

The Changing Face of School Accountability A Charge to Teacher Educators to Make Radical Changes

Dr. Kirsten Limpert
Emporia State University
Dr. Stuart Ervay
Emporia State University

Abstract

Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative is being replaced by a much different approach called Common Core Standards (CCS), education's challenge is to find ways to effectively incorporate the CCS guidelines within local curricula. This paper discusses past, current, and future teacher education as they relate to NCLB and CCS. In addition, four specific recommendations are made as we examine possible features of future teacher preparation programs as they relate to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and academic program decision-making.

Introduction

In 1939 Harold Benjamin wrote a little book titled *The Saber Tooth Curriculum* under the pseudonym of J. Abner Peddiwell. It was a satirical commentary based on how a primitive society continued to teach its young people to defend themselves against the Saber Tooth Tiger long after it had become extinct. The book was an allegory illustrating how schools tend to continue teaching subjects no longer relevant to society's needs.

Such a phenomenon exists today in America's schools, although it isn't as simple as Benjamin's 1939 description of an antiquated curriculum. Public school curriculums in this country have tended to be an assortment of everything from essential basic skills to the coverage of academic odds and ends that authors of textbooks believed to be important, often based on perspectives of college professors who specialize in particular subject disciplines.

Via the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* mandate an attempt was made by our national government at the beginning of the 21st Century to force elementary and middle school educators to refocus their attention on essential skills in mathematics and reading, as specified by standards and measured using high stakes tests. Now the NCLB initiative is being replaced by a much different approach reflected in something called the *Common Core Standards (CCS)*. Unlike NCLB, which emphasized curricular bits and pieces through benchmarks and indicators, *Common Core Standards* are advertised as being guidelines out of which a local curriculum can be created. Educators throughout the nation are scrambling to figure out how to reorganize their internal academic decision-making processes to align with the miscellaneous principles indicated in the new standards—which as yet have no high stakes assessments aligned to them.

As if the emergence of a standards system that cannot be easily "unpacked" by public schools is not challenging enough, other dimensions to a student's academic development are now recognized. While it's been around for years, Daniel Goleman

(1994) and other theorists suggest that human beings become fulfilled through more than academic prowess, an approach typically referred to as *emotional intelligence* or the *emotional quotient (EQ)*. Common sense tells us there is much truth to that concept, since we all know of otherwise mediocre students who excel in real life situations. Goleman (1994, pg. 4) feels “We have gone too far in emphasizing the value and import of the purely rational—of what IQ measures—in human life. For better or worse, intelligence can come to nothing when the emotions hold sway.” Decades ago Abraham Maslow (1943) presented a similar idea in his compelling studies on what he called a *hierarchy of needs* that, under some circumstances, lead to the manifestation of what he termed a *self-actualized personality*. Maslow emphasized the importance of self-actualization, which is a process of growing and developing as a person in order to achieve individual potential. He described this level as the desire to accomplish everything that one can, to become the most that one can be.

So, how does one address the primary title of this article: *The Changing Face of School Accountability*? In the recent past business leaders and agency personnel were quick to find the easy answer, that accountability may be measured on valid and reliable instruments that prove schools meet expectations that can be quantified and compared. NCLB, as a simplistic technique to measure basic skills in mathematics and reading, responded to those expectations. However, under the new Common Core approach, mixed with a renewed interest in emotional intelligence and other nuanced human characteristics, holding schools accountable is a much more complex effort.

Toward a Society of Achievers, Contributors and Leaders: the Role of Teacher Educators

NCLB focused on the inculcation of basic skills in mathematics and reading, but was so pervasive that it dominated pedagogical thinking and action for at least a decade. In some states NCLB influenced all curricular decisions, regardless of subject, through the elementary grades. It also had an impact on middle and high schools in that they were to collect, record and use data on students. Those data were typically generated by criterion-referenced standardized tests, supplemented by norm-referenced standardized assessments developed by testing companies and universities.

As an accountability tool, NCLB emphasized minimum expectations. It also relied on state standards that were frequently fragmented into knowledge and skill bits, a characteristic that allowed teachers and those developing high stakes tests to focus on single-dimension outcomes. Common Core Standards and the focus on other aspects of student growth are turning all of that on its head.

For teacher educators (as well as staff developers, classroom teachers, curriculum directors and administrative leaders), the ramifications of this change are huge! Let's review the elements that will cause teacher educators, particularly, to examine what is currently being done (black print) against what must be done in the future (red print).

PROGRAMMATIC CATEGORY	PAST AND CURRENT TEACHER EDUCATION	FUTURE TEACHER EDUCATION
CURRICULUM	<p>In the past teacher educators tended to view curriculum in terms of what is covered in textbooks and other prepared material. <i>Teacher educators helped their students work with such materials.</i></p> <p>With No Child Left Behind (NCLB), teacher educators turned their attention to standards and how they should be "unpacked" for instructional purposes. <i>Teacher educators helped students define and interpret benchmarks and indicators, and to discern how they should be incorporated into daily lesson plans and instructional activities. In so doing, they also focused on formative and summative assessments.</i></p>	<p>Common Core Standards (CCS) and other initiatives are currently presented as being "guidelines" from which a local curriculum can be created. The people most responsible for the development of that curriculum must be teachers themselves, and they---at this time---are often not capable of writing and implementing a results-based curriculum that is substantive, comprehensive, relevant, and coherent in terms of knowledge areas and skills students need now and in the future. <i>Teacher educators face the challenge of helping their students interpret the CCS guidelines, and to teach them how to write a well aligned curriculum that is focused, deeply meaningful, and taught to a level of mastery that also builds the confidence of their future K-12 pupils in the areas of (1) solving situational and authentic problems, (2) firmly articulating a point-of-view, (3) using writing skills to better communicate in all the core disciplines, and (4) justifying positions through use of data and other evidence. (Note the Emotional Quotient element here.)</i></p>
INSTRUCTION	<p>Teacher educators have typically done a good job guiding prospective teachers in conducting effective instructional programs. Preparation programs often incorporated proven theories emanating from historical pedagogical giants, to more recent experts such as Madeline Hunter(1982) and contemporary experts such as Robert Marzano(2007). <i>Teacher educators who use Marzano's approach and other contemporary methods employ strategies that are much more precise and professionally focused than before. That approach is essential in ensuring that published "intentions for student learning" (locally or elsewhere) are connected to what happens in the classroom with regard to student learning.</i></p>	<p>Those of us who work in districts trying to design a curriculum around the CCS realize their "guidelines" characteristic makes them very challenging to teachers accustomed to simply transporting pieces from a set of standards into a daily lesson plan. Because of that challenge, setting up an instructional program that uses appropriate scaffolding, scope and sequence, and accurate and measurable verbs is a monumental challenge. <i>Teacher educators must guide prospective teachers to either work from a curriculum that is well constructed at the district level, or develop their own curriculum out of which instruction can be well designed, articulated and sequenced. That requires the use of something like the <u>Instructional Planning Resource</u> used by the Curriculum Leadership Institute, along with functional pacing guides that ensure that classroom time is used efficiently and effectively.</i></p>
ASSESSMENT	<p>For many years the only aspects of assessment taught carefully to prospective teachers focused on</p>	<p>Today the operant focus of onsite and high stakes assessments can best be labeled <i>learning targets</i>. Unlike the NCLB</p>

	<p>selecting the correct test format for the material being assessed, such as multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank, and essay. Teacher candidates were also required to take a "test and measures" class, which typically emphasized standardized examinations and their uses for classification and predicting student success. In more recent years the notion of classroom testing for preparing students to take high stakes tests, or for generating data required by a district or state department of education, became more prevalent.</p> <p><i>Teacher educators gradually moved from showing how teachers could better use published tests (usually associated with a textbook series) to creating test categories extrapolated from those based on standards, and created or sponsored by state departments of education. Typically those state assessments were used to establish NCLB norms, which caused considerable variance between states.</i></p>	<p>approach, learning targets are usually characterized as being both formative and summative, and based on the broader-based and more substantive Common Core Standards. Two consortia have been funded by the United States Department of Education to create those tests: <i>Smarter Balanced</i> (http://www.smarterbalanced.org) and <i>The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers</i> (http://www.parcconline.org/about-parcce). Each consortium is responsible for roughly half the states that have agreed to use the Common Core Standards. Their assessments in mathematics and language arts will be ready in 2014. <i>Smarter Balanced</i> already has issued sample test questions in the area of mathematics, and they can be located at that consortium's web page. <i>Teacher educators need to become well acquainted with the Common Core Standards as they exist and are being developed now, and also be conversant with the work of Smarter Balanced and The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. They should also develop their own skills in linking the intended curriculum (complete with verbs and content fields) to assessment strategies, since there is now very little distinction between that which is an "intention" for student learning and the processes used to measure student mastery of those intentions.</i></p>
<p>ACADEMIC PROGRAM DECISION-MAKING AND APPLICATION</p>	<p>This category in traditional teacher education programs was never prominent, and even nonexistent in many preparation institutions. The reason for that condition has much to do with the way American public school organizations have been established from the Nineteenth Century to the present. They are a reflection of the way Americans organize business and the military, with policy-making boards on top of the hierarchy, managers who implement that policy directly underneath, and those who actually do the day-to-day work at the bottom. <i>Teacher educators rarely if ever explained how K-12 teachers would or could be involved in significant academic decision-making at the building or district</i></p>	<p>Although many public school educators and lay members of school boards don't yet realize it, implementation of the Common Core Standards will require much more than academic decision-making as it is currently conducted. In the past teachers could be trained to discern curricular content from published materials and standards. In that era educational gurus suggested that all teachers needed to do was "unpack" informational literature or standards, a task often made easy by focusing on primary topics or using "power indicators" (usually pieces of benchmarks that would show up on high stakes tests). Those strategies are woefully inadequate today, because the Common Core Standards require teachers to be intellectually immersed in their content. In short, they require teachers to be true scholars instead of conveyors of isolated</p>

	<p><i>level. Occasionally reference was made to service on a building leadership team or other committees. The evolution of the instructional leader position opens up other options, but typically those positions are given to educators with graduate degrees.</i></p>	<p>skills and knowledge area trivia. <i>Teacher educators must now adopt preparation strategies that cause their students to dig deep into their subjects, and help them understand how to help their own K-12 students think more deeply about essential principles, key ideas, overriding considerations, and cause and effect. Inquiry based teaching methods, now usually referred to as "constructivism," must be considered a baseline approach to teaching and learning.</i></p>
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It is clear that the Common Core Standards are designed to move students toward becoming part of a society of *achievers, contributors and leaders*. In many ways they are reflective of the academic improvement initiatives that existed before the imposition of NCLB. Now that the NCLB era is coming to a close, and we can get on with the business of creating a real profession of public school teachers, it only makes sense that those in direct contact with American K-12 students also become achievers, contributors and leaders in their own right.

Preparing Prospective K-12 Teachers as Achievers, Contributors and Leaders

What we face now as teacher educators is a *mindset challenge*, that we are no longer preparing young people to be functionaries in a vast public school bureaucracy in which all critical decisions are formed and issued by policy-makers, administrators, and local supervisors. For the ideas behind the Common Core Standards to work we must help even the most novice teacher understand that he or she is expected to grow into becoming an *academic achiever, professional contributor, and scholastic leader*. In other words, the days of solely focusing our attention on instructional proficiency in the context of static curricula and decisions made by others in a position of authority are gone. What we must do is examine possible features of a future teacher preparation program in the four categories of *curriculum, instruction, assessment, and academic program decision-making and application*.

First, curriculum really does matter! It matters because subjects are no longer passive chunks of some inert academic mass, but are instead fluid elements that can be integrated with each other (like writing and science), the base components of many real life and scholastic applications, and pieces of knowledge and skills that can and must be matched to the functioning personality of each student. No longer can curriculum be viewed as being a *one size fits all* entity. It is a malleable thing that only becomes important when a human being is inspired to become different and better because of it. The teacher educator and those studying to become K-12 teachers must become partners in the accomplishment of this viewpoint and way of being.

Second, instruction must include clear linkages to specific, agreed upon and published intentions for student learning. It is not acceptable for an instructional approach to be in the general ballpark of curricular goals. Classroom methods and activities must be directly associated with content fields specific to particular subjects and grade levels, and associated with directives included in grade-to-grade scope and sequence guides. Teacher educators must show their prospective K-12 teachers how to organize their instructional programs using those content and pacing guides. That takes considerable practice and attention to detail if it is to be done well.

Third, assessment is an ongoing function of, and inherent to, an instructional program. Curricula are increasingly being written as intentions for student learning, with considerable attention being given to the verbs and content fields.

Teacher educators must understand how formative assessments should be administered and evaluated, and how summative assessments are to be used in helping students make connections and focus on applications. Those being prepared for work in the K-12 schools will almost certainly be required to think about—and actually incorporate—those approaches in their techniques for measuring the adequacy of student learning.

Fourth, teachers as professional persons must quickly become academic leaders. That status is obviously difficult to attain while someone is in a preparation program or a neophyte instructor in an educational organization. However, schools will never become significantly better until those who work with children and young people in K-12 classrooms are more than pedagogical functionaries. They must have the ability to achieve in their own right, contribute to their profession in a larger sense, and represent the real meaning of scholarship. The challenge facing teacher educators is to go beyond the inculcation of rote teaching methods, and to assist their protégés in learning the value of research, interacting significantly with professional colleagues both locally and beyond, and growing in stature as valued members of a faculty.

Recommendations

It is recommended that those who lead and participate in the conduct of teacher education programs review their existing course offerings. Syllabi in professional courses should include the examination of curricula based on the intent and wording of the Common Core Standards. Prospective teachers would benefit from actually creating example local curricula in their subjects and grade levels, and then developing instructional programs based on and aligned with the stated intentions for student learning. Those instructional programs must include references to how students will be assessed formatively and summatively within the classroom setting, and through use of common assessments used at grade levels and in secondary departments. Finally, there must be some kind coursework or field experience that gives prospective teachers an opportunity to become involved in scholarly research, and sharing their findings with others in the profession.

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