we are getting ahead of our story.

In the early years of Prime Minister Thatcher's time in office, people spoke of the changes in English education as revolutionary. And indeed they were. But, in retrospect, one might have seen them coming. As early as 1976, in his Ruskin College address, Prime Minister James Callaghan, a union man through and through, and a stalwart of the Labor Party all his adult life, called for a Great Debate about education in England. He charged that the educators were producing graduates who lacked the basic skills needed by employers and who preferred work in academe and government to work in the private sector, that the educators had failed to prepare students with the competence in science and technology needed to power a modern economy, and had embraced teaching methods that worked well enough in the hands of exceptional educators but produced dubious results in the hands of ordinary teachers. He wondered aloud whether England needed a national core curriculum, set by the central government. And he strongly implied that the teachers had rejected the claim of anyone but education professionals to a legitimate voice in education policy, and were running the education system, not to meet the needs of students and their parents, but to suit their own interests and convenience. The educators, of course, were represented by the National Teachers Union, possibly the most powerful union in Great Britain and a core constituency of the party Mr. Callaghan headed. The speech was an act of sheer political courage.

But things went from bad to worse over the next dozen years, culminating in a bruising national dispute over teachers' pay, which ended when the union lost, as the Labor government imposed a settlement on the teachers that they had fought tooth and nail. As these events unfolded, the teachers lost whatever public sympathy they might have had in prior years. The phrase "producer capture" came into use by the analysts of the time to describe a sector of the economy, in this case education, in which policy had appeared to be hijacked by the people who produced the services, thus denying the legitimate interests of the people who were supposed to be served.

During this same period, an increasing number of local town and city Councils were taken over by representatives of the hard Left, who promptly squared off against the central government in London. Under the Education Act of 1944, these councils controlled the local education authorities, which in turn controlled the schools. Increasingly the public saw the councils as the partners of the teachers in the process of "producer capture." The councils demanded more and more money for an enterprise that appeared to produce more and more for the teachers and less and less for the students and their parents.

So matters stood when Margaret Thatcher squared off against Jim Callaghan in 1979. Education was very much on her mind. She had been Secretary of State for Education in Ted Heath's government in 1970-74. Her views on the subject were very much in harmony with those that Jim Callaghan expressed in his Ruskin College speech a few years later. She, too, thought that education had been hijacked by the professionals. She thought British educational standards dangerously low when compared to those of other industrialized nations. She was determined to wrest control of education from the local councils, which she, too, saw as captured by the hard left and by the professionals, and seize it at the national level. This was not simply a matter of disempowering a level of government that had come to be dominated by the opposition party. Thatcher came to power on a platform of arresting and reversing Britain's economic decline, and believed that she could not make good on that platform unless she

could greatly increase the efficiency and the effectiveness of British education. And she could not do that as long as the local councils held all the cards.

When she was in opposition, Thatcher had formed a think tank with Sir Keith Joseph called the Center for Policy Studies. Many of these ideas were crystallized into plans in the papers issued by the Center. Joseph became Secretary of State for Education in 1981.

Sir Keith Joseph began his tenure by trying to revolutionize British education with a school voucher initiative. But, in time, he came to see that there was no way to succeed in structuring such an initiative and carry the day in Parliament in the time available before the next general election. So the next few years were devoted to more incremental approaches to the problems he and the Prime Minister wanted to solve.

The Prime Minister, however, wanted to go much further than these incremental reforms, largely guided by the civil servants in the Department for Education and Science, would get her. The result, which came in the third Thatcher administration, was the Education Reform Act of 1988, the greatest change in British education policy since the Education Act of 1944. In the years from 1944 to 1988, the central government had very little control over local education. The Education Act of 1944 had actually transferred power to the local level of government from London. From time to time, government commissioned and issued major reports that were intended to influence local decisions, but did not mandate them, and Her Majesty's Inspectors used the esteem in which they were held to gently nudge the system this way or that, but the chance that any given school would be inspected in any given decade was nearly zero, and, in any case, the Inspectors had no authority over the schools that they inspected. The national government was little more than an interested bystander with modest moral authority and little more.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 greatly decreased the authority and power of the local level of government, sending that power both up and down. School

heads (the people we call “principals”) acquired more authority and parents and school governors were likewise given more power. The governors (a sort of school board for each school) were given more power as well as more responsibility to implement the national reforms and the parents’ powers were enhanced by permitting more choice among schools and changing the funding scheme so that the money followed the student when they changed schools. A new class of schools was introduced called “Grant Maintained Schools,” which received a charter directly from the central government and thereby evaded whatever might be left of the local school authority’s bureaucracy. These Grant Maintained Schools, however, would still have to teach the new national curriculum, their students would still have to take the national exams and the schools would have their data on student performance made available for all to see.

But it was the role of the central government that changed most dramatically.

Margaret Thatcher’s government introduced a single national curriculum, a series of detailed curriculum guides for the Core subjects of mathematics, English and science, and the Foundation subjects of history, geography, technology, music, art, physical education and, in secondary schools, a modern language. This national curriculum was to specify what students are expected to know and be able to do by the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16. These ages were to be the end points of four “key stages” in the educational development of English students. The Secretary of State for Education was empowered by the legislation to set attainment targets for each of these subjects for each subject in the curriculum and prescribe the programs of study. The Secretary, however, was not given free rein, but was required to establish national curriculum councils which had a statutory responsibility to share the Secretary’s draft curriculum guides, share them widely, solicit the views of many others, add their own commentary and make it available to the Secretary of State for Education. The Secretary could choose to ignore the advice of the independent curriculum councils, but was required to state his or her reasons for doing so publicly. In this way, the framers of the Act recognized the danger of the central government

driving a national curriculum agenda based on a narrow set of political perspectives, and provided for some degree of independence from central government in setting the national curriculum.

The Secretary of State for Education was also empowered to make all necessary arrangements for assessment. Prior to the Education Reform Act, the only national examinations were those that were offered by private organizations to secondary schools, in competition with one another. Schools made their own decisions as to which of these examinations they would choose to use. No such examinations were in use the primary schools nor did the national government conduct any national testing to independently assess the achievement of English students. All this was changed by the Education Reform Act, which required the Secretary of State to create and administer uniform national tests to all English students at the ends of Key Stages 1 and 2 and to regulate the examinations offered to schools by the independent assessment organizations for the assessment of students at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4.

The National Curriculum would have had no teeth without tests to measure student progress against the attainment targets set by the curriculum. With the new tests, the national government would have the tools it needed to enforce that curriculum. In this sense, testing became a principal weapon in the Thatcher government's quest to wrest control of public education from the profession and return it to the public. Curriculum standards and testing would provide the means for making the profession accountable to the public. Data on the performance of schools against curriculum standards could be used by parents to make intelligent choices among schools. Good schools would prosper and poor ones wither. In this way, the performance of the entire system could be ratcheted up.

Through the Thatcher years and beyond into the Major administration, a whole new system began to emerge.

The role of Her Majesty's Inspectors was greatly changed from an independent source of gentle advice and guidance based solely on the inspector's own professional norms to an agency of government whose role is to determine whether the national curriculum is in fact being taught and the national standards are being maintained, providing instruction to below-par schools as to what they must do to improve and advising government when, in their judgment, a school is past saving and its head and other staff must be replaced or the school shut down or merged with another.

The roles of various national curriculum setting and advising agencies were rationalized and combined through the years until two bodies, one to set academic standards, and the other to set vocational standards emerged. Both bodies came eventually to produce very complex systems of standards in their respective arenas, to the point that Margaret Thatcher herself complained bitterly in her memoirs that they had become far more prescriptive in their approach than she had ever intended or thought wise. Her aim had been to provide a framework within which teachers would have a great deal of autonomy to exercise their professional judgment than ultimately was provided.

In the Major years, government's frustration with the poor quality of most teachers and the even lower quality of the teacher training institutions reached the boiling point. The result was the decision to take all the government money that had been going to the universities to fund teacher education away from them, to set up a new unit of government responsible for the recruiting, training and support of teachers, and to require the teacher training institutions to apply for funds from the new government teacher training program to get any funds for teacher training. In one stroke, government changed the entire dynamic of teacher training in England. The universities, which had been fighting the new agenda, now found that they could get money to train teachers only if they accepted the view that the purpose of teacher training in England was to provide prospective teachers with the skills they needed to teach the national curriculum. Furthermore, they would keep the money they got for this purpose only if they

could show at regular intervals that the money they got for this purpose was producing the results that government was looking for.

These years were full of acrimony. The changes did not go down easily among teachers, many in government and in the universities. Teachers often threatened revolt and sometimes practiced it. Government was in some cases forced to back off of its agenda to prevent the kind of large scale revolt among teachers that could have left the new agenda stillborn.

Nevertheless, by the time Tony Blair became Prime Minister, all of the elements of the new system had been put in place. A highly aligned system of national standards, curriculum frameworks, tests and examinations had been established. Data on school performance set to the standards was being produced and made available to the public. The Inspectorate was reviewing school performance against the national standards and curriculum on a regular schedule and playing a key role in the accountability system. More choices were available to parents and students and more information was available on which to base those choices. The dead hand of the local bureaucracy had been lifted and school heads and governors given much more latitude to make the decisions they thought appropriate. Initial steps had been taken to introduce schools focusing on different themes, thereby increasing in still another way the choices available to parents and students. Standards, accountability, choice (but not vouchers), and local responsibility — all within the context of a clear and consistent national curriculum framework — had become the hallmarks of the English education system. And extraordinary measures had been taken to improve the quality of the education and training of English teachers.

Labor had been out of power for a long time when Tony Blair took the reins in 1996. During most of that period, the shadow cabinet had been issuing position papers blasting the Thatcher program and promising to roll back her education reforms. So it is not surprising that the Labor rank and file fully expected that to happen if and when Blair won.

But it did not. In the end Blair stood just where Callaghan had stood all those years before, with the parents and employers. He, too, was convinced that education had been captured by the providers and had looked with approval on Thatcher's campaign to wrest control from the profession and return it to the public. He, too, thought that the educators' "secret garden" of curriculum should be a secret no longer.

This continuity between the Blair program and the preceding Thatcher and Major programs in education is the key to the success of England's education reforms. Without that continuity of program and continued determination of government to see the whole program through to its logical conclusion, it would all have fallen apart. It is worthwhile to stop for a moment to think about how it all happened that way.

Margaret Thatcher, in her memoirs, attributes her success to her middle class background. The daughter of a grocer, she saw education as the way up and made it work that way for her. Because she was not the usual Tory daughter of privilege, she was not comfortable with an education system that worked only for the elite and provided little for everyone else. It can be argued that Tony Blair was the opposite, the son of privilege whose sympathies were with the less fortunate but who was not automatically antagonistic to the interests of business. And Blair was the first Prime Minister in a very long time to have school age children while serving in that position. Thatcher and Blair, in terms of their values, met in the middle. It was natural for both of them to think like parents, and employers, rather than deferring to the professionals. Both saw education as failing in its obligation to provide a way up for the less fortunate and both had a sophisticated enough understanding of the dynamics of modern economies to understand that the whole economic future of Britain depended on radical improvements in the performance of Britain's schools. The result was extraordinary continuity in a revolutionary education policy over the course of more than twenty five years.

To leave it at that, however, would be misleading. It is not simply that Blair continued the policies that Margaret Thatcher and John Major had put in place. It is apt to say that Thatcher and Major managed to break the mold of British education policy and put in place the basic building blocks of a new order. Blair then built on that structure to create a new kind of public administration system for education, one in which government provides the incentives, support and tools for a true education profession to develop, one that is organized to learn from its experience and incented to put that knowledge to work, constantly seeking and implementing better ways to improve student performance. This is a major contribution by itself.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. In the year before Blair became Prime Minister, as head of his party he reorganized his education team. When asked right after the election what his top three priorities would be, he famously replied, “Education, education and education!” Everyone understood that the head of Blair’s education team was Blair himself, who, far from leaving education policy to others, immersed himself in it and made it his own. The other members of this little band included David Blunkett, Conor Ryan, David Milliband, and Michael Barber. In the years to come, this tight knit team covered the key posts at Number 10 Downing Street, in the Cabinet and in the Department for Education and Skills. Their respect for one another and their fundamental agreement on values and strategy made many things possible that might not have been otherwise.

They admired Thatcher’s toughness, her lack of tolerance for school failure and her willingness to take on the profession and the bureaucracy. And they agreed with the measures she had taken to force accountability and consequences for failure into the system. As Barber later put it, “If the Conservatives hadn’t introduced the National Curriculum, national testing, regular inspection, and the devolution of [authority] to the schools, we couldn’t do what we are doing.” But they also believed that the Thatcher administration, and the Major administration that followed it had not thought through an effective strategy for providing the kind of support that teachers and school heads would need to

reach the new standards. And they were especially worried that, without that support, the Thatcher reforms would leave poor children far behind.

Before we describe the Blair team's goals and strategies for achieving them, though, we need to take a detour. We need to step back and paint a picture of the structure of the English primary and secondary education system at the time the Blair administration took over, so the reader can grasp what was being changed.

The Thatcher government had defined four "Key Stages" of the progress of an English student through the schools, as follows:

Foundation Stage	Ages 1 through 5	
Key Stage 1	Ages 6 and 7	School years 1 and 2
Key Stage 2	Ages 8 through 11	School years 3 through 6
Key Stage 3	Ages 12 through 14	School years 7 through 9
Key Stage 4	Ages 15 and 16	School years 10 and 11
Post-16	Ages 17 and 18	School years 11 and 12

At the Foundation Stage, by 1998, Government, by 1988 had assured that all local authorities had a plan for providing free, high quality nursery school and an additional plan raising its targets for places for 3-year olds.

The National Curriculum was designed to meet the needs of students for whom education was compulsory in England, that is, students from the ages of 5 through 16, or from the beginning of Key Stage 1 through the end of Key Stage 4. At the end of Key Stage 2, and again at the end of Key Stage 3, all students were to take the new National Curriculum Tests in English, mathematics and science.

Though the National Tests included only these three subjects, the National Curriculum was much more prescriptive. Students in Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) were required to take English, mathematics, science, physical education, design and technology, information technology, history, geography, music and art and

religious education. Students in Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) took all those subjects plus modern foreign languages. Students in Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16) were required to take only English, mathematics, science, physical education, design and technology, information technology, and modern foreign languages.

The form taken by the National Curriculum was and is twofold. For each subject at each stage, the National Curriculum sets out Programmes of Study that specify what the student should know and be able to do. Attainment targets specify the expected standards of student performance.

At the end of Key Stage 4, students took the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Examinations (which incorporated the old "O Level" exams). They could also take the Vocational GCSEs and certain other examinations declared by Government to be the equivalent of the GCSEs. Many students would leave formal education to enter the workforce at this point. Those that wanted to go on to Post-16 education (what was once called the "6th Form") would study for the "A levels," or their vocational education equivalents. The A levels were and remain the gateway to the universities in England. Though Government declared certain vocational qualifications to be the equivalent of "A Levels," no one else acted as if that were so, and, indeed, Government rarely behaved as if that were so. Exams were treated by the system in a way that has no parallel in the United States. Students, advised by their teachers, would decide on entering Key Stage 4 or Post-16 studies, which examinations they wished to study for two years hence. One's opportunities to go on for further education, including which universities one would be admitted to, would depend on which exams one had elected to take and what grade had been achieved in those exams. One typically elected to take between 3 and 5 exams. Thus advanced high school study in England has for a long time been much more tightly focused (from the standpoint of subjects studied) than in the United States, and students have typically done much more advanced work in those subjects than their counterparts in this country. Of course, the subjects studied were very much influenced by the requirements of the institution that one wanted to attend after secondary school.

Government was responsible only for creating the exams at the end of the first three stages. The GCSE and A Level examinations were provided by private organizations in competition with one another. The differences among them were ‘moderated’ in a system to which they had all agreed.

The academic curriculum and standards were actually set by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. A separate agency, the National Council on Vocational Qualifications, was responsible for bringing some order and system to the myriad of vocational and occupational qualifications offered by many different private organizations. Both agencies were part of government, appointed by the Secretary of State for Education, but independent of the rest of the Department of Education bureaucracy. Later, these two agencies would be merged into one, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

We return now to an account of the actions of the Blair team when they had gained office in 1996.

Their debt to the Conservatives was clear — and acknowledged. The issue was how to take these measures and use them to drive student achievement — especially the achievement of the lowest performing students — up to unprecedented levels. Blair did not accept the implicit theory of the Thatcher government that making much more and more accurate information available to parents about school performance would itself result in improved performance. He believed that major improvements in performance would come only if government invested heavily in improving the capacity of the education establishment to raise student performance, that the public would get what it needed only when reform in the incentive system and in the production of better performance information was matched by investments in greater capacity. And he was not content with letting the market work its will. Blair and his team would never give up on disadvantaged students.

Their first step, taken in their very first week in office, was to set up a system of targets. It was important, they thought, that every actor in the system, from the school head to the Secretary of State for Education, to commit to measurable, challenging but achievable goals, and be willing to stake their careers on them. The targets were stated in terms of proportions of students in each grade tested achieving at least a Level 4 (roughly equivalent to “proficient” in our terminology). When Blair took office, only 57% tested at Level 4 in literacy at the end of Key Stage 3. He set a target of 80% to be achieved within five years and made reaching that target a primary goal of his education policies, inviting the nation to hold his administration accountable for reaching that target. The target then cascaded down the system, with each lower tier setting a target for which they were willing to be held accountable. Clearly, each high level in the system had an incentive to make sure that every individual and organizational unit reporting to his or her level accepted responsibility for hitting targets that would at least sum up to the targets for which he or she had accepted responsibility. And so it went, from Prime Minister to Secretary of State to Permanent Secretary to unit heads to heads of Local Education Authorities to School Heads, right down the line.

In the event, 75% of the students tested reached Level 4, 5% less than had been promised. David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education, offered to resign, but Blair refused to accept his resignation, because almost everyone realized that moving the system from 57% to 75% proficient in literacy had been an enormous achievement. As this is written, in 2005, the figure stands at 78%, just shy of the target.

Even more impressive, the average score on the literacy test of the lowest achieving district in England is almost exactly where the average score was when Blair took office. That achievement is simply remarkable, to our knowledge a far greater move than any American state has managed to make in a comparable period of time.

How did they do it? When Blair took office as Prime Minister, the team judged that the Department for Education did not have the capacity to provide strategic leadership for a coherent, powerful, national school improvement effort. It was neither organized nor staffed for such an effort because, up to that moment, it had no charge and no legitimacy to take on such a role. So Blunkett, the new Secretary for State for Education, asked Michael Barber to create a new unit within the Department, the Standards and Effectiveness Unit that could lead the charge.

Barber was the one member of the inner circle of the education team who had been trained as an educator. Active in the teachers' union, he had come to believe that the stances taken by the union would ultimately be self defeating. Barber realized that the teachers were rapidly alienating the public by refusing to be held accountable for the results of their work, while constantly asking for more resources for doing it. They were far more likely to get those resources, he thought, when they showed that they could and would produce higher achievement and when they recognized the legitimacy of the public's interest in setting the goals of education. Barber turned out to be both the theoretician of the Blair education team and the point man for implementing its strategies on the ground.

Barber realized that no amount of toughness on teachers would produce better student performance if the teachers did not know what to do. And they did not know what to do. Not only did they not know what to do, but their whole culture left them free to do it, undisturbed by their peers or supervisors. To fix the problem, government would have to figure out what to do and find a way to train all the teachers in England's schools to do it, a giant break with all prior practice and a wrenching change for everyone concerned.

The Blair team decided to stake everything on producing a dramatic improvement in literacy, hence the pledge just reported. Having announced the goal and the measure by which its achievement would be judged, the question was how to reach it. It was up to Barber to make good on Blunkett's pledge.

In a perfect world, government could have turned to Britain's universities for the proven research and the teaching talent needed to do the job. But it could not, because the research base was weak and the institutions second rate.

Government would have to organize the effort itself, with very little help from higher education.

And it did. Barber reached out to John Stannard, a deeply knowledgeable and thoughtful educator who had for years been a senior member of the Inspectorate, and was highly respected by teachers throughout England. Stannard had in fact been tapped by the Major government to lead a National Literacy Project. In that role, Stannard had carefully reviewed the international research literature on literacy, had visited New Zealand, Australia and the United States to look at effective literacy programs firsthand, and had led the development of a pilot project to test the effectiveness of a design for literacy instruction based on the benchmarking research he and his team had done. Stannard had been particularly impressed by the work of Marie Clay in New Zealand, Peter Hill and Carmel Crevola in Melbourne, Australia (later to join the staff of the National Center on Education and the Economy in the United States as Director of Research) and various efforts in the United States to regularize the teaching of phonics in the lower grades.

Stannard knew English schools and English teachers very well, through his work as an Inspector. He saw them as deeply committed to an idea of pedagogy based on their — deeply flawed — understanding of Piaget's stages of development. Few of these teachers, he knew, had ever actually read Piaget, but they believed that Piaget's research said that children would learn to read naturally, at their own pace. Stannard's observation on their practice was that they appeared not so much to teach reading as to monitor it and had a deep seated, ideological aversion to direct teaching methods, especially methods whose use was directed from outside. And he believed that, as long as these conditions persisted, little would change in the literacy performance of English children.

The results of the pilot that had been started in the Major administration were very promising. The question was what to do next. Blunkett and Barber were of a mind: the best strategy was to go for broke. Rather than design a program that would be implemented in stages of over a period of years, slowly ratcheting up the number of schools and teachers involved, they would do it all at once. Barber felt strongly that the new administration had to persuade the professional educators that it was dead serious, and it needed to create the atmosphere of an unstoppable juggernaut, an attitude that would simply ride over the inherent opposition with unquenchable energy, optimism and drive. They were betting on momentum.

And that is exactly how it happened. Stannard came up with a design for going nationwide directly from the very small pilot that the previous administration had conducted. His team in the Standards and Effectiveness Unit built their design around a one-hour literacy block to be used in the primary schools. For Stannard, this hour of instruction was key. Only in this way could Government create a consistency between classes, and render the literacy curriculum manageable by the head teacher of the school. It would make it possible for the head to monitor the classroom, to do effective planning and to provide effective training. And it creates a common language in which teachers can work together to improve their practice. Beyond all these very sound reasons for focusing on the structure of this time block, Stannard saw that it provided a way to structure a national strategy for delivering training that would go beyond talk about principles to actually affect teachers' practice.

Stannard never believed that an hour was enough. But it was all the time that was available in the National Curriculum. If they had insisted on more, something else in the National Curriculum would have had to come out, and Government did not want to mess with the National Curriculum for fear that it would not be able to stop the revisions there. So an hour it was, although Stannard told the teachers that he hoped they would be able to find another hour and a half in the week to supplement this hour long daily block, and he sent out an advisory saying that he hoped that the teachers would use the additional hour

and half for extended writing and extended reading. Over time Government relaxed the time constraints in the National Curriculum, giving teachers more flexibility in their use of time.

The hour-long block was structured around phonics, shared and guided writing and shared and guided reading. As was the case in the United States, teachers had a strong aversion to the direct teaching of phonics, believing that students would pick up the phonetic structure of the language naturally and teaching it directly would interfere with their motivation to read and write. But Stannard realized that, although many students do pick up the phonics naturally, many do not, and those who do not fall behind quickly and never catch up. He also knew that lack of direct phonics instruction was partly responsible for English students' dismal spelling abilities. So direct phonics instruction became an important part of the block. The other parts just mentioned were based on the highly successful methods taught on New Zealand and Australia. While wars were raging in the United States between the proponents of phonics and whole language, Stannard was taking the best of both and welding them together in a single, highly effective instructional program.

England did not have the resources to provide direct instruction to all of its teachers in the new curriculum design for literacy. So Stannard had his team design what they called "the lunchbox" for the majority of schools, literally a container in the form of a lunchbox full of materials that laid out the content, structure and rationale of the required hour-long literacy block and did so in a way that did not require additional training. The "lunchbox" was distributed to all the appropriate primary teachers in England and, in some cases, would be the only aid they got to implement the new literacy program.

But a more elaborate curriculum was developed for key staff in the local educational authorities and for school heads all over the country. Three-day standard training sessions was developed for the school heads and the literacy coordinators. Stannard was given authority to hire and train 300 consultants to provide the training given in these three day sessions. Once trained, these local

educational authority staff and school heads were then expected to go out into the schools and train and provide direct support to the teachers who most needed it, with continuing support from Stannard and his 300 staff members and consultants. Throughout, more resources were directed to the lower-performing schools.

This was, of course, an enormous national effort, conducted in the glare of national publicity and, at the outset, amid relentless criticism from those — and there many — who viewed the whole project as an unwarranted invasion of the professional prerogative of teachers. But these criticisms waned and ultimately withered as teachers found the new structures much more effective than what they had been doing before.

Throughout, Stannard was visiting constantly with heads of local authorities and school heads, talking with teachers, and running focus groups of all of these groups. He was able to make constant adjustments in the design to reflect what he was learning on the ground about what worked and what did not.

Stannard knew that the teachers who got no more than the “lunchbox” were not getting enough, and he knew that many local authorities lacked the capacity to provide the kind of on-site training and technical assistance that they should have had, but he and Barber both believed that, had they waited until a much more robust system was in place, they might have waited forever, and had they implemented the strategy bit by bit as they got the resources, they would have lacked the publicity and enormous sense of momentum that, arguably, ultimately carried the day.

And it did carry the day. There was little doubt about the effectiveness of the strategy itself, when implemented on a small scale. The pilot had showed gains of seven months to an entire year above predicted gain for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 students. Children responded well. Behavior problems were reduced and teachers felt more in control of the outcomes. The question was how it would work at national scale. And you already know the answer. John

Blunkett's pledge to make 80 percent of the cohort proficient by the end of the five year program was very nearly met, a remarkable achievement. And that achievement in turn made much more possible.

Barber chose Anita Straker to run the National Numeracy Strategy. Straker had been a mathematics expert in one of the Local Education Authorities. Barber told his staff, "There are two rules about Anita. Rule One is that Anita is always right. The other is that, if in doubt, consult Rule One. She is very forceful and very clear thinking, she drives a little hard, but she's brilliant." Like Stannard before her, she was authorized to hire 15 regional directors and 300 consultants to deliver the requisite training to the school heads and math coordinators nationwide and support their work thereafter.

Here again, Government began by reviewing the research and benchmarking best practices around the world. They concluded that those nations that got better performance did so in part because they emphasized the conceptual structure of mathematics more than the English (or the Americans) and produced a better balance among the teaching of skills, concepts and applications. And they focused on a feature of the Swiss mathematics curriculum that they particularly liked: its emphasis on "mental arithmetic." Many of the pedagogical elements in the Numeracy Strategy were based the Literacy Strategy, thus providing continuity with the Literacy Strategy for teachers and students alike. And, like the Literacy Strategy, the Numeracy Strategy was a smashing success.

Nothing like this had ever happened in England before. But almost everyone was fed up with piecemeal reform and there was surprisingly little resistance to these schemes. A crucial element in the design was a move to fund the schools for three years going forward every year. This made it possible for the schools to plan ahead, knowing how much money they would have, and it made the government's seriousness of purpose even more manifest. But that was not all.

Government put a lot of money into an ongoing evaluation of their literacy and numeracy strategies once they got rolling. They let it be known that no British organization need apply for the evaluation contract. This because they wanted it to be abundantly clear that the winner would not be beholden to government and would therefore be objective and they wanted to make sure that the benchmarks by which the adequacy of the British effort was measured would be international, not local. The contract went to a team headed by Michael Fullan at the Ontario Institute of Education in Canada.

Among the evaluation instruments were forms used to evaluate the performance of the people providing the training given to the teachers served by the Literacy and Mathematics strategies. Trainers whose performance was judged inadequate were fired and replaced by others who could do the job. In this and countless other ways, English teachers received a message that government was prepared to be held accountable for its performance and would not settle for second rate performance — they meant business.