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Cooper Reflection

Summary

On Thursday, Mrs. Cooper was with our class once again to discuss Testing and Accountability. We briefly covered various aspects of the classroom in the text Why Didn’t I Learn This in College?. We shared chapter summaries from the book before our break. After the break Mrs. Cooper shared some of the information available from the TEA website. She discussed the purposes of No Child Left Behind, its original intent and what it means in the schools and classrooms. She explained the various “Title” programs that schools can be categorized as. Perhaps the one that affects the most students is the classification of Title I. This is when schools have over 40% of students that are labeled “At Risk” and qualify for free/reduced lunch programs. There are 13 criteria for labeling a student “at risk”.

Mrs. Cooper then went into Federal accountability measures that schools and districts are graded by. Federal accountability measures student performance from 3rd grade through 8th grade and 10th grade in the subjects of reading and math. State accountability is a bit more broad and examines student performance in reading, math, science, and social studies for all grades from 3rd through 12th. All schools in Texas are accountable to the states’ standards, but not necessarily the federal standards.

Reflection

As I understand it, NCLB is a system setup to hold schools accountable to increase student’s academic abilities in order for the United States to compete internationally with other countries. A system that holds schools accountable for student performance is a good thing. Unfortunately, because money is the carrot on the stick for schools, test results are of the utmost importance to schools. “Do well on the test, that’s all we want.” Many op-ed pieces have been written bemoaning this measure of performance. We are raising a test-taking society, without necessarily educating students with a well rounded education. Sure they can select the correct answer from a set of options, but can they *think* independently.

Reaction

The United States’ attempt to raise the country’s academic performance to that of other countries is inherently flawed. It’s not the test or the teachers or the student’s faults. It’s not the national education administration’s or the states’ fault. It is the American education system’s fault. It is a fact that students in the United States spend far more time away from the classroom than their peers in other countries. Politicians can continue to raise expectations, but as Mrs. Cooper said “weighing a cow won’t make it fatter”. You cannot succeed without putting in the time and effort. Currently, other countries students are in the classroom putting in the work, teachers are in their classrooms putting in the effort – they are doing this, collectively, more than their American counterparts. Ultimately, measuring American academic success against that of other countries like Japan or Korea is never going to measure up. You must compare apples to apples. Per hour of instruction, I’d imagine we’re on par. If we were to shorten or remove summer break altogether, we could probably compete.

Since I’m in no position to change the course of the American education system, nor do I think the majority would go for it, we’re stuck where we are. We must pretend to believe that test scores ultimately matter. In the current environment they do because money is tied to it. If we, as teachers, want to continue in our field we must use the broken measurement system we are given.

Test scores will shed some light on student performance, but it won’t be accurate across the board. There are serious gaps between subpopulations of students that must be closed, but is the problem deeper than just in the classroom? It has to be cultural. Students enter the classroom defeated. We must find a way to change their thinking from Day 1. Marzano’s research with school kids (and parents) receiving pre-school coaching and education showed that kids raised in a nurturing environment *will* perform better than those without.

Questions (without answers)

How can we, as a society, mimic Marzano’s techniques?

How can we raise up a new generation of students with a passion for learning and an unashamed curiosity?