

The policies that are set at the state and federal governments are attempting to give all children the same opportunities to learn, and making sure there is accountability on the part of the schools and the teachers. The state standards (and now the national common core standards) are a result of these policies and legislation and affect my teaching a great deal. First of all I am teaching in a school with very little money. The newest math text books are from the 1980's and there is not a full class set of those. The same is true for science and social studies. Reading we did get a new series this year and so have been fortunate that way. Because of these limited resources the only thing I have to "teach from" are the standards and I am piecing together a curriculum based around that, and therefore use them constantly. This is good and bad. It is frustrating to me because it feels like at times my hands are tied as to what I can do in my classroom, because in order to get it all in you have to almost stick strictly to the task at hand so to speak and it makes it really hard to incorporate student's backgrounds and interests.

The positive impact on education is that there is accountability across the grades and school districts. In a school of choice day in age, it is really important that students all have been exposed to the same teachings. Even without school of choice though it is when a teacher gets a new set of children it is good to know that they were all supposed to get the same learning targets the year before and be able to start them at the same place (this I am sure many of you are aware, is not always the case even with standards in place.)

"More than any other federal education law in history, NCLB has affected families, classrooms and school districts throughout the country. Virtually every aspect of schooling—from what is taught in elementary, middle and high school classes, to how teachers are hired, to how money is allocated—has been affected by the statute. These changes appear deeply embedded." (NCLB) The part of this that I think has been the biggest challenge for schools is how money is allocated, which can have huge impacts on the teaching staff and students. I believe learning can take place in any situation and does not need money. I do not believe that specific learning can take place without proper funding and that is what it feels like we as educators have been asked to do. We have been asked to give kids the same very specific experiences (because that is how they learn, by building on experiences) and expected to do so without the necessary monetary support.

The other part in NCLB that haunted me was: "America today faces a stark choice: do we take bold steps to accelerate progress in education and fulfill our promise to our nation's children? Or do we risk jeopardizing the future of our nation's children and our competitiveness in the global economy by maintaining the status quo?" (NCLB) I disagree that these are the options facing America, nor is it the problem we are struggling with.

The problem with education today is not teachers, lack of funding or even policy. The problem with education today is ambiguity and improper assumptions. There is term after term, and goal after goal, which are thrown into the mix of education and it's policy which are full of problems right from the start in that no one can understand them. They are not defined, or the goals are not measurable tasks. Take for instance the national goals discussed in McGill- Frazen

"Three of the National Goals relate to literacy:1

- all children will start school ready to learn;

- all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English . . .; and
- every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.”

The first bulleted goal was the one I thought was the most hardest to wrap my mind around. What does “children will start school ready to learn” even mean? My next thought then was how in the world would anyone enforce that, and how can the schools be held responsible for what should be a task of the parents, and which is at times far from met.

Then I looked at and mulled over the second bulleted goal. I believe the word challenging is immeasurable and truly a word which is dependent upon the person being challenged. There is so much that goes into reading and learning and defining something as challenging. I think of the students in my class and for one certain readings would be much more challenging for one than another and so much of it has little to do with the schooling they had received. I think of my brother and myself. We grew up in the same house with both my parents as teachers, we went to the same school and for the most part had the same teachers through school. Why then was school so much easier for me than it was for him? I am not sure that I was challenged very often, and I know he was challenged on a daily basis.

I understand the point. I agree with the theory of no child left behind, along with many other types of education reform. Unfortunately, for our children we (as in our government and policy makers) are assuming too many things. They are seemly trying to level a playing field for children, when there are so many issues that keep the field from being leveled and those aren’t getting addressed, and instead are being blamed on educators. How can a child who is concerned with his alcoholic parent and how they are going to get through the next hangover, be focused on school? I guess what I am saying is that kids do not start all the same and while I understand that that is exactly what that policy in education is trying to fix, the problem is not the education they are receiving, it is so much more than that.

Then on top of that our students should be outdoing students from other countries in order to succeed. Our national government is pretending to be grappling with the problem of achievement gap(which is a problem), but in reality they are also ticked off we can’t “keep up” with other countries whom have completely different social structures and educational structures than we do here in America.

Here is the heart of what I am saying...what are the goals of education and who gets to set those? The goals and policies don’t always seem to match up and the funding and implementation are not followed through with appropriately. It seems to me that they are only hitting on one or two aspects of education. It also seems as if they are looking at the “products” of education as something other than what they are...children, who come with baggage, experiences, skills, abilities, and all other human aspects. Or maybe if they aren’t looking at them as something other than children they at least seem to be missing the complexity of them. State and federal policies and goals while attempting to affect education positively have so many holes and theories are missing the point of learning: to grow as an individual, which because of the fact that we are dealing with living breathing human beings, could mean very different things.

My last word on policy and such is that if nothing else, one positive aspect of it all is that it has all of us in education never relaxing on our laurels. We are constantly trying to do what's best for kids and in attempting to sort out the policy and the actual learning we as educators are forced to expand how we think and teach and that makes us better.