No Child Left Behind

Junko Yamamoto
Slippery Rock University, USA

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Government passed the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) in 1965 to enable the federal government to finance public schools (Paige, 2004). This law was signed by President Johnson and has been revised every 5 years since then (Wisconsin Education Association Council, n.d.). ESEA started the provision of Title I funding, the federal money given to a school district to assist students who are falling behind academically (Public Schools of North Carolina, n.d.). President George W. Bush signed the ESEA, *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) (P.L.107-110), on January 8, 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). This provision designated that total federal funding of $116,250 million was to be dispensed between 2002 and 2007. The Act was strongly supported by both parties: the final vote was 87 to 10 in the Senate and 381 to 41 in the House (Paige, 2004). This article will address the necessity for teacher training caused by the educational institution's accountability imposed by *No Child Left Behind*, and the stronger need to assist disabled learners affirmed by the law.

BACKGROUND

The main ideas of *No Child Left Behind* are:

- **Accountability:** State decides students' performance level to be met and systematically monitors school districts' progress (Paige, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Data for 2001-2002 was marked as a base year to measure the students' academic achievement. Ninety-five percent of students enrolled in a school must be assessed for academic performance and schools need to ensure that all students achieve or exceed the proficiency level designated by the State. The assessment has to occur at least once during grades 3 through 5, grades 6 through 9, and grades 10 through 12 (P.L. 107-110).

- **Flexibility:** School districts can use federal money according to their needs (U. S. Department of Education, 2004b). There are four major federal grants, including Teacher Quality State Grants, Educational Technology State Grants, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities State Grants, and State Grants for Innovative programs (Paige, 2004).

- **Proven education results:** Rigorous scientific research is encouraged to prove which programs are successful (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a).

- **School choices for parents:** If a family lives in a school district that fails to meet the achievement level for 2 consecutive years, parents have the option to educate their children through charter schools or home schooling. Parents can also send their children to higher performing schools (Paige, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

States are responsible for writing a grant for improving education by consulting local educational agencies. Federal funds are first distributed to states and then passed on to school districts in the states. In addition, states are responsible for creating challenging standards. *No Child Left Behind* requires that the same standards apply to all students within the state. At the latest, math and reading or language arts' standards were to be established by the beginning of the 2005-2006 academic year. Moreover, states had to develop an accountability system to monitor the progress of local educational agencies. Accountability must be based on state standards. Assessment for students' academic achievement in math and reading or language arts had to occur during the 2005-2006 school year. During the following year, measurement for science has been mandated to take place.

The accountability system may change the nature of teaching. Take Pennsylvania's Academic Standards for History, for example. By the end of sixth grade, students are supposed to "identify and explain political and cultural contributions of individuals and groups

to Pennsylvania history (PA Academic Standards for History 8.2.6)." By the time they finish ninth grade, they need to "analyze the political and cultural contributions of individuals and groups to Pennsylvania history (PA Academic Standards for History 8.2.9)." Finally, students are expected to "evaluate the political and cultural contribution of individuals and groups to Pennsylvania history (PA Academic Standards for History 8.2.12)." For those familiar to Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain, "rigorous standards" designated by a state seem to address analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It is clear that students need to establish the logical link between the part and the whole or one part to another part by grade nine: students are expected to analyze the historical context of a person or a group, and how the individual or the group made change into the society or to the history. The task for twelfth graders becomes more complicated because they need to evaluate political, economical, and/or social motives for a historical figure's actions and evaluate the impact of his or her actions supported by evidence. According to Pennsylvania's Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening (n.d.), students are expected to evaluate whether texts are effectively and logically organized, produce work, analyze a link between choice of words and main theme, and produce media to show understanding by the time they graduate high school.

The quality of teachers is a crucial element for the students' high achievement (Paige, 2004). *No Child Left Behind* requires teachers to be highly qualified by June 30, 2006 (Public Schools of North Carolina, n.d.). In order to be considered highly qualified, teachers must have content knowledge, be certified, and have a bachelor's degree (Paige, 2004).

MAIN THRUST OF THE ARTICLE

Accountability and Teacher Training. Some teachers already use a variety of evaluation methods, ensuring that students meet requirements/goals to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate facts. While many in-service teachers are capable of aligning their curriculum with the standards associated with critical thinking, some teachers have their students merely list the facts or retell what the students have read, only taking them to the knowledge or comprehension levels in terms of Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain; this

occurs even in secondary schools. It takes competent teachers to use technology to assist students in achieving high academic standards.

Technology, when it is used adequately, can foster critical thinking in students. However, misuse of technology can result in the deterrence of higher-order thinking. Competent teachers would design technology use to facilitate their programming, intentional data collection, data analysis or problem solving. Some, however, use technology for mindless drills, simple listing and labeling, or entertainment. While the use of computer related low-order thinking is negatively correlated to student achievement, teacher training to facilitate higher-order thinking with technology is positively correlated with students' academic achievement (Wenglinsky, 1998).

The *Mindtool* concept (Jonassen, 2000; Jonassen, Carr, & Yueh, 1998; Jonassen, Howland, Moore, & Marra, 2003) is a useful framework to design technology use to promote complex thinking. According to this concept, technology is a means for students to construct meaning in their own unique way, process information to create something new, or to represent their knowledge. For example, if students are asked to find a brief description of characters, plots, and settings of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* via Internet search, technology is not used as a *Mindtool*. On the other hand, if students are asked to do research about the biography of Hawthorne and the moral clashes that existed in the Puritan community and write about Hawthorne's intentions about writing the story by using scenes from the stories and information collected by the Internet search, then students would use technology as a *Mindtool*. By the same token, if a French teacher uses PowerPoint only to present the relationship between French movies and the perception of the culture, then have students memorize the contents and take tests, PowerPoint is not being used as a *Mindtool*. If this teacher sets up a theme about a French movie and has students put together a presentation to show they think unique perceptions in French culture are reflected in a French movie, then PowerPoint becomes a *Mindtool*.

Naturally, knowledge and skills about technology alone do not help teachers become proficient in guiding students to meet rigorous state standards with technology. Technology training isolated from curriculum does not transfer to successful classroom use of technology. A teacher without a solid grip on content and pedagogy may use technology just for technology's sake, without

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