



Quality Network News

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Leading the Charge

Teachers as Teaching: Person or Process?

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Two recent *EdWeek* articles highlight critical barriers that limit the effectiveness of quality management's application in education. Psychologist Stephen Barone, in "The Egalitarian Virus," blames the Deming model for bringing "teamwork qua teamwork" into schools.

Barone says that in this model, "each opinion or idea is afforded equal rather than due consideration," "it's nice to be important but more important to be nice," and the "expertise of each employee (is regarded) as directly interchangeable with that of any other."

How quality management mutated into the experiences he describes may be understandable through the other article, "Teachers as Team Players." Here, Ann Cook points out how our total culture reinforces the

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prevailing paradigm of "teacher-as-school."

Through this common window, teacher-heroes are *defiers*, not *definers*, of the institutions in which they work. They gain their reputations in contradiction to, not in collaboration with, the schools in which they teach, and they "mirror a more generalized view held by the wider public that it is the individual who defines the institution."

This view, she notes, "perpetuates the myth that school reform means placing individual teachers — one here, one there — without regard to building a professional community and without creating a sense of ownership and commitment. It's a view that those who have studied the (pre-TQM) American automobile industry tell us is doomed to foster alienation, sabotage, and poor production."

Cook helps us identify the underlying condition to which Deming's actual ideas, and quality management, can and must make their major contributions. To see the differences between teacher-as-person and teaching-as-process, we must understand organizations as systems. TQM tools can give us organizational x-rays that show the interdependence of all the school's work.

This is one of those paradigm paradoxes that plague schools. Just as the earth looks flat and it *seems* that the sun revolves around the earth, when you look into

classrooms it does *seem* that teachers cause learning.

But do teachers cause learning? Do acorns cause oak trees? No! Acorns and teachers are both necessary, but not sufficient, contributors to the product. In each case, the other influences come from the environment — the immediate system of influences on the teacher/tree and the developing learner/seed. Teaching (the process) has become synonymous with teacher (the person), and we think it makes sense.

When schools confuse individuals with the interdependent acts of individuals, look what happens:

■ With teacher-as-cause-of-learning, only one teaching role — making information accessible — receives systematic and systemic support. Insufficient resources exist to support more critical dimensions of the teaching process not involved in presenting information. This puts all constructivist instructional strategies at risk.

■ To "fix" teaching, you must "fix" teachers! Teacher-fixing becomes the major thrust of never-ending staff development activities because it must be repeated every time a "fixed" teacher or staff member moves to another responsibility.

■ Comparatively little effort can be devoted to fixing processes that could support teachers' complex classroom roles and then allow them to grow into them regardless of their initial competencies.

Because these are not direct services to children, they are not seen as funding priorities.

■ To hold someone accountable for the quality of teaching's results, it must be the teacher. Yet student learning is the outcome of a process with critical interrelated and interdependent elements for which only the "system" can be accountable.

■ Conversely, the school system is held accountable — through its hiring and supervisory practices — for the quality of the individual teacher. Yet this is a process of continual growth and development for which only the individual teacher can be ultimately accountable.

■ That accountability model is carried through to the classroom where teachers are accountable for a process — learning — housed in and controlled by the learner.

Today, teachers' roles managing the process called teaching are like that of physicians managing the process called curing. In simpler times, doctors played out their roles in a self-contained office. Now, they work more effectively and efficiently through the fundamental infrastructure of the hospital or other group setting.

Failing to understand the difference between people and processes is the greatest challenge to adopting quality management in schools, yet developing that understanding is where quality management can make its greatest contribution. ▲