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1 Abstract

In New York State, the Board of Education has continuously changed their educational standards to a higher bar, without realizing that it affects more than just the students in the classroom. By demonstrating a circle diagram of the educational system (refer to 1.1) one will acknowledge that the Board of Education has targeted all assessments to be in place for all grades in all subjects (Hill 1993, 49), therefore all decisions based on curriculum will be issued and monitored through the Board of Education. There seems to be a top down cycle illustrating the Board of Education as the decision-makers, leading into the teacher, which will then teach the students the materials given, while continuously setting assessments in between; testing students will give the Board of Education the results they need in order to distinguish how well the teacher is teaching and how well the curriculum along with the materials are fit for the students, but this is not, what should only be tested and focused on. The Board of Education is so busy raising the standards for the students and think they are making progress with passing policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), but do not realise that students are proceeding into the following grade, without having the adequate knowledge or strength to do so;

2 Questions about NCLB focusing on scores

According to Census (2001), in the three-year period prior to March 2001, 102,867 immigrant students registered for grades Pre-k to 12 in New York City public schools, therefore, greater amount of students which are non-native English speakers are entering the classrooms and face a difficult time with certain subject matters, especially in English. Although there is the English Language Learner support group, which the Board of Education has conducted, the problem with this program is that it does not last or continue to support these students with their studies. Is the proper support given to these students by the teachers, while in a classroom filled with native English speakers or are they just left to suffer with the adjustments to the curriculum alone? Are non-native English learners following along with the rest of the students or will they be passed just so there will be no child left behind? I will be focusing on how teachers and English language learners are affected by NCLB in New York State, particularly problems with curriculum, how scores are meant to be read and what the Board of Education may need to keep in mind, while building up their curriculums and simultaneously, their expectations; more focus should be on the students, their needs and their abilities. NCLB may be a poor result and may cause failure to English language learners, due to the high standards set, simultaneously, demanding from ALL students to contain high scores in English and Math; this is supported by Smith and Kovacs (2011), when they explain that teachers believe NCLB is not a positive step in educational reform and there is pressure to raise test scores, therefore teachers were quite discouraged by this, forcing teachers to not encourage others to enter teaching and considered leaving the field themselves. Thankfully, on January 10, 2011 a new and improved Common Core Curriculum is brought forth, with hopes of saving students from a curriculum, which was focused on just testing rather than the central point focusing on pupil needs, accountability purposes and improving instruction, as these are reasons for which NCLB formed. Common Core Curriculum and NCLB will be compared, as to find an outcome based on why students are not receiving higher grades and what is it about ethnicity which sets test scores apart? Perhaps, beginning from the history of language policy in the U.S., this may answer some questions relevant to how the Board of Education shapes language policy for the public school curriculum in New York, while relying on the NCLB Act.

3 No Child Left Behind affecting student scores, ELL students and teacher careers

Menken (2008, 13) argues that in the United States, implicit language policies often take on the role of the more explicit official ones in the absence of a national language, focusing on policies which help shape and maintain education in the United States for public school curriculum, rather than signing paperwork and making it official. All ideas, thoughts, theories and structures of education, are passed through the Board of Education for further analysis and if they approve these concepts, then teachers are given permission to take action in their classrooms. Since the Board of Education is part of the government, this makes them automatically able to modify the curriculum, without any search of approval in passing a law and making it part of official documents; the main factor for the educational system in the United States is merely focused around the No Child Left Behind (NCLB); NCLB is perceived as a language policy, even though this is not stated in the law nor is the law presented to the general public as such (Menken 2008,13).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy has been in effect since January 2002, giving every state, the right to receive federal aid, but [they] must put into place a set of standards together with a detailed testing plan designed to make sure the standards are being met (Peterson, West, 2003, 2);

this plan of change has been in battle for approximately thirty years before putting forth, but this does not promise to make drastic changes over night. The federal legislation wanted to pass this policy because they believed that the NCLB would provide a strong educational foundation for all students; they recognised the existing inequalities in these public schools, in which local governments were failing to address before NCLB and reform the practises which have failed to educate all pupils adequately. In order to understand these issues and indicate a solution, we would have to blame the Board of Education in which formulated the curriculum and policy, the teachers not focusing on student needs, but more focus is put forth on the materials provided by the Board of Education and the parents not helping the child as much as they can during hours spent at home because they do not obtain the adequate English level; since these are all factors which can be blamed in a situation like this, let us focus on them individually, therefore adding up to the problematic situation NCLB has caused.

NCLB has stated that in America, no child should be left behind and every child should be educated to his or her potential (Ball, Tyson 2011, 39), but what does this mean and to what extent does this policy promise that no child will be left behind? One of the main changes NCLB has put forward is the detailed testing plan, which was designed to distinguish if schools have met the standards. Peterson and West (2003, 8) have stated every year, every school will need to show that students (as well as students within each ethnic subgroup of significant size) are making on average, adequate progress toward full educational proficiency, especially in grades 3-8 with a particular focus in Reading and Math and in grades 10-12, additional testing in Science will be given. The question which comes to mind is, how the government is so confident about student progress, since the teachers are the ones in which are trained to know how a child learns, various techniques and methods used to make students understand certain subject areas, especially the rate of each child's academic learning.

The ideas behind the formation of the NCLB policy, according to Billings and Tate (2006, 159), is that it is about finding the right technologies/research of what works and [it] penalizes those not working hard enough (teachers do not try hard enough or the poor decided not to work); Instead of focusing on how to better education, by setting a curriculum which fits the level of each student, the government legislation decides to focus on a policy in which pays close attention to test scores and blames teachers for this outcome; by this I mean to express that students learn on different levels, using various ways or learning techniques, therefore keeping this in mind and distinguishing this, can make a difference on the child's academic progress. The teachers job is to keep track of the students academic performances, whereas I feel as if the NCLB policy does not help or work along with teachers, since they do not receive the adequate information or help by the government to guide these children to truly progress in their studies.

4 Student Needs and the fragile topic of religion and culture

The Board of Education has certain tasks for the teachers to engage in, and is able to adjust the curriculum for all U.S. schools; this is exactly why the government often blames and criticises teachers for the students weak scores on tests, often referring to the teachers performance as ineffective in the classroom. An effective teacher will be cautious of certain factors in the classroom, which may impact student performance. The teacher's task is to bear in mind the student, meaning the student needs, religion and ethnicity for maintaining a comfortable environment for the student; after all, the teacher is working in an environment with students of various cultures. In order to understand the impact of current educational policy, it would be necessary to research and shine some light on previous policies in education and how NCLB has affected school curriculum; Menken (2008, 14)

states the first section sets recent federal legislation within a broader historical context, describing the treatment of cultural and linguistic diversity in federal education policy over time. Private schools do not have this problem because these students usually share the same background and religious practise. For example, I attended a Greek-American private school in New York, which meant that 99% of the school population were Greek-Americans and the remaining 1% was made up of other ethnic backgrounds, most likely Spanish or Italians. If a parent chose to place their child in this private school, that would mean that the child would have to follow a weekly routine of attending church ceremonies, praying in the morning and before lunch and curriculum requires at least three hours of religion class per week. Public schools sometimes may avoid dealing with fragile topics such as religion and different cultures, but when it is relevant to the discussion and meets the academic requirements, students have the right to express personal religious views in class or as part of a written assignment (Nord, Haynes 1998, 20); the only aspect which is prohibited to do is not to force their classmates to participate in a religious exercise or harass others about their religion (ibid, 1998, 20) and teachers should be aware, if discussions are leading into dangerous territories; the same treatment should be practiced with ethnic backgrounds.

5 Overview of mixed cultures following American public school curriculum and possible solutions for English Language Learners

Although, the United States does not have an official language, there are some reasons behind why the founders of the U.S.A. chose to stay away from announcing an official language and these are exemplified by Finegan and Rickford (2004, 320) (1) the dominance of English was self-evident, rendering an official policy unnecessary; (2) the founders respected linguistic diversity and minority rights; (3) hesitant to offend minorities who had supported the revolutionary cause the founders opted for a tolerant approach. English has been historically required for federal grant applications, requirement for many jobs and it is the decreed language of schooling (ibid, 322), therefore whoever wishes to migrate to the United States, in any case, will need to learn the English language to get by in their daily lives. Although, according to the 2000-2010 Census, records indicate that Asians and Hispanics have the highest population increase in New York State, with a percentage between 43.0% and 43.3%; this may perhaps be the reasons behind why the second most spoken language in the U.S. is Spanish, but why is English the first language in the U.S.? Fuller (2013, 14), argues that the ideologies surrounding Spanish in the U.S., as discussed by Schmidt (2002), revolve largely around Spanish minority immigrant language, spoken by the underclass, which is perceived by many, that Spanish is not what should be spoken by business workers, but rather she continues to inform that anglophones who can also speak Spanish may have employment opportunities in education and social services; Notice how education is one the most important factors in the U.S., especially when most of the student population is of Hispanic origin. Although, Spanish is the second and most spoken languages in the U.S., Spanish would be used within the country, but outside of the U.S. there is little recognition of Spanish as a global language, or a powerful language for business transactions (ibid, 2013, 14), and this deals with the amount of Hispanics migrating and multiplying in the U.S. yearly; immigrant children grow apart from their known environment and quickly adapt to the new environment, which are exposed to and this of course, is public school.

The government never estimated that English would ever vanish, therefore was not concerned with declaring legislation, just for language policy in the U.S.A. The reason behind why the U.S. government feels secure about the "official" language never altering to another, is partially due to the educational system they have set for the children; it is quite in favour for the U.S. to spread their

American system in education onto these children, especially of other languages. Fuller (2013, 6) states, once endorsed by educators, politicians and the media the national/official language may lend authority to those who speak it and those who are considered experts in it (e.g. educators, authors of dictionaries, national language societies); The children will grow to become "Americanized", not only from media, music and fashion, but they will begin by adjusting through the educational system first. Public school provides students with "a core curriculum, which prepares them for productive lifestyles and work, making a connection between student interest and life beyond the classroom and the immediate content of the curriculum" (Anon. 1990, 4), forcing children from adolescence, to engage in thinking about their life and careers for the future; quick pace, instead of gradual steps towards a goal is exactly what U.S., especially New York State is characterized as in the work force and education.

As mentioned by Theodora Chang (2012), in the decade from 1998 to 2008, the number of English language learner students increased from 3.5 million to 5.3 million, and researchers estimate that 1 in 10 public schools in the United States is an English language learner student; since student population is made up of mostly Asian and Hispanic origins, the Board of Education came out with a new program for non-native English speakers called English Language Learning Program ELL, ELA and ESL. According to this program, students are to take the NYSESLAT, which is a mandated test for all LEP/ELLs. Every LEP/ELL student must take this test until she/he has reached the level of proficient in English, which will allow her/him to exit a bilingual education or ESL program (2013), and yet most of the students go through the stages of this program successfully, but still end up lost or fall behind in the curriculum which native English speakers are in. Why does this happen, since these students have graduated from the program and moved on to the curriculum taught in public schools? What is the reasoning behind this? Ann M. Johns (1994) is a teacher of English as Foreign Language and has taught in various countries such as the U.S., China and Egypt, leaving her with unforgettable experiences; Johns (1994, 60) informs, while lecturing in the United States to American-born students, [I] gauge interest by the number of thoughtful questions that follow [my] formal presentation. However, in China, if a listener poses a question, it is considered to be an attack upon the perfection of the speakers lecture, making it suitable to say that each student learns and acts differently in the classroom.

6 Experience and solutions for dealing with mixed culture students-getting to know their needs

I had a similar experience while doing microteaching, and it had to do with Chinese students; two out of the eight students I was teaching did not respond, ask questions after I said something that was difficult for them to understand and this put them behind in the class. The teacher needs to be informed and that is the reason we have a number of assessments between the beginning and end of the teaching period. After two sessions, I understood what was going on and confronted them nicely about the situation. While monitoring the room and checking if everyone was doing the task which was given, I realised these two students were not following with the rest of the class and this was because of one grammar topic I have taught the previous class, which they did not quite grasp; they did not have anything written down on their paper. In order to help these students, without making them feel distress, is to invite them to tape the classes (because it may be the case that [the teacher] is speaking quickly) (Johns 1994, 62); this may give them a chance to hear the class discussion for a second or third time and understand. If these were my permanent students, I would ask them to give me a few bullet points on what they have understood and this can give me the feedback I need to help

them with their needs; this strategy will help assist in understanding what the students have learned and what they haven't and whether their reading is effective (Johns 1994, 63). A good suggestion made by Johns (1994, 62) involves direct questions made to students, in order to investigate language and literacy, which can be a good way to analyse the students' proficiency, especially with students who feel as if they are interrupting or feel that it is inappropriate to ask questions. Asking for anonymous suggestions about the class, can also be beneficial for the more quiet students. Going back to NCLB, demanding and analysing student performance on test scores, can be problematic for certain students; this example about Chinese students may be the main problem which most teachers or even the Board of Education do not bother to take into account and just let the problem pass unnoticed. Kugler (2012, 109) indicates that in the world of education, differentiation is not only a buzz word but a best practice that is used by the most effective teachers to tailor the content to meet the needs of diverse learners, making it clear that in a classroom there will be multiple levels of learning, therefore the teacher is responsible to provide the adequate instruction at a variety of skill levels (ibid, 110). Theodora Chang (2012) insists on general education classroom teachers, who may be accustomed to working primarily with student who speak English fluently, will need to adapt their teaching techniques to reach students who have varying levels of English language proficiency, making it clear that teachers needed the support to adjust their teaching techniques and make more of an effort to help English language learners.

7 A new outlook on public education curriculum

Who is to blame when student performance falls below the average test scores? The Board Of Education immediately points their focus on the teachers and asks for explanations. According to Smith and Kovacs (2011) a brief examination of NCLB's sanctions, puts pressure on teachers (required by NCLB to be highly qualified) and administrators to improve test scores lest they lose their jobs, which proves to be cruel towards the teachers which educate their students, but the pressure does not end there; Smith and Kovacs (2011) also claim the sanctions grow more punitive over time, beginning by labelling schools that fail to meet AYP goals as needs improvement and placing them on the watch list, immediately putting at stake, the teachers in which were given specific instructions and materials made by the Board of Education, which were also held responsible for the academic curriculum altogether. How can a teacher be supported or even motivated to further their teaching experience for years to come? The legislation was driving teachers from the profession, especially in high-poverty, high-minority schools (ibid, 2011), once NCLB was introduced. Instead of blaming teachers for the failing test scores, the Board of Education knew they needed to make adjustments; in 2010, the Common Core Standards was formed and this gave teachers and students a new and improved outlook on education.

In January 2011, the Board of Education set forth a new curriculum for students of Pre-12 (primary-secondary), referring to this new system as "The Common Core Standards"; The Common Core Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers aimed at instilling a common understanding for students, parents, and educators about what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate high school to succeed in college and careers (NYC.gov, 2013). It offers an additional 15% of extra focus in NYS-specific standards in ELA (English Language Arts) and Mathematics. For ELA, the additional emphasis is on literacy-building, teaching reading of informational text, integration of research skills and emphasis on writing to argue, inform and explain and better prepares students for college-level writing. For mathematics, fewer topics are introduced and there will be more time for

concepts to be reinforced, focus is on mastery on algebra and geometry and mathematical modelling in the upper grades. The reason why the Board of Education changed the curriculum is due to the regents examination percentages, descending almost 23% since 2008; since percentages of immigrant students increased, over the span of ten years (2000-2010), as mentioned above, only 13% of New Yorks English Language Learners placed in classrooms with native English speakers met the proficiency bar in English during the 2010-2011 school year (Chang, 2012); this may be due to the levels of English the students are at when ending the support program for English language Learners and beginning to attend regular English classrooms with native English speakers. In 2011-2012 school year, the percentages for ELA had a dramatic rise from 57% to almost 73% with passing grades because the new curriculum was put forth; The Common Core Standards was just what students needed to achieve better test scores, having extra help and focus on their weaknesses, which were English and Math.

The Board of Education may administer and decide upon the curriculum and materials which teachers will be teaching in their classrooms, but giving teachers and students a voice may make a difference on test scores. Since the Board of Education is concerned with raising the standards and setting out a curriculum which will very well set all students on the same level, at least provide support groups for the teachers and students to work together to make this happen; both teachers and students need the motivation to make effort in their careers and studies, but without the Board of Educations help this can only make them go backwards and not strive for excellence. Not only does the teacher need to be aware of student needs, but also the Board of Education, since they are the ones who need to know what is acceptable and adequate for the students. I can say that, after a few years of having failed at their plan of NCLB, the Board of Education is more cooperate, since the formation of the Common Core Curriculum Standards having their needs finally answered; what the students needed was extra focus in English, preparing students for college-level writing and Math was omitting subject areas, engaging in the most important ones such as mastering algebra and geometry, also preparing them for the following school year. Having the opportunity of microteaching, made me realise that certain aspects of public school in New York are invisible, such as English language learners being placed in a classroom filled with native English speakers; this may benefit them, since everything is spoken and written in English, but this can also damage their scores severely. Without having the help and support in these classrooms, then this can put back an entire nation.

8 References

9 Appendix