



**Sabu, Inc.**

**M E M**

**O**

Helping those  
who must deal with  
*whole elephants*

**Lewis A. Rhodes**

814 Lamberton Drive  
Silver Spring, MD 20902-3037  
Phone/Fax: 301-649-1296  
E-mail: lewrhodes@aol.com

11/23/99

To: Cheryl, Steve, Larry

Fm: Lew Rhodes

Subj: **The Method – Mindset “Gap” ... and the need for district-wide “scaffolding.”**

The November 3, 1999 EDUCATION WEEK contains an article -- “**The Quiet Revolution In Achievement: Common Actions and Attitudes That Are Closing the Gap**,” by Mike Schmoker.

Mike (a friend of mine with a similar Deming-influenced mental model) is apparently “seeing” in a few “successful” schools, the same things as I have at times. People with a “road map” that has, at one end of the road, teachers working every day in “goal-oriented, data-driven, obsessively collegial” work structures that “increase students’ creative and critical capacities” and, at the other end of the road, district leaders developing the “mind-set” of common beliefs, vision, and mission necessary to support that work. The “formula for success” as he points out is a “combination of *method* and *mind-set*.”

But missing in his conclusions is a way to support the scope, nature, and timing of that development. This would require the simultaneous development of method and mindset from what we do with each child each day, and not the present, seemingly-logical, linear process of mindset first. In the case he cites of Milwaukee, it took 18 months to get it to a “paper” commitment.

Yet, based on experiences, any other way doesn’t seem possible. While over 80% of a school system’s time and resources are spent each day in actions that involve children who are in schools right now, we believe it is impossible to make all of these present actions and *interactions* the criterion for our improvement processes. That is, to make present “work” the givens in the “change” equation.

An analogy might help clarify the importance of that fundamental relationship in a change process. When doctors seek to “fix” one of the basic life-supporting structures within the body, they use a “scaffolding” such as a “kidney machine” to enable life to go on while the “fixing” takes place. *Continuity of the body’s work is the criterion*. It can’t stop.

So it is with the daily life of schools. It can’t be stopped to be fixed. But schools have had no “scaffolding” structure that is committed to support that truth. Such an infrastructure is possible, and Montgomery County has almost all the elements necessary to develop it.

It requires but one change in “mindset” about the *nature of learning and teaching* so that the fulfillment of the “*Call to Action*” can be anchored not just in strategic *plans*, and new training opportunities, but in the daily *work* that the district’s stakeholders know most effects what happens to “my child.”

The purpose of its new infrastructure would be to help weave a *seamless* system that makes the

1

“...and so these men of Indostan  
disputed loud and long.

Each in his own opinion  
Exceeding stiff and strong.

Though each was partly in the right,  
They all were in the wrong!”

**The Parable of the Blind Men & The Elephant**

district's knowledge and experience accessible to those who need them when they need them. MCPS could be a school system in which no children fall "through the cracks" because there are no cracks.