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CHAPTER TWO

**SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND AND WALES:
CURRICULA, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS**

Teachers and students define the character of schools. The politics and bureaucracy of education are realities that affect the environment of schools, but the true description of a nation's education system comes from examining what teachers teach, how teachers teach, and whether students learn what teachers intend. This latter point — whether students learn — must be qualified, of course, by issues of equity. In other words, how accessible are education opportunities? In this chapter I pick up the examination of education in England and Wales by looking at the national curriculum, school curricula in general, and the system for assessing student achievement. Disparities in student achievement are considered in the context of social factors. To conclude this two-part examination, I discuss the profession of teaching as it has evolved in England and Wales, because in the end the quality of a nation's education system depends on the quality of the teaching profession.

The National Curriculum

Prior to the Education Reform Act of 1988, the curriculum was entirely in the hands of local education authorities. If the truth be told, it was more in the hands of the head teachers of the individual schools. The only subject required by the Education Act of 1944 was religion, and parents could withdraw their children from those classes if they desired. Although the system of examinations for university admission, which has been in place in some form throughout most of the 20th century, directed much of the secondary education curriculum, only a small proportion of

students actually took the exams. Consequently the curricula for both primary and secondary remained discretionary.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 introduced an aggressive course of action by the national government to standardize curricula and student assessment. The national curriculum was instituted for both England and Wales, and eventually it was extended to Northern Ireland. Scotland, which maintains a system of education apart from England and Wales, does not mandate a national curriculum but has a *recommended* national curriculum.

Administration of the national curriculum rests with two national agencies created by the Education Reform Act of 1988. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority implements the curriculum in England, and the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales is responsible for directing implementation in Wales. The two vary only slightly. Both have the same *core subjects*: English, mathematics, and science. In Wales, Welsh is also a core subject for those schools that use Welsh as the primary medium of instruction. In addition, the curriculum in both England and Wales includes the same set of *foundation subjects*: art, history, geography, music, physical education, and technology. In Wales those schools that use English as the primary medium of instruction require Welsh as a foundation subject. A close examination of the two versions of the national curriculum reveals that the Welsh variation emphasizes a more interdisciplinary approach to content (Pollard 1996).

The national curriculum is prescribed in an intricate system of developmental levels, goals, objectives, themes, and levels of performance. Indeed, the outcry heard from teachers on implementation of the national curriculum had less to do with resistance to the higher standards sought by Parliament than it did with the tedious level of explanation and onerous documentation that the new system imposed. Mackinnon et al. (1995) explained how the curriculum is organized into four *key stages* that cover the years for compulsory schooling:

Key Stage 1 corresponds to the first two years of schooling for children ages five and six.

Key Stage 2 corresponds to the third through sixth years of schooling for children ages seven through 10.

Key Stage 3 corresponds to the seventh through ninth years of schooling for children ages 11 through 13.

Key Stage 4 corresponds to the tenth and eleventh year of schooling for adolescents ages 14 through 16.

Each subject in the national curriculum includes *programmes of study* and *attainment targets*, which are similar to the terms “courses” and “goals” that are in common use in the United States. The national curriculum also makes use of *strands* of ideas that run through each programme of study and through all of the key stages. Figure 1 shows the programmes of study for the core subjects in the English version of the national curriculum (Pollard 1996).

Figure 1. Programmes of study for core subjects.

English	Mathematics	Science
<i>Speaking and listening</i>	<i>Using and applying math</i>	<i>Scientific investigation</i>
<i>Reading</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Life and living processes</i>
<i>Writing</i>	<i>Algebra</i>	<i>Materials and properties</i>
<i>Spelling</i>	<i>Shape and space</i>	<i>Physical processes</i>
<i>Handwriting</i>	<i>Handling data</i>	

The strands provide another level of detail for describing the programmes of study by concepts or themes. Some strands are consistent throughout all four of the key stages. Others appear in only some of the stages. In Key Stage 1, for example, the following strands are part of the programme of study on physical processes:

- Electricity and magnetism
- Energy resource and energy transfer
- Forces and their effects
- Light and sound
- The Earth's place in the universe (Mackinnon et al. 1995)

The national curriculum instituted by the Education Reform Act of 1988 caused sweeping change in primary and secondary schools. Where the curriculum had been decentralized and fragmentary, it became at once centralized and uniform. Many British educators continue to believe that the degree of centralization and the precision of description is more harmful than helpful. Indeed, the voice of the teaching profession was strong enough that the Department for Education is encouraging concerted efforts to simplify the implementation mechanisms. The Dearing Report of 1993, which was the official evaluation of the national curriculum by Sir Ron Dearing, chairman of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, made a firm case for streamlining the assessment system (Dearing 1993).

Assessment. The complexity of the national curriculum does not end with content. The assessment system is similarly planned in minute detail. For each programme of study there are 10 *levels of attainment* that establish the expected progress each pupil should make from the beginning to the end of compulsory schooling. These attainment levels overlap each key stage. For example, Key Stage 1 includes levels of attainment one through three; Key Stage 2 includes levels of attainment two through five; Key Stage 3 includes levels of attainment three through eight; and Key Stage 4 includes levels of attainment four through 10. *Statements of attainment* describe each of these levels of attainment. However, art, music, and physical education do not use the 10-level system. Instead, they have more general statements of learning outcomes for the end of each key stage (National Curriculum Council 1992).

The level of detail introduced for the national curriculum's assessment system has met with considerable controversy. Front-line educators — teachers and head teachers in the schools — continue to complain that the system is cumbersome and superficial. In response to their outcry, Sir Ron Dearing reported in the first official evaluation of the new system that the scheme relied too heavily on standardized tests. Dearing's report stated that the

national assessment system tended to "fragment teaching and learning" and trivialized the process of education assessment to a "meaningless ticking of myriad boxes" (Dearing 1993, p. 61). As a result of Dearing's report, major changes have been proposed for the purpose of simplifying the mechanism for assessment, while keeping the broad goals of standardization and accountability intact.

National Examinations and Qualifications

Assessment is hardly new to the education system of England and Wales. National exit examinations have been a rite of passage for British school children for the past five decades. The General Certificate of Education (GCE), which was instituted in 1951 and later modified in 1965, included three levels of qualifications. The first was the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), which was designed so that the top 60% of pupils would pass. The second was the General Certificate of Education (GCE) "O-level" examination, which was designed so that the top 30% would pass. And the third was the General Certificate of Education "A-level" examination system. The O-level examination system was designed to designate mastery of secondary school subjects at age 16; and the A-level scheme was designed to evaluate students at the completion of the sixth form, the year of preparation for admission to higher education. In 1988 the CSE and GCE were replaced by the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), giving England, Wales, and Northern Ireland a single examination system at the end of compulsory schooling (Mackinnon et al. 1995).

At present, about two-thirds of the pupils in England and Wales pass the General Certificate of Secondary Education. About 30% of the pupils who complete compulsory education subsequently pass one or more A-level examinations. During the past 25 years the proportion of pupils finishing compulsory schooling with either the CSE/GCE or the GCSE has risen significantly, from 34% to 64% (Mackinnon et al. 1995).

In addition to the national system for examinations at the end of compulsory schooling and on completion of the sixth form, numerous qualifications are available in vocational subjects under the aegis of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). Normally students take an examination for a vocational subject on completing a postsecondary course, which is called "further education" (Mackinnon et al. 1995).

Pupil Achievement

Any discussion of a nation's schools eventually ends in a discussion of pupil achievement. Moreover, the discussion of pupil achievement is always in terms of some type of comparison. The current emphasis in comparative studies of pupil achievement is on two dimensions: international ranking and social inequities. In the case of England and Wales, both kinds of comparisons provide revealing insights.

Cross-cultural comparisons of pupil achievement are fraught with the potential for misinterpretation. As Benjamin Disraeli once said, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." Actually, the 19th century prime minister's indictment was not so much against statistics as it was a jab at the manipulation of statistics to distort the truth. Statistical comparisons of education systems must respect his admonishment and consider the contextual meaning of any data that are cited. Scope and sequence of the curriculum, the proportion of the school-age population being tested, a nation's investment in education, and socioeconomic variance in the population are just a few of the variables that can affect the comparisons. With this caveat in mind, a general statement can be made that pupil achievement in England and Wales is average in comparison to other nations. Several studies are illustrative.

In a study reported by the Educational Testing Service, the United Kingdom was second in a comparison of five nations (Korea, the United Kingdom, Spain, the United States, and Ireland) for science proficiency among 13-year-olds (Lapointe

1989 as cited in Hlebowitsh and Tellez 1997). In the same report, the United Kingdom was in the middle when the subject tested was mathematics. Assessments of literacy similarly place the United Kingdom in the middle of the nations sampled (Elley 1992).

In strictly national terms, education achievement in the United Kingdom has improved. Between 1979 and 1993 the proportion of pupils who have stayed in school to age 16 increased from 42% to 71%, and the proportion for pupils who stayed through age 18 more than doubled, from 15% to 34% (DFE 1993c). The proportion of pupils who earned qualifications also increased. In 1970 only 34% of the pupils passed O-level examinations, but in 1992 the percentage improved to 64%. Similarly, pupils passing one or more A-level examinations increased during the same time span, from 17% to 30% (Mackinnon et al. 1995). These indicators of achievement, however, contain some troubling inequities when the data are examined closely.

Gender differences. Girls consistently perform better than boys in both the GCSE and the A-level examination. However, the superior achievement by girls is not uniform across the curriculum. Boys outperform girls in mathematics by a slight margin on the GCSE and a large margin on the mathematics A-level examination. The same applies for physics and chemistry, both on the GCSE and the GCE A-level examinations (DFE 1993b).

Despite the fact that women perform better than men in the GCSE and GCE A-level examinations across the board, these differences reverse themselves in higher education. More men than women receive the first degree, and the proportion of men to women increases with advanced degrees (CSO 1994a). This reversal indicates a gender bias against women in terms of English society's expectations for the higher education of women.

Differences among ethnic groups. Analysis of pupil achievement among ethnic groups is difficult because ethnicity was not identified in the national collection of data as recently as 1995. Therefore, observations come from samples taken in conjunction

with special reports. The most recent data indicate a high percentage of adults of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin have not passed the GCSE: more than 50% of the men and 60% of the women. Among Indians, slightly fewer than 40% of the women and slightly fewer than 30% of the men have not passed the GCSE. These proportions compare to fewer than 10% among white adults who have not passed (CSO 1994b).

Class distinctions. The class consciousness that is evident in British society shows up in pupil achievement. During the 1950s through 1960s, when the tripartite secondary education system was prevalent, upper- and middle-class children performed better than lower-class children in every measure of education achievement analyzed (Mackinnon et al. 1995). The advent of the comprehensive school system in the 1970s helped to close the gap between the classes, though discrepancies still are observable. Among children from families categorized as "professional," 62% go on to earn university degrees and only 3% do not pass any of the examinations for qualifications — the GCSE or GCE A-levels. However, among the semi-skilled and unskilled working classes, 64% do not pass the GCSE and only 1% goes on to earn a university degree (Mackinnon et al. 1995).

Independent schools. Differences in pupil achievement also appear when independent schools are compared to state-maintained schools. Of course, annual fees at independent schools are high — the equivalent of \$19,000 or more. Therefore, the differences in achievement between independent and state-maintained schools also are differences of social class. Even so, they are significant. In comprehensive secondary schools only 12% of the students leave with at least one A-level passing score. By contrast, 61% of the students from independent schools leave with at least one A-level passing score (DFE 1993b).

The extent to which the higher performance on A-level examinations by pupils from independent schools is a product of better education or higher socioeconomic status is a question under constant debate. Certainly there is public sentiment that indepen-

dent schools have their advantages apart from the social-class issue. The original idea for grant-maintained schools — schools freed from the oversight of local education authorities — came from observing independent schools. Also, the government has for a number of years provided an "Assisted Places Scheme," which operates much as vouchers do. Approximately 5% of the independent school enrollment comes through Assisted Places (Mackinnon et al. 1995).

School Life

Any description of a nation's schools, if it is to be complete, eventually must picture school life as seen by pupils and teachers. In the case of England and Wales, very distinctive patterns present themselves, and they make for some interesting comparisons to other nations.

Primary. The best way to understand life in a primary school in England or Wales is to follow a child through a typical day. Imagine yourself as a seven-year-old in this state-maintained English school:

You arrive at 9:00 a.m. and proceed directly to assembly, where all the school children — about 200 — participate in the nationally required, daily act of worship. Everyone is wearing the uniform, a white shirt and the school sweater, and the only differences in dress are the slight variations of shoe style. After the head teacher's concluding prayer at 9:30 a.m., you go to your classroom.

The room is arranged for you and the other students to work in small groups, and you take your seat at your table where four others join you. Because textbooks and workbooks are not commonly used, your teacher directs your attention to the chalkboard, where a set of mathematics problems has been written. The lesson is a continuation of yesterday's, and you begin work, frequently asking questions among the others at your table. When you finish your exercise problems, you and the child next to you begin to work together on a puzzle with brightly colored geometric shapes.

After the mathematics lesson, your teacher reads to your class an excerpt from a German fairytale that also becomes the subject of a writ-

ing assignment — rephrasing the moral of the story. Your teacher wants you to use two new words in particular.

At mid-morning, your teacher is replaced by an assistant, who takes you to the playground for about 15 minutes while your teacher goes to the lounge to have tea and conversation with the other teachers. Class resumes promptly at 10:45 a.m. with reading instruction, again organized in small groups.

Your lunch period begins at noon and lasts for an hour. Like most other students, you live within walking distance of your home, so you go there for lunch. Back at 1:00 p.m., your teacher has you begin geography, so your table continues its construction of a wall map of the world for the classroom. The noise level of children coming and going from the supplies shelf doesn't seem to bother the teacher, who is spending most of her time helping another group with the costumes they will use for a skit at the end of the day. You will join the entire class as the chorus when the skit is performed.

At 3:00 in the afternoon, after your teacher dismisses your class, you walk home.

How do educators observing British classrooms characterize them? First they note that they are child-centered, with heavier reliance on integrated, thematic projects than on textbooks or worksheets. Instruction is individually paced. Children have freedom of movement, and there is a more relaxed attitude toward discipline. Another aspect is that pupil evaluation is anecdotal, with the final evaluation written by the teacher in essay form. Teachers do not use letter or number grades to report pupil progress. Also, while the school year is longer than in the United States, actual instructional time is about the same because the day is slightly shorter. In general, the classroom atmosphere is a low-stress environment.

However, primary school life in England and Wales is not without its critics. The national assessment system, which tests pupils at ages seven and 11, was designed to insert more rigorous accountability into the primary school curriculum. Moreover, secondary educators in England and Wales typically complain that students are inadequately prepared for the academic expectations of secondary schools. Undaunted by this criticism, primary

school educators defend the student-centered, humanistic approach to education.

Secondary. Secondary schools enroll students from ages 12 to 16, with students having the option to continue their study in the "sixth form" or in a vocational-technical program. The first five "forms" are each one year in length, and the final, or "sixth," form usually is two years long. In contrast to primary schools, the daily routine is more structured and the classroom itself reflects a much more subject-centered focus. The academic year is 190 days, with the vacation schedule similar to the one used by primary schools — six weeks in the summer and shorter vacations interspersed throughout the year. Although a truly typical day is hard to find in a secondary school in England or Wales, given the many varieties of programs, the one that follows describes how the majority of secondary pupils at a state-maintained school in an average local education authority would spend their school day. Imagine, again, that you are the student:

Arriving at 9:00 a.m., your day begins with a short "registration" period, during which there is a schoolwide "daily act of worship." Afterward, you begin a schedule of eight periods of approximately 35 minutes each, with many of the courses using double periods. Thus some of your classes are 35 minutes and some are 70 minutes. Five minutes are allowed to pass between classes, with an hour for lunch. Students are not allowed to drive to school, and so nearly everyone stays on campus for lunch.

Yours is a typically small school (compared to U.S. high schools), less than a thousand students in all five forms; and the extended lunch hour gives you time to relax with your friends and even get an early start on your homework. As in your primary school days, you have a mid-morning break and a mid-afternoon break of about ten minutes. Your teachers look forward to their teatime, and you look forward to the time to let down as well.

Your formal school day ends at 3:30 p.m.; but with about a third of your classmates, you regularly stay after school for activities. The selection is varied, ranging from rugby and cricket to concert band and chamber choir.

As a student in your fourth year of secondary school, you are in the "fourth form." Therefore your curriculum is preparing you for the subject

exams you selected for the General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE). Your teachers gear the classes to the examinations, and there is a business-like approach to learning because everyone knows that the final grades that really count will be the ones you make on the national tests, not how your teachers grade you on your homework and projects. Those marks are more to help you see where you need to give extra attention.

Like most of your friends, you complain a little about the uniforms and the homework, but they seem to be an established part of the school life. And, just as your parents did a generation before, you still address your male teachers with "sir" and your female teachers as "ma'am." You plan to continue into the sixth form and prepare for the A-level examinations and so reason that at least the homework will pay off in the long run. As a prospective "sixth-former," you will choose three A-level subjects to study in your last two years, when you are 17 and 18. Then, based on your A-level exams, you will go on to a university.

An examination-driven curriculum is not without its problems. Many students who do not plan on attending the sixth form are not motivated for the courses in the GCSE curriculum. Indeed, classroom discipline is a worry among secondary educators, especially in areas that are economically depressed (McAdams 1993). Student disenchantment with secondary education shows up in retention after the compulsory age of 16. Approximately 50% of the students in England and Wales continue full time in some form of further education. This compares to the same proportion of students in the United States who continue in some form of postsecondary education after age 17 or 18. While the comprehensive secondary school has contributed to enlarging access to further education in England and Wales, the British system still trails other nations in retaining full-time students past the compulsory age (McAdams 1993).

The Profession of Teaching

The education reform legislation of the 1980s and 1990s introduced sweeping changes. Parliament restructured local governance of schools, nationalized curriculum and assessment, and targeted the profession of teaching for rejuvenation. As much as any aspect

of the British system of education, the profession of teaching is undergoing unprecedented change. Demographically, however, the profile is relatively stable. The majority of teachers are female, with women forming about three-fourths of the teaching force for primary schools and slightly less than half in secondary schools. Minority populations are significantly underrepresented in the teaching profession, according to the Commission for Racial Equality. White teachers constitute more than 98% of the teaching force (Ranger 1988).

Professional roles. Local education authorities in England and Wales employ more than 900,000 persons in the service of education. Of these, more than 500,000 are professional educators (CIPFA 1991). Many professional roles are represented, and each of these roles can be categorized by the level of school control: national, local education authority, or school.

At the national level the most common role is that of *inspector*. Inspection of schools is the responsibility of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), which is a department independent of the Department for Education. Prior to the 1992 Education Act, full-time inspectors from OFSTED conducted all school inspections. Since 1992 OFSTED inspectors play more of an administrative role in conjunction with an inspection system that uses teams of independent inspectors trained in the standards by OFSTED and headed by a *registered inspector* designated by OFSTED (Mackinnon et al. 1995). The new inspection system is not unlike the accreditation system found in most states in the United States.

At the district level a *chief education officer* (CEO) heads each local education authority. Sometimes called a *director of education* for the LEA, he or she functions in much the same manner as a district superintendent in the United States. The position is appointed by the local education committee, which has elected district councillors forming its majority. The chief education officer is assisted by a variety of education officers in varying degrees of subordination: deputy chief education officer, assistant

education officer, and administrative assistant. Also, like school districts in the United States, educators holding these positions come from the ranks of teachers. LEAs also employ education specialists, the most common being psychologists and social workers. Given the broad mission for LEAs — one that includes adult and community education — other education specialists are found at the district level. *Career officers*, for example, serve as resource persons for school- or community-based career development programs, and *youth and community officers* provide leadership for neighborhood recreation programs and other community action groups (Mackinnon et al. 1995).

Professional roles in the individual schools also resemble those in the United States. Each school has a *head teacher*, whose duties are like those of a school principal in the United States. Also, most British secondary schools will have a *deputy head teacher*. Because primary school enrollments usually are very small, primary school head teachers rarely will have a deputy and nearly always have some daily instructional responsibilities. The instruction staff consists of teachers, and in secondary schools they might be augmented by laboratory assistants who assist teachers in classes that use laboratory or workshop equipment. *Welfare assistants* will assist teachers with students having special needs who have been mainstreamed into their classes. And larger schools that have the requisite resources will employ audiovisual technicians and media resource officers. *Supply teachers* are employed on a temporary basis when teachers must be absent. Allowing for differences in terminology, the staffing of the education system in England and Wales is similar to the ones found in North America and nations of the European Union (Mackinnon et al. 1995).

Salaries and employment conditions. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys uses six categories for reporting social class: professional, managerial/technical, skilled non-manual labor, skilled manual labor, semi-skilled labor, and unskilled labor. University professors are considered as professional class,

and teachers employed by primary or secondary schools are considered as managerial/technical class (Mackinnon et al. 1995). Salaries for primary and secondary teachers, however, are more on the level of skilled non-manual labor than of the managerial-technical class.

Teacher salaries are governed by the Secretary of State for Education, who consults with local education authorities, teachers unions, and a review board established by the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Act of 1991. In 1994 salaries for teachers ranged from the equivalent of \$19,000 to \$50,000. Head teachers' and deputy head teachers' salaries ranged from the equivalent of \$37,000 to \$83,000 (DFE 1994).

Terms of employment and working conditions are stipulated in detail by the 1994 School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document, which is also approved by the Secretary of State for Education. The document very closely resembles a master contract that a local board of education in the United States would agree to with a local teachers association. It spells out everything from the number of hours per year teachers are to be at the school (1,265 hours distributed over 195 days) to the entitlement of a mid-day break without any student supervision responsibilities (Mackinnon et al. 1995). Following are the significant professional duties covered in the School Teachers Pay and Working Conditions Document:

- Prepare lessons.
- Teach classes as assigned by the head teacher.
- Assess student progress and maintain required records of progress.
- Engage in self-appraisal of one's teaching.
- Assist in the appraisal of other teachers.
- Maintain discipline in the classroom and school.
- Communicate with parents regarding their children's progress.
- Participate in inservice required by the LEA.
- Attend meetings called by the head teacher or LEA.

In brief, the professional responsibilities of primary and secondary teachers in England and Wales would be very familiar to

most teachers in the United States. A survey of the physical condition of school facilities in England and Wales will find wider variance. While some teachers have the luxury of teaching in modern classrooms with ample textbooks, equipment, and supplies, others teach in dilapidated buildings without enough books for all of their students. Teachers in England and Wales routinely complain that classroom conditions are crowded and capital resources, such as books and equipment, are inadequate for providing high-quality instruction. Because local education authorities control the budgets for education facilities, schools must compete with other public building projects.

Teacher morale is a concern of many educators in England (Green 1996). First of all, salaries have been eroded in terms of purchasing power. During the past 25 years teacher salaries have risen at a rate that is inferior to salaries in other professions. Given that during this same period the British pound was devalued and the cost of living increased substantially, the typical teacher's salary actually decreased. Also, the education reform legislation of the 1980s and 1990s curtailed teacher autonomy on many professional matters, particularly freedom to decide what to teach and how to assess students. The loss of professional prerogative, diminished compensation, and the increased stress from dealing with more frequent and severe classroom discipline problems all have contributed to sagging teacher morale in England and Wales.

Another blow to the professional self-esteem of teachers resulted from the public attitude that seemed to pervade all the reform initiatives. Teachers and the rest of the established education community have been blamed for the perceived ills of the education system. Less attention is paid to the fact that the proportion of students earning GCSE qualifications, A-level qualifications, and university degrees has increased significantly in the past two decades or that the United Kingdom ranks near the bottom in international comparisons of government investment in education. Political arguments on behalf of the education reform agenda targeted the effectiveness and professionalism of teachers

specifically, and the message has taken its toll on the morale of the nation's teachers.

Teacher education and professional development. There are two dominant routes for teacher preparation in England and Wales. The first is a four-year university curriculum leading to the Bachelor of Education degree. About three-fourths of the program is similar to a conventional university curriculum, and the remaining quarter is professional education. Another popular track for professional teachers is the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The PGCE is a one-year program, usually based at a university or polytechnic; and it is taken after completing a university degree. The latter is the typical route for teachers who decide on their education careers after leaving higher education. Many polytechnics offer the PGCE program on a part-time schedule for prospective teachers who are working on their teaching credentials while employed full time in other vocations. Either approach must be approved by the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE). At present, slightly more than 60,000 prospective teachers are enrolled in teacher preparation programs, either baccalaureate or postgraduate (Mackinnon et al. 1995).

A recent development in the professional preparation of teachers is the School-Centered Initial Teacher Training program. Begun in 1993, this program allows consortia of primary and secondary schools to receive grants directly from the Department of Education to design and implement their own courses that lead to qualified teacher status (OFSTED 1995). The program was implemented by the Department for Education in response to criticism that teacher training programs based in higher education were too removed from professional practice. Briefly, the program consists of prospective teachers who hold university degrees receiving their initial training directly in the schools. Not surprisingly, schools of education have been critical of the program. It is too early to tell whether school-centered teacher training programs will replace university-based programs entirely. However, the

traditional programs already have begun revisions so that curriculum, faculty, and preservice school experiences are more collaborative with local education authorities.

Teacher education in England and Wales has included a support system for first-year teachers for more than a decade. Indeed, many of the induction-year programs implemented by state education systems in the United States were preceded by the British system for assisting teachers in the first year. Teachers and head teachers alike have embraced the induction-year support programs.

A recent development is the growing shortage of teachers. An improving economy in Britain in the past ten years has made it difficult for the teaching profession to recruit or retain qualified teachers, especially in the areas of science, mathematics, and technology. A recent report by the *Sunday Times* (1998) observed that teaching would have to attract at least half of all the mathematics graduates in the nation merely to fill the vacancies for mathematics teachers. Modern languages is another area of acute shortage. With teacher shortages of this scale, the effect of education reform legislation from Parliament is placed in doubt.

Issues and Challenges

At various points in the past two centuries, *laissez faire*, social reform, local control, and nationalization all have been themes in public policy for education. The education reform movement of the past two decades has completed the shift toward a centralized national system of education, and it has amplified calls for accountability. As schools deal with much more intense public scrutiny and the national government assumes a more direct managerial role, numerous issues present themselves. Not least among them will be the national government's claim that it will be more effective than local education authorities in leading the schools into the next century.

Centralizing control. The education reform legislation of the 1980s and 1990s intended to minimize the role of the local education authority. Indeed, critics of the education system have

argued that the LEAs had become unresponsive to the nation's call for reform and too remote from the local communities' concerns. Therefore Parliament gave the Department for Education a more direct line of control over policy; and, in turn, individual schools were given more autonomy in their operation. Now, finding and maintaining a proper balance between the national role and the local communities' role will be the challenge. Without question, many educators remain skeptical that the bureaucrats in national agencies will be better than the bureaucrats in the local education authorities. Teachers especially question the wisdom of transferring so many curriculum decisions from the classrooms to national committees. Already there is complaining among teachers that more time must be spent on documentation than on teaching.

Parliament may soon learn that there are two edges to the sword of centralized control of education policy. The ministers of Parliament and the career bureaucrats of the Department for Education are finding it easy to implement their agenda for change now that control is more centralized. Of course, soon they will be expected to begin showing results.

International, multicultural, and bilingual influences. Cultural diversity has two dimensions in England and Wales. First, cultural and linguistic diversity has been a part of the history of the island for centuries. The Irish, Scottish, and Welsh cultures have endured despite a hegemonic Parliament, and only recently has public education policy begun to recognize and encourage their distinctive characters. Now a host of new cultures and languages are part of the education scene. Although England and Wales remain slightly more than 90% white, the proportion of nonwhite students in schools has doubled in the past two decades. Afro-Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi children are the more common minority populations, but political turmoil in the Balkan region has created a steady influx of refugee children with urgent needs. The British education system, especially the schools of inner London and other industrial areas, faces the enigmatic problem of being a British system and educating for

British citizenship but comprising children from the entire international community. Achieving uniformity of purpose in a community of cultural and linguistic diversity has perplexed many nations.

The case of Wales. Ironically, Britain may need to look no further than its own borders for solutions to problems presented by a national curriculum and a multicultural and multilinguistic state. Wales is a case that merits attention.

Anglo-Saxons learned early in the history of England that the Welsh were going to insist on remaining Welsh. After centuries of trying to squelch the language and culture, Parliament's attitude began to change in the latter half of the 20th century. It began to recognize that the United Kingdom is, inescapably, a multicultural society; and the goals of fully integrating regional subcultures politically and socially are not incompatible with the goal of preserving the language and customs of those regional subcultures. In brief, being British and being Welsh are not mutually exclusive; indeed, the cultivation of one should support the health of the other. In Wales, one can be a loyal British citizen and still be distinctively Welsh.

Therefore, Wales has its own governmental agency for the administration of education — the Welsh Office Education Department (Awdurdod Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru). The Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales is independent of the Chief Inspector in England, and the national curriculum is the responsibility of the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (Mackinnon et al. 1995).

As a result, Welsh schoolchildren study the same core curriculum as the schoolchildren in England, except in Wales the language of Welsh is a required subject. In addition, the Awdurdod Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru provides specific national curriculum documents for art, music, geography, and history. In those schools where Welsh is the primary language of instruction, then both English and Welsh are core subjects. Where English is the primary medium of instruction, then Welsh is a required founda-

tion subject. The overarching goal for Welsh education is educating children to be bicultural and bilingual — English and Welsh.

Equal opportunity. The thrust of education reform in the past two decades has been centralizing control of the curriculum and increasing the level of accountability. An outcome of heightened attention to assessment, whether intended or not, will be the raised awareness of inequities in the system. Lagging education attainment of nonwhite populations already is well documented; and, as minority populations increase, greater pressure will be applied to the Department for Education to develop programs and policies to close the gap. Moreover, gender inequities in education opportunity after secondary education will continue to receive attention. Analysis of the results from the GCSE and GCE A-level examinations consistently reveals that girls outperform boys, yet women remain underrepresented in university and professional school enrollments. The results of creating a highly focused national curriculum and assessment are predictable: Inequities in educational achievement and opportunity will become more glaring.

The politicizing of public policy on education. Politicians in the British Parliament have learned that education policy is a ripe field for making political hay. But even for a nation whose modern history is characterized by swings back and forth in the politics of public policy, recent years have seen a more intense politicizing of issues in education. If a politician wishes to draw a crowd with strong rhetoric that is relatively immune from backlash, all she or he has to do is criticize the schools and lay blame on the teachers. Similarly, the British press has learned that the education system is an easy mark. As a consequence, newspapers frequently carry sensational exposés of the education system. Headlines such as "A-level Students Can't Distinguish East from West" (*Sunday Times*, 15 August 1999) are common, and they provide ample fodder for members of Parliament. Nowadays both the Labour and Conservative parties use exaggerated claims to promote opposing agendas for reform. Education has become

like foreign policy, the economy, or health care — an arena for partisan political debate. Political rhetoric dominates solid research in the debate.

Comparisons to Education in the United States

Similarities. Schools in Britain — whether primary schools or secondary schools — share many of the features of schools in the United States. The bureaucratic organization of schools is very similar, with LEAs comparing to local school districts. In the broadest sense, the curriculum is the same. The primary education consists of core subjects in English, mathematics, and science; and other foundation subjects include history, geography, music, art, physical education, and technology. Parents hold the same aspirations for their children, teachers face the same challenges, and administrators worry about the same problems. Indeed, many of the issues and problems in British education are familiar to teachers in the United States.

Perhaps the most remarkable similarity is the pattern for organizing schools into primary and secondary levels. Moreover, many British LEAs are beginning to adopt the uniquely American pattern of a middle level of schooling for children aged eight to 12. Preschool or early childhood education is optional, though widely supported by parents (nearly half of three- and four-year-olds attend nursery schools or infant classes in the primary schools); and postsecondary education increasingly is seen as a necessity to economic self-sufficiency.

The general level of literacy and education attainment is comparable, with 64% of the pupil population passing the General Certificate of Secondary Education and another 30% passing at least one of the more rigorous A-level examinations (Mackinnon et al. 1995). Approximately 33% of the school population continues into postsecondary education (Mackinnon et al. 1995). In short, formal education is a major current in the mainstream of modern British culture.

Other similarities are evident as well. The British citizenry is becoming increasingly diverse in its cultures and its languages.

Widespread immigration from former British colonies, along with refugees from various Eastern European regions, has resulted in Britain becoming a truly multicultural society. Thus schools have been challenged to meet the needs of a school population that is characteristically different from that of only a generation ago.

A survey of pupil achievement in Britain reveals another, albeit regrettable, similarity. Glaring inequities exist when different social classes and ethnic groups are compared. For example, the percentage of Afro-Caribbeans who pass at least one A-level examination is less than one-half the proportion for Asians or whites. Moreover, children from the middle and higher classes unequivocally achieve higher results than the working class on virtually every criterion (Mackinnon et al. 1995). Indeed, the remnants of Victorian classism are still apparent. In a study of urban British education, Gene Maeroff (1992) observed that class prejudice continues to have detrimental effects on the education and career aspirations of working-class children.

Another noteworthy similarity is the high profile of education in the public forum. The media report education news extensively (usually looking for the sensational), and education reform has occupied much of the public's attention during the last two decades. Between 1980 and 1995 various ministers of Parliament commissioned 14 different "official reports," and three major pieces of education reform legislation have been passed: the Education Reform Acts of 1986 and 1988 and the Education Act of 1993 (Mackinnon et al. 1995). That kind of politicization of education policy rivals even the United States.

Differences. British education differs from the U.S. system in many remarkable ways. Most noticeable is the nationalization of the curriculum and assessment. Also, the example of bilingual education in Wales is very distinctive in comparison to the American approach. And the legal status of religious education has particular differences. In terms of physical facilities, schools characteristically have smaller enrollments and buildings are Spartan, especially in comparison to suburban America.

In England and Wales the patterns for organizing the age levels of schooling are different than in the United States. In particular, compulsory education begins a year earlier and formal preschool education is more prevalent. As a result, the skills and knowledge that educators in the United States normally consider to be represented by a high school diploma are covered on the examination given to British pupils at age 16. Thus the last two years of British "secondary education" are more advanced than the curriculum found in U.S. schools. In fact, a review of the objectives covered on A-level examinations in Britain compares with content found in the College Entrance Examination Board's Advanced Placement syllabi or in a program of general studies at the college level in the United States.

"Literacy first!" could well be the slogan for British primary education. Language development is given priority, and mathematical concepts and skills are taught for mastery. Whole language as a method of instruction seems to be taken for granted, and infant classrooms (equivalent to the primary grades in the United States) are enriched with storytelling and singing and playful activity. At the secondary level the curriculum is very tightly focused on core subject matter, and teachers design their classroom programs exclusively to prepare students for the national examinations, which occur at both age 16 and 18.

Without a doubt, the examination system for secondary education has given the curriculum a very sharp focus; and teachers clearly understand their role in preparing students to succeed. Interestingly, this role has observable effects in the teacher-student relationship in British secondary schools. Secondary teachers are viewed by their students as resources, not as independent arbiters of success. In this regard, the teacher is like a coach; and coach and player have a common opponent — the examination. Of course, teachers cannot really "teach the test," as the test formats are almost exclusively constructed response and essay. Rather, teachers focus on the objectives of the test. Clearly, the system of national examinations is the most evident difference between education in the United States and Britain.

Both the curriculum and the national examination system have affected teacher preparation as well. Elementary teachers usually are prepared in polytechnic colleges. These programs are three years in length, though the degree is equivalent to a four-year baccalaureate in the United States when one takes into account the rigor of the qualifying examinations (the A-levels) for admission. Secondary teachers receive a university education with a major in the subject to be taught, combined with a fifth year of study in a university for the professional certificate, or Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). If one plans to teach a subject at the secondary level, one must have mastered the same discipline at the baccalaureate level.

Another important difference between British and American schools is found in the way each approaches bilingual education. The multilingual character of Britain predates the recent arrival of immigrants. Various Celtic dialects were spoken in the British Isles long before English, and Welsh is still the language of commerce in many rural areas of Wales. The response of the British government, at least in the recent history of education policy, is worth noting by other nations with bilingual populations. Recognizing that the Welsh will always insist on being Welsh, as well as English, the Department for Education has empowered the Welsh Office Education Department with all aspects of education in Wales. Among the variations in the Welsh system is the required study of Welsh alongside English throughout primary and secondary education. While the same national curriculum applies to Wales as it does to England, the Welsh have added their own language and literature to the core curriculum. Thus the recognition of the Welsh cultural heritage in the schools of Wales, including the encouragement of the language, is a matter of official policy in the United Kingdom. The people of Wales and the Parliament of the United Kingdom have grown past the ethnic factionalism that plagues some regions of the United States.

Another significant difference in British education when compared to education in the United States is religious education. In the United States religious instruction is banned in public

schools; in Britain it is compulsory. The Education Reform Act of 1988 reinforced a similar law passed in 1944, which made religious education a regular part of the curriculum, as well as provided for daily worship services (Mackinnon et al. 1995). Religious education is not included in the national curriculum. Rather, the particular programs of study are left to the local schools to determine.

Summary

Obvious differences exist between British schools and the schools of the United States. The influence of a national curriculum and national system of qualifying exams continues to have an enormous effect on policies and practices at the local level. In brief, the emphasis on accountability results in education reform initiatives focusing more on the product of education than on the process. While uniquely the outgrowth of British history and British culture, these differences provide alternative perspectives to American educators in the continuing discussion of education reform.