

From Camelot to Obama Mia!

Recurrent Challenges to Improving Education Practice with Education Policy

In their conversation, Marshall (Mike) Smith and Catherine Snow will reflect on a half-century of education policy initiatives, including the forces that have led to the increased federal role in education, and will raise pressing issues for the second term of the Obama administration.

The over-arching question for this plenary is whether and how policy levers may, with a high probability, actually influence what occurs in classrooms in a positive way.

To this end, two framing questions will guide the discussion:

How should policy respond to reality?

How might policymakers, practitioners and researchers work together to avoid predictable disasters, e.g. the creation of lethal, rather than productive, mutations in desired practice?

Taking a historical perspective, Smith & Snow will consider why and how systemic (standards based) reform was imagined in the late 80s and early 90s and how it worked in the years up to 2002, when NCLB was introduced. The NCLB era raises the question of the advantages and disadvantages of assessment-driven, rather than inspection system-driven, curriculum-driven or continuous improvement-driven, efforts to improve educational practice.

They will assess two challenges for the Common Core State Standards era:

- (1) whether the standards themselves represent feasible goals, and
- (2) whether the capacity exists to meet the implementation requirements of the standards, and associated assessments.

The discussion will take into consideration the emerging powerful influence on teaching and learning of new technologies and the need for researchers and policymakers to study and promote adaptable, rather than rigid, interventions and policies.