Time Added to Reading Instruction Due to No Child Left Behind

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Abstract

No Child Left Behind was passed by the Bush Administration in 2002. This impacted reading instruction; and the "Great Debate" has been going on for many decades over how to teach reading, phonics or "whole-language". The Center on Education Policy did a lot of research on the amount of time spent on reading instruction. It has gone up significantly since NCLB was passed. Eight out of ten schools reported to have increased reading instruction time by at least seventy-five minutes per week. Schools are also taking time away from other subject areas in order to increase the reading time which is making it hard for teachers to teach all the standards. Teachers need to be teaching more and more interdisciplinary lessons.

Time Added to Reading Instruction Due to No Child Left Behind

Why is there time being added to reading instruction and where is this time coming from? No Child Left Behind started impacting education in the 2001-2002 school year. The studies show that this is affecting reading instruction time. Reading and math instruction time has increased in most schools while instruction time for other subjects has decreased since NCLB has been passed. Since the government required all students to pass tests annually in reading and math, school districts are taking time away from other subjects and increasing time spent on reading and math instruction.

The government has been trying to improve the education system for nearly five decades. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. The act, according to the National Education Association (2002), "is the main federal education law, describing federal requirements for the nation's public schools, most of which receive some form of aid under the statute, PL 107-110"(NCLB - The Basics, para. 1). ESEA was revised every five to seven years until 2001. In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the Bush Administration signed it in 2002 (National Education Association NCLB - The Basics, para. 1&2).

In order to hold schools accountable, NCLB requires everything from proficient test scores and adequate progress to attendance. According to the NCLB, all students in grades three through eight and one high school grade are to be tested in math and reading, once a year. All students, including blacks, Hispanics, low-income, special needs, and English language learners, have to be testing at a proficient level by the year 2014. They should also be making adequate progress between 2001 and 2014. If one student does not

meet the proficient test scores by 2014, then the school is considered to have failed. Other requirements included having at least ninety-two percent daily attendance from kindergarten through eight grade. Ninety-five percent of students have to take the administered test. Also seventy percent of high school students have to pass Grade 10 Massachusetts Comprehension Assessment System (MCAS) tests which are required to graduate (NCLB's AYP Requirements, para. 1-3).

Many people are unsure of whether NCLB is going to increase student achievement or not. The Center on Education Policy (CEP) did a lot of research on this topic. According to CEP (1996), "a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools (Mission and Role, para. 1)," schools with three or more years of good records saw that student achievement went up since 2001 when NCLB was put into place. In nine out of thirteen states that had good test records before and after NCLB showed that the achievement gaps were much larger after than before. A direct correlation, between the amount of instruction time and achievement gaps, is evident. A lot of people are against NCLB but there are a lot of studies showing that it is increasing student achievement.

How to teach reading has been a debate for many decades among teachers, parents and scholars. The two methods being discussed in the "Great Debate" on how to teach reading are phonics and the "whole-language" method. Phonics "enables readers to decode unfamiliar words by sounding them out using sound-letter relationships" (Clark, 1995, Introduction para. 1). The "whole-language" method "plunges readers directly into real stories and words" (Clark, 1995, Introduction para. 1).

Those for phonics want teachers to be teaching children to sound out words first. Students need to learn about forty-four sounds-letter relationships, like br, and cr, before they should be given actual words. Phonics can be very hard to teach and could get dull very fast. Phonics is a lot of repetition of drills and using flashcards and workbooks (Clark, 1995, Overview para. 10 & 32).

The method of “whole-language” or “meaning-first” allows students to learn to read like they learned how to speak. When this happens, the teacher puts whole words, sentences, and stories in front of the student. This approach is very student-centered learning. The goal of this approach is to develop readers that enjoy reading (Clark, 1995, Overview para. 11 & 15).

The difference between the two methods can be confusing to anyone, even teachers. Some teachers use a mixture of both methods for their reading instruction. Clark (1995) quoted a doctoral student that may help distinguish between the two:

> A teacher using a skills-based [phonics] approach would specifically teach children the effect of a silent ”E“ on the end of a word,” writes Eric J. Gee, a Utah State University doctoral student who has written on the effectiveness of whole-language reading. “The teacher would explain that 'bit' uses the short 'I' sound while 'bite' uses the long 'I' sound because of the silent 'E.' A teacher using the whole-language approach would not point this out but rather expose the child to several words with and without the silent 'E' and allow the child to arrive at their own conclusion about the rule. (Overview para 12)

The phonics teacher would be teaching why something sounds the way it does and the “whole-language” teacher is letting the students figure out the rules by themselves.

Those against the "whole-language" method say that it is a guessing game. Clark (1995) quoted a conservative activist, Phyllis Schlafly, who stated, "When you're on the operating table you care whether your doctor knows the difference between spine and spleen" (Overview para. 14). Something else, along those lines, that Clark (1995) wants us to consider is that if the sentence "The bug is on the rug" is given to a student and the students says "The insect is on the carpet" it is considered correct by the "whole-language" method (Overview para. 33).

Those for the "whole-language" approach want to develop readers that enjoy reading and not just able to decode words using phonics. Whole-language advocates argue that if a child picks their own reading material then they will be much more interested in what they read than if they are required to read something. The focus for the "whole-language" method is for the students to read for meaning (Overview para. 15 & 25). Clark (1995) quoted a whole-language advocate saying, "Professional speakers and news readers make frequent 'errors' at the word level, but these misreadings are unimportant because meaning is retained" (Overview para. 34).

Phonics seems to be the way that most teachers are teaching reading right now, although this could change at anytime due to new research. The "whole-language" method does not have rules for the students to follow and it is very student-centered. The thing that teachers have to remember is that NCLB is holding teachers accountable for their test scores. Clark (1995) quoted the creator of Hooked on Phonics, John Shanahn, who compared the "whole-language" method and phonics very bluntly, "Take your choice: Memorize the dictionary or 44 sounds" (Overview para. 30).

Teachers are being required to spend more time on reading instruction, which can be done in a number of different ways. A teacher can model reading by reading aloud to them and showing the students exactly what s/he wants them to do. S/he can read as the students follow along which is shared reading. The teacher and students can work together on fluency and expression, which is known as interactive reading. A teacher can do guided reading in small groups where s/he focuses on how the student uses the strategies that they know. Finally, the teacher can have the students read independently which requires the least amount of support (Tompkins, 2006, p. 27).

Schools have also increased reading instruction since NCLB was put into place. CEP's McMurrer (2008) looked into how much time schools are adding reading and math instruction since the 2001-2002 school year. Sixty-two percent of school districts increased their amount of time instructing English language arts (ELA) and/or math. They also found that forty-four percent of school districts increased their time spent on ELA and/or math while decreasing their amount of time spent on other areas. More reading instruction time is needed to ensure that students pass standardized tests but school districts are taking away from other important subjects.

Some of the areas that time was cut from were science, social studies, art and music, physical education, recess, and lunch (McMurrer, p. 2). Students need subjects like art, music and science to be creative and explore things. Students, especially ADHD students, need recess in order to sit still during reading instruction time. Teachers are finding it hard to meet the other content area standards when they are spending so much time on reading and math.

A lot of people are wondering how much time is being added to reading instruction a week. McMurrer (2008) found that a lot of school districts are increasing reading and math instruction by several minutes a week since NCLB was passed. Eight out of ten school districts increased their time teaching ELA by at least seventy-five minutes per week. This comes out to about 15 minutes more a day spent on ELA than before. Fifty-four percent said they increased their ELA instruction by 150 minutes per week which is thirty minutes a day.

On the other hand, only sixty-three percent of districts increased their math instruction by seventy-five minutes per week and only nineteen percent increased their math instruction by at least 150 minutes per week (McMurrer, p. 1). It seems very obvious what subjects the school districts and teachers are concerned about their students passing when it comes to standardized tests. The standardized tests are based on reading and math so it seems obvious to increase time spent on those subjects but I think they are adding too much time to reading and math instruction.

So if schools are increasing the amount of time spent on ELA and they are not adding time onto the school day, then where is this extra time coming from? The Center of Education Policy's studies have shown that schools take time away from other areas in order to spend more time on ELA and/or math. Fifty-three percent of school districts that reported increasing ELA or math and reducing other subject areas, cut social studies and science instruction by at least seventy-five minutes. A total of seventy-two percent reported to have cut a total of at least seventy-five minutes of instruction from one or more subject areas (McMurrer, p. 1). This can be very discouraging to the students that excel in or really enjoy the other subject areas. What are we taking away from those

students? I think we could be discouraging students that one day might have been an astronaut, a professional artist, or the researcher that cures cancer. Other subject areas such as art, science, social studies and physical education are outlets for some students, which they are no longer getting as much time to explore.

Social Studies has been hard for some teachers to find time to teach. CEP includes several tables with figures that show what they have found. ELA instruction has increased by fifty-eight percent since the 2001-2002 school year. On average, teachers are spending 141 minutes more a week on ELA than before. On the other hand, thirty-six percent of school districts have decreased their amount of time spent instructing social studies. The highest percentage of school districts are decreasing time spent teaching social studies. On average they decreased teaching social studies by seventy-six minutes per week (McMurrer, p. 2).

> Manzo explains (2008), “"We have been hearing from our elementary school teachers for a number of years" that they have less and less time to teach social studies, said Gayle Thieman, the president of the Silver Spring, Md.-based National Council for the Social Studies. "What social studies does particularly well is give students the opportunity to apply their literacy skills, build vocabulary, learn concepts, and get the background knowledge they need."” (Blending of Curriculum, para. 3)

The president of CEP, Jack Jennings, suggested that researchers should be finding ways for teachers to teach interdisciplinary lessons. In other words, teachers need to find a way to teach reading and social studies at the same time (Blending of Curriculum, para. 5). Teachers should always be looking for ways to teach several different subjects in one lesson because it saves them time. There are several standards for each subject so writing

interdisciplinary lessons is the best way to save time. Instead of cutting social studies time in order to do reading, have the students read about a historical event and write a paper on it.

Teachers who are complaining that NCLB has required them to spend more time on reading and less on everything else, need to write interdisciplinary lesson plans. There are several sources online and in books that will help teachers develop interdisciplinary lesson plans. The NCLB act needs to be modified because some goals are not obtainable. The teachers need to start taking advantage of the interdisciplinary resources available to them.

No Child Left Behind took affect in the 2001-2002 school year and since then student achievement has increased. Research is showing that reading and math instruction times have also increased since NCLB. The school day is not getting longer so school districts are taking time away from other subject areas in order to spend more time on reading and math instruction. Teachers and/or researchers need to be developing lessons that cover more then one subject area so that all the standards are taught.

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