

Technology Based Learning & NCLB

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By

Max Hodgen

Technology-based learning is in conflict with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In 2001 Congress passed NCLB requiring that schools and districts across the country be held accountable for student performance. States must set targets for school and district performance and assess whether schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP) towards a goal of proficiency for all students (Hannaway, 2008). AYP is calculated by comparing student achievement results on standardized tests in the areas of mathematics and English language arts to the previous year.

There is such an emphasis placed on performing well on state and federal standardized tests that educators today now spend more time than ever 'teaching to the test'. Projects, hands on experiences, field trips, interdisciplinary units and even programs such as art, music and physical education have suffered as a result. According to the Center on Educational Policy (McMurrer, 2007), art and music instruction has declined by 35% since NCLB was enacted. A nationally representative survey of 349 school districts conducted during 2006-07 and interviews with district- and school-level leaders and staff in 13 districts, found that 44% of districts reported cutting time from one or more other subjects or activities (social studies, science, art and music, physical education, lunch and/or recess) at the elementary level (Center on Educational Policy, 2007).

There is no doubt that NCLB is driving school curriculums across the country, and dictating the teaching styles of many educators today. In a case study conducted of 12 schools in Rhode Island and Illinois in the winter and spring of 2007-08 greater emphasis was placed on teacher-lead instruction. In most of the classrooms that were the subject of time-sampling observations, teachers in both states spent a considerable portion of class time asking "closed questions"—those with just one or a few correct answers. Other types of more independent learning activities, such as students working in learning centers, were used somewhat less frequently (Center on Educational Policy, 2009).

One essential condition to teaching, according to the International Society for Technology in Education, is to use a student-centered approach. Assessments should be developed that focus on collaborative projects, activities and real word problems. Technology can serve as the conduit between the learner and actually academic achievement. Technology could be utilized to; promote student interaction, generate multimedia presentations, conduct research, gather and analyze data for math and science experiments, and administer standardized tests.

How can educators develop a technology-based student-centered teaching style and still get their students to meet the demands set forth by NCLB? In my opinion, standardized tests do not challenge students beyond the comprehension level of Bloom's Taxonomy. NCLB has hindered student learning by mandating and placing such an emphasis on assessments that do not reach the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels. I am hopeful with a new administration in the White House we will see a restructuring of NCLB by eliminating AYP. Until the federal government shifts some of its emphasis on accountability and standards based reform, student learning will suffer and teachers will find difficult to fully develop technology-based student-centered classrooms.

References

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