



Sabu, Inc.

Thinking Partners with
those who must deal with
whole elephants

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The "Oliver" Twist.

Jerry;

Does the Broad Acres/Kimberly Oliver story offer an opportunity to deal with some of our frustration?

Yours, that few of those with the resources to seriously effect systemic district change see the MCPS story as relevant to the needs of their priority -- "urban" education.

Mine, the recognition of the consequences for systemic improvement of failing to understand the difference between a "teacher" and the "teaching process." The most important is the counter-intuitive idea that the former is not *accountable* for the latter. While the teacher plays the critical role for the moments-of-truth at the end of the process, the process itself is what the school system exists to create, manage and is accountable for.

I know I've probably expressed this frustration in prior notes, but they have become more acute as (1) this misperception has become formalized into a law that holds you accountable for having a "quality *teacher*" in every classroom *someday*, when what really is required is accountability for having a quality *teaching process* in every classroom. And (2) that this, as MCPS is demonstrating, is possible a lot sooner. I've watched MCPS prove this, but until now lacked an effective story that might tie it all together.

But then a person, new to education, took her first job in a school that "knowledgeable" observers had called a failure. Six years later she emerges as national *Teacher-of-the-Year*. Why... and how?

This is a two-fold story whose power to engage attention should come from Broad Acres' "urban" nature. It's the type of school found in every urban community that has become the natural priority for reformers, and which they believe are impossible for school systems to "fix."

This was the Broad Acres six years ago that the teacher entered as a kindergarten teacher in her first job:

- Some of the district's lowest test scores;
- Threatened with takeover by the state;
- High percentage of immigrant, non-English speaking students,;

- About 90 percent of the students qualify for subsidized meals,
- and nearly 80 percent of the families spoke a language other than English.

She emerged six years later from a school, that had met federal standards of *the No Child Left Behind* Act for the last three years, with beliefs, knowledge and skills that are not normally considered as products of “personal” or “professional” development – and especially for a new teacher.

Note what her words from a newspaper interview suggest she now “believes,” “knows” and “can do” ...and what questions it might lead to about the nature of the “learning” experiences from which they emerged.

- “It is a huge honor for me, [but] Broad Acres really is a school that’s filled with excellent educators,...It speaks volumes to the collaboration that I’ve experienced at Broad Acres, knowing I have not done this for long, but I have the *collective wisdom* of my colleagues.”

- ...”the experience was an early introduction to *close-knit teamwork*.”

- “The school stresses *collaboration as a staff*,” ... “It’s not a job where you can go in your classroom and close the door ... *we need to build upon one another’s strengths*.”

- Oliver’s role at the school has expanded from just teaching a kindergarten class to include *mentoring other teachers*. She was honored as the county’s top teacher and the top teacher in Maryland as well.

- She has a strong *belief system that all children can meet or exceed standards*, and a strong *commitment to do whatever it takes to get them there*,” ...

- ...she was able to find ways of reaching non-English-speaking children, so the language barrier wouldn’t stand in the way of their education.

- Oliver’s busy schedule now means she has an intern helping to teach some of her kindergarten classes at Broad Acres, a step that she says is like *a progression from the days when she drew on her colleagues’ experience*.

“I’ve been mentoring her and supporting her in her efforts,” Oliver said. “*We all have to support and help each other*.”

So what’s the “story?”

If we can find a way to tell it, it’s about a process that can change both the nature and effectiveness of a school and the people in it at the same time. And “backmapping” from Kimberly Oliver, I think may be the way to communicate how meaningful it can be for the “Broad Acres” and “Kimberly Olivers” in every district.

What do you think?

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