



# Sabu, Inc.

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who must deal with  
*whole elephants*

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## THINKING ABOUT WHAT WE HAVEN'T THOUGHT ABOUT...

Jerry-

I'm struggling through the consequences of the condition you noted earlier of "working on something that we haven't yet fully thought out." I'm going to use this therefore as a foil to help us both think more specifically about the scope and nature of what goes on your 2-page concept paper. The "answers" obviously have to come from you. I'll just try to raise some of the "questions." Then we need to find a way to interact so I can get the results of whatever this stimulates.

•**What do you see as the boundaries of the "concept" we're addressing?** Is it just the leadership development approach, or does more have to be included to have it make sense?

•**How much of its context is required to show its *natural fit* with already-underway larger processes?**

As I understand your intentions, in the strictest terms this is the Leadership Development piece of a larger, system-wide initiative aimed at upgrading the knowledge and skills of all staff [under the umbrella of *Workforce Excellence*].

And more specifically, it focuses on Instructional Leadership -- which, as part of the current ways-of-thinking, is seen as a subset of leadership that takes place at the building level.

What this concept suggests instead [in the different way-of-thinking that it represents] is that "instruction" or "teaching" is the system's core work process, and that the district is accountable for focusing its resources on its support. How much, therefore, does a reader have to know about the other pieces in place or under development that interact with this? For example,

-- the vertical and horizontal structures and processes that break through principal and teacher isolation to regularly link them to others as part of "working-the-work" of instruction.

--the information support for their role that will come through the SSA and the IMS.

•**How much does the reader need to know about why this is a present need?** About how the district's systemic success at it's two "ends" have focused attention on a "hole" in thinking about the processes that connect them. These successes:

1- the system-wide changes in the *teaching support processes* that affect the nature of the immediate environment of the learner.

2- the proactive central office processes that systemically align and support the processes that affect the nature of the immediate environment of the teacher.

•**Can we describe the end product?** Can we offer an initial vision of what will happen in classrooms and buildings because of this effort? To stimulate creating that picture, here are some pieces that are built from my own assumptions about what is going on.

My premises:

◇ The *system's work* is teaching. "Working-on-the-work" is a good way to capture everyone's responsibility for supporting the work of teaching through their own work. [The staff's learnings over the past two years from Baldrige and other processes are helping develop this understanding]

◇ But as I've looked at some of the pushback you've encountered from principals as they've tried to fit the new interconnected ways of "working the work" into their old ways of thinking, I've noted an interesting problem in the ways we understand the nature of the work we are interconnecting through our processes. It's best expressed in the ways we use the terms *jobs* and *roles* for the two simultaneous influences on what we do at work. "Jobs" and "roles" differ, and this difference becomes most obvious when we, in effect, hold people responsible for *roles* and accountable for *jobs*. Because we tend to use those terms interchangeably, we many times find ourselves dealing with the pushback of unanticipated consequences, and not knowing why.

The difference between *jobs* and *roles* that makes the difference is that "Jobs" are a way of describing an organization's minumum work requirements. They are the building blocks for budgets, planning, etc. They also are the entry point for the roles we then are called upon to actually play.

"Roles," on the other hand, are not typically created by planners, but by the work's immediate context -- the needs of the moment to which we feel we *must* respond. Here, our psychological need to make a difference for one "starfish" can override immediate job requirements. It's the "personal commitment and caring" for children [and teachers] that doesn't show up on quantifiable "job" performance assessment processes.

Roles, therefore, are created from what others *need* from us, and what we *want*, and have the time and energy, to give. Connectedness to others in our work can provide access to the time and energies of others that can complement and flesh-out the wholeness our roles call for.

◇ The *ToSA* strategy seems to directly address this condition as a *Role-connecting* process. If we make a convincing case that *role performance support* differs from *job performance support*, then this has direct implications for the structures and roles that provide that support, as well as the ways roles are assessed since they involve shared responsibilities.

In fact, "role" connecting might more appropriately be thought of as the "job" for which MCPS's leadership [regardless of job title] should [and if *ToSA* is successful, can] be held accountable.

One significant outcome of the *ToSA* strategy, therefore, could be that the district will have the capacity to be held accountable for the *effectiveness* of the roles principals and teachers play. That effectiveness at the building level will be traceable to the support and connections that enable them to address those continual contextual requirements that press in on their "jobs." Principals and teachers will still be accountable for their job performance -- what they do, and how they do it, as they turn resources into results. But it will be an individual accountability that they will no longer have to fulfill as "isolated practitioners."

◇ The system-wide outcomes of this strategy include

[1] having everyone seeing the same big picture that has teaching and learning at its center.

[2] having a sustainable infrastructure that supports the interdependent “roles” we see people playing in that picture. A major plus is that MCPS already has “on the ground” the initial templates for these new roles in the community superintendents support teams, and the information infrastructures separately conceived right now as the SSA and the *IMS*. This new strategy offers a way to continually rethink their value-adding roles in support of principals and teachers work.

[3] a developing trust that this people-connecting process will produce outcomes we want. Whether or not they are the ones “we” predetermined or anticipated, doesn’t matter if we have built-in *self-correction* as a fundamental process. This removes the risk of “not-knowing.”

•**How do we acknowledge [tell the truth about] the state-of-thinking that this approach questions without threatening the reader who may think that way?** How do we frame it as a system-wide *developmental* approach to instructional leadership development and support that, because of its systemic nature, will avoid the “scaling-up” and other “implementation” problems that have doomed funders previous attempts to change the system while it does its everyday work?

•**This 2-pager, will really have two audiences that we want to stimulate to action:**

1- potential funders and supporters *outside the district* whose interest we want to attract because it seems to meet their felt needs to know how to more effectively apply their resources, and possibly learn why they’ve failed in the past.

2- those *within the district and community* whose full engagement and participation will be influenced by the degree to which they think this meets their felt needs to make a continuing difference with children.

Can the same document serve each?

•**How do we take advantage of the challenge to thinking of the concept *Teachers-on-Special-Assignment*.** That is, as a concept it creates cognitive dissonance and can force a reader or listener to think differently. [Which at one level is what this is all about.] Another strength is that it offers a picture that tells a story about what MCPS believes about its people and their work.

[a] “Teachers” aren’t the only adults who measure their personal effectiveness by the differences they make for kids. It’s the common glue that has the power to connect the actions of disparate adults into *collaborative efforts*.

[b] Even though one’s *job* may be out of the classroom, the *roles* they play can still allow them to *make* a difference ...and *know* it.

If you are *really* interested in a word picture that creates cognitive dissonance, you might want to look back at a memo I sent you in June, called The One-Room School District. Then I had noted how well the *Teachers-on-Special-Assignment* idea fit with the principles that actually underlay the warm feelings evoked by the old *one-room school* image.

I had noted that the one-room school house was not a one-size-fits-*all* learning environment, but rather a one-size-fits-*each*. A way to manage available resources to respond to the range of obvious differences the space contained within it. Children were in the care of someone who knew [had information about them as individuals], and who could creatively match resources [even if scarce] to their needs. And that

subsequent increases in numbers of students changed only the management problem, but not the fundamental nature of the *process of responding to individual differences*.

The “rest of the story,” however is what happened between then and now. I like to think of it in this simplistic way:

As the single room began to fill up with increasing numbers and variety of students, the choices were to expand the walls or add more rooms, and then buildings, to hold them. And suddenly *teaching* -- as students *directly interacting* with an caring, committed adult -- had to include other duties that could create and maintain the spaces, time and resources to support that interaction. Any one teacher couldn't be expected to do it all, so some [initially called *principal teachers*] took on those tasks as a *special* assignment.

And as more and more responsibilities fell on those caring, committed adults working outside the classroom walls -- on special assignment -- they began to be given new titles. Administrator, principal, superintendent, management, etc. And unfortunately lost in the forest of of job titles, was recognition of the common role they shared as someone who cared, and wanted to know he/she was making a difference for children.

That's why I see *ToSA* as a way to use that *common role* as the organizing point for a new instructional leadership development and support process that can be integrated into the district's regular way of doing business.

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