Large-Scale Reform in Literacy and Math: Rethinking Strategy in the Light of International Evidence

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Editor’s note:
Reading Recovery educators have long followed Andy Hargreaves’ thoughtful research on public education policy and leadership. In this article he addresses several issues that will resonate with JRR readers:

1. A superficial understanding of an initiative, even if there is full implementation, will not achieve powerful results. For Reading Recovery, this means we must commit to continuous communication and strive for continuous improvement; even a “full implementation” of Reading Recovery without deep understanding may not achieve desired outcomes at the system level.

2. Across international boundaries, high-stakes testing has not successfully improved results. In Reading Recovery assessment, teachers and students are the beneficiaries of Marie Clay’s assessment theory and tools that inform instruction.

3. System change is possible, but it cannot be fast. For those of us involved in the scale-up of Reading Recovery, especially in schools where Reading Recovery is new, this reminds us that vigilant monitoring of the implementation and a commitment to full understanding is imperative.

The thoughtful reader will find other implications for Reading Recovery practice. We invite you to develop your own lists as you share this article with your colleagues.

The Inversion of Autonomy
The last two decades have been characterized by what Michael Fullan (2000) identified as being the return of large-scale reform. Especially in English-speaking nations, this has been characterized by the centralization of many things like curriculum and assessment that were once the autonomous domain of schools, and the growing decentralization of things over which schools used to exercise little control, like finance and judgments about salary. There has been an inversion of autonomy. What used to be autonomously decided now isn’t; and what wasn’t autonomously determined, now is!

In 2001, I described these trends as comprising a New Educational Orthodoxy (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning). The elements of this orthodoxy in England, parts of Canada, and a growing number of states in the U.S. included a focus on raising standards (what later came to be known as raising the bar); deeper learning (which then fell to the wayside for more than a decade); centralization of the curriculum; more emphasis on assessment, accountability, achievement targets and indicators; and, not least, a tightening focus on literacy and math.

More recently, Finnish reform expert Pasi Sahlberg (2011) has referred to what he calls the Global Educational Reform Movement (or GERM) that, he says, has spread virally with the support of governments, business organizations and large-scale corporate philanthropy. GERM, Sahlberg says, promotes and perpetuates standardization, curriculum prescription, market competition, and test-based accountability. It also places almost all of the emphasis in education and educational reform on literacy and math at the expense of other areas of learning such as the arts, engaging with nature, creative play, physical activity, scientific problem solving, and social studies.

Literacy and math, then, have made up much of the substance of large-scale reform, across many parts of the world. What can we learn from these recent reforms that will be helpful in guiding new reform efforts today? Let’s look at a few different countries and contexts.

The Origins of Large-Scale Literacy Reform in the U.S.
Large-scale literacy reform has been in vogue in the U.S. for two decades now. It has been one of the driving forces of educational change across the country and many other parts of the world. Before the introduction of No Child Left Behind, one of the places that this reform movement
began was in New York District 2 in the mid 1990s. There, Superintendent Anthony Alvarado and his staff introduced a literacy program across the whole system, linked to measurable achievement gains, and backed up with detailed new materials and intensive, job-embedded staff development processes. These included one-on-one in-classroom coaching with detailed feedback, residencies in classrooms of expert teachers, and intervistation and supervision linked to deep knowledge of instruction. The professional development process was designed to be systemic and comprehensive so it reached all elementary teachers, not just those who were initially most enthusiastic and committed as had happened in Alvarado’s previous district.

There was a belief in the importance and possibility of districtwide change (Elmore & Burney, 1997). Great effort was expended on ensuring that all school administrators had collective responsibility for improving instruction. The point was not to ensure compliance with one given instructional method but to promote continual improvement of instruction. Leaders and teachers, it was emphasized, should be committed not just to this improvement process, but also committed to supporting each other as people within this community of practice.

Over the 8 years of Alvarado’s tenure and more, the district moved from being 10th to 2nd in the city’s reading scores and also made progress in math scores. This was districtwide change on a considerable scale. It was also slow, steady, and progressively staged in its implementation.

In their field-defining analysis of the changes in District 2, Elmore and Burney (1997) came to the following conclusions:

District 2 staff recognize that change can’t occur in all dimensions of a person’s work simultaneously. So while they create the expectation that instructional improvement is everyone’s responsibility, they also focus improvement efforts on specific parts of the curriculum and on specific dimensions of teaching practice. … Initial improvement efforts focused on literacy, reading, and writing and have gradually branched out into other areas, including math. … The underlying principle in these actions is that, even though instructional change efforts need to be focused and gradual, they should be universal. Everyone in the system should be engaged in instructional improvement as part of the routine work. (p. 17)

It is not possible to ask teachers to change their practice on all dimensions simultaneously in, for example, reading, writing, math, science, social studies, etc... What’s systemic about the strategy is not that it tries to change all dimensions of teaching practice at once…The strategy suggests, however, that it is possible to create the expectation that system-wide changes can occur in certain domains and that, over time, these changes can reach progressively more content areas and more teachers. (p. 25)

Across the continent, San Diego City’s school district became so enamored of District 2’s model, that it transplanted Alvarado and many of his team members to implement it in its own city, but in a different culture and in a fraction of the timescale. The results were catastrophic. Having arrived as chancellor of instruction in 1998, along with many of his senior staff, Alvarado was effectively gone by 2002, with a revised contract that vastly reduced the scope of his influence.

The reasons for failure to transplant this reform have been reviewed by Michael Fullan (2001) and studied using extensive firsthand data by Mary K. Stein, Lea Hubbard, and Hugh Mehan (Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan 2004; Mehan, Hubbard, & Stein, 2005). There were many reasons why District 2’s reform design could not be transplanted or replicated with ease in San Diego. San Diego is more politically and culturally conservative than New York District 2, and affluent parents were more suspicious of the balanced literacy model, including Reading Recovery (Clay, 1987; Pinnell, 1989), on which the reform was founded. San Diego was, at that time, six times the size of District 2. Getting to know principals in 170 schools, and gaining their trust and passionate commitment, was very different than building relationships with just 45 of them in District 2.

The design in San Diego was, on the face of things, very similar to District 2: the goal to impact all schools and classrooms; making teaching and learning the center of reform with a clear focus on balanced literacy; an aligned and embedded model of staff development; and a commitment to developing leaders to be able to lead this model through support groups, walkthroughs, conferences, mentoring, and so on. Many of the staff who came to San Diego were already experts in the model. District 2 instructors were brought to
San Diego to lead workshops and do demonstration lessons, and San Diego staff in turn made site visits to New York.

The main problem, though, was that a prepackaged reform was launched on a scale that was too big, too fast. In District 2, it had taken 9 years to develop the reforms, and only then were they extended into mathematics. In San Diego, the on ramp was shorter and steeper. Principals and teachers were expected to learn all this very quickly, even though the pedagogy was complex and the understanding required very deep thinking. Math reform was introduced sequentially after 3, not 9, years. Principals and other instructional leaders had to acquire the model so quickly they felt barely one step ahead of their teachers. The result was the second tragedy of educational change described by Steve Anderson (2009). The first tragedy is that there is no implementation. The second tragedy is that there is full implementation but without understanding of what is being implemented. In San Diego, principals sometimes had to rely on and point to superficial signs of instructional changes like word walls rather than understanding the depth of the practices they were supposed to lead.

The teacher unions became resistant to the reform and reluctant teachers found there were fewer places to escape its reach than in District 2 where they had been able to transfer to other districts. Ironically, some San Diego teachers tried exiting the literacy reforms by taking refuge within math. Teachers and principals were presented with District 2’s reform as a finished product — they had no time to own and invest in it.

Stein, Hubbard, and Mehan (2004) concluded from their study that “size and pace matter for reforms that demand significant changes in classroom practice. In particular… the size of the district impacted the ability of San Diego leaders to create enough models of good practice to guide learning at every layer of the system” (p. 32). What was the lesson to be learned from these early American systemwide changes in literacy? Large-scale literacy reform has to be grown gradually. It cannot be imposed impatiently. It is a lesson that most system reformers have failed to take to heart.

### English Impatience

Across the Atlantic, about the time of New York District 2’s reforms, England’s Blair government was also setting about large-scale reform by instituting a National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NLNS) for 1997 for literacy and 1998 for numeracy. The strategy had an extremely tight focus on these basics: It provided prescribed and paced instructional materials, it exercised relentless support for and surveillance over implementation through the use of coaching and other strategies, and it imposed high-stakes consequences for schools that failed to improve on “key stage” achievement tests as well as through the school inspection reports of the national inspection agency, Ofsted.

Architects and admirers of the strategy, like Tony Blair’s Education Adviser Sir Michael Barber, claimed there were significant gains as a result of the self-acknowledged “command and control” strategy between 1997 and 2001, and that this application of “deliverology” (Barber, 2008)—a relentless commitment to delivering results—was “highly effective” (Barber, 2009). Barber argued that the success of the reforms demonstrated that “large-scale reform is not only possible but can be achieved quickly” (Barber, 2000, p. 39). In support of Barber’s and the Labour government’s claims to success were data showing that for English language, especially reading, on the government’s own designed test measures administered at the end of children’s primary (elementary) education, the percentage of children scoring Level 4 proficiency between 1995 and 2000 rose from 48% to 75%. In mathematics or numeracy, the rise was from 44% to 72% (National Audit Office, 2001).

The Statistics Commission (2005), however, analyzed the data and growth trends and concluded that the improvement trend was statistically improbable, especially given that the year-by-year growth rates were almost identical in two different subjects. The Commission was then disbanded by the government.
The most-detailed and authoritative analyses of the veracity and plausibility of government claims to systemwide success were conducted by researchers at the University of Durham. They reanalyzed the government’s own data, and also collected other available and independent measures of literacy and numeracy levels for periods preceding, during, and after the implementation of the NLNS (Tymms, 2004; Tymms & Merrell, 2007). On mathematics, although the government’s figures showed striking gains during the implementation of the numeracy strategy, on at least six other independent measures, mathematics gains were statistically lower than this by 8% or so at Level 4 (Tymms & Merrell).

In relation to reading, Tymms (2004) compared the government’s claims of an almost 30% increase at Level 4 at the end of primary school, with the results over time on 11 other independent measures in existing published research. Government claims were found to be “illusory” and “exaggerated” with the gains from 48% to 58% at best representing very small effect sizes that “could easily result from test practice” (Tymms & Merrell, 2007, p. 14). Tymms and Merrell were especially concerned about failure to attend to the long tail of underachievement—of children who seriously struggle with reading—because “resources and effort were targeted at those pupils who were within the range of achieving a Level 4 because that is the standard by which the success of the schools was judged” (2007, pp. 14–15). In other words, excessive effort was being devoted to what Booher Jennings’s (2005) research in the U.S. identified as “Bubble Kids,” who are very close to reaching the high-stakes threshold of measured achievement with intensive effort and support.

Critics provided data indicating that the improving trend preceded the implementation of the strategy. They pointed to how the results hit a plateau once the easiest wins had been made, and they revealed the existence of huge collateral damage in the form of a narrowed curriculum, loss of classroom creativity, and the rise of teaching to the test (e.g., Tymms & Merrell, 2007).

In association with meeting the test requirements, teaching methods during the period of the NLNS became more traditional and conservative. Summarizing a range of studies, Tymms and Merrell (2007) conclude: “Whole class teaching … was a traditional teacher-directed style. Teachers asked closed questions, pupils supplied brief answers which were not probed further, praise rather than diagnostic feedback was given and there was an emphasis on factual recall” (p. 19). In general, the authors conclude, on a range of independent measures and contrary to the government’s own data, “levels of reading have been more or less static since the 1950s” (p. 20) with some evidence of decline concerning enjoyment of reading. The government’s reforms were associated with a movement to direct instruction, lower levels of classroom discourse, and a narrowed curriculum. The conclusion of this meta-analysis that formed one of the biggest and most-systematic reviews of primary-school curriculum and pedagogical change in the past 50 years was this:

Reading attainment has shown just a very slight improvement and attitudes to reading have declined. A clearer focus on those who have serious difficulty with reading would have made sense with less concentration on accountability in general and level 4s in particular. Five hundred million pounds was spent on the National Literacy Strategy with almost no impact on reading levels. (p. 20)

What is the basic lesson to be learned? Rapid implementation and also simultaneous imposition of literacy and math reform requires teachers to change all their practice all at once in the direction of raising performance on the cut scores that count for government targets. This is so overwhelming and overbearing for the teacher that it threatens the basic capacity of the profession to maintain its quality, by narrowing the curriculum, making classroom practices less professionally rich, and ultimately discouraging others from entering or remaining in the profession. It has also created a burden in the capability of teachers who have lived, worked, and survived through this system to develop the 21st Century skills of innovation and creativity that are now at a premium. More importantly still, despite government’s admiration for its own reform success, the extensive and expensive reform program showed no discernable gains in children’s literacy achievement on independent measures and was actually associated with declines in affective engagement with reading.

None of this means that authentic systemwide literacy reform in England has been impossible. My colleagues and I have analyzed and written about the impressive growth in literacy and math achievement in the two London urban school dis-
districts of Tower Hamlets and Hackney, the latter having been operated under a nonprofit Learning Trust for most of the past 10 years (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, 2012; Hargreaves, Boyle, & Harris, 2014; Fullan & Boyle, 2014; Woods, Husbands, & Brown, 2013). Tower Hamlets moved from being the worst-performing school district in England out of 149 such districts in 1996, to performing above the national average on all key indicators, including literacy and math by 2006. The neighboring borough of Hackney, which had taken over Tower Hamlets’ unenviable basement position by 2002, is also now performing above the national averages from 2012 on the same indicators.

The methods to achieve the results were not of the command and control variety. Rather they involved setting a common and inspiring vision for inclusive success; establishing shared targets for improvement rather than having these imposed from the inside; building internal leadership capital wherever possible through strong knowledge of and relationship with local schools rather than importing miracle workers from the outside; realizing that most solutions can and should be developed locally rather than introduced from outside by the private sector; and creating architectures and expectations for schools and professionals to assist each other in professional practice and in taking collective responsibility for each other’s results. Crucially though, these two systems were more like the size of New York’s District 2, rather than being as big and unmanageable as a vast city or entire nation, and they improved steadily and sustainability at 2–3% a year, reflecting genuine transformations in teaching and learning, rather than by higher percentages that are more typically achieved by test preparation or concentrating on Level 4 students to the cost of others.

**Ontario Adjustments**

On the U.S. northern border, the high-performing province of Ontario also took on the strategy of large-scale reform, but tried to learn from the mistakes that had been made in England where support had been insufficient, pressure had been punitive, and change had been implemented too fast.

Inspired, in part, by the systemic literacy-oriented change efforts of Peter Hill and Carmel Crévola in the Catholic School system of Melbourne, Australia (Crévola & Hill, 1998; Hill & Crévola, 1999), Ontario created a literacy and numeracy secretariat that made these areas of change the province’s core priority. It paced the change agenda so that achievement gains would be steady and sustainable rather than spectacular but unstable. It also provided much higher levels of support than in England in terms of resources, training, partnership with the teacher unions, and an emphasis on school-to-school assistance.

Ontario is one of four high-performing provinces on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test at age 15, and Canada is one of the world’s highest performing jurisdictions on that test outside Asia (Knighton, Brochu, & Gluszynski, 2010). Ontario has also attracted attention as an international successful reformer from the OECD (2011), the U.S. National Center for Education and the Economy (Tucker, 2011) and McKinsey and Company (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2011) because of its introduction of specific policies since 2003 to concentrate on raising achievement in elementary students’ literacy and numeracy and on improving high school graduation rates (Levin, Glaze, & Fullan, 2008; Fullan, 2010). There has been gradual, albeit uneven, progress towards reaching the provincial target that was set at 75% of students attaining Level 3 proficiency in Grade 6 on the provincial standardized test administered by the Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). Although this “Drive to 75,” as it has been colloquially called, has not yet reached the stated target, significant gains have been made nonetheless. Proficiency levels stood at around 71% in 2014 — up from 54% at the beginning of the drive in 2004. At the same time, high school graduation rates climbed upwards from 68% in 2004 to 83%.

Ontario’s strategy retained some aspects of England’s high-pressure expectations for change in terms of clear targets for systemwide improvement, but without the inclusion of punitive accountability measures for struggling schools. At the same time, strong support was evident in the establishment of labor peace with the teacher unions, significant increases in financial investment, and abundant provision of quality materials, training, and coaching. Lateral peer-to-peer networks were also established where schools could connect with and receive support from similarly placed schools.

From 2009–2011, I codirected a project with Henry Braun on almost a seventh of Ontario’s 72 school districts in order to determine the architecture and impact of the province’s
special education strategy (Hargreaves & Braun, 2013). It has significant connections with the province’s broader policies to improve literacy. The data from detailed reports we produced for each of the 10 districts, along with survey data collected from classroom and special education resource teachers in all but one of the districts, indicate that educators saw strong and positive connections between the special education strategy and the province’s focus on literacy and numeracy achievement. They felt the project had been associated with improvements in their literacy practice over time that had benefitted not just students with special learning needs, but all students. According to survey responses, from all but one of the boards, this complementary approach encouraged “teachers to engage in practices that benefit students” which has “translated into better results in testing. Also, there is a more-collaborative atmosphere amongst teachers which, in turn, benefits students.”

At the same time, the uses of standardized testing did not receive such consistent support. On the one hand, system administrators tended to be highly supportive of the EQAO because this was a way for them to understand progress in their system and to exert leverage over their schools. Many principals saw some benefits to EQAO, and so too did special education resource teachers who felt that it often pushed classroom teachers in a positive way to take responsibility for all their students and to raise their own expectations for those of them who had been formally identified as having learning disabilities, rather than passing across responsibility for these students to the resource teachers.

At the same time, even with the lessened degree of punitive pressure, the greater degree of instructional and resource support, and explicit admonishments from provincial system leaders warning schools not to “game the system” to get better results, the “Drive to 75” (percent of students reaching Level 3 proficiency) still had these distorting effects. Teachers in one district, for example, reported that they were under constant pressure to move students to the 3.0 mark of measured proficiency and to concentrate especially on those students hovering around the 2.7–2.9 mark. On a chart in one principal’s office, the number of students who fell into these categories was circled in order to stimulate focused interventions that could possibly move more students to a 3.0. As in England, and even within Ontario’s more-supportive environment, some teachers felt that their efforts were directed towards concentrating on and intervening with students near the borderline of measured proficiency at the expense of other students whose own achievement needs may have been just as great or greater. “That’s been a thrust in low performing districts. You need to look at results. You need to look at 2.7 to 2.9 and figure out how to get them over the 3.0 hump. There was no consideration for all the school has done to get kids into level 1” (Hargreaves & Braun, 2013, p. 79). Similar results were reported throughout several districts in the project sample.

What was operating to produce these professional distortions, despite official protestations to the contrary? In the literature on statistical issues in educational testing, there is a famous principle called Campbell’s Law, named after Dartmouth College professor Donald T Campbell: “The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor” (Campbell, 1976).

Ontario’s literacy gains of 2–3% or so every year seem to have been both steady and cumulatively substantial and sustainable. But even its more-advanced strategy had its limitations. The existence and undue influence of end-of-year high-stakes testing accountability still drove some educators to game the system and inflate the scores, even when there was official discouragement to do so.

Ontario’s literacy gains have also not been matched by similar patterns in math, and in the past 5 years, math results have actually fallen slightly (Hammer & Alphonso, 2014). In practice, reformers now acknowledge, the numeracy strategy was not nearly so intensive and effective as the literacy strategy. This is one reason why mathematics achievement and also increasing student’s engagement with mathematics are important priorities in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s 2014 vision paper on Achieving Excellence (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

What is the lesson to be learned here? In practice, even Ontario, with all its change knowledge, has not been able to implement wholesale systemwide changes in literacy and numeracy together, at the same time, just as Elmore & Burney (1997) predicted almost 20 years ago. So one half of the strategy fell by the wayside by default. And if student achievement in literacy is too closely tied to high stakes, end of year testing, even with support and official advice to the
If student achievement in literacy is too closely tied to high stakes, end of year testing, even with support and official advice to the contrary, there were still distortions of results and of teachers’ classroom practices to produce those results.

Saving Wales?
Having seen what we might learn about systemwide literacy reform from England, the U.S., and Canada, let’s consider one final and intriguing example: Wales. In October 2013, I participated as one of two international experts in an OECD team to review the school improvement strategy of Wales (OECD, 2014). Sandwiched between the Irish Sea on one side and England on the other three, this nation of just over 3 million people has the highest poverty rates in the United Kingdom and ranks in the bottom third of all participating countries and jurisdictions on PISA. Wales is the lowest ranking of the four UK countries on PISA, and it is the only one to differ from the rest by a statistically significant degree.

Our review, published in April 2014, paid tribute to Wales’ strong showing on equity among OECD countries, and to its fully comprehensive system of secondary schools where there is negligible private sector participation, and where there are no English-style academies or free schools (the equivalent of U.S. charter schools). These are features that the country shares in common with high-performing Finland. As we noted in our report, Wales had also abolished high-stakes standardized testing after it had taken over control of its educational system from the UK government in London.

At the time of our visit and review, the Welsh government had an aim to move into the top 20 countries and jurisdictions on the PISA tests. It had also embarked on a plan for systemwide reform in literacy and numeracy (or math). So what policy advice could we offer in response to these directions and to the challenges that the country faced?

Among our four key recommendations, we proposed that the Welsh government should build stronger professional capital and a culture of collective responsibility among its teachers to create improved learning for all students. This involved developing strategies to attract high-quality teachers into teaching, but also entailed reducing the feelings of overload among teachers who felt they had to implement too much too fast. One way to achieve this, we said, was to learn from the mistakes of other jurisdictions and sequence the literacy and numeracy strategy into literacy, then numeracy, or vice versa.

A more-sustainable pace of change could be achieved, we added, if the system’s achievement goals and targets were recalibrated to suit a longer-term improvement perspective. The point in raising standards was not to push to get a higher ranking on PISA 2015 for its own sake, and we discouraged policymakers from only doing this. Instead, as the BBC news headlined our review: “Welsh government lacks education ‘long-term vision’” of the kind of learners it wants its students to be. Overall, we said, the Welsh government should, “Develop a shared vision of the Welsh learner, reflecting the government’s commitment to quality and equity, and translate it into a small number of clear measurable long-term objectives” (OECD, 2014). This is the conclusion our team reached on this matter:

Effective continuous professional development and implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework may… require judgments about sequencing. To implement the framework requires teachers to learn three new things: new content in literacy, new content in numeracy, and new pedagogical strategies for effective differentiated teaching in particular. For a primary teacher, these three areas of learning affect all their teaching, almost all of the time, all at once. There is increasing evidence that this is simply too much. (OECD, 2014, p. 76)

In September 2014, in response to the OECD review and other consultation, the Welsh government produced its longer-term vision for 2020. The government is now bolder and clearer about its vision for Welsh learners: Learners in Wales will enjoy teaching and learning that inspires them to succeed, in an education community that works cooperatively and aspires to be great, where the potential of every child and young person is actively developed (Welsh government, 2014).
The Welsh government still has a systemwide numerical improvement target (and there will be critics of this stance), but the goal of scoring above 500 on PISA (currently a standard that only higher-performing countries reach) by 2020 (compared to the previous goal of being in the top 20 jurisdictions by 2015), means that the pace and sequencing of change will be able to be managed more sustainably, that it will be built on a vision of learning and engagement from which achievement will follow, and that the risks of gaming or other kinds of corruption will be lessened by aiming for a standard, rather than a ranking. This is a valuable lesson not only for Wales, but also for all nations undertaking systemwide reforms in literacy, or math, or both.

Conclusion

Almost 20 years on, Elmore and Burney’s (1997) diagnosis and prediction that teachers cannot change everything all at once and be effective in their practice still holds true and bears the weight of international evidence and experience. Michael Barber (2000) was only half right. Genuine systemwide change in education is possible and can be effective; but it cannot be fast.

From New York and San Diego, we know that systems have to own changes rather than rent them out from other people. And this ownership requires time, investment, and understanding on the part of everyone involved.

From England, we have learned that command and control regimes based on high-stakes measures that have been designed and implemented by the systems that need to claim political success, will lead to inflation of the results and distortion of the teaching and learning process, to the detriment of literacy itself.

Even Ontario, with all its care for better balance and stronger support, has been prone to some of these effects, given its existing accountability instruments, and has had difficulty implementing effective systemwide change in numeracy to the same extent and with the same success as it has in literacy.

Wales has pulled back from trying to do too much too fast, though it remains ambitious for the future of all its learners. Instead of racing towards the top 20 of the international PISA rankings within 2 years, it is now embarking on serious and sustainable improvement without rankings and without rancor — to reach a standard, not outstrip a rival.

The point of systemwide literacy change is to be urgent but not to panic, to abandon envy of one’s rivals for aspirations to achieve excellence, and to work in a culture of collaboration and commitment, not in a climate of compliance and fear. This is what the international evidence shows us. It should also be what our professional conscience should tell us.

References


About the Author

Andy Hargreaves is the Brennan Chair in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College and advisor to the Premier and Minister of Education in Ontario. He is the founding editor-in-chief of the Journal of Educational Change and leading editor of the first and second International Handbooks of Educational Change. His books have achieved outstanding writing awards from the American Educational Research Association, the American Libraries Association, the National Staff Development Council, and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, and are translated into many languages. His new book with Alan Boyle and Alma Harris is Uplifting Leadership, published by Jossey-Bass.